

# *Research on Ethnarchaeology of Song Tombs*

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**Abstract:** the study of National Archaeology of tombs in the Tang and Song Dynasties aims to break through the limitation of relying on documents to prove each other, and reveal the ideological concepts and social and cultural motivation behind the funeral practice by introducing local folk materials. This paper emphasizes the importance of national archaeological methods, and advocates the combination of living folk materials and direct historical methods to construct a three-dimensional interpretation framework of archaeological remains, documents and folk practices. Folk custom materials fill the gap between Archaeology and literature, promote the transformation of Archaeology in the historical period from "verifying classics and supplementing history" to "reconstructing society", and deepen the understanding of the cultural connotation and social changes of tombs in the Tang and Song dynasties.

## **1. Introduction**

The rise of Chinese National Archaeology is closely related to the introduction of western new archaeological theories. In the last century, the theories and methods of National Archaeology were introduced into China and have been well developed for a long time. Wangningsheng, zhangguangzhi, liyangsong, Rong Guanyi, Chen Chun and other scholars all have expectations for National Archaeology. In 1987, Wang Ningsheng published on ethnoarchaeology, which is considered to be the symbol of the formation of Chinese ethnoarchaeology. In this paper, he systematically discussed the research methods of ethnoarchaeology and proposed the research method of "analogy hypothesis verification". Zhangguangzhi pointed out that ethnology is a way for archaeology to see things through and see people, because cultural anthropology studies the customs and systems of different cultures around the world and has a blueprint for various interpretations. [1-2] Li Yangsong combines prehistoric archaeology with ethnography, and points out that there is conceptual continuity between the urn coffin burial custom of Yangshao culture and the burial custom of Naxi and Pumi using sacks and pottery pots as burial utensils in Yongning, Yunnan Province. [3] Rong Guanyi used the burial customs of the Naxi people in Yunnan and the Yao people in Liannan, Guangdong to analyze the origin of the ancient Chinese bent limb burial, and stressed that "in the study of National Archaeology, analogy can imply the explanation of the past. These explanations are as a hypothesis and technical attempt, and need to be verified in many aspects before they can be established. Analogy, hypothesis and verification are based on objective

facts, and are not transferred by the ability, skills or imagination of a certain scholar" [4]. From the perspective of archaeological theory construction, Chen Chun systematically reviewed the interactive history of Ethnology and archaeology, criticized that Chinese Archaeology relied too much on the combination of typology and literature, ignored the theoretical construction, and called on Chinese archaeology to use the "holistic view" of Ethnology for reference, reconstruct ancient history from ecological, economic, social and other dimensions, and integrate into the academic trend of globalization. [5] In short, these scholars have made unremitting efforts for the development of National Archaeology in China and provided reference for the current domestic national archaeology research.

However, in the field of ethnoarchaeology, previous scholars inherited the Western tradition and focused their research on the prehistoric period. Ethnographic materials were mostly collected from ethnic minorities in Yunnan and other places, but they ignored the folk custom materials of traditional Chinese society and rarely discussed the archaeological phenomena in the historical period. Therefore, this paper aims to emphasize the use of local folk materials to explain the archaeology of tombs in the historical period.

## **2. Limitations of the archaeological literature narration of tombs in the Tang and Song Dynasties**

China has a long tradition of compiling history. In the field of Archaeology in China's historical period, the interpretation of archaeological remains in the literature has been absolutely dominant for a long time, which also leads to researchers' easy to fall into the "text centered" thinking mode, often ignoring the in-depth study of folk culture and non-verbal tradition. It should also be pointed out that the development of Chinese Archaeology is closely related to the traditional epigraphy. Up to now, there are still quite a large number of scholars who take "proving classics and supplementing history" as the purpose of archaeological research. Ancient Chinese documents, such as official history and official classics, are mostly compiled by intellectual elites such as scholar bureaucrats, whose contents often reflect the values of the ruling class or cultural elites. In the study of tombs in the historical period, the official ritual classics such as the book of rites, the new ceremony of the founding of the Tang Dynasty, the new ceremony of the five ceremonies of political harmony, and the new book of geography are often regarded as the standard. The burial phenomenon found in archaeology is forcibly corresponding to the funeral rituals recorded in the literature, and a large number of unrecorded phenomena of "exceeding the system" are understated and avoided. However, the elite narrative attribute of official documents has led to the marginalization of the funeral practice and cultural expression of the underlying groups, and they are helpless in the face of the alternative funeral phenomenon of civilian tombs, resulting in the flat tendency of the interpretation of archaeological materials.

The form, funerary objects and customs of local civilian tombs are often determined by geographical characteristics and economic status, but also by the local traditions and cultural factors of residents. The ruling power of the ancient government over the local area was very limited, especially in the Tang and Song Dynasties, the social form had changed greatly, and the boundary between the civilians and the aristocracy had become increasingly blurred, which was particularly obvious in the funeral customs. For example, in the Song Dynasty, officials banned civilians from building stone chamber tombs. However, powerful businessmen competed to pursue the construction of tombs without restriction. Such violations are common in archaeological discoveries. Therefore, although there was a ritual system construction in the Tang and Song Dynasties, the official documents recorded that the etiquette provisions of the design were not as stubborn as the local folk customs in practice. Therefore, the interpretation of archaeological discoveries in the

documents inevitably had its limitations. As Chen Chun pointed out, "since Chinese archaeologists are mainly trained in the field of history, it is a convenient tradition to combine archaeological materials and documents for interpretation. Relatively speaking, anthropology and ethnology are not prominent in China, and are relatively weak in tradition and research." [6]

### 3. Case Examples and feasibility analysis of ethnic Archaeology Research in Song tombs

Ethnoarchaeology, as a branch of archaeology, advocates the establishment of an interpretation model between material remains and social practice by observing the cultural behavior of modern nations. Lewis Binford, a representative of National Archaeology, explained the bone accumulation pattern of Paleolithic sites by observing the hunting and slaughtering behavior of the nunamut Eskimos. Through this classic case, Binford emphasized the establishment of a logical chain between "static remains" and "dynamic behavior". Ethnoarchaeology emphasizes cross-cultural comparative research, while the corresponding direct historical approach pays more attention to the use of known recent culture to deduce early archaeological phenomena. Its effectiveness depends on the continuity of cultural traditions, so it pays more attention to vertical correlation. The Canadian scholar Bruce Trigger defined the direct history method in his "history of archaeological ideas" as "the use of the history of living cultures or ethnographic information to explain the same culture, or the textual findings of closely related cultures in the early period without written records. Just like the historical interpretation, this is an analogy method" [7]. Compared with the analogy method of National Archaeology, the direct history method has a wider application space in China's local archaeological practice.

#### 3.1 Case examples

Compared with the west, China has not only preserved a large number of ethnographic materials, but also left more abundant local folk materials in the countryside. For example, the tomb of the Zhou family of the Southern Song Dynasty was found in De'an County, Jiangxi Province in 1988. According to the archaeological report, the body was surrounded by silver boxes, clothing bags, shoe bags, silk bags, etc. The toiletries were wrapped in a brown colored silk towel and placed in the silver boxes, including silver powder boxes, silver plates, iron mirrors, wooden combs, bamboo hairpins, bamboo knives, paper combs, paper grates, etc. In addition, the deceased held one peach branch and two zongzi in his right hand. Zongzi is tied at one end of the peach branch, and the outer skin is zongzi leaf, which is bound with ramie. [8] The above funerary objects are quite different from those of similar song tombs, especially the burial of zongzi, the host of the tomb, is the first discovery, so archaeologists have no definite conclusion for a long time. However, Jiangxi folklore records the funeral ceremony in Xunwu County, southern Jiangxi Province:

There are three things in the coffin: a Red Crowned Rooster to wake the dead up; A brain comb bag containing a seven tooth wooden comb; A white rice bag. Some also took a peach branch and a rice ball and put them at the hands of the deceased for driving dogs in the underworld. In rich families, there are also gold and silver jewelry, various utensils and the favorite items of the deceased. [9]

It can be seen from the above that among the burial customs left in Xunwu County so far, the funerary objects have amazing similarities with the archaeological relics unearthed from the song tomb in De'an, so they have the value of reference and analogy in National Archaeology. Through the analogy method of National Archaeology, we found that the objects unearthed from the tomb were not all the daily necessities and preferences of the tomb owner, but a specific combination of funeral objects. The peach twig zongzi held by the tomb owner was not his favorite object, but was used as a tool for the dead to drive away evil dogs in the underworld, which found a more

reasonable explanation for the problem and provided a broader interpretation space. In addition, in the HuLong ceremony of burying graves in southern Anhui Province, Mr. Feng Shui will read out the "Yindi contract", and the writing content of the "Yindi contract" is very similar to the content format of the official land purchase voucher in the Song Dynasty. It can be said that in some places, the funeral etiquette tradition of buying land and setting up vouchers in ancient funerals still continues. In a word, there are numerous folklore cases that can be compared, and it is worth paying attention to as an archaeological research method, as shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2.



Fig. 1 Land purchase deed of the Northern Song Dynasty unearthed in Zongyang, Anhui Province

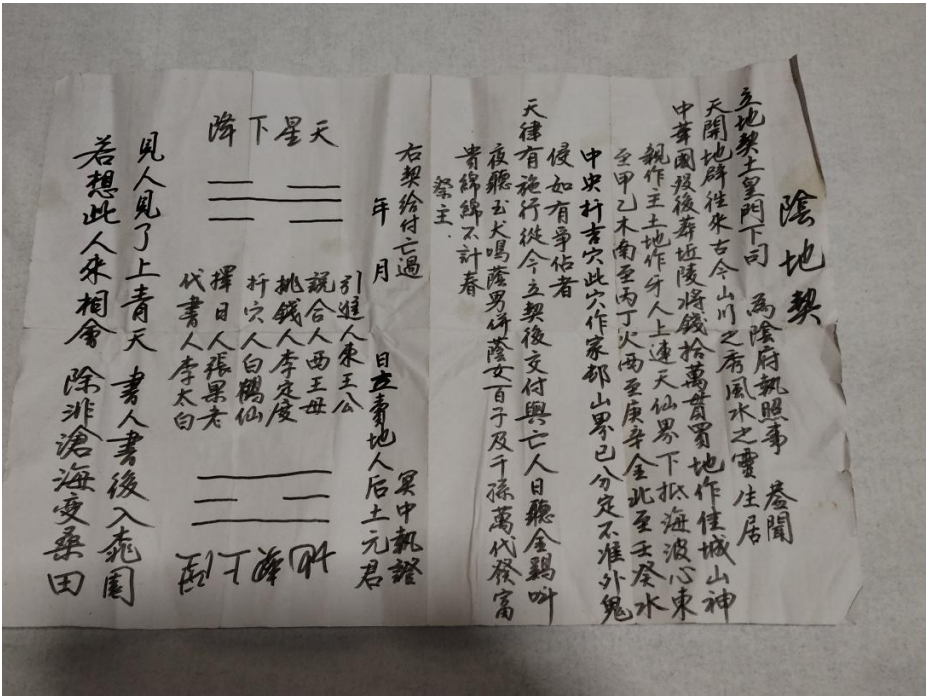


Fig. 2 Land title deed of burial grave in Huaining, Anhui Province



### 3.2 Feasibility analysis

Typology and stratigraphy have been the two carriages of archaeology for a long time, while National Archaeology has been questioned by the analogy method of modern and ancient evidence. On the one hand, it is determined by the limitations of national archaeology as a research paradigm. On the other hand, it is also due to the rich literature and physical materials of Chinese archaeology. In most cases, the interpretation of the problem is easy, which leads to the relative neglect of National Archaeology. Objectively speaking, there is a great risk in the research path of proving the present from the ancient. Although China's historical development has strong stability and continuity, the behavior of contemporary people is directly grafted in the Qin and Han Dynasties, the Shang and Zhou dynasties, and even prehistory through the direct historical method. In the long historical process, the temporal and spatial dislocation of any link will lead to the distortion and deviation of the conclusion. However, the Song Dynasty was a critical period for China's transformation from "medieval" to "modern". The profound changes in society made it different from any previous dynasty. The religious thought, life and death concept, social ethics and aesthetic taste of the Song Dynasty were closely related to modern Chinese society, which provided a feasible premise for the application of National Archaeology. At the same time, the historical documents of the Song Dynasty are very rich, especially the historical documents of literati's notes, which have a large number of records of folk customs and habits, which provides a reference for the analogy study.

## 4. Application principle and reflection of direct History Law

### 4.1 Application principles

In the archaeological practice in the historical period, it is often difficult to reveal the deep-seated ideas behind the funeral practice through the mutual verification of traditional typology and literature. However, the folk custom materials have undergone thousands of years of evolution and inheritance, and contain the internal historical motivation and evolution logic. Bringing them into the archaeological research and discussion in the historical period can provide a unique interpretation perspective. From a macro perspective, the super stable characteristics of Chinese history determine the amazing continuity of the historical tradition. The social tradition has the mechanism to maintain the core stability in the historical turbulence, which is the key condition for the application of direct historical method in Chinese historical archaeology. However, we can not ignore the internal changes such as the reform of the Tang and Song Dynasties and the external impact brought by the nomadic people in the north. Because the core logic of direct historical law is the vertical inheritance of the same culture, which is applicable to the society with clear cultural continuity. This static cultural view assumes that a region or ethnic group maintains a static development in the long history, thus ignoring the dynamic evolution brought by immigration, war and cultural transmission. Therefore, the introduction of folk materials in historical archaeology needs to be vigilant against two risks. The first is the time dislocation trap. To avoid directly equating the connotation of modern folk customs and the function of artifacts with ancient practice, it is also necessary to confirm the cultural continuity through multiple evidence chains such as literature records, comparison of artifacts, and scientific and technological archaeology; The second is the blind area of spatial variation. We should neither overly advocate the control ability of the political central region, nor homogenize the culture and ignore the radiation effect of the central region. We should take care of each other between the central "big tradition" and the local "small tradition". In addition, National Archaeology and direct historical law, as Western archaeological theories, have their specific background and application environment, while Chinese indigenous

academia also has its development mode. When introducing new theories, we need to avoid rigid transplantation, and make theoretical adjustment based on China's unique history and culture, and adhere to the guidance of solving local problems.

## 4.2 Reflections

The direct historical law aims to connect antiquities with modern customs, and explain the cultural behavior of archaeological sites by proving the connection between the two. It should be pointed out that although archaeological materials are objective material existence, most of the tombs are disturbed by man, which not only has a large number of cultural relics available for research been stolen, but also destroys the primitivity of the internal ritual space of the tombs, thus affecting the judgment of ritual forms such as the combination of burial objects. In addition, most tombs lack accurate records of epitaphs and other written materials. The identity of the tomb owner is often judged by the analogy of the tomb shape and objects and the customs and traditions of the area where the tomb is located, which inevitably has distortion. In addition, the rapid development of urbanization has not only changed the external form of traditional Chinese society, but also profoundly changed the traditional ideas of Chinese people, which has increased the difficulty of collecting ethnography and folk custom materials. At the same time, the original traditional burial customs have been continuously simplified and diluted, and the original context of ethnography materials has undergone modern changes, which makes it increasingly difficult to solve related problems by using ethnoarchaeology. Therefore, the selection and use of folk materials is the key issue at present.

## 5. Conclusion

Archaeological materials provide traces of activities, literature records provide institutional background, and folk materials fill the gap between the two. Archaeology in China's historical period is facing a paradigm shift from "verifying classics and supplementing history" to "reconstructing society". Folk custom materials can not only activate the sleeping non elite narration in archaeological materials, but also build a theoretical system of trinity of archaeological remains, literature records and folk practice through the comparative framework of national archaeology, the logical deduction of medium-term theory and the continuous tracing of direct historical law, which promotes the deeper social and cultural interpretation of Archaeology in China's historical period.

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