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Analysis of Chinese jade tiger decoration

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Abstract: As early as the Neolithic Age, tigers had an indissoluble bond with jade. A variety of tiger shaped jade carvings have appeared, and the image of the tiger has gone through the development process from partial to complete form: They are either attached to other jades, or are in sheet shape or round sculpture. Their styles range from mysterious terror to docile and tame. Different times have their own characteristics.

Keywords: Jade; Jade carving; Jade tiger; Tiger ornamentation.

1. Introduction

In the Neolithic Age, there were jade articles with tiger as the theme. The Lingjiatan culture in the Jianghuai River valley has unearthed jade decorations with tiger heads, and the tomb of Fuhao in Yin Ruins has also unearthed many jade tigers. There were many jade tigers unearthed in the Spring and Autumn Period, but few were found from the Warring States Period to the Western Han Dynasty. Only two jade tigers were unearthed in the Qin Dynasty sites. In the Eastern Han Dynasty and the Wei and Jin Dynasties after that, the tiger image on the jade ware was seen again. A new tiger jade tag was unearthed from Fan Wenhu's tomb in the Yuan Dynasty, and there was no lack of tiger patterns on the jade belt plate of the Yuan Dynasty. According to the literature, jade tigers are mostly used for wearing, except for ritual vessels and pass certificates. In addition, there are tiger shaped ear scoops, tiger shaped jade towns, dragon shaped sword decorations, tiger shaped inlay, tiger shaped jade chimes, etc. The tiger and other animals are also used as decorations, for example, the Western Han Dragon and Tiger Body Hooks in Guangzhou Nanyue King's Tomb Museum, and the Western Han Tiger Head Hooks in Hebei Museum. These jade articles with tiger as the theme have been presented wonderfully in various times, including blue jade, white jade, crystal, agate and other materials. It can be seen that the tiger has been a widely used jade carving theme since ancient times and is treasured by people.

2. Tiger Head Jade in Neolithic Age

Lingjiatan culture found a number of jade objects decorated with jade tigers or tiger heads. Tiger head jade decoration (Fig. 1), The upper body of a recumbent tiger is carved at one end, and the other end is incomplete. The section is oblate. The tiger head carving is clear and simple, highlighting the mouth, eyes and ears of the tiger head. The mouth is big and teeth are exposed. The upper and lower lips are broad and thick. Two rows of tiger teeth are exposed in the front, and a pair of protruding tusks are exposed in the back. Nose is convex, fusiform eyes, and the perforating round hole is fine. The forehead is slightly convex, the ears are one in front and one behind, and stand back. The front leg bends forward and is in a creeping shape. The carved patterns show tiger legs, tiger feet, tiger claws and wrist decorations. The foot is carved with 5 claws.

The jade pendant with two tiger heads (Fig. 2) is a semicircular ring, with the upper part of a recumbent tiger carved on each end. The image of the crouching tiger on both ends is basically the same. The carved lines on the muzzle are more abstract, showing the upper and lower lips and the upper and lower rows of teeth with four horizontal carved lines, and the corners of the mouth depict a pair of protruding tusks. The nose is convex, the perforation is fine, and the eyes are located in the upper front of the upper tusks. The forehead is slightly convex, and the ears stand back. Cut horizontal lines on the bridge of nose, forehead and ear root. The front leg bends forward and crawls. The carved patterns show tiger legs, tiger feet and tiger claws. The feet are carved with 3 claws.

The so-called "Jade Dragon" (Fig. 3) unearthed from Lingjiatan Tomb is actually a circular jade tiger, which is misinterpreted as a "Jade Dragon". The head of the annular jade tiger represents the head of the tiger, and the body of the annular jade tiger represents the body of the tiger. A series of holes are pierced at the edge near the tail. The features of the animal's face on its head: prominent snout, slightly opened upper and lower lips, olive shaped eyes, a pair of upper and lower tusks at the root of the mouth corner, the tip of the upper tusks at the back of the eyes, raised forehead, ears at the top of the head, and towering to the rear. The snout, lips, tusks, eyes, forehead and ears of the head of the annular jade tiger are not easy to distinguish because of their small shape and scrawled lines. However, compared with the above two tiger head jade ornaments unearthed in Lingjiatan Site, it is easy to identify them, but they are different from the shape of the tiger head jade ornaments. The head of the ring jade tiger has a small proportion. It does not show the upper and lower rows of teeth, and its eyes are not perforated. However, some basic features are the same as the head of the tiger jade huang: The upper and lower tusks, olive shaped eyes, and the lines of the upper tusks are also part of the olive shaped eye carving lines. The ears are scattered up and down and towering backward, and the forehead is prominent. It can be seen that the jade tiger images unearthed in the Neolithic Age are relatively abstract.



Fig. 1 Tiger Head Jade Ornament



Fig. 2 Double Tiger Head Jade Ornament



Fig. 3 Ring Jade Tiger

3. Carved Jade Tiger from Shang and Zhou Dynasties to Spring and Autumn Period

3.1. Late Shang Dynasty

The carved jade tiger patterns of this period have the following characteristics: Tigers lie prone, with their heads hanging down in general, and some with their heads raised; The mouth is usually drilled with a hole, which is not only convenient to wear, but also shows the open mouth and the teeth that are butted up and down; The ear is nearly rectangular, and the moire is usually carved along the inner edge of the auricle with a single yin line; Emphasize the performance of the thigh; Strong sense of static, slightly formal style. The following two jade tigers are representative.

A jade tiger (Fig. 4) was unearthed from the tomb of Fuhao in Yin Ruins in Anyang. It was lying on its back, with its head held high, its mouth wide open, and its sharp teeth exposed. It had rectangular eyes, a thick short tail, and its tail tip rolled up. The body parts are carved with curly cloud patterns with double hooked yin lines, tiger claws with single yin lines, herringbone tiger stripes on the tail, and scales on the cheeks.

A round carved jade tiger was unearthed in the forefoot of Tengzhou, Shandong (Fig. 5). The head of the tiger is low, the eyes are nearly diamond shaped, and the outline of the front and rear legs and the claws are carved with the yin line. The tail of the tiger is long and rolled up, and the tail is pointed with a hole drilled.



Fig. 4 Tomb of Women in Yin Ruins in Anyang



Fig. 5 The front palm of Tengzhou, Shandong

3.2. Western Zhou Dynasty

The tiger is in a latent state, with its head generally raised, and its ears are mostly peach shaped. The part below the elbow is obviously elongated, emphasizing the performance of the lower leg. The tiger claw is half-moon shaped or tooth shaped.

The jade tiger unearthed from the tomb of Guo State in Shangcunling, Sanmenxia, Henan (Fig.6), has almond shaped ears, near minister shaped eyes, open mouth, exposed teeth, short tail rolled up, and a hole in the front paw and tail. Two sides are decorated with double hook yin line herringbone tiger stripes. The style of this jade tiger shows some vividness in the formality, such as the obvious growth of the part below the elbow and the drooping head.

A jade tiger unearthed from Bo Tomb in Rujiazhuang, Baoji, Shaanxi (Fig. 7). Peach shaped ears, head outstretched, round eyes looking ahead, mouth slightly open, teeth vaguely exposed, tail up. Single Yin lines, peach shaped cloud lines on the ear, and curly cloud lines on the front and rear limbs.

As shown in the figure, the following two pieces of carved jade tigers have the typical characteristics of jade tigers in the Western Zhou Dynasty, with simple lines, obvious dynamic feeling and freely stretching style.



Fig. 6 Map of the Tomb of Guo State in Shangcunling, Sanmenxia, Henan



Fig. 7 Tomb of Rujiazhuang, Baoji, Shaanxi Province

3.3. Spring and Autumn Period

During this period, jade tigers were mostly Huang shaped tigers, generally making internal arc curves from head to tail, and some made external arc curves. Most of them have lower head, closed mouth, long upper jaw, nearly square, short lower jaw, arcuate; Generally, it is the volt ear carved with fine and dense lines; Thin legs, the part above the elbow is longer than the part below the elbow; The tiger claw is in the shape of a slot, with a hole drilled in the middle; The thick tail droops and the tip of the tail rolls back.

The jade tiger patterns unearthed from the tomb of Huang

Junmeng and his wife have slightly changed. The tiger has round eyes, the main body pattern is tiger stripes, and the tail and upper and lower jaws are decorated with cloud patterns. Tiger legs are decorated with fish scale patterns, and other parts are mostly carved with coiled cobra patterns with double hooked yin lines, supplemented by tiger stripes, with dense patterns (Fig. 8).

The jade tiger unearthed at Xiasi Temple in Xichuan, Henan Province (Fig. 9) is generally decorated with thin curly cloud patterns on the upper part of the tiger legs, simple thin lines on the lower part, coiled cobra patterns on the head and tail of the tiger, and tiger stripes on the abdomen. The decorative process of thin lines, widened and large oblique knives is mostly used, which has the effect of relief. The edge of the tiger body is generally decorated with twisted silk patterns composed of thin and dense lines.



Fig. 8 Tomb of Huang Junmeng Couple



Fig. 9 Xiasi Temple in Xichuan, Henan

3.4. Development characteristics of carved jade tiger

First, from the overall shape, jade tigers in the Shang Dynasty and the Western Zhou Dynasty were the most diverse. The Shang Dynasty mainly imitated the static recumbent tiger and the more concrete flat jade tiger. In addition, there were more vivid recumbent tigers and more freehand jade tigers. In the Western Zhou Dynasty, Huang shaped jade tigers appeared, and in the Spring and Autumn Period, Huang shaped jade tigers dominated.

Second, the change of decorative patterns. In the late Shang Dynasty, jade tigers were mostly plain and without lines. There were also a small number of cloud patterns with the style of the times. There were also realistic tiger stripes carved on the Yin lines. The jade tiger in the early and middle Western Zhou Dynasty inherited the straight shape of the jade tiger in the Shang Dynasty and its characteristics of not emphasizing decorative patterns. The jade tigers in the late Western Zhou Dynasty changed greatly, and the patterns became relatively dense. In the early Spring and Autumn Period, the ornamentation of the jade tiger in the shape of Huang tended to be complicated, with the main pattern of coiling cobra carved with double curved lines, supplemented by fish scale patterns, tiger stripes, etc; In addition, patterns with shallow relief effect decorated with thin incised lines and oblique knives also appeared. The jade tiger in the late Spring and Autumn Period mainly decorated the coiled cobra pattern with the method of reducing the rising of the earth sun. The pattern was more delicate and compact, full of anxiety and confusion.

Third, the change of style. In the late Shang Dynasty, the main style of jade tigers tended to be realistic, showing a little prudence and naivety. The tiger was more static than dynamic. In the Western Zhou Dynasty, the main style of jade tigers was still realistic, emphasizing the instant performance of tigers when they were lurking. The tiger's momentum was full, and there was a sense of ferocity. The jade tiger in the Spring and Autumn Period highlighted its practical functions, with smooth lines on the outer side, namely the back, and more formalized legs and mouth.

4. Round carved jade tiger

The round carved jade tiger in the early Shang and Western Zhou Dynasties shows the shape of a tiger lying on its back or standing ready to move. The tiger moves in silence, with its head in front of it and its tail behind it, its mouth open and its teeth exposed. Generally, its ears stand up, its tail extends diagonally downward, and its tail tip rolls back. The tiger body is generally decorated with geometric lines by the double hook method of yin lines. The overall style is realistic and simple, giving a strong sense of naivety. As for its functions, some are furnishings and some are accessories.

The round carved jade tiger in the Eastern Zhou Dynasty is obviously rare. In addition to the fact that the outline of the tiger still mimics the real tiger, the tiger exaggerated the performance of some details, especially the mouth and tail. The upper jaw became long and rolled up, making people feel like they want to open their mouth and roar to the sky. The tail is very short and rotating. The patterns on the tiger body reflect the typical characteristics of this era.

The two round carved jade tiger shaped towns in the Western Han Dynasty originated from the recumbent looking back tiger, which emphasized the performance of the head. The upturned tail added vitality to the jade tiger in a simple way. Although the tiger lay still, it could not hide the ferocity. In addition to the necessary lines, the tiger has no redundant decorative patterns, which is very different from the jade tiger before. The function of jade tiger has also broken through the previous limitations and become a tiger shaped town.

The round carved jade tiger of the Ming Dynasty shows us another style of the tiger, which is gentle and cute, reflecting greater freedom and greater subjectivity in the creation of works of art. From the perspective of modeling, it inherits the characteristics and realistic style of jade tigers that have been briefly summarized since the Han Dynasty, but the overall feeling is completely different from that of the Han Dynasty. The jade tiger's face shows its simplicity and ferocity.

5. Conclusion

The jade tiger has been passed on from the mysterious and solemn to the gentle and cute and charmingly naive. People adore tigers and love them. They have made round or carved tiger shaped ornaments of different shapes and styles with jade. On jade articles such as Yushanzi and jade belt ornaments, tigers are combined with people or other animals to form beautiful patterns, which conveys people's good feelings of praying, exorcising evil spirits and taking blessings with the power of tigers.

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