When is a Qin Tomb not a Qin Tomb? Cultural (De)construction in the Middle Han River Valley

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ABSTRACT

When scholars of early China use terms like "Qin" to interpret archaeological remains, they often conflate three registers of meaning: temporal, political, and cultural. This leads to problematic understandings of history and renders the agency of non-elite people invisible to historical narratives. By conducting exploratory statistical analyses including correspondence and principal component analyses on a cluster of burials from the Wangpo cemetery site in Xiangyang, Hubei, this article demonstrates that the mortuary practices of local communities in the middle Han River valley consisted of much more cultural mixture than current designations suggest. The study proposes an alternative approach to interpreting cemeteries like Wangpo that highlights cultural mixture, leading to a version of history that better incorporates the experiences of non-elites in the formation of early Chinese empire in the middle Han River region. Keywords: archaeology, cultural mixture, exploratory data analysis, middle Han River valley, Wangpo cemetery.

INTRODUCTION

This article grapples with an important methodological issue that has arisen in the study of Early China as a result of the tremendous amount of archaeological fieldwork currently being done in the middle Han River region of Hubei province. This region has drawn scholarly attention in recent years due to the discovery of several very important burial grounds, specifically the tomb of Marquis Yi of the Zeng State and its associated burials in 1972 (Hubei 1989) and the more recent discovery of Zeng State royal cemeteries in 2012 (Fang and Wu 2015; Hubei 2013). These discoveries raise important questions about the region's role as a crucial political, military, and economic crossroads between the Central Plains and the resource-rich Yangzi River region during the first millennium B.C.E.

However, while the contributions of spectacular finds such as royal tombs should not be overlooked or downplayed, the vast majority of archaeological work currently being done in the middle Han River area consists of the excavation of large-scale burial grounds containing small and medium-sized tombs with relatively minor elaboration. These cemeteries have the potential to open new avenues of research in early Chinese history, particularly concerning areas outside of the Central Plains. Unfortunately,

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current attempts to utilize emerging corpora of material culture are being hindered by an uncritical reliance on problematic terms used to designate small and medium-sized burials. Specifically, archaeological site reports tend to characterize individual tombs, and indeed entire burial grounds, using terms such as "Western Zhou," "Chu," "Qin," or "Han," and so on, while only rarely elaborating on what these designations mean.

This article argues that, when it comes to large-scale cemeteries in the middle Han River region, such designations problematically dictate how we conceptualize the different cultural, social, and political processes that occurred in the past. This can lead to historical misrepresentations, epistemological errors, and other problematic assumptions. This article demonstrates the problems of using current methods for analyzing large-scale cemeteries by conducting exploratory statistical analyses of burials at the Wangpo (王坡) site located in the Xiang-Yi (襄宜) Plain in the heart of the middle Han River region. Alternative approaches to designating small and medium-sized burials are also proposed to highlight the cultural mixture, local agency, and historically contingent identity formation that traditional methods tend to ignore.

BACKGROUND: XIANG-YI PLAIN AND WANGPO CEMETERY SITE

The Wangpo cemetery site is located on the northern banks of the Han River in Hubei province, 10 km north and slightly to the west of the modern city of Xiangyang (襄陽) (Lat. 32°5′33″, Long. 112°6′2″) (Fig. 1). It consists of 173 burials separated into four individuated clusters located on the slopes and summits of a series of rolling ridges that make up the immediate terrain. The presence of ancient burials on these ridges was first detected in the 1960s and 1970s, though no formal archaeological work was done until 2001, when a joint task force made up of archaeologists from the Jinan City Archaeological Station, Xiangyang Municipal Archaeological Team, and Xiangyang

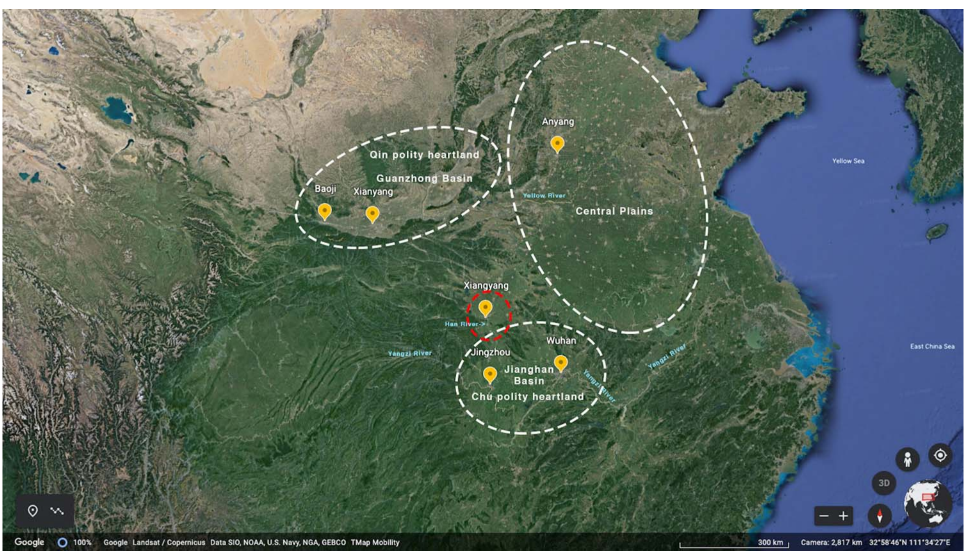

Fig. 1. Map of Xiang-Yi Plain relative to major geopolitical regions of Early China (dashed circles) (base satellite image from Google Earth, 3 April 2022).

Bureau of Cultural Relics excavated roughly fifty thousand square meters of the site, including all four burial clusters (Hubei 2005). The present study focuses on Wangpo Area 1, which comprises 62 burials that make up the largest and southernmost of these four clusters (Fig. 2, Table 1).

The area around the cemetery is known as the Xiang-Yi Plain. Its geopolitical history is relevant to the interpretation of the cemetery.[1] Beginning in the Late Shang (商) Period (ca. 1250–1045 B.C.E.), the Xiang-Yi Plain was likely a transportation hub for raw materials, predominantly copper ore, moving from mining sites in the Yangzi River valley to the Shang capital of Anyang (安陽) in the Central Plains. During the subsequent Western Zhou (周) Period (ca. 1045–771 B.C.E.), the region came under the control of a group of elites with the family name Man (曼) who were culturally affiliated with the Western Zhou kings and were appointed to govern the territory on behalf of the Western Zhou rulers. They became known in historical and inscriptional records as the rulers of the Deng (鄧) polity and were frequently called upon as allies to the Western Zhou kings during their campaigns against enemies further south.

It is unclear what happened in the region immediately after 771 B.C.E. The Deng polity only reappears in historical records in 688 B.C.E., when it was destroyed by the Chu (楚). After that, the region was converted into Deng County (鄧縣) under the growing Chu territorial state. It functioned in many ways in the same capacity for the Chu as it did for the Western Zhou, specifically, as a border protectorate against

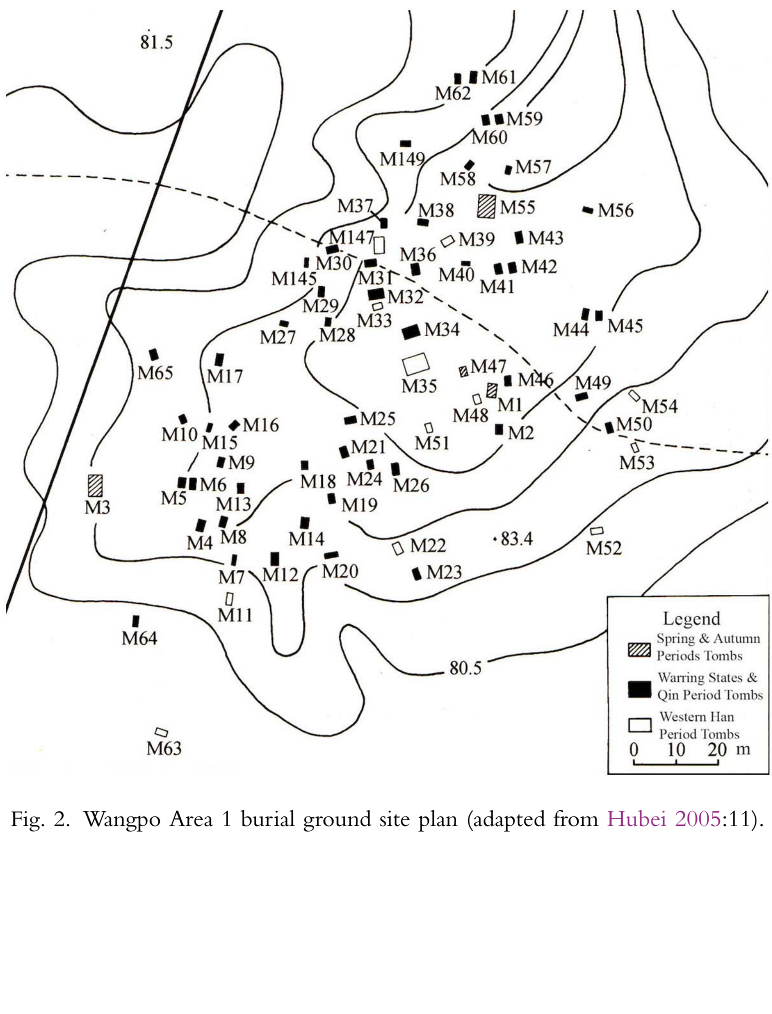

Fig. 2. Wangpo Area 1 burial ground site plan (adapted from Hubei 2005:11).

Table 1. Characteristics of Wangpo Area 1 Burials, Showing Major Material Features and Grouped by Period Assigned in Original Site Report

Tomb	Orientation	Base area (m^2)	Tomb architecture	Coffin structure	Total grave goods	Artifact types in assemblage
						Late Warring States (ca. 278–221 B.C.E.)
M2	0°	2.87	Parallel ledges	N/A	4	1 CII *ding* tripod, 1 *he* covered bowl set, 1 CI *hu* vase, 1 lacquer object
M7	11°	3.45	Wall-niche	Single	8	1 AI *ding* tripod, 2 AI *he* covered bowl sets, 1 AI *hu* vase, 2 BII *dou* pedestal dishes; 1 C bronze mirror, 1 bronze weight
M9	7°	1.59	Wall-niche, ledges	Single	2	1 AII double-handle jar, 1 AI *fu* basin
M14	3°	3.58	N/A	Nested	7	1 AI *ding* tripod, 1 AII *hu* vase, 1 small *hu* vase, 2 AII double-handle jar; 1 bronze AI belt hook, 2 AI chime bells
M15	6°	0.8	Wall-niche, ledges	Single	3	1 AIV double-handle jar, 2 BII *yu* basin
M18	0°	2.51	Ledges	Nested	6	1 EII *hu* vase, 2 BI *yu* basin, 1 I *mou* basin; 2 bronze AII chime bells; 1 A glass bead
M23	345°	2.52	N/A	Nested	6	2 AII *ding* tripods, 2 AII *he* covered bowl sets, 2 AI *hu* vases
M24	355°	2.51	Ledges	Nested	3	1 A *fu* basin; 1 AII belt hook; 1 lacquer object
M26	355°	3.66	Ledges	Nested	5	1 AI double-handle jar; 1 iron *ding* tripod; 2 lacquer ear cups, 1 lacquer *he* covered bowl set
M29	186°	1.44	Ledges	Single	2	1 BII *hu* vase, 1 BI *fu* basin
M31	267°	4.13	N/A	Nested	8	2 AI *ding* tripod, 2 AI *hu* vase, 1 AII *dou*; 1 AII bronze mirror, 1 bronze sword adornment; 1 unidentified lacquer object
M37	359°	1.46	Wall-niche, ledges	Nested	6	1 AI *ding* tripod, 1 AII *he* covered bowl set, 1 AIII *hu* vase, 1 BII *dou* pedestal dish; 4 BI chime bells, 1 bronze *huang* plaque, 5 faience beads
M38	95°	2.53	Ledges	Nested	6	1 AII *ding* tripod, 1 AIII *hu* vase, 1 AI *dou* pedestal dish, 1 AIII *dou* pedestal dish, 2 I *deng* lamps
M46	358°	3.08	N/A	Nested	5	2 AII *ding* tripods, 2 AIII *hu* vases; 1 D bronze belt hook
M49	83°	4.86	Ledges	Nested	7	2 AI *ding* tripods, 2 AI *he* covered bowl sets, 2 AIII *hu* vases; 1 bronze belt hook
M50	165°	3.11	Ledges	Nested	3	1 AI *ding* tripod, 1 AI *he* covered bowl set, 1 AII *hu* vase
M57	185°	3.22	N/A	Nested	17	1 BII *he* covered bowl set, 1 CI *hu* vase, 1 AI *yu* basin, 1 BI *fu* jar, 1 *ping* bottle; 2 bronze *huan* bracelets, 1 C bronze belt hook, 1 A 1 bronze mirror; 1 lacquer *he* covered bowl set; 1 stone pendant, 1 stone *bing* flattened disk; 1 stone pendant adornment, 2 stone tubes, 1 stone cylindrical adornment; 1 B glass bead, 1 glass tube
M60	358°	3.17	N/A	Nested	4	1 *ding* tripod, 1 AI *he* covered bowl, 1 *hu* vase; 1 AII belt hook
M61	2°	4	N/A	Nested	10	2 AI *ding* tripods, 2 AI *he* covered bowl sets, 2 AIII *hu* vases, 1 AIII *dou* pedestal dish, 2 BI *dou* pedestal dish; 1 bronze halberd head

(*Continued*)

Table 1. (*Continued*)

TOMB	ORIENTATION	BASE AREA (M^2)	TOMB ARCHITECTURE	COFFIN STRUCTURE	TOTAL GRAVE GOODS	ARTIFACT TYPES IN ASSEMBLAGE
M62	358°	3.91	N/A	Nested	7	1 AII *ding* tripod, 1 AI *he* covered bowl set, 1 AIII *hu* vase, 3 BI *dou* pedestal dishes, 1 AII double-handle jar
M145	183°	2.3	Wall-niche, ledges	Nested	6	1 AI *ding* tripod, 1 AIII *hu* vase; 1 B bronze sword, 1 AI bronze mirror, 1 bronze personal adornment; 1 A jade *bi* disk
						Qin (221–206 B.C.E.)
M4	14°	3.75	N/A	Nested	3	1 AIII double-handle jar, 1 AIII *yu* basin, 1 III *mou* jar
M5	185°	4.81	N/A	Nested	3	1 AIII *yu* basin, 1 III *mou* jar; 1 lacquer ear cup
M6	185°	3.36	N/A	Nested	5	1 BI *dou* pedestal dish, 1 AIII double-handle jar, 2 F 1 *hu* vases, 1 BI *yu* basin, 1 bronze button
M8	20°	1.68	Ledges	Single	2	1 AIII double-handle jar, 1 AIV double-handle jar
M10	349°	1.68	Wall-niche, ledges	Single	4	1 AIII double-handle jar, 1 BI *yu* basin, 2 BII *yu* basins
M13	0°	1.26	N/A	Single	3	1 CI *he* covered bowl set, 2 AIV double-handle jars
M15	6°	0.8	Wall-niche, ledges	Single	3	1 AIV double-handle jar, 2 BII *yu* basin
M16	190°	1.58	Ledges	Single	3	1 BIII *ding* tripod, 1 BII *he* covered bowl set, 1 BIII *hu* vase
M17	10°	2.64	N/A	Single	3	1 BIII *ding* tripod, 1 BII *he* covered bowl set, 1 CIV *hu* vase
M19	335°	2.73	N/A	Nested	6	1 CI *he* covered bowl set, 2 BIII *dou* pedestal dish, 1 FII *hu* vase, 1 AII *fu* basin; 1 BII bronze belt hook
M21	343°	1.6	Wall-niche, ledges	Single	3	1 AIII *yu* basin, 2 III *mou* basin
M25	85°	3.75	N/A	Nested	2	1 FII *hu* vase, 1 AII *fu* basin
M27	104°	2.4	N/A	Single	7	1 AII *dou* pedestal dish, 4 BIII *dou* pedestal dish, 1 AIII double-handle jars, 1 FIII *hu* vase
M28	2°	2.92	N/A	Nested	3	1 AII double-handle jar, 1 IV *mou* jar; 1 AI bronze belt hook
M30	85°	3.63	N/A	Nested	6	2 CII *ding* tripod, 2 BII *he* covered bowl set, 1 BII *hu* vase, 1 DI *hu* vase
M32	263°	8	Ledges	Nested	5	2 DII *hu* vase, 1 AII double-handle jar; 1 B bronze mirror; 1 lacquer ear cup
M34	72°	7.56	Wall-niche, ledges	Nested	11	4 BII *dou* pedestal dishes, 1 II *deng* lamp; 1 A bronze *ding* tripod, 1 BI bronze *ding* tripod, 1 small bronze *weng* urn, 1 I bronze garlic bulb flask, 1 D bronze belt hook; 1 A jade *bi* disk
M36	352°	2.12	Ledges	Nested	3	1 BII *ding* tripod, 1 BI *he* covered bowl set, 1 CIV *hu* vase
M40	95°	2.12	N/A	Single	6	1 AII double-handle jar, 1 *fu* basin; 1 AIII bronze chimes, 2 BIII bronze chimes; 5 B glass beads, 1 glass tube
M41	173°	2.6	Ledges	Nested	6	1 BIII *ding* tripod, 1 BIV *hu* vase, 4 AIII *dou* pedestal dish
M42	175°	2.38	Ledges	Nested	3	1 AIV *ding* tripod, 1 AIII *hu* vase; 1 AII bronze belt hook
M43	355°	4	N/A	Nested	2	1 CIII *ding* tripod, 1 CIII *hu* vase

(*Continued*)

Table 1. (*Continued*)

TOMB	ORIENTATION	BASE AREA (M^2)	TOMB ARCHITECTURE	COFFIN STRUCTURE	TOTAL GRAVE GOODS	ARTIFACT TYPES IN ASSEMBLAGE
M44	5°	2.97	N/A	Nested	5	1 BII *fu* basin; 1 A and C belt hooks, 1 bronze *huan*; 1 lacquer vessel with bronze handles
M45	0°	2.90	Ledges	Nested	3	1 AIII double-handle jar, 1 BII *fu* basin; 2 lacquer vessels with bronze handles
M56	96°	2.16	Ledges	Nested	3	1 CIII *ding* tripod, 1 BIII *he* covered bowl set, 1 DII *hu* vase
M58	215°	2.59	N/A	Single	4	2 AIII double-handle jars, 2 AII *yu* basins
M59	356°	4.4	N/A	Nested	4	1 AIII *ding* tripod, 1 BII *he* covered bowl set, 1 BIII *hu* vase; 1 BIII bronze belt hook
M64	4°	2.85	N/A	Single	4	1 CII *ding* tripod, 1 CII *he* covered bowl set, 1 CIV *hu* vase; 1 lacquer vessel
M65	170°	4.6	N/A	Nested	3	1 *guan* jar, 1 EIII *hu* vase, 1 AI *yu* basin
Early Western Han (ca. 206–141 B.C.E.)						
M11	185°	3.51	N/A	Single	10	1 AIII *ding* tripod, 1 BII *he* covered bowl set, 1 II *fang* square vase, 1 AII double-handle jar, 1 I *zao* stove model, 1 *ping* vase, 1 ceramic flattened *bing* disk; 2 lacquer ear cups, 1 lacquer *he* toiletry box
M22	156°	4.05	N/A	Nested	11	2 BII *ding* tripods, 2 BII *he* covered bowl sets, 2 BI *hu* vase, 2 BI *guan* jars, 1 II *zao* stove models; 2 1 *banliang* coins, 1 AII belt hook
M35	66°	12.31	Wall-niches, tiers	Nested	20	2 AIII bronze *ding* tripods, 2 II bronze *fang* square vases, 1 B bronze ladle, 1 II bronze mirror; 2 D ceramic hu vases, 4 *dou* pedestal dishes, 6 *deng* oil lamps; 17 *banliang* coins; 1 jade *huan* hoop
M39	56°	3.25	N/A	Nested	4	1 CI *ding* tripod, 1 CI *hu* vase, 1 BI *guan* jar; 1 jade *bi* gem
M48	348°	3.61	N/A	Nested	10	2 AI *ding* tripods, 2 BI *he* covered bowl sets, 2 I *fang* square vases, 1 AII *weng* urn, 1 II *zao* stove model, 1 type I *ping* vase; 1 unidentified lacquer object
M51	346°	2.64	N/A	Nested	7	1 AI *ding* tripod, 1 BII *he* covered bowl set, 1 IV *fang* square vase, 1 AIII double-handle jar, 1 I *mou* jar, 1 II ladle; 10 *banliang* coins
M52	86°	4.13	N/A	Nested	9	2 AIII *ding* tripods, 2 BII *he* covered bowl sets, 2 II *fang* square vases, 1 II *zao* stove model; 1 *banliang* coin; 1 lacquer object
M53	337°	2.16	N/A	Nested	6	1 AIII *ding* tripod, 1 BII *he* covered bowl set, 1 BII *hu* vase, 1 III *zao* stove model, 1 I *ping* vase; 1 bronze seal (+ inscription)
M54	130°	4.66	Ledges	Nested	6	2 AIII *ding* tripods, 2 BI *he* covered bowl sets, 2 III *fang* square vases
M147	358°	10.8	N/A	Nested	4	1 AII bronze *ding* tripod, 1 bronze *fang* vase; 1 jade *bi* disk; 1 glass bead
Early-Middle Western Han (ca. 141–118 B.C.E.)						
M33	74°	3.12	N/A	Single	5	1 AIV *ding* tripod, 1 AII *he* covered bowl set, 1 AII *hu* vase, 1 AIII double-handle jar; 1 lacquer *he* toiletry box
M63	105°	3.13	N/A	Nested	1	1 II *zao* stove model

enemies and rivals from afar. The main difference between the two was that the Deng elites seem to have operated more autonomously under the Western Zhou regime than did Deng County governors appointed by the Chu state.

The implicit assumption embedded in traditional historical narratives of this early first millennium B.C.E. transition was that the social and cultural integration of people living in the area occurred unproblematically in tandem with the region's political incorporation into the expanding Chu territorial state. Historical records credit the Chu takeover of the area for laying the groundwork for its smooth integration into the Qin (秦) empire in 281 B.C.E. According to transmitted texts, after Qin's conquest of the former Warring States territories, it instituted empire-wide reforms that sought to unify its newly incorporated imperial subjects into a single easily managed unit. Under this standardizing regime, the Xiang-Yi area was converted into Xiangyang County under the larger organizational umbrella of the Nanyang *jun* (南陽郡) ("Nanyang commandery"), which was one of 36 commanderies established by the Qin empire. The area remained a part of the Nanyang commandery throughout subsequent dynastic periods until at least the sixth century C.E., after which political jurisdictions were altered by the Sui (隨) Dynasty (581–618 C.E.). Importantly, after 221 B.C.E., historical annals cease recording the Xiang-Yi region as a culturally distinctive place. Instead, the area came to be imagined as a place that had always been a part of the imperial landmass and its unique regional characteristics seemed to have become unworthy of mention in historical records.

Wangpo cemetery, like similar burial grounds from the Xiang-Yi Plain, challenges the traditional narrative of gradual cultural homogenization because it contains evidence of localized mortuary practices that suggest that the transition from Chu to Han was more complicated than historical records represent. For instance, the archaeological report notes that a specific type of commonly encountered large ceramic jar featuring paired handles at the neck and shoulder (discussed below) appears to have no comparative antecedents beyond the immediate Xiang-Yi region (Hubei 2005:144). This observation warrants careful consideration in terms of regionally specific cultural praxis and meaning, but the report treats it only as an aside; no other research has been conducted on the creation, use, or significance of these vessel types. The goal of the present study is to bring the presence of localized material features and artifacts such as these unique jars to the forefront of historical analysis. This can only be done after thoroughly understanding why such work has not been regularly conducted in the past.

The Wangpo site report divides the 62 tombs that comprise the Wangpo Area 1 burial ground into four chronological periods which together span 160 years: Late Warring States (ca. 278–221 B.C.E.), Qin (221–206 B.C.E.), Early Western Han (ca. 206–141 B.C.E.), and Early-Middle Western Han (ca. 141–118 B.C.E.) (Table 1).[2] This periodization is based on a combination of assemblage analysis and typological comparison of individual grave goods with specimens from known type-sites in the middle Yangzi River region and beyond. Where available, coinage was used to provide absolute dates. Historically, these dates correspond to the period from 278 B.C.E., when Qin destroyed the Chu capital of Ying (郢), to 118 B.C.E., when Emperor Wu of Han first began to issue *wuzhu* (五铢) coins. The Wangpo Area 1 cemetery's use-life thus spans the transition of the region from territorially based polity to empire.

Unfortunately, by adhering to this periodization scheme, the report vastly oversimplifies the complexity of this period of transition. For instance, while they label some burials as Late Warring States, and chronologically date them to 278–221 B.C.E., they make very little attempt to interpret the mixed presence of highly localized artifacts with Chu style or Qin style artifacts. They only begin to label burials as Qin when there are more identifiably Qin type ceramics within the assemblage than not. They do the same for burials labeled Western Han. Furthermore, when artifacts of older styles appear in Qin or Western Han period tombs, their presence is mainly interpreted as spoils of war, affirming the conquest narrative of the region recorded in transmitted histories.

These kinds of interpretations flatten the complex socio-political and cultural connections between occupants of the burial ground into single, politically defined concepts. In other words, designating a tomb as a Qin or Early Western Han tomb based on typology without interrogating evidence of anomalous material features leaves no room for the occupants of the tombs to possibly have held different categories of identity simultaneously. It also signals to any other interpreter that typology of artifacts alone dictates occupants' political and cultural affiliations, which is not how people in the past would have identified themselves. Thus, traditional methods of analyzing small and medium-sized burials like those from Wangpo Area 1 force complex past identities to be slotted into historical narratives that are motivated by the actions of politically affiliated elites; this leads to the erasure of localized agency and experience.

Given the break-neck pace of archaeological discovery happening in the Xiang-Yi plain, it is time to develop better methods of interpreting these kinds of burials. Inspired by scholars who have previously addressed similar issues of archaeological interpretation in early China, the present study attempts to move in this direction. In order to best situate the analysis of Wangpo that follows, it is necessary to first briefly discuss these previous critiques and studies.

ARGUMENT: A PROBLEMATIC CONFLATION OF MEANINGS

Applying terms like "Qin" or "Western Han" to large swaths of small and medium-sized burials overlooks the contingencies of localized identity formation through mortuary ritual because doing so conflates different registers of meaning. These registers are: temporal in the sense of a historically recorded time period associated with the term; political in the sense of the specific polity or empire the term refers to; and cultural in the sense of a shared cultural tradition (material or ritual) that the term can also designate (Campbell 2014:8). Each of these registers can be talked about using the same word such as "Qin," but their various meanings do not typically line up. For instance, chronologically, the Qin period refers to the reign of the historical Qin dynasty, but the Qin polity existed for quite some time prior to unification, so the political history of Qin does not match up with the chronological Qin period. We also use the term Qin to refer to a specific material culture complex or archaeological culture made up of various bronze and pottery styles that originated in the Wei River valley during the first millennium B.C.E. (Teng 2002, 2014). The geographical and temporal boundaries of this material culture complex extend beyond those of the Qin polity and Qin period due to the circulation of material goods such as pottery and bronzes through trade and warfare, to say nothing of stylistic emulation and diffusion.

The problem with using these terms to designate multiple registers of meaning simultaneously is that while they are historically attested dynastic names, they are also ideational units originally created to divide up a broad continuum of time and complex layering of processes in ways that make sense for the construction of archaeological narratives (Miller 1982:17–26). As such, they are tools that archaeologists use to measure or characterize political, social, and cultural aspects of the past; they are not necessarily reflective of the realities of past self-designations in and of themselves (von Falkenhausen and Shelach 2014:37–53). Assuming that they are and collapsing the various registers of meaning, we mark with them leads to blanket assumptions about the past. One consequence is that the cultural and social mixtures represented by small and medium-sized tombs that speak to the agencies of local communities are rendered invisible in historical scholarship (O'Brien and Lyman 1999:21–22).

To be clear, I am not claiming that it is wrong to use "Qin" or "Han" as ideational units. Rather that we need to revisit what we mean when we use them. We need to keep the role of "Qin" and "Han" as ideational units separated from their roles as empirical units or phenomenological things that have an objective existence. "Qin" and "Han" are not empirical units because they do not have an ontological status in and of themselves; however, the objects that we characterize as "Qin" or "Han" do have ontological status because they exist in real time. It is the conflation of the ideational unit "Qin," used to arbitrarily designate groups of objects, with their ontological reality as "Qin" that is the root of the problem here.[3]

Conflating these registers of meaning also reifies the strong tendency in Chinese archaeology towards privileging written accounts produced by and for the royal court and members the aristocracy (Chang 1977, 1981; von Falkenhausen 1993). As illustrated by the overview of the Xiang-Yi Plain presented above, traditional historical narratives tend to see the formation of early imperial culture among non-elite strata of society as only having been contested and negotiated on the frontiers of the empire, while the same process is assumed to have been straightforward, inevitable, and therefore historically insignificant in areas closer to the Central Plains. Alice Yao (2016:216) has recently referred to the latter as "a universal experience of fatefulness wrought by imperialism."

In recent years, historiographical methods of archaeological interpretation in studies of Early China have come under some criticism. For instance, both Campbell (2014) and Shelach-Lavi (2015) note that current archaeological practices in China focus too narrowly on the typological classification of archaeological finds—usually pottery vessels—which is then used to link archaeological cultures to historically recorded ethnic groups, to the detriment of historical accuracy and nuance. Importantly, they note that one of the main consequences of this kind of narrow focus is that it is anachronistic; it also overlooks the cultural diversity of early China in favor of teleological narratives of inevitable Sinicization (Clark 2018).

Other scholars have advocated for approaches that attempt to move beyond questions of typology and classification. For instance, Hein (2016, 2017) argues that instead of seeking universally applicable classification systems that use increasingly rigid and sub-divided categories of form and style to break archaeological chronologies into ever-smaller and less historically meaningful pieces—as traditional typologies tend to do—we should only utilize broad categories of vessel function and artifact assemblage to break down regionally specific archaeological sequences and put more focus on the production sequences that resulted in these artifacts. In this approach, any notion that typological classification can and ought to be pegged to absolute chronological dates and historically recognized cultural groups is removed. This follows Chang's (1967) belief that artifact form and function were not clear-cut in the past and were likely subject to local manipulation. In this view, typology becomes an organizational means for investigating deeper historical meaning and not an end of archaeological research in itself.

Building off these critiques, some scholars have begun to turn towards new ways of interpreting the social and cultural patterns underlying cemeteries throughout China in ways that avoid overly relying on typologies. For instance, Flad (2002) has utilized a non-typologically based breakdown of tomb assemblages at the Early Bronze Age site of Dadianzi (大甸子) in Inner Mongolia to measure the process by which mortuary ritual transitioned from an arena for negotiating social relationships within the mourning community to a platform from which individual social status during life was projected and displayed. Instead of relying on traditional typologies to establish a chronology from which change over time would be traced, Flad divided the material features of individual burials into distinct synchronic variables, then used regression analysis on them to detect and interpret social patterns.

In another study, Shelach (2001) used correlation matrices and regression analysis to compare patterns of social and economic difference between the Upper and Lower Xiajiadian (夏家店) cultures in Northeast China. Like Flad, Shelach-Lavi classified the material culture features of his dataset by labor investment (determined by size of tomb, quantity of artifacts, complexity of artifact production, and other variables) and used these classifications as the basis of his cross-cultural interpretations. Finally, Jaffe has employed multivariate analyses in his studies of local identities at the Liulihe (琉璃河) cemetery near Beijing and Tianma-Qucun (天馬曲村) in Shanxi (Jaffe 2012; Jaffe and Bin 2017). In all these cases, scholars have pushed back against typologically based interpretations of mortuary practice as an arena where local populations adopted aspects of Western Zhou elite material culture in order to tie themselves to the Western Zhou state apparatus, writ large, and instead argued that a bottom-up approach to analyzing mortuary remains, derived through statistics, reveals a picture of lower-elite and non-elite Zhou society that is much more varied and not as defined by their connection to Western Zhou elite culture as traditional approaches suggest.

My approach builds on work done by these previous scholars. In what follows, I use Principal Component Analysis (PCA) to demonstrate not only how overly relying on established terminology can misleadingly flatten cultural associations in the Xiang-Yi area, but also that more attention paid to local agency and cultural mixture leads to more nuanced historical understandings of the lived experiences of these communities. Where my approach differs from the studies discussed above is in its emphasis on the linkages between the results of statistical analysis and cultural identities, something that many archaeological studies of early China neglect to investigate in greater detail. Additionally, my approach deliberately ignores the periodization provided by the Wangpo site report. Instead of adhering to its traditional chronological scheme, which as already discussed above carries the danger of simplistically associating material culture with singular political or cultural identities, I analyze all 62 burials together to explore alternative expressions of past identity and grouping.

NEW APPROACHES TO INTERPRETING HISTORICAL MEANING FROM ARCHAEOLOGICAL REMAINS: WANGPO CEMETERY AS A CASE STUDY

PCA is a data reduction technique for rendering a large number of variables within a certain dataset into only a few variables (or principal components) which can then be interpreted meaningfully. The way that variables are reduced in PCA is a mathematical correlation between each variable with every other in geometric space. Without going into exhaustive detail, any archaeological dataset can be visualized and represented in terms of a spreadsheet of rows and columns, where each row represents an individual object and where each column represents the material features of that object. The algorithm that PCA is based on takes a linear combination of two rows of variables from the original database spreadsheet and plots it onto a two-dimensional x-y plane, then repeats the process with all the remaining variables in the dataset to produce a multi-dimensional cloud of points. The principal components are derived by mathematically determining the best fit line between the furthest two points in the cloud such that a maximum of other points are also crossed by that line. The process usually begins with determining one line first, which is the first principal component, and then determining the second principal component, which should be orthogonal to the first line, meaning perpendicular to it. Continuing to do this until all the variables in the dataset are accounted for (intersected by a line) determines the number of new, uncorrelated dimensions that the original dataset can be summarized by without losing too much of its variability.

Using PCA as the foundation for interpreting Wangpo Area 1 in lieu of ceramic typology decenters chronology and minute periodization as the focus of archaeological interpretation. Instead, other past human agencies can be explored, such as how choices and options for cultural or social self-expression through mortuary ritual changed over time, which is the focus of the present study. PCA does have its limitations, however. First, it is a tool that only works for datasets that are numerical, which means that the researcher must first convert archaeological observations, many of which are qualitative, into quantifiable values. Second, PCA works most effectively on measurement data, which was not possible to obtain for all of Wangpo Area 1's observations because many of them could only be converted to binary numerical values or counts. This doesn't mean that the PCA results on Wangpo Area 1 are incorrect, only that the algorithms will not operate as efficiently when extracting components.

It also means that the choice of what variables to measure with the PCA and how they are measured matter greatly. Since the aim of the analysis is to explore other meaningful social and cultural patterns that might undergird the burial ground when we do not overemphasize traditional units of analysis like chronology and typology, the first choice I made was to set aside the periodization provided by the excavation report and combine all 62 burials from Wangpo Area 1 into a single dataset. Secondly, because the goal of analyzing this burial cluster is exploratory rather than to affirm extant narratives or chronologies, I chose to measure variables in a way that allowed for the interpretation of both cultural and social aspects of the site.

The material features of the cluster that I elected to measure are listed in the first column of Table 2. Tomb size was recorded as a measurement (m^2), while burial orientations, structural features such as parallel ledges, wall niches, and tiers, and furnishings such as single or nested coffins were recorded as present/absent binaries

TABLE 2. COMPONENT LOADINGS CHART SHOWING FIVE MOST SIGNIFICANT PRINCIPAL COMPONENTS STRUCTURING WANGPO AREA 1 DATASET

FEATURES	PC 1[a]	PC 2	PC 3	PC 4	PC 5
Tomb size (m^2)	0.75	0.23	0.23	0.07	−0.19
Outer coffin	0.46	−0.23	−0.03	−0.18	−0.32
Ledge	−0.24	0.25	−0.12	−0.12	0.55
Wall niche	0.04	0.57	0.05	0.27	0.47
Occupant orientation					
North	−0.45	0.00	0.04	0.60	−0.39
East	0.52	0.15	−0.11	0.01	0.02
South	0.03	−0.17	0.11	−0.70	0.48
Grave goods					
Ding tripod	0.30	−0.78	−0.21	0.27	0.19
He bowl	0.21	−0.70	0.05	0.22	0.13
Guan jar	−0.36	0.21	0.07	0.06	−0.15
Yu basin	−0.42	0.37	0.10	0.01	0.28
Fu basin	−0.20	0.20	0.14	−0.51	−0.40
Mou basin	−0.33	0.21	0.14	0.24	0.09
Dou dish	0.54	0.32	−0.14	0.14	0.12
Hu vase	0.47	−0.21	−0.60	−0.12	−0.06
Fang vase	0.11	−0.52	0.59	0.17	0.25
Pottery model	0.69	0.33	0.37	0.16	0.06
Misc. pottery	0.00	−0.39	0.72	−0.01	0.03
Weapon	0.19	−0.16	−0.35	−0.09	0.11
Metal vessel	0.68	0.57	0.26	0.17	0.01
Personal item	0.25	0.18	0.23	−0.45	−0.20
Chime	−0.18	0.18	−0.16	0.06	−0.14
Lacquer ware	−0.13	−0.15	0.57	−0.15	−0.09

[a] Average positive or negative correlations range ±0.3–0.8; strong positive or negative correlations have values >±0.8.

where 1 indicated presence while 0 indicated absence. Together, these types of material features can be interpreted as markers of energy investment, wealth, social status, or culturally-based mortuary traditions. For instance, coffins at Wangpo are typically either single coffins built out of large wooden planks or nested coffins consisting of a single coffin placed inside a larger structure also constructed from wooden planks; nested coffins are typically understood to be a sign of increased energy expenditure. At the same time, the distinctive "II" shape of the outer coffin most commonly found at Wangpo is usually considered characteristic of Chu burial practice. Similarly, parallel ledges are formed when the bottom of the tomb shaft is not fully excavated by the mourning community; the coffin is placed between the ledges. Parallel ledges are often seen as evidence of lower labor investment (because the very base of the tombs are not fully excavated), but they can also be interpreted culturally as an extension of the earlier tradition of creating *erengtai* (二层台) earthen ledges, which were usually found in the burials of elites prior to the eighth century B.C.E. in the Central Plains.

Wall niches at Wangpo are shallow alcoves dug into the base of the tomb shaft at one end of the burial where grave goods are placed. Archaeologists have identified the most commonly encountered types of wall niches in Hubei province as those constructed one third of the way up the side of the tomb shaft, situated above the lid of the coffin; this would have made the grave goods placed within them visible over the top of the coffin (and likewise the niche accessible to mourners after the casket was in place) (Ding 2004:64–69). The niches do not conform to this pattern at Wangpo Area 1. Instead, they are dug into the wall at the base of the tomb shaft rather than one-third of the way up the side, which would have made them and their contents inaccessible and invisible once the coffin structure was in place. This suggests that the purpose of wall niches and the placement of grave goods therein played a specific role in mortuary ritual at Wangpo in a way that differed from how they were deployed elsewhere in Hubei, pointing to a highly localized version of practices that were going on elsewhere in the region (Flad 2002).

Tomb orientation is usually determined by what direction the occupant's head is facing, which is typically determined by the placement of grave goods and wall niches. Occupant orientation within the tomb has traditionally been considered a measure of cultural affiliation. For instance, northward orientation is primarily a hallmark of Western Zhou burials of all ranks (Thorp 1979:58–61; von Falkenhausen 2006:127–164), while Chu occupants are often oriented either eastwards if they are of high-rank or southwards if they are non-elites (Xu 1999:22); westward orientation is a characteristic of Qin burials from Gansu (甘肅) and the Guanzhong (關中) Valley (Teng 2002:204–234). Finally, Han period burials tend to have either an eastward or northward orientation (Poo 1993:91–102). Because PCA operates best when the numerical values are as consistent as possible across the database, I recorded them as binary presence/absence variables, which necessitated the removal of westward directionality as a variable. This is because each tomb can only be categorized according to a single cardinal direction, so if all four cardinal directions are recorded as presence/absence variables, the PCA algorithm will end up nullifying orientations altogether. By removing one directionality, it avoids an artificial skewing of the data. The significance of westward oriented burials can be reintroduced when interpreting the results of the PCA.

I divided grave goods by overall object type and material and measured them as counts so that the PCA would be able to detect and give weight to multiples of the same type of artifact. Traditional typological analysis is undergirded by the same general categorical breakdown, but they go further by subdividing these categories into types and styles, which are then pegged to historical time periods and cultures. I elected to avoid this kind of subdivision for two related reasons. First, full subdivision of grave goods into types and styles would have resulted in some variables having too few counts to be measurable by the PCA, and would therefore have skewed the analysis. Second, I wanted the PCA to identify broader structures within the dataset that might be explained by means of stylistic transformation instead of assuming a priori that stylistic differences equate to meaningful chronological or cultural distinctions. This is in keeping with Hein's (2016, 2017) push for a model of analysis that focuses less on types as markers of chronology and more on other possible distinguishing characteristics of burials. It also puts more emphasis on features of mortuary practice such as energy expenditure and form and function of grave goods than on arbitrarily defined types and styles. Finally, as seen in Shelach's (2001) and especially Flad's (2002) analyses, it helps us draw conclusions about the social demographics of the burial cluster.

The results of these analyses were then synthesized in order to arrive at an interpretation of the burial ground that takes into account the roughly 160-year occupation history of the site without equating typological change and periodization to political, social, or cultural transformations. The results of the PCA are presented in three newly interpretable visual representations that express the variability of the original dataset. The first is the eigenvalue chart, which gives the interpreter some indication of how many components summarize the lion's share of variation in the dataset (Shennan 1997:289–290) (Table 3). Each component has an eigenvalue; when tabulated in order, the variance values should add up to 100 percent, meaning that together all the components explain the total variation of the original dataset (Drennan 2009:303). Typically, any eigenvalue over 1.0 is deemed important enough for interpretation because 1.0 represents the variance of a single variable in the correlation matrix. If a component has an eigenvalue of less than 1.0, it actually accounts for less of the variation in the data than one of the original variables.

The second newly interpretable result of PCA is the component loadings chart which shows measurements of the geometric angles between each variable in the scatter plot and the principal component vector (Drennan 2009:303) (Table 2).

Table 3. Eigenvalue Chart Showing Nine Potentially Significant (>1.0) Principal Components of Wangpo Area 1 Dataset

PC	EIGENVALUE	% VARIANCE
1	3.50294	15.23
2	3.01741	13.119
3	2.17437	9.4538
4	1.78726	7.7707
5	1.54112	6.7005
6	1.42511	6.1961
7	1.30224	5.6619
8	1.21837	5.2972
9	1.11897	4.8651
10	0.997333	4.3362
11	0.879246	3.8228
12	0.718031	3.1219
13	0.596884	2.5951
14	0.538372	2.3407
15	0.443361	1.9277
16	0.431941	1.878
17	0.387894	1.6865
18	0.245688	1.0682
19	0.225703	0.98132
20	0.213806	0.92959
21	0.121911	0.53005
22	0.0696727	0.30292
23	0.0423679	0.18421

Typically, the way that this chart can be read is that any (positive or negative) score over 0.3 indicates a significant correlation between the variable and the component vector, while any (positive or negative) score over 0.8 indicates a strong correlation. The first component typically shows a fairly large number of loadings on a fairly large number of the original variables; this number usually decreases as new components are identified. The loadings chart is meant to aid the researcher in figuring out which major trends (represented by individual variables) are connected to one another in the original dataset and which are not.

Finally, there is the component scores chart (Table 4). As stated above, the original dataset is made up of columns and rows, of which the columns are variables and the

TABLE 4. COMPONENT SCORES CHART FOR WANGPO AREA 1 DATASET

TOMB[a]	PC 1	PC 2	PC 3	PC 4	PC 5
M2	−0.97	−0.68	−0.31	0.84	0.44
M4	−1.77	1.13	0.45	1.10	−0.88
M5	−0.84	0.65	1.15	−1.28	0.68
M6	0.16	0.44	−0.80	*−1.98*	0.35
M7	0.38	0.02	−0.48	**1.71**	0.74
M8	−2.45	1.09	−0.11	0.72	−0.02
M9	*−2.40*	**2.13**	0.17	0.14	0.33
M10	*−3.28*	**2.73**	0.81	1.09	**2.23**
M11	−0.34	*−2.58*	**5.37**	−0.87	1.34
M12	0.24	−1.12	−0.03	0.78	−1.18
M13	*−2.11*	0.22	0.06	1.12	−0.76
M14	−0.66	0.17	*−1.49*	0.66	*−2.12*
M15	*−2.99*	**2.46**	0.06	1.22	**2.04**
M16	−0.62	−0.87	−0.86	−1.21	**2.22**
M17	−0.66	−0.85	−0.74	1.18	−0.33
M18	*−2.30*	**1.82**	−0.66	0.66	0.05
M19	−0.07	0.19	−0.36	−0.54	*−1.98*
M21	*−3.11*	**2.63**	0.43	**2.14**	**2.20**
M22	0.97	−0.63	−0.19	*−1.62*	−0.12
M23	0.58	*−2.49*	−1.50	**1.27**	−0.59
M24	−1.45	0.74	0.70	−1.16	−1.40
M25	0.56	0.63	−0.53	*−1.55*	−1.58
M26	−1.08	0.74	**1.85**	0.07	−0.86
M27	0.94	1.47	−1.18	0.28	0.20
M28	−1.48	0.80	0.38	0.83	−1.30
M29	−1.34	0.62	−0.45	*−2.80*	0.96
M30	1.95	*−2.21*	*−1.67*	0.42	−0.01
M31	**1.71**	−1.56	*−1.89*	−0.62	−0.15
M32	0.82	0.64	−0.24	−1.01	−0.59
M33	0.18	−0.56	−0.30	0.23	−0.01
M34	**4.39**	**4.47**	1.02	0.77	1.30
M35	**9.08**	**5.78**	**2.27**	**1.50**	0.11
M36	−0.49	−0.89	−0.99	0.68	0.06

(*Continued*)

TABLE 4. (*Continued*)

TOMB[a]	PC 1	PC 2	PC 3	PC 4	PC 5
M37	−1.07	0.99	−1.20	**1.35**	1.13
M38	1.51	0.43	−1.11	−0.09	0.78
M39	1.11	−0.53	*−1.92*	−0.41	−0.24
M40	−1.17	1.72	−0.19	−1.37	−1.70
M41	0.91	0.08	−1.20	−1.37	1.76
M42	0.01	−0.48	−0.78	*−1.94*	1.35
M43	0.00	−0.50	−0.72	0.70	−1.13
M44	−0.92	0.62	1.12	−1.43	*−2.57*
M45	−1.87	0.75	1.28	−1.02	−1.62
M46	0.47	−1.28	−1.44	0.60	−1.02
M48	0.73	*−4.39*	**4.70**	**2.04**	0.43
M49	2.03	−1.77	*−1.63*	0.04	0.69
M50	0.22	−1.06	−0.79	−1.47	1.55
M51	−1.02	−1.59	**2.27**	**1.59**	−0.41
M52	2.06	*−2.99*	**2.21**	0.99	0.81
M53	−0.02	−1.25	1.34	0.90	−0.77
M54	0.83	*−3.27*	1.47	−0.25	**2.74**
M56	0.67	−0.68	−1.23	−0.19	0.72
M57	0.42	−0.02	**2.80**	*−5.11*	−1.29
M58	−2.26	1.55	0.28	0.06	0.37
M59	0.32	−0.96	−0.54	0.70	−1.14
M60	0.08	−1.04	−0.64	0.67	−1.04
M61	**2.01**	*−2.30*	*−2.59*	**1.28**	−0.11
M62	0.54	−0.41	−0.85	**1.24**	−0.94
M63	0.85	0.67	0.02	−0.21	−0.49
M64	−0.72	−0.97	−0.15	1.03	−0.46
M65	0.19	−0.28	−0.20	*−1.51*	0.68
M145	0.66	0.20	*−1.44*	*−2.12*	**2.56**
M147	**1.84**	1.65	1.19	0.56	*−2.00*

[a] The larger the value, the higher scoring the burial is for each particular component; the highest positive scores for each principal component and the corresponding tombs are in bold font, while the highest negative scores (i.e., furthest away from 0 on the negative scale) and corresponding tombs are in italics.

rows are individual archaeological objects. PCA replaces the original set of variable values with new averaged ones in order to find component vectors within them; this process also replaces the values of the original rows with new ones such that they can be plotted in geometric space at right angles to the vectors made up by the variable values (Shennan 1997:283). Once the principal component vectors are identified, the value that describes the original position of the row (or object) value in space is replaced by the value of its ninety-degree relationship to the component vectors rather than the original variable vectors (Shennan 1997:286). The component scores chart is thus a table of scores of individual objects or assemblages on each of the components identified in both the eigenvalue and loadings charts. Looking at how positively or negatively valued the scores are for each component allows the interpreter to determine, by reference back to original archaeological observations about individual objects, the material trends that characterize each component. In other words, it tells the researcher precisely what the PCA is summarizing about the original data, which can then be interpreted in light of research questions such as those regarding periodization, change over time, or cultural differences and similarities.

Results of the Statistical Analysis

Tables 2–4 display the results of running a PCA on Wangpo Area 1 burials based on the breakdown described above. Table 3, the eigenvalue chart, indicates that the original dataset of 23 variables can be reduced to at most nine new, uncorrelated ones that account for approximately 74 percent of the total variation. Typically, all components with an eigenvalue greater than 1.0 can be considered significant enough for analysis, though for the purposes of the present analysis, only the first five components, which together account for just over 52 percent of the total variation at the site, are discussed in detail.

PC 1 — The component loadings chart shows that the first component, PC 1, accounts for roughly 15 percent of the total variation and that it represents a trend away from large, eastward facing burials containing numerous ceramic models, pottery *dou*, and/or metal vessels to small-sized, northward facing burials containing mainly ceramic basin-type vessels (Table 2). The highest and lowest scoring burials summarized by this component are displayed in the component scores chart in Table 4. In addition to being large in size, the highest scoring burials for PC 1—M35, M34, M61, M147, and M31—are some of the most richly furnished tombs within the cluster. They are all vertical shaft tombs featuring nested coffins, and their mortuary assemblages consist of ritual vessels like *ding* tripods, *he* covered bowl sets, *hu* or *fang* vases, and *dou* pedestal dishes.

The unique mixtures of artifact types represented at this end of the component vector bears remarking upon. For instance, M34 contains two bronze *ding* tripods, a bronze urn, a bronze vase with an opening shaped like an inverted garlic-bulb (hereafter "garlic-bulb flask"), four pottery *dou* pedestal dishes, and a pottery oil lamp (Fig. 3, Table 1). Closer examination reveals that the type A bronze *ding* from M34 stylistically resembles specimens found in metropolitan Chu tombs from ca. 400 B.C.E. and earlier. This type of archaism, wherein an older style of object is mixed into an assemblage from later time periods, is generally understood in early Chinese contexts as a desire to mark social distinction; it is also evidence of a closer tie to the deeper cultural history of the locality than to Qin mortuary practices alone. Lothar von Falkenhausen (2010:77) describes this kind of antiquarianism as "the conscious rediscovery of something already lost, guided by a veneration of the antique as such." The rest of the tomb's assemblage is equally a jumble of different stylistic traditions, including the Han-style ceramic oil lamp, another tripod whose body, handles, and legs suggest the Qin bronze-casting tradition, and a bronze garlic-bulb flask that stylistically originates in the Qin heartland (Teng 2002:28–40). Almost all high-scoring burials for this component contain bronze objects, whether ritual vessels or weapons.

At the other end of the first component vector, burials with high negative scores for this component—M21, M10, M9, M13, and M18—tend to be small (none exceeding 2.6 m^2) and have less elaborate coffin furnishings (Table 1, Table 4). They also tend to

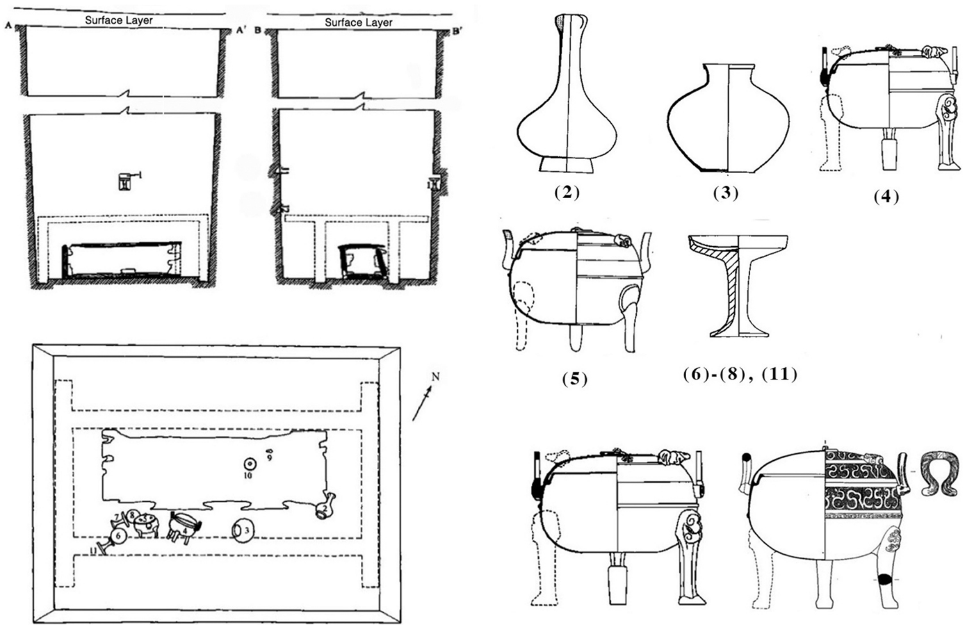

Fig. 3. Tomb M34: (top left) cross-section showing location of furnishings and wall niches (adapted from Hubei 2005:99, fig. 75); (bottom left) aerial plan showing placement of grave goods (2–8 and 11) within nested coffin (adapted from Hubei 2005:100, fig. 76); (2) garlic bulb flask; (3) small bronze *weng* urn; (4) A bronze *ding* tripod; (5) BI bronze *ding* tripod; (6–8, 11) BII *dou* pedestal dishes (2–8, 11 drawings all adapted from Hubei 2005:198, fig. 155); (bottom right) comparison between A bronze *ding* tripod from Wangpo Area 1 (adapted from Hubei 2005:198, fig. 155) and bronze *ding* tripod from Jiudian (九店) cemetery in the Chu polity heartland of Jianghan Plain (ca. 500–300 B.C.E.) (adapted from Hubei 1995:204).

be northward oriented and, while not necessarily sparse in grave goods, none contain metal ritual vessels, ceramic models, or *dou* pedestal dishes. For the most part, they contain utilitarian vessels like *guan* jars alongside either *yu*, *fu*, or *mou* basins. Interestingly, while the basins are stylistically typical of Qin burials found in the Wei River valley region of northern China, their co-occurrence with double-handled *guan* jars that do not have stylistic antecedents outside of the Xiang-Yi Plain suggests cultural mixture among smaller and less well-furnished burials in addition to large and elaborate ones (Fig. 4). Only two burials at this end of the component vector contain ritual ceramics. These consist of a single *he* covered bowl set from M13 (Fig. 4 middle shows a similar example from M19) and a small *hu* vase from M18 (Fig. 4 right) that is very simplified in style compared to ritual ceramic *hu* vases from the Chu, Qin, and Han traditions; these can thus be designated as possessing local flair. Thus, unlike the burials at the other end of this component vector, these burials are characterized not only by their small size, but by the restriction of their mortuary assemblages to local, utilitarian pottery forms.

In summary, the single biggest organizing feature of Wangpo Area 1 is the size of the burial in combination with the abundance of its grave goods. An important conclusion

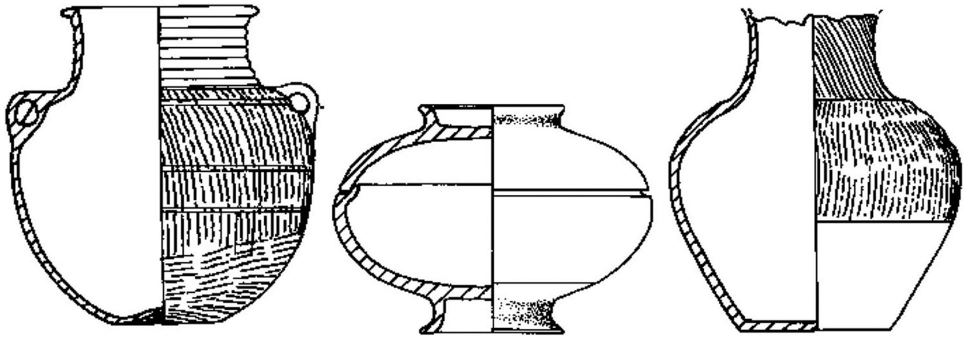

Fig. 4. Ceramic vessels showing local stylistic flair from assemblages on the negative end of the PC 1 vector at Wangpo Area 1: (left) AII double-handle jar from M9 (adapted from Hubei 2005:145, fig. 108); (middle) CI *he* covered bowl set from M19 (adapted from Hubei 2005:128, fig. 97); (right) EII *hu* vase from M18 (adapted from Hubei 2005:139, fig. 104).

that we can draw from this is that, while tombs at Wangpo range in size, even small burials can contain abundant grave goods, though these tend to have utilitarian functions (basins and jars), while those in larger tombs tend to include ritual vessels in both ceramic and bronze. This suggests that, alongside overall energy expenditure and probably wealth, access to ritual mortuary paraphernalia was the main structuring feature of this cemetery. Interestingly, Qin cultural traits are found in many of these burials, which suggests that Qin culture influenced the communities using Wangpo cemetery. At the same time, however, PC 1 also suggests that cultural mixture abounded, especially among the richer tombs (as evidenced by Chu archaism).

PC 2 — Component 2 accounts for 13 percent of the total variation. It has high negative values for *mingqi* (明器) "spirit vessel" ceramic *ding* tripods, *he* covered bowl sets, and *fang* vases, and high positive values for wall niches and metal ritual vessels, indicating that the trend that this component represents summarizes the relationship between mortuary assemblage and tomb structure (Table 2). The scores chart indicates that M35 and M34 are again the highest positively scoring burials alongside M15, M18, M10, M21, and M9, while tombs M48 and M54 are the highest negatively scoring burials, alongside M52, M11, M23, M30, and M61 (Table 4).

Focusing on the highest negative scoring burials first, tomb size is generally under 5 m^2, orientation is variable, and all are vertical shaft tombs containing single or nested coffins with "II"-shaped outer coffins. These are furthermore united in the inclusion of the paired sets of ceramic ritual vessels described above and a few also contain lacquer objects, ceramic models, and bronze weapons. Several of these features bear remarking upon. First, ceramic *hu* and *fang* vases do not co-occur in the same tomb, suggesting that choosing between the two was deliberate. Second, the juxtaposition of the styles of ritual vessels and their appearance in pairs in these burials speak to a curious intermixing of various traditions of mortuary practice. This can be visually observed among the *ding* tripods from M61, M23, and M30, all of which deviate from both Chu and Qin norms in their use of exaggerated flattened flanges on their lids, their slender, not quite saddle-shaped legs with small, tapered feet, and their flimsy upright handles (Fig. 5). Comparatively, Chu ceramic *ding* tripods from the Late Warring States period

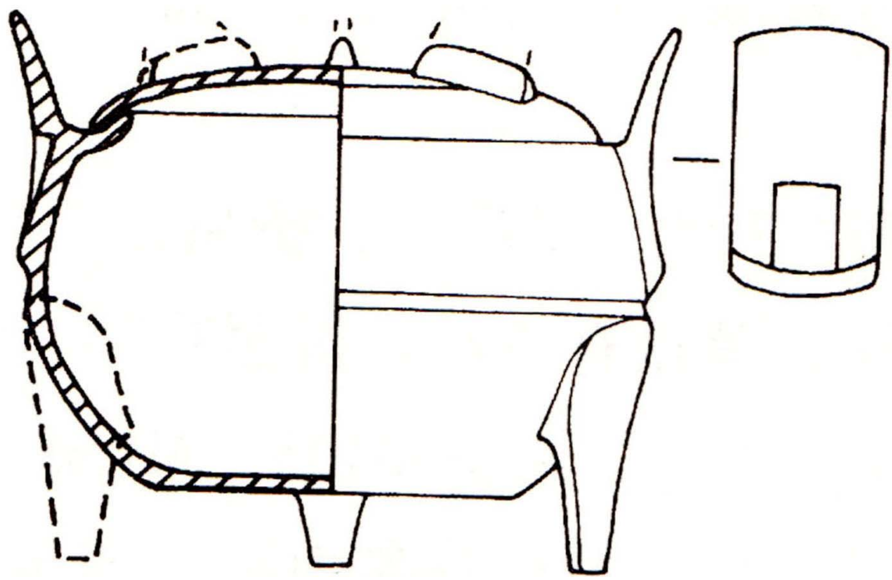

Fig. 5. Type AII pottery *ding* tripod from M23 at Wangpo Area 1 (adapted from Hubei 2005:121, fig. 93).

resemble the bronze specimen from M34, while Qin ceramic tripods from the Wei River region have squatter, thicker, and more saddle-like legs, as well as smaller knobs upon their lids (Teng 2014:74–79). The practice of pairing ritual ceramics in burials harkens back to sumptuary traditions of graded sets of ritual bronze vessels of the Zhou cultural sphere, which was carried on in Chu in the Jiangling region through the third century B.C.E., though that custom had died out in the Qin heartland by the mid-fifth century B.C.E. (von Falkenhausen 2004:149–150).

Finally, the "II"-shaped outer coffins are three-sided or four-sided wooden structures that enclose the rectangular inner coffin in which the body of the deceased is placed. Typically, the two end planks extend beyond the width of the total structure, thereby creating the "II" shape (see Fig. 3 and Fig. 6 for reference). These distinctive outer coffins are usually considered characteristic of Chu burial practice (Guo 1995:18–20; Song and Zhang 1995:225). In most Chu burials, nested coffin structures like this have wooden bases, sometimes with horizontally placed wooden beams beneath as foundations (e.g., M10 seen in Fig. 6). At Wangpo, however, many of these outer coffins lack both baseboards and foundations and are instead composed of a rectangular wooden frame constructed of thin planks with an equally thin lid placed on top (e.g., M24 seen in Fig. 6). Some scholars have noted that outer coffins among Qin burials in the Guanzhong region are sometimes constructed of excavated layers of stamped earth (*hangtu* 夯土), with only the lids constructed of wooden planks and laid upon the stamped earth layers (von Falkenhausen 2004:126). This practice has been explained as an economic measure motivated by the exhaustion of timber resources in the Guanzhong (關中) region, but at Wangpo, bottomless outer coffins exist alongside those that have full bases, and furthermore, the area did not have the same issues with timber exhaustion. This suggests that the reasons for using bottomless outer coffins at

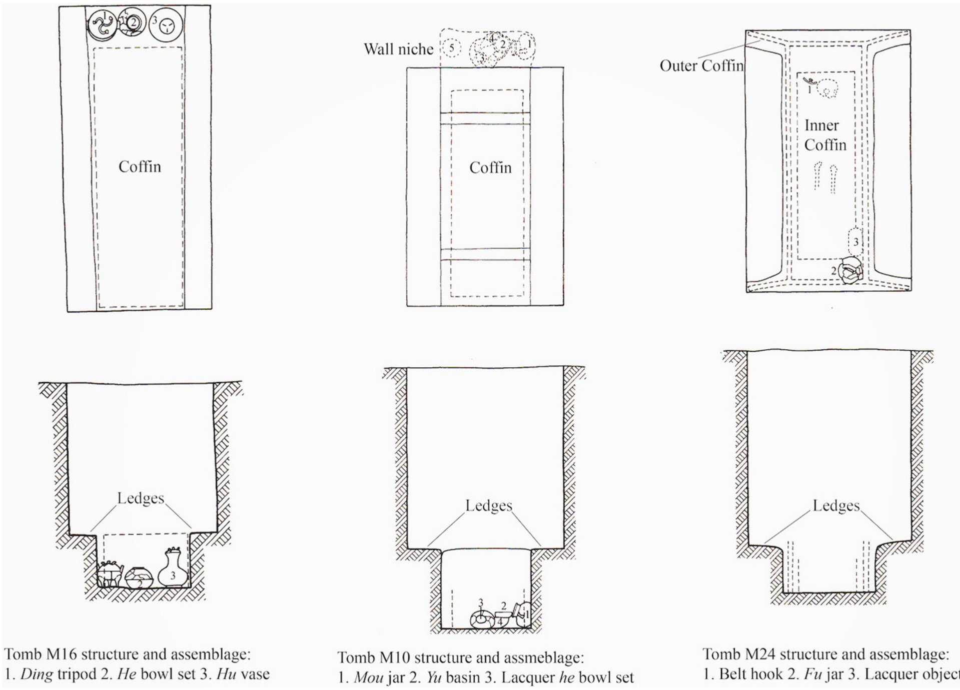

Fig. 6. Wangpo Area 1 tombs showing different structural configurations and grave goods: (left) M16, a single interment burial with a single coffin and parallel ledges, containing (1) *ding* tripod, (2) *he* bowl set, (3) *hu* vase (adapted from Hubei 2005:72, fig. 51); (middle) M10, a single interment burial with a single coffin with parallel ledges and a wall niche, containing (1) *mou* jar, (2–4) *yu* basins, (5) lacquer *he* bowl se (adapted from Hubei 2005:80, fig. 58); (right) M24, a single interment burial showing a nested coffin structure with parallel ledges, containing (1) belt hook, (2) *fu* jar, (3) lacquer object (adapted from Hubei 2005:112, fig. 86).

Wangpo were more complex than just energy expenditure, a topic deserving further study but which extends beyond the scope of the present analysis.

At the other end of the component vector, M34 and M35 reappear as large-sized burials that are also well-furnished, but that contain very few ceramic ritual vessels and no ceramic *ding* or *he*. These two burials, alongside the others with a high score for this component, feature wall niches, though unlike M34 and M35, tombs M15, M18, M10, M21, and M9 and others like them do not contain ritual vessel sets in either pottery or bronze. Instead, their assemblages are dominated by ceramic vessels like *yu* basins alongside *guan* jars and occasionally *mou* and *fu* basins. Furthermore, the wall niches of M34 and M35 are different from the other examples at this end of the vector, being small, more numerous, and placed high above the coffin structure on every wall of the tomb shaft.

The more typically encountered wall niche at Wangpo is a type of shallow alcove dug into the base of the tomb shaft at one end of the burial where grave goods are placed (Fig. 6). As mentioned earlier, these alcove-like niches are unique to Wangpo. The fact that grave goods placed inside would have been blocked from access (as well as view) once the coffin was placed into the burial suggests that these niches could be localized derivations of the Qin practice of constructing catacomb tombs, which were usually much deeper and housed the coffin alongside grave goods.

In summary, component 2 represents a trend based primarily on the relationship between tomb structure and the presence of paired sets of ceramics, wherein those burials that feature ceramic *mingqi* vessels, especially if they appear in paired sets, are differentiated structurally from those that contain either bronze ritual vessels or utilitarian pottery. Here, as in in component 1, such distinctive and localized mortuary practices are on display in the way tombs, mortuary furniture, and grave goods were constructed. The presence of sets of *mingqi* ceramics might have been due to chronology, though the localized flare of *ding* tripods included among ritual assemblage sets suggests that deliberate anachronism might be a more accurate interpretation of this trend. Finally, we can identify M34 and M35 as structural outliers because of their atypical wall niches and their inclusion of metal ritual vessels; clearly, whatever principles undergirded the structure of burials belonging to people who had access to only ceramic *mingqi* vessels for burial were not the same as those that guided the burials of individuals who had access to bronze ones.

PC 3 — Component 3 accounts for only a little over 9 percent of the total variation within the dataset. It shows high positive values for miscellaneous pottery, ceramic *fang* vases, and lacquers, and high negative values for *hu* vases. This suggests the trend that this component summarizes has to do with the exclusive use of *fang* versus *hu*. Table 4 shows that high negatively scoring burials for this component include M61, M39, M31, M49, M145, M30, and M14. All of these are small (none are over 5 m^2 in basal area) and, except for M145, M49, and M29, each of which has parallel ledges, they are all vertical shaft burials with few architectural additions. Orientations display no consistency among these burials, which range in grave goods from two to ten. For the most part, the grave goods from these tombs consist of ceramic ritual sets comprising *ding*, *he*, and *hu* vases, alongside *dou* pedestal dishes in some, *guan* jars in others, weapons such as halberd heads and swords, and personal ornaments such as jade *bi* disks and bronze mirrors, belt hooks, or chimes. What unites these burials is the presence of *hu* vases, which at 49 total specimens, are the most abundant and frequently encountered grave good within this burial cluster.

Importantly, these *hu* also display a wide range of styles and morphology that bear remarking upon here. At the most negative end of this component vector, the *hu* vessels all feature long necks, rounded bellies, ring bases, and lids. The Wangpo site report divides these into four types (A, B, C, and D) that were differentiated from one another based on overall morphology. Each type was then further subdivided into period styles (designated with roman numerals I, II, etc.) based on nuances in the shape of their openings, necks, bellies, and ring bases (Fig. 7). For the most part, none of types A through D *hu* are typical of either Qin or Han vases, though they possess many elements of both traditions as well as traditions pre-dating the imperial era. For instance, the slim elongated profiles of the type A *hu* harken back to Chu specimens that are commonly found throughout the Jiangling region of Hubei. The lack of dish-like openings is also a marker of pre-imperial *hu* vases, though their high ring bases nevertheless suggest that their production was influenced by Qin bronze *hu* that have been found at Gaozhuang (高庄) cemetery in Fengxiang county (鳳翔) in Shaanxi (Teng 2014:78–79). According to Teng Mingyu (2014:80), the Gaozhuang cemetery

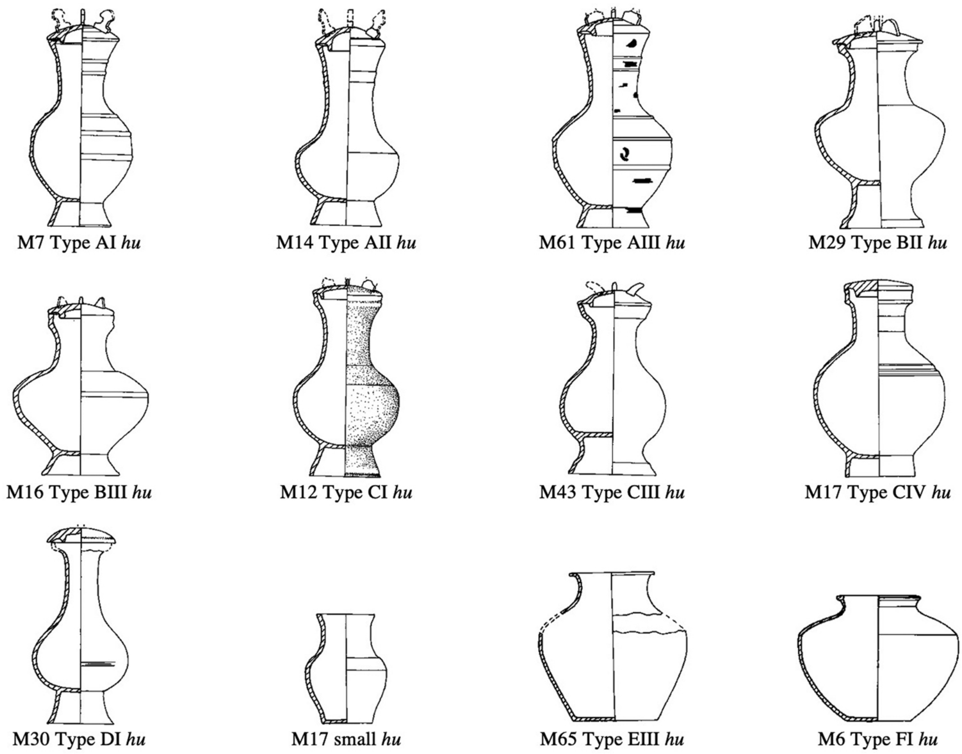

Fig. 7. *Hu* vases from Wangpo Area 1 burials (adapted from Hubei 2005:130–139, figs. 98–105).

dates to the Late Warring States through early imperial era, when the Qin dynasty was rapidly and aggressively expanding its territory southwards and eastwards along the Yangzi River in its quest for unification. This expansionary process was one in which local practices were mixed with Qin practices, forming localized material culture repertoires in different locations (Teng 2014:84–85). I believe that the *hu* vases from burials at this end of the component vector exemplify this particular phenomenon, as evidenced not only by type A's slim profile and simple openings, but also by the unique flattened, outwardly flaring knobs on the lids found on most of the vases from these burials.

Furthermore, the typically encountered assemblage from these burials features ceramic *ding* with similar localized flair in their ornamentation, alongside local ceramics such as double-handled *guan* jars and bronze personal items and weapons such as mirrors, belt hooks, chime bells, halberds, and swords. Many of these items form part of assemblages that predate Qin presence in the region. For example, chime bells, like "II"-shaped outer coffins, were commonly included in Chu mortuary practice (Thote 2004:133). Additionally, the halberd from M61 bears a crudely incised inscription, two characters of which can be transcribed as 少府, translated as "Minor Treasurer." Since the position of "Minor Treasurer" was associated with the Qin polity, the fact that the halberd was found within a tomb containing a "II"-shaped outer coffin along with paired sets of ceramic *ding*, *he*, *hu*, and *dou* suggests that the occupant was likely an individual who was simultaneously connected to the local community and associated with the Qin polity.

At the positive scoring end of the component vector are the tombs M11, M48, M57, M35, M52, M51, and M26. Except for M35, these are also small-sized tombs measuring under 4 m^2 and contain numerous grave goods. Like those at the negative end of the vector, these also vary in terms of burial orientation, though they tend to have fewer architectural modifications, save for M35's small lamp niches and M26's parallel ledges. What unites these burials is their inclusion of miscellaneous pottery consisting primarily of *ping* bottles, *weng* jars, and ladles and *fang* vases, which as mentioned previously do not co-occur in the same tombs as *hu*. Like *hu*, *fang* appear most frequently among ritual vessel sets, though at Wangpo, they are not mixed among utilitarian vessels. Unlike *hu*, the types and styles of the *fang* are much less varied, consisting primarily of two types differentiated mainly by the presence or absence of slip paint residue (Fig. 8, top row).

Fang vases have a curious use-history in early Chinese mortuary ritual. Though rectangular-shaped vessels date back to the Shang period, direct antecedents of square cross-sectioned wine containers (as *fang* were primarily used for) are few in the Han and Yangzi River region prior to the second century B.C.E. Rectangular wine vessels made of bronze and known as *fang hu* (方壶) were popular as ritual and mortuary

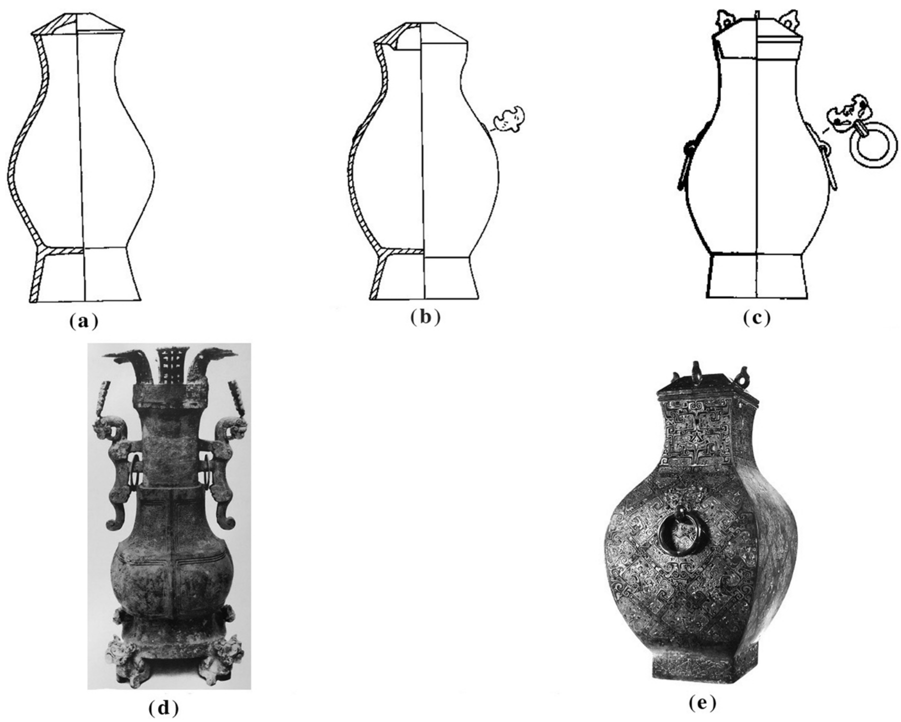

Fig. 8. *Fang* vases: (a) M11, II *fang* vase (adapted from Hubei 2005:257, fig. 190); (b) M51, IV *fang* vase (adapted from Hubei 2005:259, fig. 191); (c) M35, II bronze *fang* vase (adapted from Hubei 2005:288, fig. 215); (d) bronze *fang hu* from the Cai Hou tomb, Ximennei, Shouxian, Anhui province (late sixth century B.C.E.) (adapted from So 1995:34, fig. 41); (e) bronze *fang hu* from Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution (late fifth or early fourth century B.C.E.) (adapted from So 1995:49, fig. 79).

accoutrement among elites of Eastern Zhou polities like the Chu, Jin, and Qin beginning in the early seventh century B.C.E. At that time, these polities were emerging from under the cultural auspices of the Western Zhou and beginning to demonstrate regional diversity in their bronze casting (So 1995:13–17). The *fang hu* were typically monumental in stature as well as flamboyant in their surface decoration, especially in the Chu region of the Han and Yangzi River valleys, where they reached the pinnacle of stylistic elaboration (Fig. 6). They seem to have fallen out of general usage and production by the late fourth century B.C.E., so are unlikely to have been the direct stylistic antecedents of the *fang* found at Wangpo, especially since ceramic imitations are not commonly found among small to medium-sized burials in either the Xiang-Yi Plain or in Jiangling.

More likely models for ceramic *fang* began to appear in the fifth century B.C.E. in northern polities like Zhongshan 中山 and Jin, where the Houma (侯馬) foundry was at that time known for design replication as well as inlay (So 1995:46–50) (Fig. 6). According to Teng Mingyu (2014:75), this style of *fang hu*, with its square cross-section and inlaid surface decoration arranged in geometric patterns, came to be adopted into the Qin polity's bronze vessel repertoire during its period of expansion in the late fourth into the third centuries B.C.E. It was likely brought to the Han and Yangzi river regions from Qin, as evidenced by their presence at the Yunmeng Shuihudi (睡虎地) cemetery in Hubei.

Interestingly, however, the assemblages that *fang* are typically found in at Wangpo differ dramatically from those at Shuihudi. At Shuihudi, bronze *fang* were recovered alongside bronze *ding*, *hu*, *pan*, *yi* as ritual sets, *he* covered bowl sets, mirrors, belt hooks, swords, *mou* basins, and garlic-bulb flasks (So 1995:70; Yunmeng 1981:44). All of these mortuary goods are typical of Qin cemeteries in Shaanxi where the polity originated (cf. Teng 2014:75–79). At Wangpo, on the other hand, many of the burials—M11, M48, and M52 especially—that contain *fang* tend also to contain *ping* bottles, *zao* stove models, and *weng* jars, which appeared during the Western Han period. The *zao* stove models especially are hallmarks of Han mortuary practices, when creation of miniature models of community buildings that began with *cang* granaries in Qin during the late sixth century B.C.E. became widespread and common (von Falkenhausen 2004:132). Indeed, even M35, which contains the only bronze *fang* from the Wangpo cemetery, contains ceramic *deng* oil lamps characteristic of Han burial traditions, alongside its mixed assemblage of bronze *ding*, ceramic *hu* and *dou*, and several bronze and jade ornaments.

The *ding* tripods that accompany *fang* vases in these burials provide more chronological information, as most of them, with their flattened bodies, unadorned lids, and squat curvy legs, resemble specimens from Mawangdui (马王堆) cemetery, Hunan (dated to 168 B.C.E.) and from Qianping (前坪), Hubei (dated to 122 B.C.E.) (Psarras 2015:262–263, fig. 10, fig. 28). Finally, several burials from this end of the component vector—M35, M52, and M51 specifically—contain *banliang* (半两) coins, which were in circulation since at least the mid-fourth century B.C.E. before being replaced by *wuzhu* (五铢) coins during the Han Dynasty (Chen et al. 2021:1). This provides additional evidence placing the likely date of burials from this end of the component vector to the mid- to late second century B.C.E.

Based on the above observations, we can conclude that component 3 summarizes compositional trends of ritual vessel assemblages revolving around *hu* on the negative end and miscellaneous vessels as well as *fang* on the positive end. The burials that lie closer to zero along this vector are burials that either do not contain ritual vessel sets with *hu* or miscellaneous vessels and *fang* together, such as M15, which contains only a *guan* and a *yu*, or that contain mixed assemblages that do not form full ritual vessel or utilitarian vessel sets, such as M6, M14, M18, M19, M25, M27, M29, M32, and M65. Some of these burials, like M14, contain archaic types of *hu* typical of Chu grave goods alongside chime bells, local style double-handle jars, and Qin-style *ding* tripods, while others, like M65 and M6, contain *hu* that more closely resemble Han-style *guan* alongside local style double-handle *guan* jars and *yu* basins. Indeed, Wangpo M65's specimen resembles *guan* from the Dafentou (大坋頭) cemetery at Yunmeng (雲夢) in Hubei province, which has been dated to 173 B.C.E., while the specimen from M6 closely resembles a *guan* from Shuihudi cemetery that has been dated to the same year (Psarras 2015:209, fig. 9, fig. 12).[4] Mixtures of these kinds reinforce the idea that the division between Qin and Han in this area was not at all clear cut and that there was ample space for ad hoc blending of different traditions of mortuary practice.

It should also be noted that component 3 partly summarizes the temporal component of the Wangpo Area 1 burial ground by grouping similar burials based on assemblage composition, with vessel typology helping to fine-tune the chronology. At the earlier end of this chronological spectrum, we have burials that contain grave goods similar to the contents of Qin burials from the Guanzhong Valley during the third century B.C.E., as represented by burials from the negative end of the component vector. At the later end, we have burials from the positive end of the vector that exhibit Western Han cultural practices dating to well into the mid-second century B.C.E. This provides a spread of roughly a century and half of usage, which corresponds to the temporal range proposed in the original site report.

PC 4 — Component 4 accounts for nearly 8 percent of the total variation in the burial cluster. It has negative values for southward orientation, *fu* basins, and personal items and high positive values for northward orientation (Table 3). According to Table 4, highly negatively scoring tombs include M57, M29, M145, M6, M42, M22, M25, and M65, while highly positively scoring tombs include M21, M48, M7, M51, M35, M37, M61, M62, and M23. The negatively scoring burials are all small and exhibit a diversity of grave good richness and structural elaboration, from M57's highly mixed assortment of incomplete ritual vessel sets alongside utilitarian vessels and personal adornments to M29's set of a single *hu* vase and *fu* jar. These burials are also varied in terms of date, with some tombs like M145 containing Qin-style *ding* with local flair and Chu-style slender *hu* vases that place the tomb towards the earlier end of the chronological spectrum of the site; others, like M22, contain grave goods such as *fang* and *banliang* coins that place it towards the latter end. Aside from the burials all having similar orientations, with many containing *fu* or numerous personal items, there is very little that these burials have in common with one another.

The positively scoring tombs exhibit two underlying trends regarding northward oriented burials. The first trend (represented by M21, M48, and M7) is that, like southward oriented burials, northward oriented tombs at Wangpo exhibit diversity in structure and elaboration. For instance, M21 is a small tomb with a wall niche and parallel ledges and has a single coffin containing only ceramic *yu* and *mou* basins as grave goods, while M48 contains neither niches nor ledges, but instead has a nested coffin set containing paired sets of *ding*, *he*, and *fang* alongside a *weng* jar, *zao* stove model, *ping* bottle, and an unidentifiable lacquer object. M7 falls somewhere between these two, as it has a wall niche as well as a single coffin, and its grave goods include a single ceramic *ding*, two *he*, a single *hu*, two *dou*, a bronze mirror, and a bronze weight. The second trend summarized by these northward burials, represented by M51, M37, M61, M62, M23, and M35, is that many contain ritual sets of *ding*, *he*, and *hu* alongside small personal items like coinage or personal ornaments, suggesting a slight tendency at this cemetery for burials containing ritual vessel sets to be northward facing.

Overall, component 4 clearly summarizes trends tied to burial orientation at Wangpo, specifically northward versus southward orientations. As stated earlier, burial orientation has traditionally been considered a measure of cultural affiliation. What this component shows, however, is that burial orientation is a very weak structuring principle at Wangpo in practice. Whatever rules may have governed the orientations of elite burials among different early Chinese polities did not apply to lower elites and commoners.

PC 5 — Component 5 accounts for almost 7 percent of the total variation of the dataset. It shows high positive values for ledges, wall niches, and southward orientation at one end of the vector, and moderately negative values for *fu* basins and northward orientation at the other. The trend that the PCA summarizes here has to do with the inverse relationship between these sets of features. The highest positively scoring burials include M54, M145, M10, M16, M21, and M15, all of which are relatively small in size and lack uniformity in terms of assemblage composition and tomb structure beyond the presence of ledges. Indeed, the presence of ledges itself seems to exhibit a considerable amount of variation at Wangpo, with some tombs like M54 and M145 featuring ledges alongside nested coffins, others like M16 featuring ledges and a single coffin (Fig. 6), and still others like M15 and M21 featuring ledges, wall niches, and single coffins. The only combination not encountered at Wangpo are tombs with niches, ledges, and nested coffins. This suggests that certain features, such as niches or outer coffins, were intimately connected with the placement of grave goods in that multiple storage spaces never coincided in a single tomb. For instance, if nested coffins were present, a wall niche was rendered redundant.

Similar to the bottomless outer coffins discussed above, I believe that parallel ledges ought not to be interpreted in terms of energy expenditure or labor investment, but rather as practices that carry localized meanings. While a full study of what those meanings might be goes beyond the scope of this analysis, it could very well be imagined that some relationship existed between the practices of constructing parallel ledges at Wangpo and *ercengtai* among elites of the Shang dynasty. The recently discovered Yejiashan (叶家山) cemetery (Hubei 2013) in neighboring Suizhou (随州), Hubei, belonging to the Western Zhou-period Zeng polity, contains large tombs with *ercengtai* as well. Large burials associated with the Chu polity from the Jianghan Plain often feature inverted tiers leading down towards the burial chamber from the surface, a practice that could also be an antecedent to parallel ledges at Wangpo. What all this suggests is that there were many ledge-constructing practices among elites in the areas surrounding the Xiang-Yi Plain preceding the creation of Wangpo cemetery, such that the ledges at Wangpo may represent a culmination of their combined influences. Indeed, parallel ledges like those from Wangpo Area 1 appear with some frequency along the middle reaches of the Han River, and taper off as one moves further south towards the Jianghan Plain, as well as further north towards Shaanxi and Henan provinces (Hubei 2004).[5] This suggests that the practice might have been unique to this region.

High negatively scoring tombs for this component include M44, M14, M147, and M19 to a moderate degree. In a way, these burials are much more uniform in terms of structure vis-à-vis the positive end of this spectrum in that all of these burials have nested coffins and no niches or ledges, though like the highly positively scoring end of the component vector, their sizes and assemblages vary widely. Given that this component represents such a small percentage of the overall variation of the Wangpo Area 1 dataset, and that not all of these northward-facing, nested coffin tombs contain *fu*, I hesitate to ascribe too much meaning to the patterns represented by this end of the component vector. Similarly, I do not believe that southward orientation has any strong organizing correlation with parallel ledges considering that component 4 has already shown that orientation is not a strong organizing force in and of itself. The most interpretable information provided by component 5 is in regard to parallel ledges, which occur in a variety of tomb structures and sizes and alongside a variety of grave good assemblages. Moreover, most ledge-bearing tombs are southward oriented at Wangpo. What the negative end of the component vector suggests is that Wangpo's ledge-bearing tombs are less likely to be northward oriented or to contain *fu* basins.

CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A NEW WAY OF THINKING ABOUT CULTURAL CATEGORIES

In summary, the first and largest structuring feature of the Wangpo cemetery, represented by component 1, is tomb size in combination with an abundance of grave goods. One of the major findings associated with this conclusion is that, while tombs at Wangpo can range in size, even small burials can contain abundant grave goods. This suggests that access to ritual paraphernalia, alongside overall energy expenditure and probably wealth, was the main structuring feature of the cemetery. Another important finding is that, while Qin cultural influence was certainly present, it was mixed liberally with influences from other extant traditions as well as those of non-Qin origin.

The second structuring feature of the cemetery centers on the relationship between tomb structure and paired ceramic ritual vessels. The single most important conclusion to be drawn from this structuring feature is that traditional socio-political ranks based on tomb richness and grave goods are at work at Wangpo. Specifically, we seem to have large tombs featuring mainly bronze ritual vessels sets, medium-sized tombs with paired *mingqi* ceramic vessel sets, and the smallest tombs featuring mainly utilitarian vessels. However, the demarcations between these various "ranks" are quite murky at Wangpo because of the considerable ad hoc mixture of vessel types and styles within any single tomb assemblage. This suggests that whatever sumptuary regulations that may have existed among higher elites during the Warring States period might have been practiced in very idiosyncratic ways among lower and non-elites.

The third structuring feature of the cemetery is chronology, as represented by the spread of *hu* versus *fang* vases in component 3. The chronology represented by component 3 spans the early third into mid-second century B.C.E., covering the historical time period during which the Qin and subsequently the Western Han polities occupied the region. This time period is also arrived at in the original site report, which based its periodization on vessel typologies. What traditional periodization fails to take into account (and the approach taken here highlights) is that the relatively simplistic three-part chronological breakdown, even if accurate in terms of dates, does not take appropriate consideration of the ad hoc and highly idiosyncratic mixtures of burial practices present at the cemetery. Change over time for the community that utilized the Wangpo Area 1 burial ground did not happen by means of wholesale cultural replacement as new polities conquered older ones. Instead, the process involved significant negotiation and manipulation of different sets of material culture symbols. Furthermore, the fact that chronology is revealed in this analysis not to be the foremost structuring feature of the burial ground supports my argument that, while typological periodization may be useful for establishing a temporal framework, it should not serve as the foundation upon which cultural interpretation is based.

The fourth structuring feature of the cemetery is burial orientation. This was not a very strong force here, suggesting that some other consideration was at play when people were choosing how to orient tombs. One possibility is that choice of burial orientation was based more on the terrain rather than on ideological or ritual principles. Indeed, this cemetery is located on the slope of a hill. A possible future line of inquiry regarding the question of orientation might involve examining the placement of seemingly paired burials and the movement of smaller tomb groupings over space and time from the beginning of the cemetery's use-life to its end. Such a study would require further refinement of the site's chronology with burial pairing in mind.

The fifth and weakest structuring feature of Wangpo Area 1 cemetery has to do with the presence of architectural elaborations of the tomb, most significantly, parallel ledges. The main finding here is that the creation of these ledges was not simply the result of energy-conservation decisions. Rather, because they occur in rich and elaborate tombs but do not co-occur with wall niches, parallel ledges should more likely be interpreted as ongoing adaptations of much older and archaic Shang, Western Zhou, and Chu mortuary practices that competed with incoming practices represented by wall niche construction.

Overall, the findings of this study reveal the benefits of utilizing exploratory data analysis to draw preliminary conclusions about cemeteries like Wangpo over more traditional approaches. These benefits include the deprivileging of ceramic typologies as markers not only of chronology but also of cultural identity. By not a priori assuming that a burial containing a certain type of ceramic object that is traceable to an early polity is in its entirety a product of that polity's intentional cultural creation, more room is made to explore regionally based cultural mixture. The second benefit is that it allows us to elevate burial features other than grave goods as equally important markers of culture and social rank. In other words, it allows us to take the entirety of the mortuary ritual process into consideration when evaluating cemeteries. This is particularly useful for burial grounds containing small to medium-sized burials that otherwise lack obvious affiliations with established polities and makes it easier for scholars to begin interpreting their role in the formation of empire.

The findings from this study suggest that the process of imperial incorporation of communities in the Xiang-Yi region was mediated by extant cultural practices. This conclusion intersects with ongoing research that uses material culture from the middle Han and Yangzi River valleys to challenge established narratives. For example, based on analysis of Western Han funerary relocation documents, Guo Jue (2019:147) argues that lower elites in the Jianghan region used material culture to strategically negotiate social identity as well as appropriate state authority. At the same time, Wangpo should not be taken to be representative of the entirety of the Xiang-Yi region. It is expected that different cemeteries will exhibit different degrees and kinds of cultural mixture. In addition, recent studies of excavated early imperial texts reveal that state-organized or state-induced migration was a common practice in the early imperial period (Barbieri-Low 2019; Korolkov and Hein 2021), though the degree to which this movement of peoples manifests clearly in the archaeological record of the Xiang-Yi area remains unexplored here. However, the methodology proposed in this study, if extended to cover areas broader than a single burial ground, represents a step towards answering this kind of historical question and engaging other innovative ways to approach, examine, and ultimately interpret the history of early China.

NOTES

1. This discussion does not cover Palaeolithic or Neolithic evidence of human habitation in this region. So far, the only evidence we have of sustained anthropogenic activity in the Xiangyang area for these periods is the remains of the Late Neolithic Qujialing 屈家 (ca. 3400–2500 B.C.E.) and Shijiahe 石家河 (ca. 2700–1800 B.C.E.) cultures. Both of these merit further research that exceeds the scope of the present study.
2. In addition to this periodization, Wangpo Area 1 also features four Spring and Autumn period (ca. 771–481 B.C.E) burials that lie outside of the scope of the present study (see Fig. 2).
3. For more detailed information about this issue, which is not unique to Chinese archaeology, but that is curiously under studied in this particular field, see O'Brien and Lyman (1999:21–22).
4. Clearly, objects that the Wangpo site report labels *hu* have been labelled *guan* in other site reports.
5. At the site of Luopogang (羅坡崗) located near Jingmen City (荊門市), approximately 130 km south of Xiangyang along the Han River, only one burial (tomb M109) features this kind of parallel ledge structure. The same burial features a wall niche and a single coffin (Hubei 2004).

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