



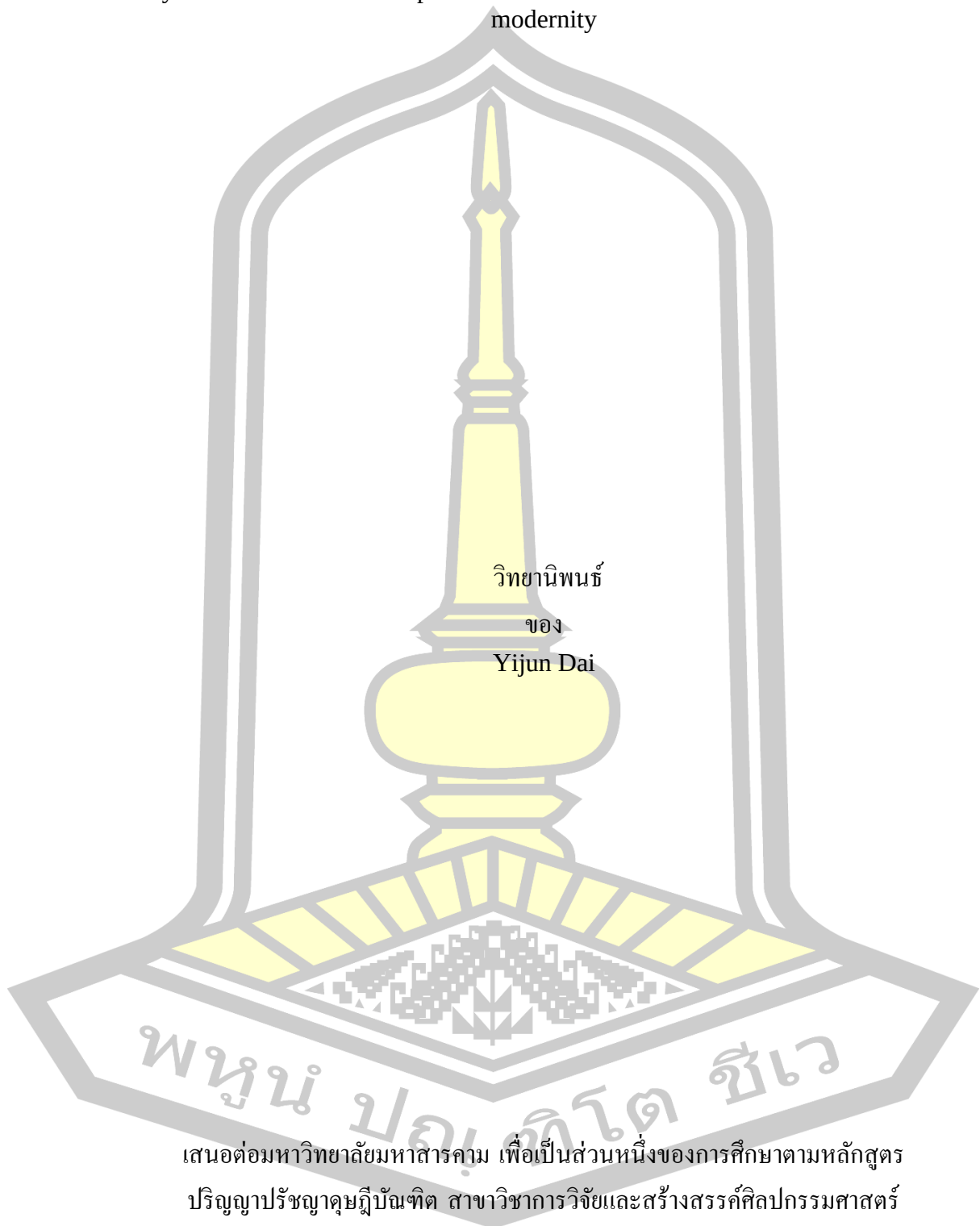
Images of Han Dynasty Artifacts Haihun Marquis state Nanchang China Semiotics
and Symbolic narrative In the process of revitalization China's traditional culture and
modernity

Yijun Dai

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Fine and Applied Arts Research and Creation
May 2025

Copyright of Mahasarakham University

Images of Han Dynasty Artifacts Haihun Marquis state Nanchang China Semiotics
and Symbolic narrative In the process of revitalization China s traditional culture and
modernity



เสนอต่อมหาวิทยาลัยมหาสารคาม เพื่อเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษาตามหลักสูตร
ปริญญาปรัชญาดุษฎีบัณฑิต สาขาวิชาการวิจัยและสร้างสรรค์ศิลปกรรมศาสตร์

พฤษภาคม 2568

ลิขสิทธิ์เป็นของมหาวิทยาลัยมหาสารคาม

Images of Han Dynasty Artifacts Haihun Marquis state Nanchang China Semiotics
and Symbolic narrative In the process of revitalization China s traditional culture and
modernity

Yijun Dai

พหุบัณฑิต

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
for Doctor of Philosophy (Fine and Applied Arts Research and Creation)

May 2025

Copyright of Mahasarakham University



The examining committee has unanimously approved this Thesis, submitted by Ms. Yijun Dai , as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy Fine and Applied Arts Research and Creation at Mahasarakham University

Examining Committee

.....Chairman

(Assoc. Prof. Niyom
Wongphongkham , Ph.D.)

.....Advisor

(Assoc. Prof. Arkom Sa-
Ngiamviboon , Ph.D.)

.....Committee

(Asst. Prof. Vuthipong
Roadkasamsri , Ph.D.)

.....Committee

(Yihan Ke , Ph.D.)

.....Committee

(Somkhit Suk-erb , Ph.D.)

Mahasarakham University has granted approval to accept this Thesis as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy Fine and Applied Arts Research and Creation

.....
(Asst. Prof. Peera Phanlukthao , Ph.D.)

Dean of Faculty of Fine - Applied Arts
and Cultural Science

.....
(Asst. Prof. Pondej Chaowarat , Ph.D.)

Dean of Graduate School

TITLE	Images of Han Dynasty Artifacts Haihun Marquis state Nanchang China Semiotics and Symbolic narrative In the process of revitalization China s traditional culture and modernity		
AUTHOR	Yijun Dai		
ADVISORS	Associate Professor Arkom Sa-Ngiamviboon , Ph.D.		
DEGREE	Doctor of Philosophy	MAJOR	Fine and Applied Arts Research and Creation
UNIVERSITY	Maharakham University	YEAR	2025

ABSTRACT

"Images of Han Dynasty Artifacts, Haihun Marquis state Nanchang, China: Semiotics and Symbolic narrative In the process of revitalization China's traditional culture and modernity," is foundational research. Guided by Roland Barthes' theory of cultural semiotics, it employs qualitative research and interdisciplinary methods. The study explores the formation of cultural symbols in the artifact images of the Haihun Marquis State from multiple dimensions, including the history of pre-Qin Chinese image studies, Confucian moral thought in the Western Han Dynasty, traditional Chinese aesthetics, sociology, and communication studies. Using structured or semi-structured qualitative data analysis and description, the research takes a cross-disciplinary approach, both vertically and horizontally.

The research findings are as follows:

1.The formation of artifact images from the Haihun Marquis State originates from the ancient human understanding of the relationship between the universe and nature. These image-based cultural symbols are an important part of the historical process. Images transcend texts and become expressions of socially shared spiritual values and ideas. These cultural symbols not only represent material cultural heritage but also embody the intangible cultural heritage of human spiritual culture.

2.The Confucian ethical cultural symbol system of the Han dynasty involves individual moral cultivation, national governance, and social order. Image symbols materialize Confucian ethical thoughts, forming a cultural symbol narrative system for social rites and laws. This became the spiritual foundation of the ethical order in the Han dynasty and later generations, influencing the cultural symbol narrative of social images throughout history.

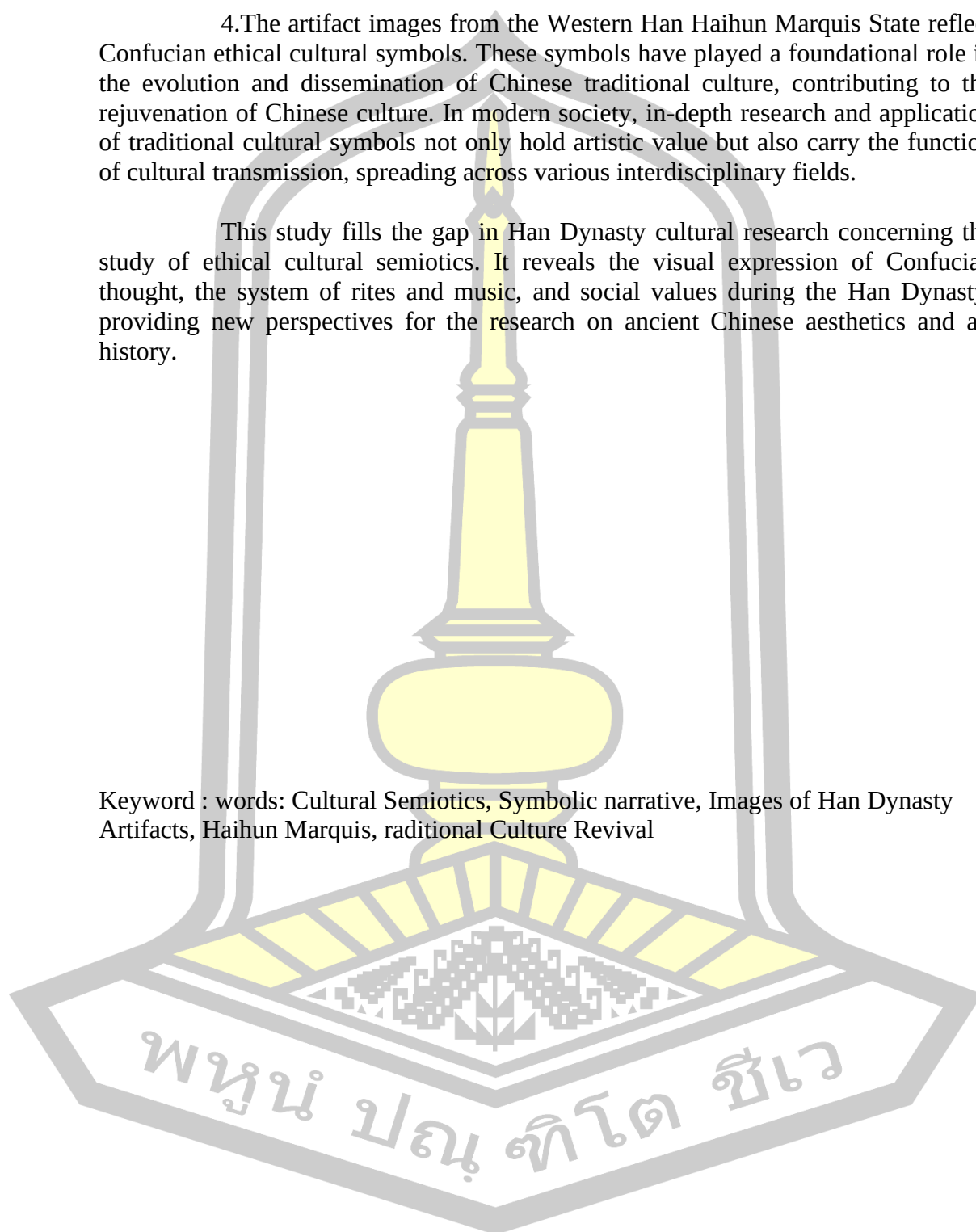
3.The artifact images unearthed from the Haihun Marquis State reflect the guiding role of Confucian ethical culture in traditional aesthetic culture. These images have evolved from diachronic to synchronic cultural symbols, building aesthetic

cultural symbols with Confucian ethical concepts, which are distinctively Chinese.

4.The artifact images from the Western Han Haihun Marquis State reflect Confucian ethical cultural symbols. These symbols have played a foundational role in the evolution and dissemination of Chinese traditional culture, contributing to the rejuvenation of Chinese culture. In modern society, in-depth research and application of traditional cultural symbols not only hold artistic value but also carry the function of cultural transmission, spreading across various interdisciplinary fields.

This study fills the gap in Han Dynasty cultural research concerning the study of ethical cultural semiotics. It reveals the visual expression of Confucian thought, the system of rites and music, and social values during the Han Dynasty, providing new perspectives for the research on ancient Chinese aesthetics and art history.

Keyword : words: Cultural Semiotics, Symbolic narrative, Images of Han Dynasty Artifacts, Haihun Marquis, traditional Culture Revival



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

At this moment, my heart is especially moved, and as I reflect, my journey at Mahasarakham University is about to come to an end. I still remember the Thai rainy season three years ago when I first set foot on this unfamiliar land to begin my academic journey. The warmth and kindness of the university's professors, along with the enthusiasm of the staff and fellow students, made me feel at home in a foreign country. As the time to bid farewell approaches, I wish to express my gratitude:

First of all, I sincerely thank God for giving me such an excellent advisor—Professor Arkom Sangiamvibool. I would like to express my heartfelt thanks for your guidance, support, and patience throughout my doctoral research. You pointed me in the right direction for my research concept, encouraged my writing, and trusted me to develop my thesis. Your academic insight and rigorous scientific approach have always been a role model for me in my studies.

Next, I would like to thank my colleagues who came to Thailand with me. Throughout the learning process, we supported each other, made progress together, and our discussions and exchanges sparked many new ideas and inspirations, while also leading to valuable friendships.

Finally, I would also like to express special thanks to my family, especially my husband, Mr. Huangkai. On this journey of studying abroad, your support and encouragement allowed me to focus on my studies without worry and maintain a positive mindset. Your understanding and companionship have been a constant source of strength, enabling me to persevere until the end. And

In the future, I will carry everything I have learned here as I continue forward, exploring and pursuing academic excellence. I would like to thank everyone who has offered me help and support. It is because of you that my journey has been so exciting and unforgettable.

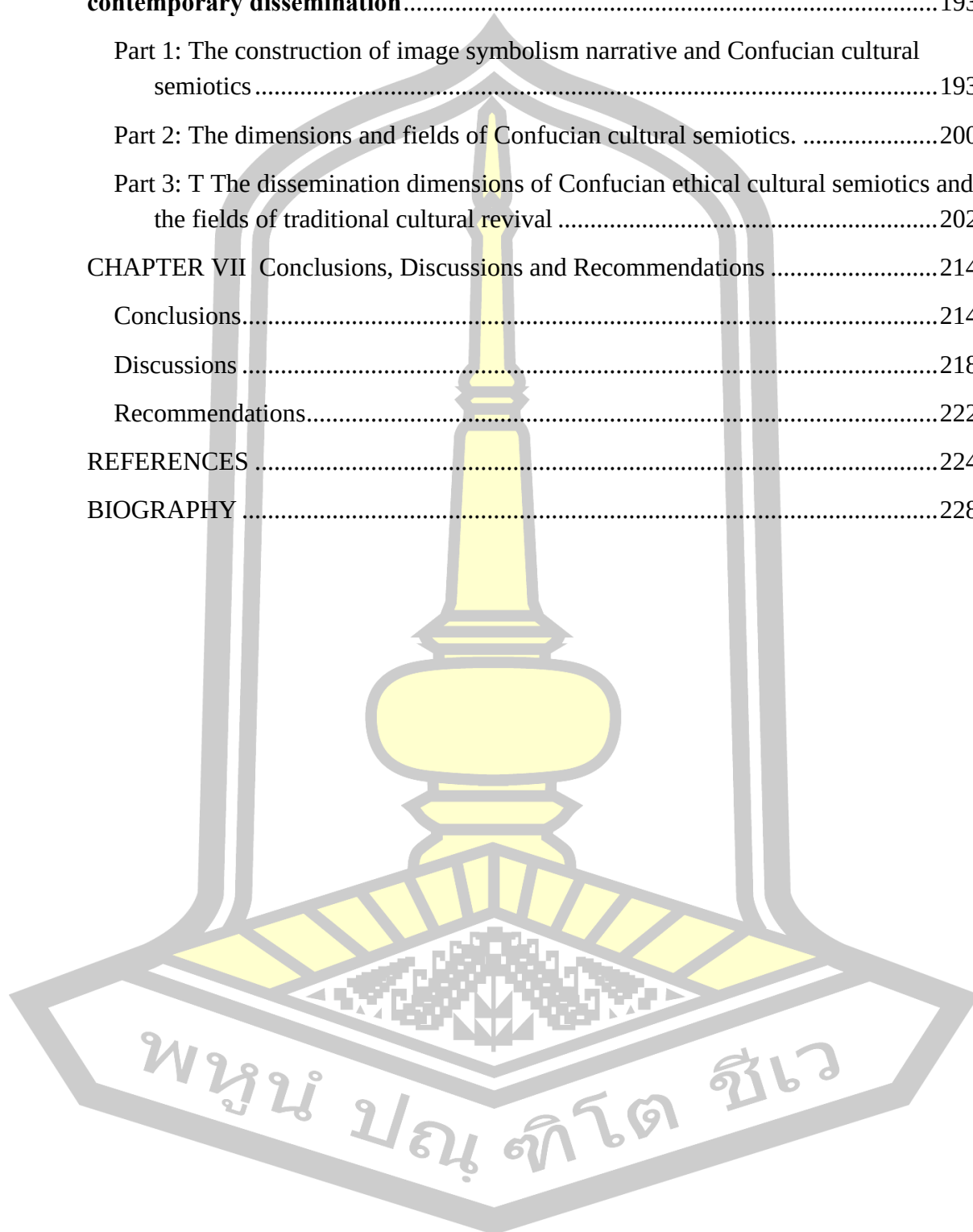
Yijun Dai

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	D
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	F
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	G
LIST OF TABLES.....	J
LIST OF FIGURES	L
CHAPTER I Introduction	1
1. Background Research	1
1.3 Archaeology of the Haihun Marquis State and images Data of Unearthed Artifacts	6
2. Research Objectives.....	15
3 Research Questions.....	15
4. Definition of Terms	16
5. Scope of Research.....	20
6. Research Methodology	21
7. Literature Review	24
8. Concept, Theory and Conceptual framework.....	29
9. Research plan.....	31
10. Benefit of Research.....	32
CHAPTER II The historical evolution of the cultural symbols in the artifacts of the Haihun Marquis state	33
Introduction.....	33
Part 1. The narrative evolution of the "Unity of man and nature" cultural symbol in pre-Qin images	34
Part 2. The evolution of the symbolic narrative of "Unity of man and nature" in the images of cultural symbols from the Western Han to the Ming and Qing dynasties	54

Part 3. The homogenous transmission and evolution of the "Unity of man and nature" cultural symbol in the images of artifacts from the Haihun Marquis State and traditional Chinese images.....	62
Summary.....	78
CHAPTER III The narrative of Confucian ethical cultural symbols in the images of artifacts from the Haihun Marquis State.....	81
Introduction.....	81
Part 1: The emergence of Confucian ethical cultural symbols in the images of artifacts from the Haihun Marquis State	81
Part 2: The narrative of Confucian ethical cultural symbols in the images of artifacts from the Haihun Marquis State, and the ethical cultural symbols of the northern and southern regions of the Yangtze River.....	89
Part 3: The synchronic transmission of Confucian ethical cultural symbols through the images of artifacts in the Haihun Marquis State.....	96
Summary.....	109
CHAPTER IV The aesthetic characteristics of Confucian ethical cultural symbols through the images of artifacts in the Haihun Marquis State.....	111
Introduction.....	111
Part 1: The aesthetic characteristics of the cultural symbols of "theocracy unified" in ritual music and ceremonial systems during the pre-Qin period.....	111
Part 2: The Images of Artifacts from the Haihun Marquis: Aesthetic Study of the "Theocratic unity" Ritual and Legal Symbols.....	126
Summary.....	161
CHAPTER V The images of artifacts from the Haihun Marquis state: A social language narrative of Confucian cultural and artistic symbols.....	163
Introduction.....	163
Part 1: The Linguistic Narrative of Imperial Power Symbols in the Artifact Images of the Haihun Marquis State.....	164
Part 2: The Symbolic Narrative of Regional Culture in the Artifacts Unearthed from the Haihun Marquis state	174
Part 3: The social value of the cultural symbols of imperial power and society in the images of the Haihun Marquis State.	188
Summary.....	191

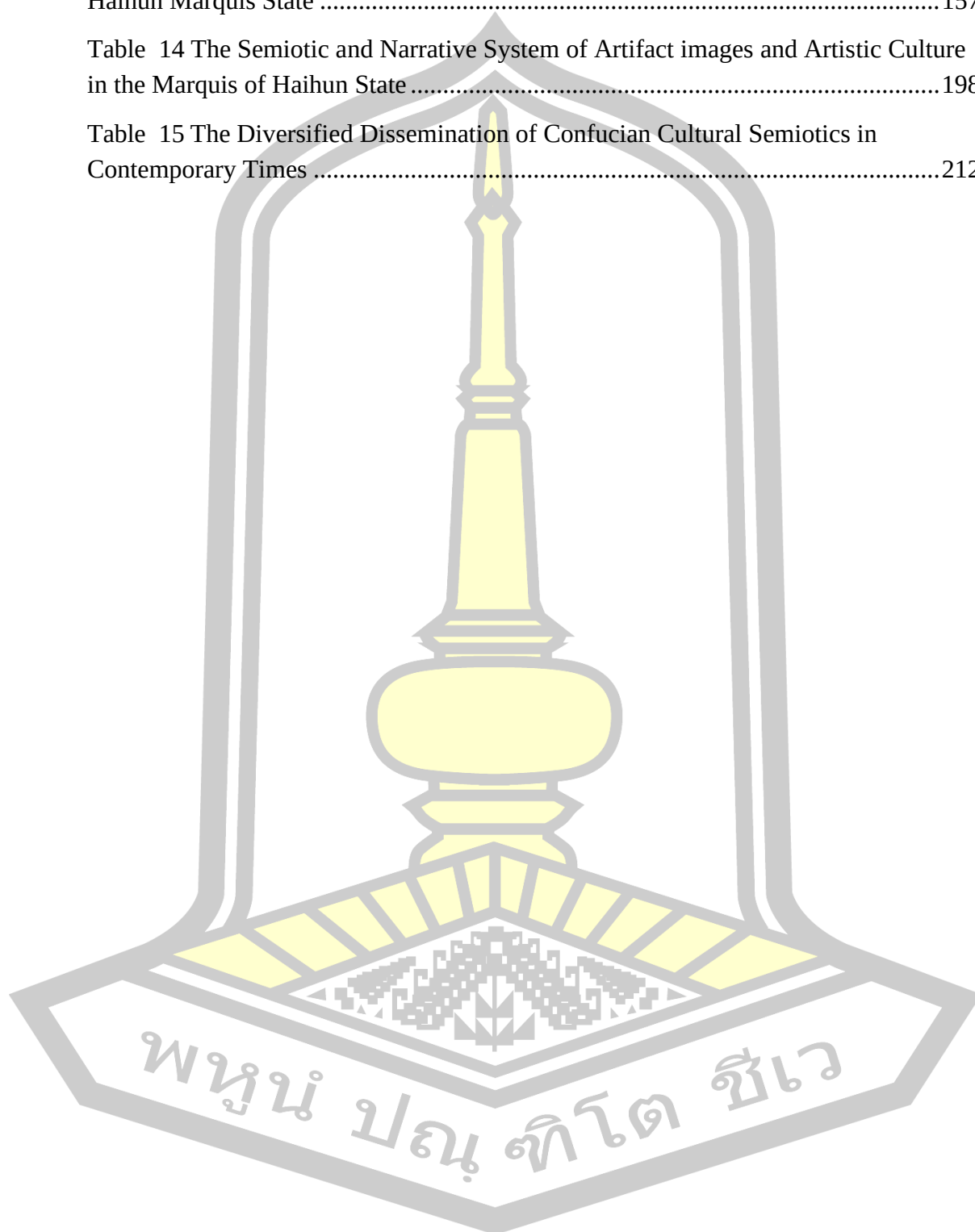
CHAPTER VI The construction of Confucian cultural semiotics and its contemporary dissemination.....	193
Part 1: The construction of image symbolism narrative and Confucian cultural semiotics	193
Part 2: The dimensions and fields of Confucian cultural semiotics.	200
Part 3: T The dissemination dimensions of Confucian ethical cultural semiotics and the fields of traditional cultural revival	202
CHAPTER VII Conclusions, Discussions and Recommendations	214
Conclusions.....	214
Discussions	218
Recommendations.....	222
REFERENCES	224
BIOGRAPHY	228



LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1 Comparison of Cultural Symbols of Haihun Marquis Artifacts and the South-Central and Southwest Regions of the Yangtze River--Chushu Cloud Images.....	69
Table 2 Comparison of Cultural Symbols of Haihun Marquis state Artifacts and Sun and Moon Images of Chu and Shu in the South-Central and South-Western Yangtze River Region	71
Table 3 Haihun Marquis artifacts and the western Sichuan and south-central region of the Yangtze River - fish images	73
Table 4 <i>The uniformity evident in the above images of feathered figures indicates that various regions within the Yangtze River basin were similarly influenced by fatalistic spiritual beliefs</i> (Table4). The concept of "Unity of man and nature" took shape in Western Han society as a cosmological view encompassing heaven, earth, and humanity, evolving into a thematic narrative in local artisanal cultures. This "mandate of Heaven" ideology became a spiritual cornerstone of traditional Chinese culture and a textual theme in artisanal and material cultures.	76
Table 5 Shang Dynasty. Bronze vessels from the Shang and Zhou periods bear inscriptions with characters like "li" (ritual)	117
Table 6 The Aesthetic, Category, and Symbolic Cultural Data of Artifacts Unearthed from the State of Haihun Marquis	126
Table 7 A Comparison of the Evolution of Jade Artifact Shapes and Art from the Haihun Marquis State and the Pre-Qin Period.....	141
Table 8 evolution of Jade Phoenix images from the Han to the Ming-Qing Dynasties	142
Table 9 Comparison of Jade Dragon Artifacts Unearthed from Royal Tombs in Northern and Southern Regions of the Western Han Dynasty	143
Table 10 Comparative Analysis of the Schematic Patterns of Phoenix Paradigms in the Western Han Dynasty	144
Table 11 Analysis of Heaven-Man Figures and Cultural Symbols in Lacquerware Images	149
Table 12 The images of winged figures and divine beasts on the lacquerware of the Haihun Marquis State.	153

Table 13 Ethical Texts of Ruler and Subject from the Bamboo Slips Unearthed in the Haihun Marquis State	157
Table 14 The Semiotic and Narrative System of Artifact images and Artistic Culture in the Marquis of Haihun State	198
Table 15 The Diversified Dissemination of Confucian Cultural Semiotics in Contemporary Times	212



LIST OF FIGURES

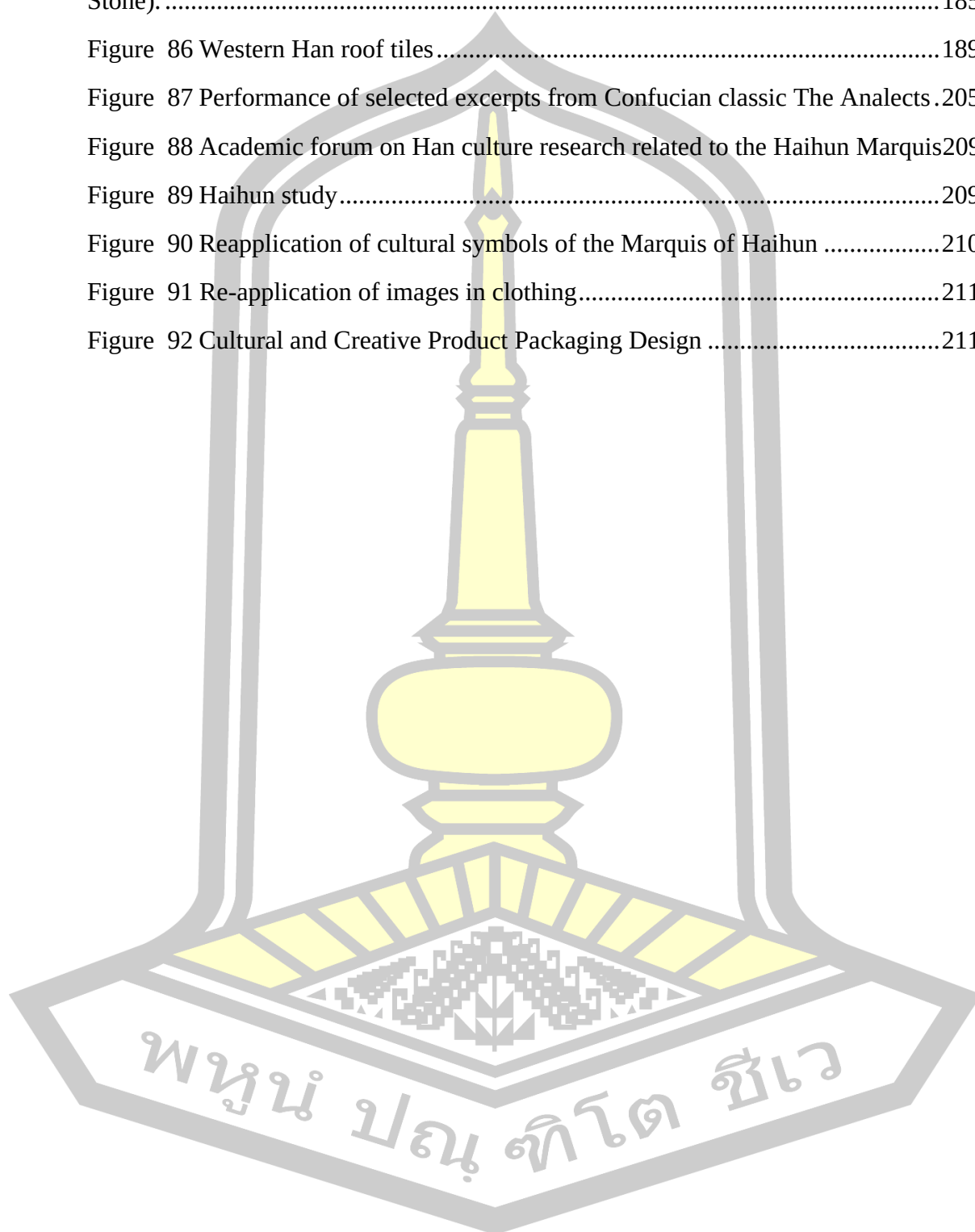
	Page
Figure 1 The statue of Liu He	5
Figure 2 Research framework.....	31
Figure 3 Research plan.....	31
Figure 4 Sun worship in petroglyphs across China	35
Figure 5 The image of the jade carving divine emblem/Dahe Village type sun pattern	37
Figure 6 Carved symbols on pottery unearthed at Banpo site	38
Figure 7 Painted pottery with fish motif on human face	38
Figure 8 :Hieroglyphics, sun, moon, rain, clouds and air, thunder, water, mountains, deer, horses, tigers, cows and sheep	39
Figure 9 Shang dynasty: Hui and Lei patterns / Fire pattern on the mouth of a tripod in the late Yin Shang period.....	41
Figure 10 The Eight Trigrams of the Book of Changes (Zhou Yi) Image	43
Figure 11 Image of the Sun with circular vortices.....	43
Figure 12 Western Zhou dynasty, Thunder image fire image	45
Figure 13 Combination of images of Huashan rock paintings in Guangxi during the Warring States period	47
Figure 14 Lacquer Clothes Box Cover with Twenty-eight Patterns, Zeng Houyi Tomb, Suizhou, Hubei, China.....	48
Figure 15 Lacquer Clothes Box Cover of Zeng Houyi's Tomb in Suizhou, Hubei (Houyi Shooting the Sun) Source: Guo Lianfu Ding Tao, Dictionary of Chinese Patterns, Tianjin Education Press, 1998,, P122	48
Figure 16 Jinser head pattern of the Chu tomb at Changtai Pass of the Warring States period, Henan Province (partial).....	49
Figure 17 Image of the Imperial Dragon	50
Figure 18 Han Dynasty Bronze Bronzes and Bricks with Feathered Figures of the Gods of the Sun and the Moon	52
Figure 19 Warring States, Qin Wadang.....	52

Figure 20 :Qin Dynasty Wa Dang Yangbird	53
Figure 21 Lacquer Box with Cloud and Air Pattern	54
Figure 22 Han Dynasty portrait on the back wall of the ancestral hall in Changqing, Shandong Province	56
Figure 23 Western Wei Feitian Image	57
Figure 24:Northern Wei A flying figure holding a pipa obliquely	58
Figure 25Tang Dynasty stone carvings: Flying Apsaras, Buddha statues, and musicians' motifs.....	59
Figure 26 :Four Gods carved in stone in the Sui Dynasty/Chutang Riding the Dragon and Flying to the Sky/Song Dynasty Architectural Decoration Common Life Bird Pattern	59
Figure 27 Twelve Chapter Image	60
Figure 28: Bamboo slips unearthed from Haihun Marquis state	84
Figure 29 Confucius' disciple's lacquered mirror	87
Figure 30 Fan Sui and Xu Jia, excavated from the Tanghe Knitting Factory in Henan.	90
Figure 31 The Ugliness of Wuyan (copy), Wu Family Shrine, Jiaxiang, Shandong..	91
Figure 32 Bo Yu Weeping for His Mother, Wu Family Shrine, Jiaxiang, Shandong.	91
Figure 33 Ding Lan and the Wooden Man, Wu Family Shrine, Jiaxiang, Shandong	92
Figure 34: Lacquerware featuring wild goose images excavated from the tomb of Mo Shu in Jiangsu.	94
Figure 35 Phoenix Pattern in the Buddhist Wall Paintings of the Northern Wei Dunhuang Mogao Caves.....	98
Figure 36: Phoenix hairpin head of Tang Dynasty	99
Figure 37 Phoenix in Song Dynasty Architecture	100
Figure 38 Phoenix on Yuan Dynasty Ceramics.....	100
Figure 39Phoenix in Ming and Qing Architecture / Phoenix on Qing Dynasty Ceramics	101
Figure 40 Fragment of a wooden slip depicting Liu He's expression of fealty.....	105
Figure 41 Han Dynasty Portrait Stone Confucius.....	106
Figure 42 :Statues of Confucius through the ages (Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing)	106

Figure 43: The Neolithic Age of China's primitive society: the artistic evolution of "divine-human" images in Majiayao, Gansu	112
Figure 44 Animal mask image	115
Figure 45 Gilt animal mask image	115
Figure 46 Phoenix in the Western Zhou Dynasty	116
Figure 47 The lacquered coffin god Chu	119
Figure 48 Spring and Autumn King's Head and Snake Body Jade Ornament Image	121
Figure 49 Land and water occupation map	121
Figure 50 Three-legged bird/White tiger constellation/Canglong constellation	124
Figure 51 Beidou and Diche	125
Figure 52 Hou Yi shoots the sun/Emperor of Heaven and Fuxi Nuwa/Prince of the East and Queen Mother of the West	125
Figure 53 Bronze mythical beast/Bronze animal face scroll/bronze button clock ...	130
Figure 54 Western Zhou Dynasty phoenix bronze handle/Warring States period, Panyu pattern shop title ring/Bronze Boshan furnace from the Western Han Dynasty	131
Figure 55 The bronze branching lamp unearthed from the tomb of Liu He, the Haihun Marquis, in Nanchang, Jiangxi, Western Han Dynasty	133
Figure 56 The bronze sacred tree and branching lamp from the Sanxingdui site in Sichuan. Western Han Dynasty	133
Figure 57 The bronze lamp in the shape of a Fusang tree unearthed from Tomb No. 1 at Luobowan, Guixian, Guangxi, Western Han Dynasty	133
Figure 58 The thirteen bronze branching lamps unearthed from the Leitai Han Tomb in Wuwei, Gansu, Eastern Han Dynasty	133
Figure 59 The Haihun marquis utensils phoenix	134
Figure 60 Jiangling Chu phoenix	134
Figure 61 Xi'an Phoenix WaDang	134
Figure 62: Cultural symbols of camels, big-horned sheep, and cloisonné wave-patterned artifacts	135
Figure 63 Restored Front View of the Mirror Box - Images of the Phoenix, the East and West King, and Sacred Beasts	152

Figure 64 Reconstructed image of the back of the lacquer mirror with Confucius in lacquer clothing, unearthed from the Haihun Marquis State	156
Figure 65 Images on the Lacquered Chest Unearthed from the Haihun Marquis State	159
Figure 66 "Four Guardian Deities" Roof Tiles featuring Dragon, Phoenix, Tiger, and Black Tortoise	159
Figure 67 Unearthed lacquer from the Haihun Marquis State	165
Figure 68 The artifacts unearthed by the Haihun Marquis State, the goose fish lamp	166
Figure 69 Jing Ke assassinated the King of Qin	167
Figure 70 Coupled Plowing Diagram	169
Figure 71 Shaanxi Ox Plow	169
Figure 72 Shandong Iron Smelting	170
Figure 73 Jiangsu Textiles	170
Figure 74 Henan Residential Architecture	171
Figure 75 The Marquis of Haihun State unearthed persimmon shaped utensils	172
Figure 76 The Marquis of Haihun State unearthed Lacquer inscriptions	173
Figure 77 The lacquerware of the Marquis of Haihun, featuring a phoenix and flowing cloud pattern.	177
Figure 78 The Horse Trampling the Xiongnu	179
Figure 79 The gilded bronze dragon-headed artifact unearthed from the Haihun Marquis tomb.	180
Figure 80 Dragon Chariot Image Han Dynasty Stone Carving unearthed in Qufu, Shandong	180
Figure 81 The excavation of horse-hoof-shaped gold from the Haihun Marquis State.	181
Figure 82 Ancient Persian motif patterns on artifacts from the Western Regions ...	181
Figure 83 The "Zhaigong" roof tiles excavated from the eastern part of the Changling Tomb of Emperor Gaozu of the Han Dynasty in Xianyang, Shaanxi.	182
Figure 84 The "Banquet of Music and Dance" illustration, found on the eastern wall of the Shi Shrine at Wulao Wa in Jiaxiang, Shandong (Western Stone).	184

Figure 85the Elderly Care Home, Zhi Fang Town, Jiaxiang, Shandong (Seventh Stone).	185
Figure 86 Western Han roof tiles.....	189
Figure 87 Performance of selected excerpts from Confucian classic The Analects.....	205
Figure 88 Academic forum on Han culture research related to the Haihun Marquis.....	209
Figure 89 Haihun study.....	209
Figure 90 Reapplication of cultural symbols of the Marquis of Haihun	210
Figure 91 Re-application of images in clothing.....	211
Figure 92 Cultural and Creative Product Packaging Design	211



CHAPTER I

Introduction

1. Background Research

The background of the research is divided into five sections.

1.1 Background of Haihun Marquis State during the Western Han Dynasty

The Haihun Marquis State of the Western Han Dynasty was located in the area surrounding the site of the Han Dynasty Zijin City in Xinjian District, Nanchang City, the capital of Jiangxi Province, in southern China, and the site of Youtang City in Changyi Township, covering an area of 45,000 square meters. According to Ban Gu's Book of Han - Geographical Records, in 201 BC, during the reign of Emperor Gaozu of Han, the city of Yuzhang Commandery was established and named Nanchang, symbolizing prosperity in the south. Yuzhang Commandery governed eighteen counties, including Nanchang and Haihun, with its general boundaries extending: east to the area of Poyang Lake, north to present-day Wuning County, south to the southern border of Fengxin County, and west to the western boundary of Fengxin County, roughly corresponding to the entire area of present-day Jiangxi Province. In the third year of Yuankang (63 BC), Emperor Xuan of Han granted the title of Haihun Marquis to Liu He, the former King of Changyi, and established the Haihun Marquis State in Haihun County, Yuzhang Commandery. Haihun County was located at the source of the Pengli Marsh during the Han period, in what is now the western region of Poyang Lake in Jiangxi Province. According to the Book of Han, the Haihun Marquis State lasted for four generations. The first generation was the subject of this discussion, Haihun Marquis Liu He; the second generation was Liu Daizong, the second Haihun Marquis; the third was Liu Baoshi, the third Haihun Marquis; and the fourth was Liu Huiyi, the fourth Haihun Marquis, lasting for a total of 168 years. In the sixteenth year of the Yongyuan era of the Eastern Han Dynasty (104 AD), the Haihun Marquis State was formally abolished due to the immoral conduct of its close associates and violation of righteous principles. The existence of the Haihun Marquis State reflects the diversity of ancient Chinese political, historical, and cultural systems. (Lu Xing, Fang Zhiyuan, 2016; Yang Jun et al., 2016)

During the Western Han Dynasty, a special system of parallel commanderies and States was implemented, which established a relationship of subordination between the central authority and the regional states. The feudal states were divided into two types: the States of princes and the Marquis States. The Haihun Marquis State, being a royal family title, was named after Haihun County in Yuzhang Commandery. It was the southernmost Liu family direct-line Marquis State in the Yangtze River region, far from the political, economic, and cultural center (present-day Shaanxi, An).

In the Western Han imperial society, the political structure was built on the foundation of imperial power, which ensured social stability and national unity. In this system, the emperor was not only the supreme authority of the state but also a moral

exemplar and spiritual leader. The emperor's power extended across all areas, from national policies to the daily lives of the people, and everything was under his jurisdiction. At the same time, the emperor was also responsible for maintaining social stability and promoting national prosperity.

Liu He's father originated from Shandong, the hometown of Confucius, and thus, his reverence for Confucian thought is self-evident. As members of the royal family, Liu He and his father, Liu Qi, were deeply influenced by noble education and had received instruction from renowned Confucian scholars. They studied the Four Books and Five Classics, becoming proficient in the "Six Arts." The bamboo slips unearthed from the Haihun Marquis State, which are linked to the Confucian classics of the Han Dynasty such as the Qilu Lunyu, Liji, Xiaojing, and Fu (compiled after Emperor Wu of Han's "banishing of the hundred schools of thought"), reveal the spread and development of Confucianism during the Western Han Dynasty and its influence on social rituals and customs (Yang Jun et al., 2016).

For example, some unearthed artifacts, such as clothing and mirrors, feature images of Confucius and his disciples, as well as relevant inscriptions. These findings highlight Liu He's deep influence from Confucian thought and even "suggest that after his dethronement, the marquis may have had profound self-reflection, using Confucian teachings as a mirror to restrain his own actions," showcasing Liu He's exemplary demeanor as a Confucian scholar (Wang Renxiang, 2020). This presentation reveals Liu He's Confucian appearance. Moreover, the bamboo slips and memorials found in the excavation, which refer to the marquis as a subject, fully demonstrate the Haihun Marquis's respect for the Confucian "Three Bonds" and "Five Constants," adhering strictly to the rites of ruler and subject. The accompanying set of bells and musical instruments further reveal the close integration of ancient ritual music and the political system. Since the Zhou Dynasty, musical instruments of ritual and music were not only used for witchcraft, religious, and political ethics but, by the late Western Zhou, had gradually evolved into a crucial support and specific symbol for the national political system. These musical instruments served both as tools for the spiritual entertainment of rulers and nobility and as a guide for the direction of ritual education and politics.

The Haihun Marquis State was a Marquis State under the jurisdiction of Yuzhang Commandery, part of the central administration of the Han Dynasty. Located to the west of the Poyang Pengli Marsh during the Western Han period, the Marquis State was situated far from the economic and cultural center of Chang'an (modern-day Xi'an, Shaanxi). Despite its geographical distance from the capital, it remained a royal family territory. Liu He, the first Haihun Marquis, inherited all the wealth of his father, Liu Qi, and the local agricultural and commercial development of Haihun County. The population of the Haihun Marquis State was approximately 20,000, with an average of five people per household.

During Emperor Wu of Han's reign, the opening of the Silk Road promoted the expansion of the economy, culture, and territorial boundaries, contributing to the prosperity of the Han dynasty. The Book of Han records that "in Poyang, around Wuyang, there was gold mining within ten or more li" (Ban Gu, Book of Han, Zhonghua Book Company, 2012, p. 1428). The discovery of various gold artifacts, such as hoof-shaped gold, phoenix talon gold, gold cakes, gold plates, and Wu Zhu coins, as well as a variety of currency types, exceeded the total number of coins

unearthed in previous Han Dynasty excavations. This evidence points to the prosperity of the monetary economy during the Western Han period, highlighting the extensive casting and circulation of gold and copper coins. Before the discovery of Liu He's tomb, the total amount of gold unearthed from the Western Han period had reached approximately 82 kilograms, which demonstrates the burial customs of the time, where the royal family and nobility preferred elaborate and lavish tombs. The unearthed artifacts not only reflect the wealth and strength of the Han Dynasty but also embody the material legacy of the cultural fusion between East and West.

During the Western Han period, industries such as bronze, lacquerware, and jade craftsmanship were highly developed. One notable aspect of this was the fine goldsmithing techniques used on gold artifacts, including techniques like *gan zhu si* (bead stringing), *fan hua si* (reverse floral filigree), and *gong si* (twisting filigree), which were strongly influenced by foreign cultures. These techniques reflect the profound impact of Mediterranean Greek art on Chinese craftsmanship. Some of the artifacts also feature images that combines elements from both Central Plains culture and Western regions. Examples include goat motifs on silver *danglu* (a type of ritual vessel), jade ornaments depicting two wolves fighting a pig, gold-plated bronze hooks in the shape of camel figurines attached to bell frames, and insect amber pendants. These images hold significant importance for the study of the Silk Road, as they provide tangible evidence of cultural exchange between ancient China and the outside world during the Western Han period. Such artifacts mark the beginning of the integration between Chinese society and Western culture, illustrating the early formation of cultural interactions that would continue through the centuries. This exchange not only reflects the prosperous trade and communication along the Silk Road but also highlights the broader fusion of Eastern and Western cultures, influencing the development of both civilizations.

During the reigns of Emperor Wu to Emperor Xuan of the Western Han Dynasty, Liu He lived in a period marked by significant historical and political contexts. Emperor Wu was deeply committed to military achievements and large-scale construction projects, which led to frequent wars abroad and considerable expenditures, causing the national economy to fall into a crisis. In response to this dire situation, the reigns of Emperor Zhao and Emperor Xuan brought about significant policy adjustments. They implemented strategies focused on the recovery of the people's livelihoods and the gradual restoration and continuous promotion of social and economic production and development. In 81 BCE, the first year of Emperor Zhao's reign, the Salt and Iron Conference was held, emphasizing the importance of agriculture. This demonstrated the ruler's profound attention to agriculture and placed hope in the people to contribute to the economy through agricultural activities, thus laying a solid foundation for the development of both the economy and society. The *Book of Songs* ("Zhou Song," "Good Plowing") says, "Every family's granaries are full, and the wives and children live in peace." Agriculture, as the foundation of the state, held unparalleled importance. Furthermore, to emphasize the great importance placed on agricultural affairs, rulers also practiced the "Jiedian" (land-registration) ritual. The Changyi Jiedian Ding unearthed from the Haihun Marquis State is one of the powerful testimonies of the rulers' emphasis on agriculture during this era. Archaeologists, through meticulous examination of the grain storage found in the tomb of Liu He at the Haihun Marquis site, discovered plant remains such as rice,

millet, hemp, melons, and plums. A preliminary study based on current data and historical context suggests that rice, millet, and hemp were the primary grains during the Han period, while melons and plums reflect the rich diversity of crops in the Jiangnan region of Han China.

1.2 Overview of Liu He, the Haihun Marquis of the Western Han Dynasty

Haihun Marquis (Figure1), the ninth emperor of the Western Han Dynasty, was the second-generation King of Changyi. He was the son of the first-generation King of Changyi, Liu Bing, and the grandson of Emperor Wu of Han, Liu Che, and the renowned beauty, Lady Li. Liu He was the ruler of the Haihun Marquis State in Western Han, located in present-day Nanchang. His life, spanning 33 years, was marked by twists and turns, crossing four identities: king, emperor, commoner, and marquis. He was deposed after only 27 days on the throne, and there is no biography of him in the official Chinese historical records. Liu He almost became one of the forgotten emperors in Chinese history, yet his life, full of legendary events, is unique in ancient Chinese history.

Liu He lost his father at the age of five and succeeded to the throne of Changyi in present-day Juye, Shandong. In 74 BCE, at the age of 19, Emperor Zhao of Han, Liu Fuling, passed away without leaving a successor. With the support of the Grand General Huo Guang, Liu He ascended to the throne. Liu He was known for his flamboyant personality and his lack of awareness of the dangers within the royal court and the cruel political struggles. According to historical records, his absurd actions during his brief reign led to his deposition after just 27 days, returning him to his former status as a commoner in Changyi. Afterward, Emperor Xuan of Han ascended to the throne, and the existence of the deposed emperor posed a threat to the young emperor, so Liu He was closely monitored by the imperial court.

In 63 BCE, in the third year of the Yuan Kang era, at the age of 30, Liu He was reinstated through the "Zhao Fu Jia" system, which allowed his return to noble status. Emperor Xuan issued an edict stating, "Though separated by fate, blood ties remain unbroken." After being deposed for 11 years, Liu He was granted the title of Haihun Marquis and restored to his noble status as a marquis. He was relocated from northern Shandong to the southern region of Jiangxi, to Yuzhang Commandery, where Haihun County was renamed Haihun Marquis State. He was granted an estate of 4,000 households but was forbidden from participating in ancestral sacrifices or court rituals.

Although Liu He was forced to leave his homeland, the wealth of both him and his father, Liu Bing, was moved to the Haihun Marquis State in Nanchang, Jiangxi. Liu He died in 59 BCE, at the age of 34, suffering from depression. After his death, his son, Liu Chongguo, should have succeeded him, but both Liu Chongguo and Liu Fengqin passed away soon afterward. The ministers then petitioned, saying, "It is the will of heaven to end the Haihun Marquis lineage." Emperor Xuan of Han decreed the abolition of Haihun Marquis State. As a result, all the treasures of the Haihun Marquis State were buried with Liu He, becoming part of the underground world's riches.

Despite Liu He being nearly forgotten in history, his existence and the rise and fall of Haihun Marquis State bear witness to the diversity of ancient Chinese politics, economy, history, and cultural arts. The Records of the Grand Historian ("Shiji")

mentions, "Jiangnan is humid, and men die young," which is one reason for Liu He's early death.



Figure 1 The statue of Liu He
Source: Illustrated by Dai Yijun, 2024

We can only learn about the life and deeds of Liu He, the Haihun Marquis, through historical records like the Book of Han (Han Shu). The book states that Liu He, having lost his father at an early age, lacked guidance and care from elders, leading him to enjoy play, hunting, and rebellion during his youth. His reign lasted only 27 days, and he was described in historical records as "debauched and incompetent, losing imperial etiquette and disrupting the Han family's system." At the request of officials like Huo Guang, and with the approval of the empress dowager, his throne was abolished. This is the image of Liu He presented in history. However, when we combine the artifacts unearthed from the Haihun Marquis State Ruins with historical documents, can we truly believe that this portrayal of Liu He accurately reflects the complex political situation of the Western Han period? Perhaps we can find new clues in the unearthed relics. These discoveries force us to reassess Liu He's historical image. The dual evidence from these artifacts and documents may offer a fresh perspective on Liu He's personal life, interests, and attitude toward society.

Additionally, there have been many differing views in later historical records regarding the reasons for Liu He's deposition. One view holds that Liu He lacked discipline from a young age, which may have led to personal moral flaws, making the behaviors described in historical records seem credible. Another view suggests that Liu He's deposition was related to the concentration of power in the hands of Huo Guang. After ascending to the throne, Liu He relied on the old ministers of Changyi, showing no respect for Huo Guang. This made Huo Guang feel that his own power was threatened, and, in order to protect his interests and the Han Dynasty's rule, he fabricated a series of charges against Liu He for debauchery and lack of proper conduct, ultimately leading to his deposition. A third view suggests that Liu He's lack of political experience made his deposition an inevitable outcome of the evolving political landscape at the time. Liu He failed to demonstrate the qualities and abilities of a qualified emperor, so his deposition seems reasonable.

It is worth noting that when Liu He was deposed, his defense directly quoted Confucian¹ sayings from Confucius (circa 390-305 BCE), a great philosopher of early China known for his thoughts on moral governance. Moreover, among the unearthed artifacts, there were objects featuring portraits of Confucius, such as "Confucius' robes," as well as a large number of bamboo slips, including texts like *The Book of Rites*, *The I Ching*, *The Six Board Game Records*, *Medical Texts*, *The Qi Analects*, and *Fu*. These findings reflect Liu He's respect for Confucianism and his extensive study of classical texts. This discovery gives us a deeper understanding of Liu He. Perhaps he was not as debauched and incompetent as described in historical records, but rather had his own unique thoughts and beliefs.

From the above analysis, it is clear that Liu He, the Haihun Marquis, is a legendary figure. Although his life was short, it was filled with twists, turns, and controversies. Liu He held a royal political identity, pursuing the political ideals of noble imperial power. At the same time, having come from the lowly status of a commoner in Changyi, he also displayed the consciousness of a scholar-official from the Western Han gentry, which shaped his political attitudes, values, and worldview. During his time as a marquis, Liu He was a Confucian scholar-official who received a high-level education and pursued the spiritual and moral values of Confucianism. Despite the twists in his life, he always adhered to the Confucian principles of the "Three Bonds and Five Constants" (the ethical framework of ruler-minister relationships). This paper suggests that Liu He, the Haihun Marquis, was a multifaceted noble in the course of Chinese history, with a comprehensive identity. Without any one aspect of his life, Liu He, as the Haihun Marquis, would not have come to be two thousand years ago.

At the same time, by examining the images of the artifacts unearthed from the Haihun Marquis State, we can empirically study the ideological beliefs, customs, intellectual qualities, and personal interests of the aristocratic class during the Western Han period. These artifacts also reflect the Han dynasty's aristocratic funeral practices, which treated death as an extension of life. The unearthed artifacts, through their images, offer a way to explore the history, ideals, and cultural symbols of the Haihun Marquis State and its noble life, as well as the spiritual concepts and historical traces of the Western Han society, with the Haihun Marquis himself representing the aristocracy.

1.3 Archaeology of the Haihun Marquis State and images Data of Unearthed Artifacts

On March 23, 2011, the cultural heritage department of Jiangxi Province received a report from the public regarding the theft of an ancient tomb located in Guanxi Village, Datangping Township, Xinjian District, Nanchang City, Jiangxi Province, China. After an on-site investigation by experts, it was confirmed that the tomb was large in scale and of high status, possibly related to the historical records of the Haihun Marquis State from the Han Dynasty. Subsequently, an expert consultation meeting on the protection of the Dunding Tomb was held on April 6, 2011, in Xinjian County, Nanchang. This emergency archaeological project was

¹ Confucius (c. 390–305 BCE) was a Chinese philosopher and thinker of the pre-Qin period, known for his contributions to Confucianism, a school of thought emphasizing moral governance and virtuous leadership. His teachings focused on ethics, proper conduct, and the cultivation of moral values, and his influence shaped Chinese culture and philosophy for centuries.

officially approved and executed in strict accordance with the national regulations set by the State Administration of Cultural Heritage, which called for "first-class archaeology," "first-class preservation," and "first-class exhibition.

From April 20 to 30, 2011, the archaeological team conducted a large-scale preliminary survey of the Haihun Marquis State site. The excavation process was carefully documented by the lead archaeologist, Researcher Yang Jun. Excavation of the accompanying pit K1 began on March 5, 2013, and the excavation of the main tomb started on November 16, 2013. During the excavation, the archaeologists discovered that the tomb robbers had made a precise hole right in the center of the main tomb. Additionally, several other holes of varying sizes were found, indicating that the tomb had been looted in earlier times. One hole, located at the northwest corner, had been dug into the tomb. Despite the robbers' entry into the tomb chamber from the northwest, they did not find the expected gold, silver, or jewelry due to the surrounding collapse. According to historical records, an earthquake occurred in the Nanchang region in 318 CE, which may have caused the tomb chamber to collapse. Over a century later, floods from Poyang Lake caused the water to backflow southward, raising the groundwater level, which turned the area beneath the tomb into a water reservoir and submerged the tomb chamber. The water immersion created an oxygen-free environment for the artifacts, inhibiting microbial growth and providing favorable conditions for preservation.

Today's tomb robbers are equipped with advanced tools and are precise in their location of the looting holes, following the customary practice of Western Han tombs, such as the tombs at Dabaotai in Beijing and the Mawangdui tomb in Changsha, where the main coffins were typically placed in the center. As a result, the robbers dug holes in the center, but the main coffin of the HHaihun Marquis State was not placed in the center. It was positioned in the northeast corner, likely reflecting the layout of the tomb based on the owner's living space during his lifetime. Therefore, despite the robbers' advanced equipment and accurate hole placement, they did not locate the main coffin and thus avoided the fate of having the tomb plundered. As a result, the precious artifacts from over two thousand years ago were preserved.

After five years of excavation by the archaeological team, experts unanimously agreed that the discovery of the Haihun Marquis State tomb could be considered a typical example of the tombs of noble lords during the Han Dynasty. First and foremost, it is the best-preserved, most clearly laid out, and most complete Western Hanhaihun Marquis State complex in China to date. The tomb complex was meticulously designed based on the living environment of Haihun Marquis Liu He, with a courtyard-like structure arranged in a (hui) shape, reflecting the spaces where Liu He lived. The northern tomb chamber contains a wardrobe, a money storage area, a grain storage area, and a wine storage area. The western tomb chamber holds a weapons storage area, a document archive, and a collection of recreational items. The eastern tomb chamber features a kitchenware storage area, while stables for chariots and horses are located on either side of the corridor. The tomb's burial items include personal belongings and ritual items, with a rich variety of artifacts, covering nearly every type of object. As of 2020, the archaeological excavation of the Haihun Marquis State site was fully completed.

Over 10,000 items (or sets) of artifacts were unearthed, including large quantities of bronze, lacquerware, jade, grain, pottery, everyday utensils, bamboo slips, wooden figurines, and more from various storage areas. Among these, over 500 items related to daily life, dining, and entertainment were found, such as Boshan stoves, tables, beds, screens, ear cups, interconnected lamps, and wooden figurines. Additionally, in the northern storage area, China's first discovery of iron-made chime bells, known as bianqing, was made, including 10 yong chimes and 14 niujing chimes. The excavation also yielded the earliest known physical examples of traditional Chinese herbal medicines, and the first physical artifact of the Western Han Dynasty's decree of the removal of the Haihun Marquis State (Chú Hǎihūn Hòu Guó Zhào). There were more than 400 jade items found, including jade seals, jade pendants, jade belt hooks, jade rings, jade figurines, jade swords, as well as gemstones and agate. More than 3,000 bronze items and 3,000 lacquerware pieces were unearthed, including lacquered ear cups, plates, boxes, lacquered chime racks, guqin (stringed musical instrument), se (zither), and xiao (flute). The artifacts are richly decorated with intricate and varied patterns, depicting animals, plants, birds, clouds, immortals, and winged figures, reflecting the Han Dynasty's Taoist and Huang-Lao philosophy of immortality. Notably, the tomb also yielded the earliest known portrait of Confucius (a lacquered mirror with an image of Confucius and his disciples). There were more than 200 wooden figurines, and about 400 gold items, including horseshoe-shaped gold, gold from a qilin's claw, and gold plates—representing the largest collection of such items discovered in China. Additionally, bamboo slips, including the I Ching, medical texts, and rhapsodies, were uncovered.

Furthermore, the Haihun Marquis State is the site of the only well-preserved true chariot and horse burial pit found south of the Yangtze River in China. The pit contained 20 horses and 5 chariots, along with more than 3,000 exquisite bronze decorative items affixed to the chariots. The items feature carefully etched images of the Four Symbols (Blue Dragon, White Tiger, Vermilion Bird, and Black Tortoise), and demonstrate the highest level of Han Dynasty craftsmanship in gold, silver, and bronze inlay techniques. These artifacts are not only of great archaeological significance but also possess immense cultural and artistic value.

Historical records indicate that the Han people practiced a burial tradition known for its respect towards the deceased, treating death with the same reverence as life. This custom symbolized the deceased's yearning for the afterlife and their desire to continue living as they did in the mortal world. As a result, during the first year of a monarch's reign, they would commission the construction of a mausoleum for themselves. The archaeological discoveries from the Haihun Marquis state represent one of the most valuable historical legacies from the Han Dynasty, with over 10,000 exquisite artifacts unearthed, vividly reflecting the Han people's custom of grand burials.

The life of Liu He, the Marquis of Haihun, was tumultuous, with his status shifting significantly from prince to emperor, and later from emperor to marquis. As the owner of the Haihun Marquis State, the scale of his burial, the size of the mound, and the quantity and variety of the burial items were meticulously organized according to burial rituals and social hierarchy. The tomb adhered to the system of a three-tiered tomb passage for feudal lords, and notably, Liu He's burial did not

employ the "yellow intestine interlocking" system—a special burial ritual for Han emperors—indirectly reflecting Liu He's political failure and the decline in his status. This detail underscores the changes in his political position and identity, and the unbridgeable constraints imposed by the burial rites.

Archaeologists observed that Liu He initially planned for such a system when the tomb was being designed, but it likely could not be implemented due to a lack of approval from the imperial court. Despite Liu He's political misfortune and demotion, his pursuit of status and rank remained unwavering. The opulence and prestige displayed in the burial items are still staggering. From golden-inlaid glass mats to gold cakes and lavish chariot and horse ornaments, every detail of the tomb's furnishings highlights Liu He's relentless pursuit of social distinction.

The discovery of these artifacts not only reveals the Han Dynasty's strict adherence to ceremonial rites but also serves as a testament to Liu He's former imperial glory. This also reflects the harsh realities of Han royal politics: once a ruler loses power, maintaining their former noble status becomes exceedingly difficult. The unearthed artifacts not only showcase Liu He's extreme pursuit of identity and rank but also provide us with insight into the core of Han royal politics—strict division of power and rigid social hierarchy. These items are not just historically valuable; they offer a profound reflection of the Han Dynasty's political culture.

Today, we can still feel the solemnity and mystery of Han royal politics through the artifacts found in Liu He's tomb. They are not only historical witnesses but also a profound revelation of humanity's pursuit of identity and rank. Through these artifacts, we gain a deeper understanding of how social rank and identity were expressed in Han royal culture through material objects.

1.4 Social, Political, and Cultural Background of the Western Han Dynasty

In Chinese history, the Han Dynasty was a crucial period. The Qin Dynasty established the first unified country in Chinese history, and the Han Dynasty inherited the Qin system, creating a unified political structure for Chinese feudal society based on multi-ethnic unity. This period saw systematic development in politics, economy, and culture, which rapidly expanded outward, leaving a lasting influence on the social development of future dynasties.

To maintain and consolidate centralized power, the Han implemented a system of dual administration, with both commanderies (jun) and feudal States (guo). The country had a unified military, and administrative management was centralized through the control of commanderies and counties. Artifacts unearthed from the site of the State of Haihu in the Western Han reflect the complex and distinctive features of feudal states in the Yuzhang commandery during the early Han period.

Commanderies and feudal states were both high-level administrative divisions in early Han China. Commanderies were directly controlled by the central government, while feudal states were ruled by appointed vassal kings. In the early years of the Han Dynasty, Emperor Gaozu, Liu Bang, granted the "Seven States of Different Surnames" (Han, Zhao, Chu, Huainan, Yan, Changsha, and Liang) to various kings. These States had their own territories and officials, and the political system in these states was similar to that of the imperial court. As the power of the vassal states grew, this led to the "Rebellion of the Seven States." Toward the end of Emperor Gaozu's reign, all of the vassal kings, except for the Wu clan's State of Changsha, were eliminated and replaced with nine states ruled by Liu Bang's brothers and nephews,

reinforcing power through clan ties. Later, the minister, Zhao Gao, advised the implementation of the "Edict of Granting Favors" (Tui En Ling), which weakened the local power of the vassal states and strengthened the centralization of Han power. Politically, the Han Dynasty implemented a feudal system with social hierarchy, based on the "Three Bonds" (ruler-subject, father-son, and husband-wife) and the "Five Constants" (benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trust). This system became a key component of the Western Han Dynasty's state governance. During Emperor Wen's reign, the emphasis on "filial piety" was strengthened in the country's ideological framework. By promoting filial ethics, the Han Dynasty aimed to regulate the relationship between imperial authority and the vassal kings, marking a new development in the relationship between the central government and local rulers. This transition signified China's gradual shift from the Qin Dynasty's legalistic state control to the implementation of a moral system based on the ideals of "benevolence," "ritual," and "law," which further solidified the unity and stability of the state and society.

1.4.1 The Social and Cultural Background of the Western Han Dynasty: "Dong Zhongshu's Promotion of Confucianism as the Sole Doctrine"

After the establishment of a unified empire by the Qin and Han Dynasties, the rulers needed academic and public discourse to represent the idea of unity. Dong Zhongshu ²(c. 197-104 BCE), a renowned scholar, politician, and philosopher of the Western Han Dynasty, became the theoretical architect of the monarchic feudal system. Dong Zhongshu once held positions such as the Governor of Jiangdu, and after resigning from official duties, he devoted himself to writing. Although he was not part of the court, whenever the government faced important decisions, officials would consult him, highlighting his significant political influence at the time.

Living in an era of unprecedented prosperity in feudal society, Dong Zhongshu deeply realized that in order to maintain the centralized political system, it was necessary to comprehensively analyze the lessons of the Qin Dynasty and the early Han Dynasty's policy of passive governance. Therefore, he strongly advocated for and reinforced the unity of "laws and principles," emphasizing the importance of ideological consistency. To this end, Dong Zhongshu proposed the idea of "eliminating the hundred schools of thought and establishing Confucianism as the sole respected doctrine," a notion that laid the foundation for China's cultural authoritarianism.

In terms of political philosophy, he combined the Confucian concept of moral governance with the Legalist idea of rule by law, forming a complementary principle of governance. He also stressed the close connection between strict hierarchical titles and the maintenance of monarchical autocracy and the supremacy of the emperor's power. This led to the creation of a theoretical system of feudal monarchic despotism, centered around the "Three Bonds and Five Constants"³ (the bonds of ruler-subject,

² Dong Zhongshu: (c. 197 – 104 BCE) was a renowned scholar, politician, philosopher, and master of the modern Confucian classics during the Western Han Dynasty in China.

³ The "Three Bonds and Five Constants" refer to the following:

The Three Bonds mean that the subject submits to the ruler, the son obeys the father, and the wife follows the husband. These are considered natural, fundamental, and unchangeable principles.

The Five Constants are five moral standards: benevolence (Ren), righteousness (Yi), propriety (Li), wisdom (Zhi), and trustworthiness (Xin). These are the core virtues that guide ethical behavior.

father-son, and husband-wife, and the five moral standards of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trust).

In philosophical thought, Dong Zhongshu advocated for the concept of a celestial-human connection, with humans as the highest moral standard. He believed that the heavens would send favorable or disastrous signs depending on the actions of the emperor, whether good or bad. This idea provided a seemingly fragile yet powerful divine constraint on the supremacy of imperial power, and Confucianism gradually formed into a structured system. During the Han Dynasty, it became integrated with politics and became the national philosophy of the time.

1.5 The Cultural Heritage Significance of the Artifacts from the Haihun Marquis State

The artifacts unearthed from the Haihun Marquis State, as objects used in ancient daily life and burial rituals, carry significant meaning. The images on these artifacts represent a unique form of language, reflecting the thoughts and concepts of the ancient people. They embody the ethnic consciousness of the Western Han period, showcasing the visual representation of this consciousness, which is also the source of the soul of the nation and the cultural gene of its cultural patterns. As objects imbued with meaning, these images express the relationship between life and death, the relationship between images and people, images and nature, and images and society in the Han Dynasty. Through a systematic semiotic macro interpretation of these artifact images, we can better understand the historical and cultural characteristics of Haihun Marquis State's images in relation to ancient society, as well as the historical significance and cultural contribution of these images in the transmission to contemporary traditional folk images.

Semiotics encompasses the history of human civilization, including philosophy, culture, and society, serving as a record of social development. The world of signs transcends the objective world and has become an important area of study in 20th-century anthropology. This paper treats the artifact images unearthed from the State of Haihun Marquis as a system of image signs, exploring their close connections with five aspects: the history of images, art aesthetics, semiotic language narration, human philosophical cultural values, and the transmissibility of signs.

Semiotics, in its broad sense, refers to the humanistic thoughts reflecting the ancient human view of the universe, nature, and the objective world of society, forming the primary system. The second system arises from the historical changes and evolution of the era, which leads to the transformation and reconstruction of new meanings within semiotics. These two systems alternate with one another, creating an ongoing fusion between the subject and the secondary elements of semiotics. This gradual process has evolved into a cultural semiotics paradigm and art form for Chinese traditional folk symbolic images. This dialectical relationship constructs the multiple attributes of image art semiotics as a domain language.

In the artifact images from the State of Haihun Marquis, the encoding and recombination of multicultural information reflect a narrative that transcends its original meaning—transforming into a "renewed" symbolic expression. This process resembles metaphors, similes, and allegories in human linguistics, where narrative representation is reinterpreted.

We can further explore the semiotic system of artifact image art, where the concept-based narrative of the multiple semantic meanings in Chinese images generates a

deconstructivist context and various aggregation relationships. These aggregations are not just superficial similarities but also reflect the historical and social culture behind the symbols. Through an in-depth study of the relationship between artifact images and various disciplines, we can gain a deeper understanding of the significance and role of artifact semiotics. Additionally, this will assist in more effectively utilizing symbols for information transmission and communication.

By applying Roland Barthes' deconstructivism in semiotics, we can reclassify and recode semiotics and explore the aggregation relationships. This study reveals the multi-layered meanings and broader symbolic significance of signs. These discoveries will provide a more comprehensive and profound perspective on understanding the philosophical content and construction of Chinese ancient image art semiotics, as well as dissecting symbolic narratives.

By analyzing over 1,000 artifact images and symbols currently displayed at the Haihun Marquis State archaeological museum, we can interpret the patterns and paradigms contained in the symbols of the artifacts, including the historical semiotics, aesthetics, symbolic narratives, human philosophy, and communication studies. This includes exploring the symbolism, narrative methods, and spiritual cultural values, revealing the evolution and transmission of artifact images from the Haihun Marquis State, and their relationship with ancient and modern images through a multidisciplinary semiotic paradigm.

Firstly, from the pre-Qin to the Western Han period, pattern symbols gradually evolved in form and development, showing a trend of standardization, condensation, and an increased narrative focus, where images convey meaning and convey moral principles. By the Western Han period, this process reached a stage of formalization and standardization. From the Western Han to the Ming and Qing periods, the dissemination of symbols can be analyzed to reveal the universal human consensus values in the royal symbol culture of the Western Han, as well as the narrative transmission of Confucian ethics within Chinese traditional culture and art. This allows for the explanation of Chinese traditional cultural semiotics and its role in the transmission of values through the Dao. In Confucian ritual culture, human cultural symbols of Chinese agrarian civilization became historical facts or ideological forms. Their expression was law-bound and institutionalized, forming the basis of image paradigms. Secondly, under the transformation of historical eras, the evolution of artifact images expanded the paradigm of Chinese ancient craftsmanship in creating cultural art symbols and the transmission of culture. In the process of societal modernization, Chinese traditional artifact image semiotics has strict regulatory constraints and is influenced by social and spiritual concepts, with national image symbols gradually extending to multiple fields, such as museums, cultural industries, education, media, commerce, and entertainment. The former focuses on academic research, while the latter examines the application of symbols in modern society.

In recent years, research on the artifacts from the Haihun Marquis State has been carried out in several aspects. First, from the archaeological perspective, studies have examined the historical form and value of artifacts, as well as the repair and preservation of unearthed relics, discussing material characteristics, craftsmanship value, and cultural significance (Xu Changqing; Yang Jun; Zhu Hong, 2015; Zhou Yihang; Wang Kai; Guanli; Huang Xi, 2018). Second, from a design perspective, scholars have explored the aesthetic beauty of artifact decorations and their

implications for modern design (Dai Yu; Liu Wentao; Li Chao, 2016). Third, from an art history viewpoint, researchers have explored the social and cultural aspects of artifact images, including the aesthetics of the Chu-Han period (Yuan Enpei; Liu Kun; Wang Jianling, 2017). Fourth, from a tourism development perspective, the utilization of unearthed artifact images in promoting deeper cultural resource utilization has been studied (Chen Chao; Ma Jun, 2019; 2020). The artifact images from the HHaihun Marquis Stateserve as visual evidence of history. Using semiotic methods, studies have analyzed the symbol system of these images and compared them within a modern context, exploring the evolution and value transmission of image symbols, which has not yet been extensively discussed.

Roland Barthes argued that there is a dialectical relationship, distinction, and connection between language and speech, noting that language is social, while speech is individual. Semiotics is the product of social conventions and individual behavior. He emphasized the relationship between language and culture, striving to use semiotics to explain various cultural phenomena, such as how unearthed artifacts are symbols of ancient civilizations that lay the foundation for human culture and values, reflecting the lives, labor, and rituals of our ancestors. Additionally, Barthes believed that semiotics could be viewed as a system and identified three levels in a non-linguistic semiotic system: the material level, the linguistic level, and the level of customary usage. Barthes also proposed the concept of combinatorial relations, which pertain to the mental realm, referring to two axes of speech acts: the horizontal axis of combination. Barthes' semiotic thought presents a "diversified" aspect where semiotics, literature, and cultural studies merge and advance together. Philosophically, Barthes' semiotics underwent a significant shift from structuralism to deconstructionism, demonstrating the "variability" of his theories. The "diversification" and "variability" of Barthes' semiotic thoughts were evident throughout his academic career, reflected in his changing philosophical stances, shifting research interests, fragmented textual representations, and the strong influence of semiotic theory.

By applying Roland Barthes' semiotic theory and conducting a multidimensional analysis of the diverse cultural languages embedded in the semiotic system of HHaihun Marquis Stateartifact images, we can explain the spiritual, social, and symbolic expressions in these images from the Western Han period. This involves interpreting how the images from the Haihun Marquis State convey symbolic expressions of human society and their influence on contemporary value systems in different linguistic frameworks within physical space. Based on Barthes' semiotic principles of cultural and narrative language, the following concepts are explored within the context of the Haihun Marquis State:

1. Historiography: Semiotic art history and the significance of the image transmission and value of Haihun Marquis State images.
2. Philosophy: Semiotic analysis of Confucian ethical cultural human consensus and universal values in artistic symbols.
3. Aesthetics: The semiotic paradigms in the structure of Chinese traditional cultural aesthetics.
4. Sociology: Semiotic narratives across various fields, including political, economic, social, cultural, geographic, and folk contexts in cultural semiotics.

5.Communication Studies: The role of semiotics in the revival and reapplication of contemporary traditional culture.

The world of semiotics is the sum of both the objective world of human society and the spiritual world, and precedes philology as the "linguistic" narrative of humanity. Writing originates from the expression of symbols, such as Chinese pictographic characters in oracle bone script. Academic analysis of symbols has been immersed in a purely structuralist approach, which is limited to analyzing the text, structure, and system of symbolic language's combinatory relations. French scholar Roland Barthes, in his later years, proposed a structuralist semiotics that emphasizes the theory of semiotics having a multi-dimensional, hierarchical spatial theory. In the exploration of the artifacts and images of the Haihun Marquis State, it is clear that texts do not hold ultimate meaning. The structuralist view of texts as "woven fabrics" suggests that we should explore meanings originating from the text while transcending it. The narrative system of Haihun Marquis State's iconography constructs a semiotic framework that analyzes the semiotics beyond the extended meanings of the text from multi-dimensional and layered spaces. This includes the development of a semiotic theoretical model system and a deconstructive analysis system. The material culture of symbols exhibits characteristics of a structuralist narrative language, including the signifier-signified, direct-indirect, linguistic structure-speech (semantics), and combinations-systems. Semiotics is historically dynamic, with symbols often changing as times evolve.

Non-material cultural heritage in semiotics often embodies deconstructivist, multi-dimensional narrative language features, with a synchronicity of semiotic origins. This allows for the formation of cross-temporal transmission and dissemination of values, even shaping an anthropologically localized and internationalized semiotic culture under the context of global cultures. Semiotics combines cultural narratives across various fields of social humanities. Historical semiotic cultures, under certain conditions, also undergo transformations into synchronic semiotics, thus leading to the semiotic and semiotic narrative analysis of the cultural significance of the Haihun Marquis State's artifact images. Using structuralist and deconstructivist approaches to explore semiotic narratives and cultural semiotics through multi-dimensional, multi-layered investigation brings new academic value.

The world of the semiotics of the Haihun Marquis State's artifact images transcends the narrative of human society's real world. It is currently one of the richest texts in the archaeological culture of the Western Han society and a feasible path to filling gaps in the history and cultural art of the Western Han imperial court. Its goal is to explore the semiotics of image art from the perspectives of art history, art aesthetics, sociology, philosophy, and communication studies, investigating the text system of semiotics.

Social material culture forms the basis for human spiritual culture. Research on material culture should not be confined to the artifacts themselves but should delve deeper into the organic relationship between the iconographic text of these artifacts and their signifiers and signifieds. It should also explore the multi-layered and multi-field (comprehensive) cultural system they constitute. This includes both material culture and intangible heritage culture. Through the study of the artifact images unearthed from the Haihun Marquis State, this research seeks to explain the

relationship between material culture, individuals, and historical society, as well as the various social conditions and issues that relate to them.

Thus, this study, through the lens of artifact image art semiotics and material culture, interprets the relationship between the artifacts and their users, the relationship between the images and the entire society, and the historical status and value of the Haihun Marquis State's artifact images across time.

2. Research Objectives

The objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To study the historical origins of artifacts, images and cultural symbols of the Haihun Marquis State
2. To study the value and significance of artifacts, images, Confucian ethics, cultural symbols, narrative philosophy, spiritual culture of the Haihun Marquis State
3. To study the aesthetic expression and characteristics of Confucianism and cultural symbols in the artifacts and images of the Haihun Marquis State
4. To study the social and multi-field image art narrative characteristics of Confucianism and cultural symbols in the artifact images of the Haihun Marquis State
5. To study the construction of the Confucian cultural semiotic system and its re-dissemination in contemporary society

3 Research Questions

How were the artifacts, images and cultural symbols of the Haihun Marquis State formed?

1. That is, how cultural symbols developed in the Pre-Qin period and became the basis for the construction of ancient Chinese cultural symbols; how did this cultural symbol transform into Confucian cultural symbols during the Haihun Marquis period of the Western Han Dynasty, and spread through artifact images; how did Dong Zhongshu's theory of "induction between heaven and man" in the Western Han Dynasty affect the composition of artifact images in the Haihun Marquis State? How did the craftsmanship culture of the Western Han Dynasty restrict the appeal of spiritual ideologies between man and nature, man and society in artifact images?

2. How did the Confucian ethical and cultural symbolic narrative carried by the artifacts from the Haihun Marquis State dominate the values of the ancestors and social spiritual philosophy of the Western Han Dynasty?

3. How did the Confucian ethical culture in the artifact images of the Haihun Marquis dominate the spread and reinterpretation of regional cultures in the north and south in various historical periods after the Han Dynasty, and thus became the spiritual core of traditional Chinese culture that was the consensus philosophical concept of folk society after the Han Dynasty? How does it dominate the narrative context of "carrying the Tao through pictures" in the creation culture of image art and cultural symbols?

5. How do the Confucian cultural symbols form the aesthetic characteristics of the artifacts and images of the Haihun Marquis State?

6. What are the unique symbolic aesthetic cultural paradigms of images? In the images of craftsmanship artifacts, how does Confucianism influence the aesthetic orientation of royal cultural symbols? And its impact on the differences and commonalities in the aesthetic styles of the Central Plains culture, Western Shu culture, Chu culture, and Western Region culture in the north and south? And its

value and significance to many fields such as the spiritual style of folk society in various regions after the Han Dynasty?

7. What are the human philosophies and cultures (Confucian benevolence and ethics) in the symbolism of the artifacts and images of the Haihun Marquis State?

Study how the Confucian cultural symbols carried by the artifacts and images of the Haihun Marquis State dominated the spiritual style of folk society in various regions in the north and south of the Western Han Dynasty? How do the spiritual and moral concepts constructed by Confucian ethical culture between people and between people and social order in Western Han Dynasty form constraints on the dependence between people and society that ethical cultural symbols have? What impact did its social spiritual value orientation have on the social transmission of the post-Han dynasties?

8. What cultures are the Confucian cultural semiotics system constructed from? In the revival of traditional culture in modern society, how can we promote the value and significance of "Use the past for the present" by promoting the re-inheritance and re-dissemination of Confucian cultural semiotics?

4. Definition of Terms

4.1 Haihun marquis state

The Haihun marquis state was the capital city of a marquissate established by Liu He, the second generation Changyi King during the Western Han Dynasty in 63 BC in Yuzhang Commandery. It lasted for four generations and was officially abolished in the 16th year of Yongyuan in the Eastern Han Dynasty (104 AD), with a history of 168 years. It now includes a series of important remains such as the Zijin City ruins, tombs of various Haihun marquis generations, and aristocrats and civilians, forming a complete large-scale site. The term "Haihun marquis state" in the text specifically refers to the entire geographical space of the Purple Forbidden City where Liu He resided during his lifetime and the cemetery after his death, referred to as the Haihun marquis state in the text.

4.2 Haihun marquis

The Haihun marquis is a title of nobility granted in ancient China to members of the imperial family and a very small number of meritorious officials. The title of Haihun marquis was hereditary, passing down through four generations until the Eastern Han Dynasty. Among them were the first generation Haihun marquis Liu He, the second generation Haihun marquis Liu Daizong, the third generation Haihun marquis Liu Baoshi, and the fourth generation Haihun marquis Liu Huiyi. The focus of this article is specifically on the study of the first generation Haihun marquis, Liu He.

4.3 Images of artifacts

The images of unearthed artifacts refer to the images taken or recorded through other means during archaeological excavations of relics found underground. These images may include various types of relics such as bronze, gold and silver ware, ceramics, jade, lacquerware, bamboo slips, and so on.

In this context, the images of unearthed artifacts specifically refer to the artifact images unearthed from the Haihun marquis state site in Nanchang, Jiangxi, China. They have representative and exhibition-worthy images, which have been repaired and exhibited in the Haihun marquis state Museum. Due to the large number

of unearthed relics, many of them are still under repair or not yet publicly displayed, and therefore do not fall within the scope of this study.

4.4 Han Dynasty artifacts

Han Dynasty artifacts refer to the various items and tools produced and used during the Han Dynasty (202 BCE-220 CE), typically including daily necessities, religious ritual objects, weapons, utensils, and more. The artifacts discussed here primarily refer to the daily life items, everyday utensils, and ritual objects excavated from the Haihun Marquis State. These include primarily bronze ware, lacquerware, jade artifacts, and chariot and horse-related items.

4.5 Semiotics

Semiotics is the synthesis of the world of human objective society and the world of human spiritual thought. The world of signs is broader than human objective events, representing humanity's understanding of nature and the philosophical concepts of the universe. The semiotics used in this study is based on the semiotic theory of Roland Barthes, a renowned French philosopher, literary theorist, and semiotician of the 20th century. In this research, Barthes' semiotic theory is primarily applied to explore how images of artifacts, as signs, convey the meanings of culture and ideology, and the hidden social and cultural constructs behind these signs.

4.6 Symbolic narrative

Semiotics is the synthesis of human objective social world and human spiritual and ideological world. The symbolic world is greater than objective human events. It represents human beings' understanding of the philosophical world of nature and the universe. The symbolic narrative in this study refers to the cultural narrative of Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism cultural symbols in the cultural relics unearthed from the Haihun state from the Haihun state of the Han Dynasty to the image culture of post-Han artifacts. It represents the symbolic meaning of traditional society and modern society.

4.7 Confucian Ethical Culture

Confucian ethical culture is an important component of traditional Chinese culture, originating from the Confucian school during the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period, particularly the thoughts of Confucius and his disciples. Confucian ethical culture centers around the core values of "Ren (benevolence), Yi (righteousness), Li (propriety), Zhi (wisdom), and Xin (Integrity)," emphasizing individual moral cultivation, family harmony, social order, and state governance.

Ren (benevolence) is the core of Confucian ethics, often understood as "love for others." Confucius believed that Ren is an inner moral feeling and care for others, requiring individuals to demonstrate tolerance, understanding, and respect for others in their actions. Ren also includes the principle of "do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself," promoting a moral priority of others. Benevolence is not only reflected in care for family but also includes a sense of responsibility toward society and the state. The pursuit of Ren forms the foundation of Confucian ethics, emphasizing harmony and mutual assistance between individuals, such as the respect and love between ruler and subject, father and son, and husband and wife.

Yi (righteousness) refers to morality and justice, emphasizing that individuals should follow moral principles in their actions and decisions. Unlike the emotional aspect of Ren, Yi is more rational and normative, involving moral judgment and behavioral choices when facing various situations.

Li (propriety) refers to social norms, behavioral rules, rituals, and systems, and is a crucial aspect of Confucian ethics. Li includes not only formal ceremonies and regulations but also covers daily life etiquette, manners, and respect for others. The role of Li is to maintain social order and interpersonal harmony, emphasizing mutual respect and appropriate behavioral norms between people. Learning and practicing Li are essential educational elements in Confucian culture.

Zhi (wisdom) represents wisdom and discernment, referring to the ability to make correct judgments, have insight, and distinguish right from wrong. Confucianism emphasizes cultivating wisdom through learning and reflection so that individuals can make morally sound decisions. Zhi is also related to rationality, scholarship, and insight, helping people better understand and address complex social and moral issues.

Xin (Integrity) refers to trust and credibility, and is an important moral requirement in Confucian ethics. It is a moral responsibility that means being honest and trustworthy in social interactions, avoiding deception and hypocrisy. The normal functioning of society also depends on the establishment of trust.

In this text, the dimensions of Confucian ethics are more focused on social order, political ethics, and the educational role of Confucian ethics.

4.8 Ritual and Music Culture

Ritual and Music Culture is an embodiment of Confucian thought. Through the regulation of rituals and the harmony of music, it emphasizes the unity of external behavior and inner cultivation. It not only focuses on the moral cultivation of individuals but also highlights social order and harmony, making it an indispensable component of traditional Chinese culture. In the context of this text, Ritual and Music Culture during the Shang and Zhou dynasties refers to the rituals and etiquette involved in religious activities such as sacrifices and ceremonies. In the Spring and Autumn Period, it referred to the rituals and rules used to maintain the hierarchical social order between different classes. Over time, it gradually expanded to encompass social norms and behavioral codes in everyday life.

4.9 Aesthetic Characteristics

Aesthetic characteristics generally refer to the qualities that evoke a sense of beauty during the perception of an object or artwork, involving aspects such as form, color, texture, and structure. In this context, the aesthetic characteristics referred to in this paper are specifically related to the aesthetic experience within the framework of Confucian culture. These aesthetics are closely tied to values of morality, ritual, personal cultivation, and social order. They do not merely refer to the physical appearance of objects but also represent cultural symbols that convey moral, ritualistic, and societal values.

4.10 Cultural Symbolism

It refers to certain objects, signs, images, behaviors, or customs within a specific cultural system that carry particular cultural meanings, representing the values, beliefs, or traditions of society, history, religion, or ethnicity. In this paper,

cultural symbols are not merely physical entities; they are transmitted through images of ancient artifacts and cultural symbols unearthed from archaeological sites, forming interpretations and meanings that offer different insights into culture.

4.11 Semiotics of Culture

The semiotics of culture is the study of how symbols convey meaning within a specific culture. By analyzing elements such as symbols, sign systems, context, and cultural coding, it reveals how culture constructs social cognition and transmits values through symbols. In this paper, the cultural symbols are part of a semiotic system collectively constructed through the fields of ancient Chinese iconography, Confucian ethics, aesthetics, sociology, and communication studies.

4.12 Unity of Man and Nature

The concept of the Unity of Man and Nature is an important idea in ancient Chinese philosophy, deeply reflected in the thought systems of Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, and others. Its core idea is that "Heaven" and "Man" are inseparable, and there should be a harmonious and unified relationship between humans, nature, and the cosmos. This philosophy reflects the interconnection and interdependence between humanity, nature, and the universe, emphasizing that humans should follow the laws of nature to achieve an ideal state of harmonious coexistence with Heaven (nature and the cosmos). In this context, the Unity of Man and Nature is not only an expression of cosmology and natural philosophy, but also represents an ancient human perspective on life and values, advocating that people should strive for a harmonious coexistence with nature and align with the natural principles of the universe.

4.13 Linguistic Narrative

Linguistic narrative refers to the process of constructing and expressing meaning through language. It involves not only telling a story but also using specific linguistic tools, narrative techniques, and structural arrangements to influence how the story is presented and how the audience or readers perceive it. In this paper, linguistic narrative refers to the language shaped by the cultural influences of different periods, particularly under the influence of Confucian culture. This includes narrative language shaped by regional cultures, such as the language of Chu culture, Shu culture, and others, which affect image-based narratives. The linguistic narrative in this context reflects the presentation of stories with Confucian ethical values in the historical setting of the Han dynasty.

4.14 Revival of traditional culture in China

This is the context of this article. "Revival of Chinese traditional culture" refers to the efforts to re-excavate, research, inherit and innovate Chinese traditional culture. This includes the research and inheritance of ancient culture, philosophical thoughts, art forms, etc., as well as the promotion and development of traditional values, moral ethics, etc. The characteristics in the article explore the culture of the Han Dynasty.

The revitalization of traditional culture in this article specifically refers to the "Opinions on Implementing the Inheritance and Development Project of Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture" issued by the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the General Office of the State Council on January 25, 2017. In order to build a socialist cultural power, enhance the country's cultural soft power, and realize the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the

Chinese nation, the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the General Office of the State Council issued the "Opinions on Implementing the Inheritance and Development Project of Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture" to implement the inheritance and development project of excellent Chinese traditional culture. The research on Chinese traditional culture started at this time point.

4.15 The Process of Modernization

The "process of modernization" refers to the efforts made in Chinese society to modernize various fields, including economics, politics, science and technology, and society as a whole. This involves enhancing the overall level of the country and society through technological progress, institutional reforms, and educational development, with the ultimate goal of achieving modernization.

In this context, "the revival of Chinese traditional culture and the process of modernization" describes an integrated goal and effort, aiming not only to protect and inherit the treasures of Chinese traditional culture but also to keep pace with the times and promote the modernization of society. Cultural semiotics and symbolic narratives play a crucial role in this process. By studying and interpreting the images of artifacts, one can uncover the symbols, meanings, and cultural connotations embedded within them, leading to a better understanding and transmission of traditional Chinese culture. This helps to integrate traditional culture with modern society, fostering the development of Chinese traditional culture in contemporary times.

5. Scope of Research

5.1 Research area

Nanchang, abbreviated as "Hong" or "Chang," was known as Yuzhang and Hongdu in ancient times. It is now the capital city of Jiangxi Province. Nanchang was founded in 202 BC, symbolizing the prosperity of the south. It is a nationally renowned city with a rich historical and cultural heritage. Located south of the Yangtze River, Nanchang has well-developed transportation by land and water. It is known as the "area embracing three rivers and surrounding five lakes." Throughout history, Nanchang has been an important administrative center, thriving and prosperous. Present-day Nanchang consists of six districts and three counties, including a national-level new area called Ganjiang New Area. The total area, including water, is 7,400 square kilometers, with plains accounting for 35.8% and water surfaces accounting for 29.8%. In 2017, Nanchang had a per capita GDP of 93,000 yuan (14,700 USD) and a population of 5.464 million.

In the Tang Dynasty, the poet Wang Bo referred to Nanchang as a place of great beauty and talented people in his preface to the Tengwang Pavilion. During the Southern Tang Dynasty, Nanchang served as the capital. On August 1, 1927, the "Nanchang Uprising" marked the birth of the Chinese People's Liberation Army under the leadership of the Communist Party of China. With over two thousand years of history, Nanchang has preserved many famous historical sites, such as the burial site of Haihun marquis (the Marquis of Haihun), Tengwang Pavilion, the Memorial Hall of Bada Shanren, Baihua Island, and the site of the August 1st Uprising.

The reasons for choosing Nanchang in Jiangxi Province are as follows:

(1) From a geographical and historical perspective, Nanchang had superior geographical advantages in ancient times. It was a region with frequent waterway transportation, located at the intersection of the Wu and Chu cultures, facilitating

frequent cultural exchanges. It was an important city in ancient China with abundant resources.

(2) From a cultural perspective, Nanchang is a culturally renowned city with a history of thousands of years. The Haihun marquis burial site, with its large size, excellent preservation, and rich content, is the largest Han Dynasty feudal state settlement site discovered in China to date. Yuzhang Commandery was the capital of the Western Han Dynasty, and the unearthed cultural relics and images reflect social life, politics, and aesthetic concepts of the Han Dynasty and pre-Qin period. They can represent symbolic expressions in various fields.

(3) From the perspective of unearthed cultural relics, after the discovery of the Haihun marquis burial site, over ten thousand cultural relics were unearthed. These well-preserved artifacts and their craftsmanship are typical representations of the Han Dynasty, providing a true depiction of the prosperous civilization of the Western Han Dynasty. It is a cultural treasure trove.

5.2 Time

The research period is divided into three stages:

From the pre-Qin period to the Haihun marquis period, exploring the evolution of images in ancient Chinese artifacts from the pre-Qin period to the Western Han Dynasty's Haihun marquis state. (1675-202 BC)

From the Haihun marquis period to the Ming and Qing Dynasties, investigating the stylistic features of the Haihun marquis state's artifact images and their influence on traditional Chinese images during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. (202 BC - 59 BC)

The exhibition of the archaeological achievements of the Haihun marquis state's artifacts began in November 2015 and continues until now, exploring the impact of Haihun marquis artifacts on contemporary society.

6. Research Methodology

This study uses qualitative research methodology to explore and understand the past and modern symbolic expressions of images symbols through the exploration of the history, aesthetics, Confucianism, communication, etc. of text images and the description and interpretation of unstructured or semi-structured data.

This article provides an in-depth analysis of the cultural symbol system of artifact images unearthed from the Haihun Marquis state, and explores the artistic expression of the artifacts and images unearthed from the Haihun Marquis state as an important transition period in the history of Chinese icons and symbols, from pre-Qin to contemporary times. Through the analysis and interpretation of these images, we can not only understand the historical evolution of traditional Chinese symbols, but also reveal the shift in China's pre-Qin material and spiritual images, as well as the symbolic expressions of folk images, royal images, etc., and explore the relationship between artifacts and the entire historical network. Metaphorical symbolic relationships. At the same time, the meanings of these symbols are constantly being inherited and innovated, providing an important reference for us to understand the evolution and spread of traditional images in the history and culture of the Western Han Dynasty. The article uses Roland Barthes's semiotic principles as theoretical guidance, combined with field investigation data, and uses an interdisciplinary method to classify the types of semiotic objects diachronically and consensually.

Further interpret and refine the deeper meaning of the image, and conduct an in-depth interpretation of the cultural connotation of cultural symbols.

6.1 Population and Sample

6.1.1 Researchers involved in the Haihun marquis state archaeology.

They will provide first-hand information on the artifacts unearthed from the Haihun marquis state, and they are also key sources of information for this study. They have been leading archaeological teams dedicated to the excavation of the Haihun marquis state's tomb and have been working in the field of archaeology for a long time.

6.1.2 Visitors to the Haihun marquis state park

The tourists visiting the Haihun marquis state site park are the second key sources of information for this study. Through questionnaires, interviews, and other methods, their understanding and interpretation of the Han Dynasty's Haihun marquis state artifact images can be explored, as well as their attitudes and opinions towards symbolic expressions. Additionally, this research can investigate visitors' knowledge and interest in traditional Chinese culture and Han Dynasty culture, and their willingness to understand and appreciate the meaning and value of traditional cultural symbols. They provide relevant field information for this study.

6.1.3 Staff members of the Haihun marquis state park

As internal personnel, they can provide insights into how they perceive the role and impact of Haihun marquis state artifact images in contemporary society. They provide information about the original geographical environment and spatial layout of the site, among other relevant data. They are one of the social groups involved in this study.

6.1.4 Enthusiasts of Han culture

Enthusiasts of Han culture are defined as individuals who are interested in and passionate about traditional Chinese culture, particularly Han Dynasty culture. This includes scholars, artists, cultural workers, cultural inheritors, as well as ordinary cultural enthusiasts. They are another social group involved in this study.

6.2 Instrumentation

6.2.1 Literature analysis

By collecting relevant literature and materials, including books, journals, newspapers, theses, reports, and databases, historical documents and information related to the Han Dynasty's Haihun marquis state will be analyzed and screened to obtain information and knowledge about the historical and social background, conceptual theory, and related scholars' research during the period of Haihun marquis state. By identifying key information and viewpoints in the literature, it can provide strong support for the research.

6.2.2 Image collection

Image information of exhibits from the Haihun marquis state site museum, as well as relevant historical relics image data, will be obtained for in-depth research and analysis.

6.2.3 Interview method

Firstly, by visiting researchers involved in the Haihun marquis state archaeology team, relevant information on unearthed artifacts and historical information will be obtained, as well as understanding their interpretation of artifact images as cultural symbols from an archaeological perspective. Secondly, through

interviews with visitors to the Haihun marquis state museum, their understanding and interpretation of the Haihun marquis state's Han Dynasty artifact images and culture, as well as their attitudes and opinions on contemporary symbolic expression, can be explored.

6.3 Data Collection

In terms of data recording, I have utilized tools such as a camera, a voice recorder, and a notebook. The camera is primarily used for capturing image data, including images of the artifacts from Haihun Maquis State and images of various cultural activities related to Han culture. The voice recorder, on the other hand, is used for recording conversations in various formal or informal situations, providing strong support for subsequent data analysis. Lastly, the notebook is used for documenting the process of data processing and conducting comprehensive analysis to ensure the accuracy of both practice and theory.

6.3.1 Image data collection of excavated artifact images

(1) The research objects include regional information, legends, and history. These aspects are important for understanding the context and background of the research.

(2) The image information for the research includes maps, images from books, images of artifacts displayed in museums, and images of cultural activities. These pieces of information will be collected and analyzed through recording and photography methods.

6.3.2 In the field investigation

one approach is to visit museums and collect excavated artifacts as original data for the images of artifacts. Additionally, it is valuable to interview visitors and tourists to gather their understanding and perspectives on Han culture. These interviews can provide insights and diverse opinions that contribute to the research.

6.4 Data Analysis

6.4.1 Analysis of Image Data from Pre-Qin to Western Han Period

This stage of the research involves studying both literature and image data. Relevant textual and visual materials related to the images of excavated artifacts from the Haihun marquis state will be collected. These materials, including related information, legends, and historical data, can primarily be sourced from libraries, historical archives, and online databases.

6.4.2 Analysis of Image Data from Western Han to Ming-Qing Periods

In accordance with the research progress, the collection of textual and visual materials influenced by Han culture during the Western Han to Ming-Qing periods will be conducted. The primary sources for these materials include libraries, relevant architectural structures, and images found on ethnic clothing and everyday objects.

6.4.3 Analysis of Data on the Formal Exhibition of Haihun marquis State Artifacts to the Present Day

For this part of the research, the image information to be studied includes images of artifacts displayed in museums, as well as images and videos of cultural and educational activities related to Han culture. This information will be collected and analyzed through methods such as photography, videography, and on-site investigations.

6.5 Research presentation

6.5.1 Full text of the study

Descriptive analysis

6.5.2 Research articles

International journals, Scopus level or ERIC

7. Literature Review

7.1 Literature review related to the Haihun Marquis State

Since its public debut in November 2015, the discovery of the Haihun marquis State has sparked a wave of academic research in the field. Over the past decade, the study of the Haihun marquis State has gradually evolved from a simple archaeological excavation in 2015 to a multidisciplinary comprehensive research endeavor. This includes fields such as history, art, and communication, and can be divided into the following three main stages:

7.1.1 Initial Phase of Cultural Exhibition (2015-2016)

In November 2015, the first public exhibition of the archaeological findings of the Western Han Dynasty Haihun marquis state was held, which not only served as a concentrated display of the research achievements at the site but also explored and summarized the fields of archaeology, cultural heritage protection, and public exhibition. Archaeological experts such as Xu Changqing, Yang Jun, and others conducted an analysis of the tomb's structure and scale, highlighting its intact structure, rich variety of unearthed cultural relics, high level of craftsmanship, and the noble status of the tomb owner, all of which hold significant historical and cultural value (Xu Changqing, Yang Jun, Zhu Hong, 2015).

7.1.2 Deepening Research Phase (2016-2019)

After a year of archaeological exhibitions, scholars began to analyze the geographical environment, political system, and artifact craftsmanship of the Western Han Dynasty Haihun marquis state. Scholars such as Xin Diyong, Li Longwu, Wang Zijin, Zhu Shaohou, Pan Jianrong, (Xin Deyong & Huang Wei 2017), and others explored the geographical environment of the Haihun marquis state through a comparison of historical documents and on-site archaeological research. (Wang Zhijin. 2016) They discovered that the unique geographical location of the Haihun marquis state, adjacent to the Yangtze River and relying on Poyang Lake, provided favorable conditions for economic development and cultural exchange, making it a prosperous region in the south during the Yu Province of the Han Dynasty. Regarding the political system, scholars conducted in-depth research on the official system, feudal system, and the relationship with the central government of the Haihun marquis state. They found that the political system of the Haihun marquis state was both different from other vassal states and, to some extent, reflected the characteristics of centralized power of the Han Dynasty. This discovery provides a new perspective for understanding the diversity of local political systems during the Western Han period.

In addition, scholars such as Yuan Enpei, Liu Kun, and Zhang Yi explored the aesthetic characteristics of unearthed artifacts, Chu-Han decorative art, and the concept of the Four Gods in the early Western Han Dynasty from an artistic perspective. The research revealed that these artifacts not only demonstrated exquisite craftsmanship but also featured intricate and profound patterns. These artifacts not

only reflect the high level of craftsmanship during the Western Han period but also provide important evidence for understanding the aesthetic concepts and cultural connotations of the Han Dynasty. Li Xiaoyong, Zhang Jianwen, and Li Longfei conducted research on the state of Confucian classics, rituals, and music in the Han Dynasty, exploring the study of ancient texts such as "Yijing" (Book of Changes), "Qilunyu" (Analects of Qi), "Liji" (Book of Rites), and the simplified version of "Chunqiu" (Spring and Autumn Annals) found in bamboo slips unearthed from the Haihun marquis state, revealing the historical process of the transmission and evolution of surviving versions of ancient literature.

7.1.3 Cultural Inheritance and Innovation Phase (2020-present)

With the emphasis on cultural heritage protection and cultural confidence by the country, research on the important historical site of the Haihun Marquis State from the Han Dynasty has continued to advance. With the promotion of relevant policies, the Nanchang Han Dynasty Haihun marquis state Museum was officially opened in 2020 after four years of careful preparation. This museum not only provides a valuable platform for the study of the Haihun Marquis State but also increasingly becomes an important carrier for cultural inheritance and innovation for various cultural institutions and teams.

In the research of the Haihun Marquis State, researchers have paid more attention to and developed the cultural expressions and innovative strategies of artifact images, cultural and creative products, and traditional craftsmanship in modern design and art. These studies not only help us gain a deeper understanding of the history and culture of the Han Dynasty but also inject new inspiration and ideas into modern design and art. The excavation and promotion of local culture occupy a central position in the research of the Haihun Marquis State. By delving into the unique charm and profound connotations of local culture, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the values and lifestyle of Han society, providing valuable references and insights for modern society. In terms of dissemination, significant achievements have been made in the publicity and promotion of the Haihun Marquis State. Through the application of modern technologies such as virtual reality digitization, virtual tourism development, and scene-based museums, innovative methods of communication have expanded the influence of the Haihun Marquis State's discovery. These technological applications not only enrich the visitor experience but also inject new vitality into the promotion and dissemination of the Haihun Marquis State.

Interdisciplinary and diverse research plays a crucial role in the field of the Haihun marquis Tomb. Experts from multiple disciplines such as history, archaeology, art, and communication have participated together in the research of the Haihun marquis Tomb, bringing innovation and development to the field. This interdisciplinary research approach not only contributes to a deeper exploration of the historical and cultural value of the Haihun Marquis State but also provides new ideas and methods for the development of related disciplines.

7.2 Literature review related to semiotics

7.2.1 Semiotics

Semiotics, as a general methodology in the humanities and social sciences, is a tool necessary for human cognition of the world and interpersonal communication. "Signs" serve as the bridge connecting the subject and the object. The purpose of human cognition is to acquire knowledge and ideas, and these abstract concepts must be understood through specific carriers or intermediaries. Signs, therefore, act as these carriers and intermediaries. The origin of semiotics can be traced back to the ancient Greek physician Hippocrates, who was the first to regard the "symptoms" of patients as signs, earning him the title of the father of semiotics ((Achim Eschbach & Jürgen Trabant, 1983)). Later, the Christian thinker Augustine developed semiotics into an existence that transcends sensory impressions, extending to material objects, and further evolving into theological semiotics, which in turn influenced Saussure and Peirce .(Barthes, 1964).

In the early 20th century, Saussure proposed a semiotic theory from a linguistic perspective, defining semiotics as the "science of the role of signs in social life." He emphasized that linguistic signs reflect a binary relationship between the signifier and the signified, and that there is "no natural connection" between them. Later, Peirce pointed out that semiotics is the study of the essential characteristics and fundamental types of all possible sign processes. He introduced the triadic division of signs, objects, and interpretants, known as the "semiotic triad," which focuses on the interpretation of sign meanings. Both Saussure and Peirce elaborated on the relationship between semiotics and other disciplines. In his 1969 epistemological masterpiece *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault stated that all knowledge connecting laws should be referred to as semiotics(Foucault, 2012). Heidegger believed that expression itself is a sign; without meaning in expression and understanding, the human world would not exist, and human thought would be impossible. Therefore, semiotics is a comprehensive discussion of meaning. As a result, the scope of semiotic studies gradually expanded to non-linguistic fields, such as epistemology, phenomenology, hermeneutics, psychology, and logic. All cognitive objects and mental activities fall within the domain of semiotic research.

Through extensive research and in-depth discussion, we have gradually come to realize that modern semiotic theory is not limited to Saussure's linguistics and Peirce's logic. Building on this foundation, Roland Barthes argued that semiotic systems are open, dynamic, and mutable, applying this theory to various fields of art(Peter Pericles Trifonas, 2015). He conducted in-depth research within the categories of literary language systems, fashion systems, furniture systems, automobile systems, and integrated systems, drawing conclusions of significant theoretical value. He believed that semiotic texts and language possess multidimensional layers, thus providing the theoretical feasibility for interdisciplinary semiotic studies. As a reflection on the universal principles of meaning-making activities, the purpose of semiotics is to clarify the various cultural phenomena encompassed by the ways in which humans express and understand meaning.

Thousands of years ago, the I Ching (Book of Changes) established a complete semiotic system to describe the changes in things. It represents one of China's earliest semiotic discourses(Lebovitz, 2018). The Shang Shu (Book of

Documents) also contains written records of language symbols and script. During the Spring and Autumn period, the debate between various schools of thought regarding "name and reality" marked the peak of semiotic discussions in Chinese cultural history. Classical texts such as *Zhi Wu Lun* (On Pointing to Things) by Gongsun Long from the Pre-Qin period provide historical evidence that semiotic thought in China has existed since ancient times. The father of modern Chinese linguistics, Zhao Yuanren, was the first to independently propose semiotics in China. In a 1926 article titled *Outline of Semiotics*, he pointed out that while symbols themselves are ancient, no one had yet systematically studied the various properties and uses of symbols as a research topic (Ding, 2007). Later, scholar Zhao Yiheng provided a clearer definition of the symbol, describing it as a perception that carries meaning. Meaning must be expressed through symbols, and the purpose of a symbol is to convey meaning. Conversely, if there is no meaning, a symbol is unnecessary, and there are no symbols that do not express meaning.

Semiotics is a comprehensive collection of socially relevant signifying activities. In China, semiotics serves to analyze, describe, judge, and establish the underlying cultural phenomena, contributing to the construction of modern culture in society. (Binder, 2017)

7.2.2 Symbols and History

In his article *Gu Jiegang's Historiography and Historical Semiotics—On the Theoretical Development of Chinese Ancient History*, Li Youzheng explores the connection between historiography and the humanities from an interdisciplinary epistemological and methodological perspective (Li, Y. 2007). He advocates for the use of modern views and scientific methods in interdisciplinary interaction to create a new historical science that meets the academic theoretical requirements of the new century, namely, historical semiotics. In his work *The History of Ancient Chinese Material Culture: Qin and Han*, Han Guohe discusses the value of the integration between archaeology and its related disciplines. He notes that Qin and Han culture transformed from the pluralism of previous eras to a sense of unity. By examining material culture, he explores the characteristics, influences, and significance of ancient cultural material culture (Wu, 2017).

7.2.3 Symbols and aesthetics

Aesthetics originally refers to the study of sensibility, beauty, and art. Semiotic aesthetics is the basic theory and methodology for analyzing the formal meanings of all aesthetic texts. Langue described art as "a symbolic form of human emotions," while Meyer Shapiro developed traditional iconography into the analysis of art symbols. Barthes, in works such as *The Fashion System* and *The Empire of Signs*, incorporated aesthetics into a deeper social and cultural context of art (Disilvestro, 2006).

Ancient China had its own aesthetic tradition. Relatively independent aesthetic activities and specialized discussions of aesthetics emerged during the Wei and Jin dynasties, but the roots of Chinese aesthetic thought can be traced back to the Pre-Qin period. The various philosophers of the Pre-Qin era did not directly address aesthetics and artistic activities, but while contemplating general philosophical, life, and social issues, they touched on core aspects of aesthetics. The more independent aesthetic thought of later generations is, to some extent, an extension of the ideas of these early philosophers. Therefore, the historical starting point of Chinese aesthetic history is the

philosophical thought of the Spring and Autumn period, specifically the teachings of Laozi and Confucius. To understand the aesthetic thoughts of Daoism and Confucianism founded by Laozi and Confucius, one must first examine the ritual and music culture of the Shang and Zhou dynasties, which serve as evidence of the cultural foundation of Chinese thought. At the same time, one of the key characteristics of Chinese aesthetics is its close connection to life, its integration with various art practices, and its deep penetration into the collective national spirit (Zehou & Maija Bell Samei, 2010).

7.2.4 Semiotics and Communication

In the mid-20th century, Western semiotic scholars such as Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco, Stuart Hall, and John Fiske applied semiotic methods to explore media culture and communication phenomena. In the field of communication, semiotics has been widely applied to the analysis of news, advertising, and internet communication. Meanwhile, the development trend of communication studies and semiotics has shown a characteristic of multidimensional integration, involving disciplines such as sociology, phenomenology, journalism, and archaeology. Domestic and international semiotic communication studies have gradually had a significant impact and development. (Hu Yirong, Ma Yiang, Yin Jingwen, 2023) summarized the progress of semiotic communication studies both domestically and internationally in terms of foundational theory, focal topics, discourse systems, and methodology. The integration of semiotics with various disciplines has advanced the deepening and development of certain core concepts in each discipline. (Jiang Xiaoli and Zhong Dibing, 2021) analyzed the reconstruction of news authenticity from a semiotic perspective. Tang Xiaolin and Cheng Tianyue (2018) reexamined Barthes' myth theory and explored the interrelationship between mass media and ideology. Liu Tao (2014), based on a semiotic analysis of the Lanzhou water contamination incident, studied the symbolic innovation and rhetorical practices of environmental public events. The fusion of semiotics and communication studies has given birth to new theories. (Zhu Dong and Hu Yirong, 2023) At an international semiotics conference held in Chengdu, China, scholars unanimously mentioned the key concept of "symbolic archaeology," noting that the evolution of symbols and modes of signification profoundly influences human thought and cultural psychology. (Zhu Dong, 2023) pointed out that the Zhou dynasty rulers used virtue to gain the mandate of heaven and consciously employed symbols to moralize natural objects, thus completing the early ethical turn of Chinese semiotics and forming the ritual and music cultural symbol system that became a hallmark of Chinese civilization.

It is evident that the field of semiotic communication studies, focusing on Chinese cultural symbols and related ideas, has gradually become a contemporary hot topic. Semiotics is becoming an indispensable part of communication studies. Additionally, as a methodology, "communication semiotics" provides new discursive interpretation approaches for multimedia and cross-genre texts, including art.

7.2.5 Semiotic Narratology

Semiotic narratology is a branch of semiotics that mainly studies the narrative properties of all symbolic texts. The core of semiotic narratology lies in how the combination and transformation of symbols can achieve narrative functions. Roland Barthes' Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives proposed a shift from metalanguage semiotics to implicit semiotics, providing a theoretical basis for

understanding the narrative turn. Additionally, Peirce's theory of general signs emphasizes the openness and growth of symbols in narratives, suggesting that narratives are sustained through the infinite transformation of symbols (Benston & Jameson, 1983). The field of semiotic narratology is primarily found in literature. It not only offers new perspectives for understanding texts and cultures but also provides theoretical support for cross-cultural communication and media convergence. Future research should further explore the interdisciplinary study of semiotic narratology to advance the development of this field.

7.3 The revitalization of traditional culture in the process of Chinese modernization

Chinese President Xi Jinping has repeatedly emphasized the importance of traditional culture to China's modernization. Xi Jinping advocates cultivating the cultural self-confidence of the Chinese people by carrying forward the essence of traditional culture and integrating traditional culture with modern science and technology and economic development. Zhang Dainian emphasized in "Chinese Traditional Culture and Modern Society" that Chinese traditional culture does not only refer to the study of knowledge, but also contains many essences that are beneficial to social development. The revival of Chinese traditional culture can not only enhance national cohesion, but also provide humanistic care and moral guidance.

Chinese-style modernization is the specific implementation form of China's modernization path. This is reflected in the fact that it contains Chinese elements such as Chinese historical traditions, Chinese culture, Chinese national conditions, and Chinese creation. It is different from Western-style modernization and the traditional Soviet model, and emphasizes telling Chinese stories well. , tells the story of turning people into good people and virtuous people in the world, tells the story of the general and the special, law and morality, China and the world, socialism and capitalism; the philosophical foundation is peace and common prosperity based on the system.

Zhang Bo, in "The Revival of Folk Traditions in the Context of Globalization", proposed that folk customs are an important part of traditional culture and the revival of rural areas is a common fact in China. Folk traditional culture is a set of culture closely related to life. The revival of traditional culture shows that under certain conditions, traditions can return to the daily life of society through inheritance and be followed, performed and practiced.

8. Concept, Theory and Conceptual framework

8.1 Research Concept

This research is based on the semiotics concept in Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. Barthes' semiotics is derived from Saussure's structural linguistics theory. Barthes believes that a symbol system is a specific, dynamic, adaptable, and open symbol system. In linguistic semiotics, this formed cultural semiotics. Some art with cultural symbolic meaning can acquire new meaning and vitality under different interpretations. Roland Barthes' "text" perspective states that symbols have multi-dimensional levels, i.e., the transition from single structuralism to deconstructionism, and the denial of the center, deconstruction, system, and hierarchical perspectives of texts are all multi-dimensional spatial meanings. Semiotics research discovers the unique time of all systems and all forms of history.

Roland Barthes believed that any material is suitable for narrative, but in reality, the development of narrative studies has not entirely followed this assumption.

Its research objects are limited to myths, folk stories, and especially narrative works such as novels that are carried by written language. Therefore, from the perspective of actual development, narrative studies mainly focus on written narrative materials such as myths, folk stories, and novels, and use them as a reference to study other narrative fields. This research mainly explores the symbolic meaning of unearthed artifact images through the ability to indicate in semiotics, and explores the semantic evolution of artifact images from the perspective of chronology using narrative theory.

This study, based on Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, combines semiotic narratology, semiotic aesthetics, and semiotic communication to explore the Confucian ethical cultural meanings of the Han Dynasty Haihun Marquis State's artifact images and their dissemination in the revival of traditional culture.

1.Semiotics: Cultural Encoding and Decoding of Artifact Images

Semiotics is the study of sign systems, emphasizing the relationship between the signifier and the signified. Barthes argued that cultural symbols have both surface meanings and cultural metaphors. The artifacts unearthed from the Haihun Marquis State, such as lacquerware, gold, jade, and bamboo slips, are not only historical relics but also symbol systems that carry Confucian culture, royal power symbolism, and societal values. For example, the cloud patterns on lacquerware not only depict natural elements but also implicitly symbolize the Confucian idea of the unity of Heaven and humans. The first-level meaning is decorative, while the second-level meaning symbolizes Han Dynasty political culture.

2.Semiotic Narratology: Historical and Cultural Expression in Artifact Images

Semiotic narratology focuses on the narrative function of symbols within cultural and historical contexts. The artifacts from the Haihun Marquis State can be viewed as a semiotic narrative system, telling the ethical concepts and power structure of Han society through visual symbols. For example, the bells and bamboo slips found in tombs not only reflect the practice of the Confucian system of rites and music but also construct a narrative about societal values of the time through material symbols. The texts of Liji and Lunyu on the bamboo slips became symbolized carriers of knowledge, revealing Han society's emphasis on moral education and the legitimacy of power.

3.Semiotic Aesthetics: Artistic Symbols and Symbolic Meaning in Artifacts

Semiotic aesthetics focuses on the form and visual expressiveness of symbols. The artifact images from the Haihun Marquis State adhere to the Confucian principles of the "Three Bonds and Five Constant Virtues" and influence the symbolic system of Han Dynasty art. Symbols such as the winged human figure and dragon and phoenix motifs not only reflect the aesthetic tastes of the Han Dynasty but also carry deep cultural symbolism. The winged human figure, originating from Daoist mythology, symbolizes the ideal of immortality, while the dragon and phoenix motifs represent imperial power and auspiciousness. From a semiotic perspective, these images are not just visual symbols, but also representations of cultural power.

4.Semiotic Communication: The Historical Evolution and Cultural Revival of Artifact Symbols

Semiotic communication explores how symbols are accepted, spread, and recreated within social cultures. With technological advancement, the symbols of the Haihun Marquis State have been digitized and widely applied in cultural creative

products, museum exhibitions, and other media. These symbols not only revive the cultural spirit of the Han Dynasty but also promote cross-cultural communication, allowing traditional symbols to gain new vitality in contemporary society.

By combining semiotics, semiotic narratology, semiotic aesthetics, and semiotic communication theories, this study reveals the deep Confucian ethical cultural meanings embedded in the artifact images of the Haihun Marquis State.

8.2 Conceptual framework

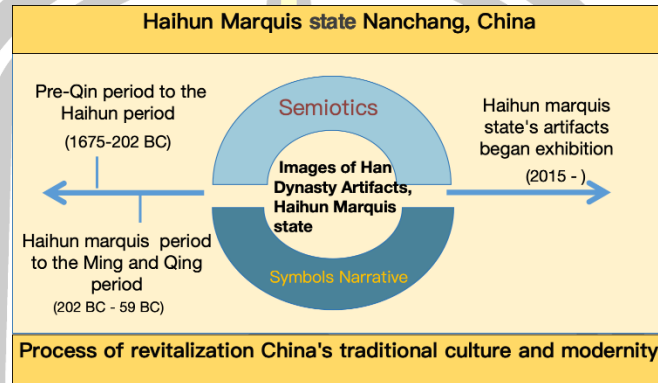


Figure 2 Research framework

Source: Illustrated by Dai Yijun,2024

The research framework of this study takes the artifact pictures of the Haihun Marquis State as the core, and takes the period from the Pre-Qin to the Western Han Dynasty, the Western Han Dynasty to the Ming and Qing Dynasties, and the public display of the artifact pictures of the Haihun Marquis State to the present as research clues. Research on inheritance and communication in the context of the process. (Figure2)

The pictures of artifacts from the Haihun marquis state inherited the pictures, culture and other paradigms of the Pre-Qin Dynasty. As a turning point in image culture, they influenced the image culture from the Han Dynasty to the Ming and Qing Dynasties. The unearthed pictures of the artifacts from the Haihun marquis state have demonstrated the symbols of traditional Chinese image culture. Multi-dimensional expression, through the analysis of the artistic form, cultural connotation and social function of pictures in different periods through the two concepts of semiotics and symbolic expression, it realizes the revival of Chinese traditional culture in modern times and its spiritual core issues.

9. Research plan

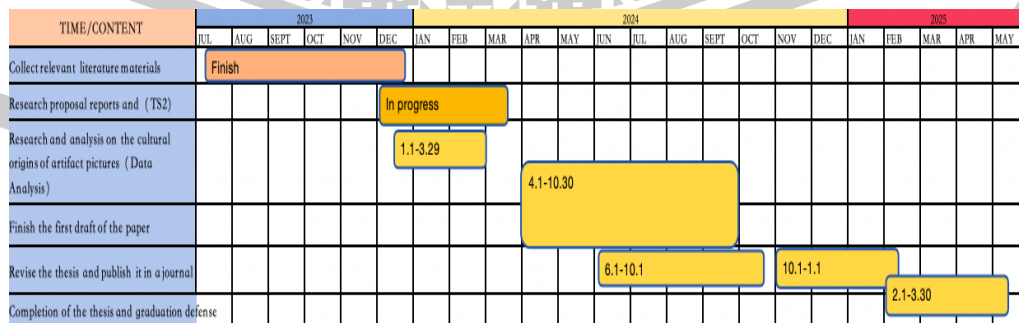


Figure 3 Research plan

Source: Illustrated by Dai Yijun,2024

1.July-September 2023: Conduct on-site investigations at the Haihun marquis State to determine the research topic and collect relevant literature materials.

2.October 2023 - March 2024: Carry out research and analysis on the cultural origins of artifact image, compare, organize, and classify cultural and artistic materials based on historical records. Complete ts1 and ts2 (specific details are missing).

3.April 2024 - September 2024: Complete the initial draft of a 100,000-word text.

4.October 2024 - December 2024: Revise the thesis and publish it in a journal.

5.January 2025 - March 2025: Prepare for the final thesis defense. (figure3)

10. Benefit of Research

This study presents an ethical cultural semiotics and semiotic narration with an anthropological perspective, showcasing the spiritual core of traditional Chinese culture, and highlights a vast academic field.

1.Achievements in Academia:

This study fills the gap in the research on ethical cultural semiotics within the field of Han culture, particularly in the study of the images of artifacts from the Western Han Dynasty's Haihun Marquis State, providing a theoretical foundation for both Han culture research and semiotics research.

The study has been approved as a project under the Ministry of Education's Social Science Research Program, with its cutting-edge nature and innovation holding academic and practical value.

The researcher has conducted educational activities, leading discussions on Han culture, guiding undergraduate thesis design, and providing cultural exhibitions, which benefits the study of intangible cultural heritage.

2.Cultural Heritage Benefits:

This study promotes the dissemination of traditional Chinese culture and contributes to the enhancement of cultural heritage's protection, inheritance, and reuse value. Firstly, through in-depth research on the symbol system of artifacts from the Haihun Marquis State, the cultural symbolic meanings are clarified, providing a scientific basis for the classification, display, and protection of cultural relics. Secondly, the study proposes modern applications of traditional symbols, such as digital preservation, cultural product development, and cultural tourism promotion, facilitating the recreation and widespread dissemination of the value of cultural relics. Through the visual presentation and modern translation of artifact symbols, the study provides theoretical support for the sustainable development of cultural heritage.

3.Social and Cultural Communication Benefits:

This study enhances the social sense of identity with traditional Chinese culture and promotes the international dissemination of Chinese culture. Firstly, through analysis of symbol communication, this study reveals how artifact symbols are accepted, spread, and innovated in contemporary society, driving the modern revival of traditional culture. Secondly, the research findings can be applied to museum exhibitions, educational curricula, and the cultural creative industry, helping the public better understand the deeper meanings of Han Dynasty cultural symbols and raising awareness of cultural heritage protection. Furthermore, through international academic exchanges, this study provides a new semiotic perspective for

CHAPTER II

The historical evolution of the cultural symbols in the artifacts of the Haihun Marquis state

Introduction

Since ancient times, the spiritual concept of the “Unity of man and nature” of ancient Chinese people, the ancestors into the natural world, heaven, earth, and human harmony, man and the concept of the universe as one, interdependent, understanding the way of nature, the relationship of pursuing humanity and obeying heaven. Human beings live in nature, and the spiritual values of human beings must return to the permanence of nature, this is the exploration of the philosophy of human existence and the universal concept of the objective world, which is the proposition of “What is man, where he comes from and where he will go”. The image art of ancient Chinese craftsmen and craftsmen is not a simple creation culture; it includes the whole Chinese historical and cultural heritage. From the Primitive Xia and Shang dynasties, the Western Zhou dynasty, the spring and autumn periods, and the Warring States period to the later period of ancient China, the art of utensil image is the text of sacrifice, custom, emotion, spirit, and narration of ancient people. In the long river of Chinese history, it has been continuously inherited, evolved, and disseminated, thus creating a specific human spiritual concept of the art image in the form of an allegorical to express the human material and spiritual world. It has the significance of human cultural semiotics and thus constructs the semiotics and semiotic narration of Chinese ancient image conceptual art culture.

The content of this chapter is the history and survey of Chinese traditional image symbol construction. This paper probes into the relationship between the history of conceptual art and the cultural semiotics of “Unity of man and nature” in ancient China and the “Unity of man and nature” in the artifacts unearthed from the sea-evening marquis. It is also the basis of the following chapters to explain the phenomenon of symbolic narration, and it is also the spiritual essence of Chinese ancient image conceptual cultural semiotics. This chapter is divided into three parts: Part I: To explained the pre-Qin period Chinese tradition image is the human and the universe, the nature, the society “Unify of man and nature,” the spiritual worship, is the Chinese ancient times social history culture symbol narrative meta-language, it has the characteristics of the cultural symbol of the image art in the pre-qin period, which is the foundation of the construction of the cultural symbol in ancient China. Part II : To explained under the pre-qin “Unify of man and nature” the spiritual culture symbol dissemination evolution, the Western Han dynasty to the Ming and Qing dynasties Chinese traditional image culture symbol, as the historical society spiritual culture manifestation, the unity of time-history and consensus reflects the pursuit of human spirit and ideology in each historical era and becomes a consensus spiritual culture with human beings spanning history and nationalities, it is also the cause of the synchronic idea culture symbol and the same-opposite culture of the symbol narration. Part III: To decode the image of the Western Han dynasty in the deconstruction of cultural semiotics in the multi-level narrative language of “Unity of

man and nature”, this paper explores the relationship between its evolution and dissemination. The history of the royal family of the Western Han dynasty, the social history and culture of the southern and northern regions of the Western Han dynasty, and the ethnic folklore of the southwestern and China-South Africa regions of the Yangtze River valley, with its ancient Chinese philosophy, society, aesthetics, cultural dissemination, and other extensions of history.(Feng, Y., & Zhao, F., 1985).

Part 1. The narrative evolution of the "Unity of man and nature" cultural symbol in pre-Qin images

1.1 The totemic cultural symbol narrative of "Unity of man and nature" in the images of artifacts from ancient times

In the initial stage of the development of human society, due to the relatively low level of productivity, people's understanding of the natural world is extremely limited, and human beings are unable to fight against the harsh natural environment. In this environment, people tend to use their imagination to explain the complexity of natural phenomena in a primitive way of thinking. They created a series of mythological images and interpreted the gods as the embodiment and visualization of natural forces, thus laying the rudiments of the concept and cultural symbols of image art. The universe, as the unique imagination of the world by ancient humans, is a subjective construction of the objective world in the context of a lack of understanding of the natural world and has become a product of human spiritual consciousness. To a certain extent, it also reflects the real world of the ancient human spirit in society at that time and embodies people's ways of thinking and values. As Cassirer said, any great culture is deeply influenced and permeated by the principles of mythology. With its unique charm, mythology runs through the whole of human culture and has become an important window for us to understand history and explore culture.(Cassirer, 2023)

In ancient Chinese myths and legends, Fuxi, Nuwa, and Shennong are the three ancestral gods of China. The creation myth of Nuwa can be found in the Han Dynasty document “Huainanzi Lan Yin Xun” and the “Fengsu Tongyi”. In addition, “Classic of Mountains and Seas” contains the mountains and trees as a ladder to heaven; the Kunlun Mountains are the capital of the Emperor of Heaven. In the ancient mythological system, there are also some legendary stories, such as Kuafu Zhuri, Hou Yi Shoot the Sun, and Sunbird, which take the relationship between heaven and man as the core content. A Chinese concept of “Unity of man and nature” has gradually been established in the human world.

In ancient times, the ancestors of the Chinese nation worked, lived and bred on this vast land. They regarded fire, light and sun as connected beings, a simple, dialectic spirit of materialism exploration. Ancient ancestors believed that gold, wood, water, fire, earth these five elements constitute the cornerstone of nature. Therefore, as a unique symbol, divine fire occupies an important position in human culture, and it symbolizes the source of life in nature. In the book of rites, ritual vessels, it is recorded that the sun is the destination and sustenance of the human spirit. This kind of thought further constructs the semiotics and the semiotic narrative system of the theory of “The unity of man and nature”, the celestial phenomena closely connected with the sun, the Moon, the nebula, the Lightning and so on are taken as the representation of the conceptual cultural symbols of the artistic

images, so as to construct the spiritual concept of the coexistence and co-prosperity between human beings and the nature, human beings have a strong sense of attachment to nature at the spiritual level. Human beings are constantly exploring nature and thinking about the relationship between human beings and nature. Edward Burnett Tylor, a well-known British anthropologist, said: "All primitive beliefs and religions arise from the idea of the soul. The idea of the soul produces something great and stubborn, which is the basis of primitive beliefs." In ancient times, in the process of social life and thought exchange, the ancestors gradually created pictures, wedges and graphic symbols for the need of memory and expression. The images of rock paintings unearthed in various parts of China, with their unique artistic form and profound connotation, record the ancient people; spiritual belief of "Heaven and man" at that time, shows its original appearance and the deepest pursuit. These rock paintings are not only the crystallization of ancient wisdom, but also the most direct reflection of their way of thinking, providing us with valuable clues to understand ancient society and culture. As the testimony of history, the ancient totem symbols truly and vividly show the historical context, religious beliefs, myths and legends, dance art, hunting and farming activities, etc. These symbols are not only the important carrier of human prehistoric culture, but also provide us with valuable cultural heritage, which helps us to understand and explore the civilization and human wisdom in ancient times.



Figure 4 Sun worship in petroglyphs across China

Source: https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/d3JKjwyKM_0ghMhiwSUCKg, 2024

As can be seen from the above picture (Figure4): Ancient ancestors in the dialogue with nature, the sun as the object of worship, as a "Destiny" theory to explain the relationship between man and the universe nature. The ancient rock paintings of Inner Mongolia in the north, Qinghai in Gansu in the northwest, Jiangsu in the middle, Guangxi in the southwest, Yunnan in the southwest, Sichuan in the southwest and other parts of China all reflect this belief in the sacred spirit of the Sun, it is the thinking of the ancient people about the pursuit and philosophy of taking the sun as the living ideal, and it is also the social group concept constructed by the totem of the clan group of the ancient people, taking the sun as the symbol of the clan group shows the unity of the ancients "View of the universe" and "View of society", including the unity of human existence of the whole cognition. Thus the formation of heaven, earth, man-made relationship. Thus, the ancient Chinese established a simple materialism philosophy in which "Humanity" was attributed to "The way of heaven" in the relationship between the "View of the universe" and the "View of society", it is the objectively existing narrative cultural symbol that determines the human ideology, and forms the ancient human spiritual culture. The myths and legends worshipping

the sun and rock paintings are earlier than the narration of Chinese characters, but has the idea art culture symbol the intrinsic quality. As can be seen from the above picture: Ancient ancestors in the dialogue with nature, the sun as the object of worship, as a "Destiny" theory to explain the relationship between man and the universe nature. The ancient rock paintings of Inner Mongolia in the north, Qinghai in Gansu in the northwest, Jiangsu in the middle, Guangxi in the southwest, Yunnan in the southwest, Sichuan in the southwest and other parts of China all reflect this belief in the sacred spirit of the Sun, it is the thinking of the ancient people about the pursuit and philosophy of taking the sun as the living ideal, and it is also the social group concept constructed by the totem of the clan group of the ancient people, taking the sun as the symbol of the clan group shows the unity of the ancients "View of the universe" and "View of society", including the unity of human existence of the whole cognition. Thus the formation of heaven, earth, man-made relationship. Thus, the ancient Chinese established a simple materialism philosophy in which "Humanity" was attributed to "The way of heaven" in the relationship between the "View of the universe" and the "View of society", it is the objectively existing narrative cultural symbol that determines the human ideology, and forms the ancient human spiritual culture. The myths and legends worshipping the sun and rock paintings are earlier than the narration of Chinese characters, but has the idea art culture symbol the intrinsic quality. This inner quality not only played a catalytic and spreading role in the germination and development of Chinese culture such as ancient Chinese social philosophy, thought, sociology, aesthetics and communication, moreover, the vision of the Chinese primitive people who viewed things with the theory of "Heaven and man" continued to expand, and the history of Chinese graphic art developed in the two directions of repetition and change, form the Chinese image art concept cultural semiotics "The unity of man and nature" characteristic narrative context inheritance and dissemination. (Duan, L., 2023)

1.2 The sacrificial cultural symbol narrative of "Unity of man and nature" in the images of the primitive society

China's primitive society about 1.7 million years ago - 6,000 years ago, with the evolution of mankind, continued to recognize the use of natural resources as a basis for survival, prompting the gradual development of agriculture, animal husbandry and handicrafts, the ancients continued to open up arable land, raising animals to make new artifacts, and the primitive nature as a totem. Ancient humans began to expand their social cognitive abilities, and the ancestors began to portray the complex natural phenomena in the natural world of heaven and earth, prompting the embryonic use of images for rituals to begin to take shape.

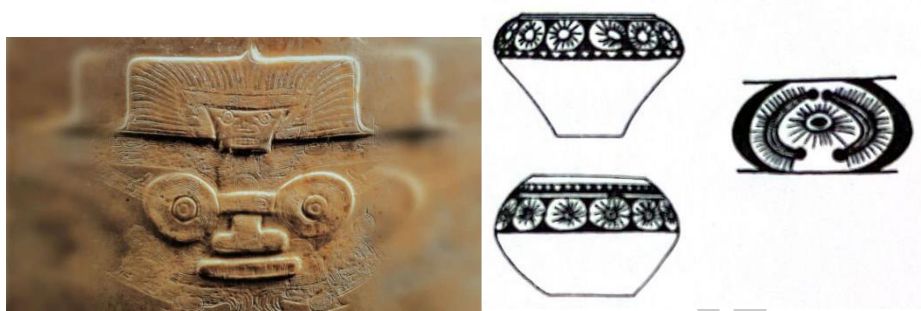


Figure 5 The image of the jade carving divine emblem/Dahe Village type sun pattern

Source : National Museum of China.History of Cultural Heritage China.World Book Publishing Co., Beijing : 2018.12.1977.P234/Guo Lianfu Ding Tao, Dictionary of Chinese Patterns. Tianjin Education Press, January 1998 P65

About 7,000 years ago, China's Neolithic period of colored pottery was the most prosperous period. In China, Shanxi, Gansu, Shaanxi, Jiangsu, Guangxi, Tibet, Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, and other places, ancient people used natural tools in the pottery pieces or rock paintings on the carving and drawing images (Figure5). Such as Shaanxi County Miaodigou site found on the colored pottery pots painted with sun bird images, Yunnan Cangyuan rock painting images painted in the sun, trees, hunting, and other images, half-slope site unearthed pottery engraved symbols, Shandong Juxian Ling Yanghe, Dazhu Village, Zhucheng before the Zhai and other sites of the pottery on the sun, fire, etc., all reflecting natural phenomena that are not affecting the lives of mankind all the time, the spirit of everything has become a universal understanding of the people. This is a manifestation of the ancient Chinese ancestors' concept of the unity of heaven, earth, and nature.

From the cultural semiotics of the conceptual culture in the image art, in primitive society has been shaped a ritual culture system. Although there is a hieroglyphic writing system of narrative, the world of images has been much larger than the world of text and linguistics. That is, the narrative in the symbols of pictorial art, including the material world of human society, also includes the cognition of the spiritual world of man. (Figure 6) Sun worship is the ancient human clan group for the cosmic concept of the narrative and before the use of hieroglyphics narrative, from the epistemological point of view of the construction of Chinese cultural semiotics earlier than the production of words, and has a long history of ancient times. The cultural symbolic narrative of "Unity of Man and Nature" is a cultural reference system that predates the hieroglyphic writing period and became the germ of the cultural semiotics of ancient Chinese pictorial art.

พหุ มั บณ จั โด ชี เว

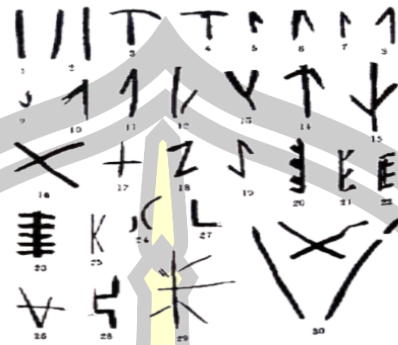


Figure 6 Carved symbols on pottery unearthed at Banpo site

Source: Xia Yong, Zhu Xuefei. Pictures and symbols: Liangzhu primitive writing. Hangzhou: 2019.7, P03



Figure 7 Painted pottery with fish motif on human face

Source: National Museum of China. History of Cultural Heritage China. World Book Publishing Co., Beijing : 2018.12.1977..P234

There are also many records of sun worship in ancient Chinese literature. “Pick up notes 1” records : the emperor's consort Zou Tu's daughter,... swallow the sun, will have a son. It should also be traced to the sun worship, It should be part of the traceability of the sun cult. “Classic of Mountains and Seas, East of the Great Wilderness”: Xihe, Emperor Jun's wife, born ten suns.” The Emperor of Heaven is in charge of all things in the solar universe. Shaohao country in the East China Sea, because of the worship of the sun and the bird as a totem of the clan emblem engraved on the performance of colored pottery. Ancient human forefathers faced nature and the universe with reverence, utilized totems to distinguish between different tribes, and sacrificed to the gods of heaven and earth through totem worship.

(Figure 7) Totem, as a sign that tribal clans can perceive the existence of ancient human beings, has become a symbol of the most primitive human society and an expression of the spiritual concept of the “celestial and human unity” culture. The natural elements depicted have the significance of metacultural symbols. For example, the sun, the moon, clouds, thunder, water, mountains, and so on.

These schematized paleographic symbols of the Neolithic period are prevalent all over the world, such as Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics, Mayan writing, cuneiform, and other natural symbols occurring in abundance all over the world. The

historical process of the evolution of pictograms into writing is presented. Guo Moruo, in his “Dialectical Development of Ancient Writing”, Journal of Archaeology, put forward the theory of clan emblems and the two major symbol systems of referents and hieroglyphs in this regard. Wang Ningsheng and Yan Ruxian also agree with the perception that the referential system preceded the hieroglyphic system. (Chen, S.K.1982)

This kind of thing symbolized by symbols in the objective world is the cornerstone of early Chinese image art semiotics as the semantics of human symbols and cultural emergence, and it is the distinctive feature of Chinese image cultural semiotics. It is a set of symbolic systems existing in the Chinese land, a narrative culture of regional images, illustrating the multi-source origin and diversified development of Chinese images, and gradually becoming an allegorical cultural semiotic paradigm of Chinese image semiotic narrative.

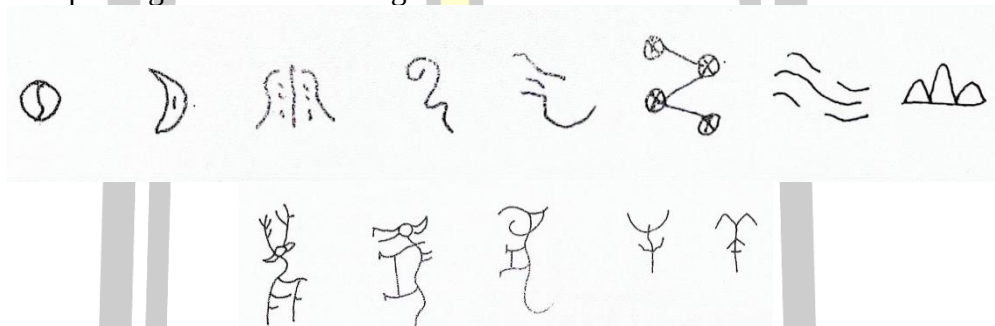


Figure 8 :Hieroglyphics, sun, moon, rain, clouds and air, thunder, water, mountains, deer, horses, tigers, cows and sheep

Source: Shi shiren .Decorative Design, Beijing Chemical Industry Press, 2011, P17

From the viewpoint of semiotics to analyze, hieroglyphics simplifies the figurative art of images into the symbolic and normative representative schema of shape and sound and has the visual semantic recognition and differentiation, which is derived from the images and forms a consensus textual and linguistic symbols. (Figure8) Thus, it can be found that Chinese characteristics of image semiotics and linguistic and textual, and there exists a theory of substitution and mutation between the two. That is, the image schema morphing into similar text modeling is the ancient human cognition of the universe, nature, and social things inherent meaning, but much higher and greater than the hieroglyphics, variant text, but the hieroglyphic text is difficult to replace all of the image symbols in the full context and extension of the significance of the image. As for the graph of the two symbolic narratives, the degree of difference can be seen. The textual narrative of pictorial symbols is not only ephemeral but also has physical and non-verbal information, and it is unified with the universal consensus conceptual semantics. Thus, the pictorial symbols of the ancient “view of heaven and man” can become one of the important sources of the spiritual transmission of traditional Chinese culture.

1.3 The cultural symbol narrative of "Unity of man and nature" in the images of ritual and music during the Xia and Shang dynasties

The Xia Dynasty, the first ancient dynasty established in Chinese history, lasted from about the 21st century B.C. to the 16th century B.C. By the Shang Dynasty, a complex social structure of classes had already been formed to transition to the state system, and from then on, it crossed into a slave society. The forefathers had a certain accumulation of material wealth obtained from nature and used the social wealth to set the hierarchy of superiority and inferiority, with ritual instruments and ritual music as the rites and ceremonial culture to solidify the rule of the king.

In the age of ignorance, they believed that all things on earth were dominated by the mysterious "heaven," and they communicated with heaven by means of divination, divination bronzes, rituals, and musical instruments, as part of the ritual culture of "heavenly authorization of the king." Zuo Zhuan. Xuan Gong three years" note: "the Xia Dynasty, the image of the sky into images, cast on the nine tripod objects, by the governor of the tribute, in addition, in some of the ritual objects, but also can be seen in people trying to use a specific image to express the connection with the heavens and pray for heaven's blessing. In the bronze, often appear a variety of mysterious images such as cloud and thunder pattern, fire pattern, back to the figure was given supernatural power symbols attached to the artifact image pattern paradigm, the formation of the "king's right to heavenly authorization" under the spirit of worship of the artifacts artisanal culture.

According to "The Book of Songs", the ancestors of the Shang Dynasty were born from eating birds' eggs in obedience to heaven's command, and the ancestors of the Zhou Dynasty were conceived in the footsteps of the "Emperor of Heaven". The rulers of the Shang Dynasty built stargazing platforms to observe the heavens, used bronzes to worship their ancestors, and used the stars to distinguish between good and bad luck, believing that kingship from heaven. Ancient peoples have always believed that as rulers they should be powerful people who are blessed by the heavens to protect the people and should be in harmony with the order of the universe. "The book of changes" says that human virtues should be in harmony with the virtues of heaven and earth, the light of the sun and the moon, the four seasons of spring, summer, autumn, and winter, and the good and bad fortune of ghosts and gods; that is to say, human activities should be guided by the laws that govern the functioning of nature in the universe. "Heaven is a spiritual symbol of Chinese culture, a pillar of supernatural spirituality that harnesses the universe and leads ancient mankind, manipulates the conceptual consciousness and way of thinking of the Chinese people, monitors China's political ecology, and infects China's folklore and customs.

The people of the Yin and Shang dynasties regulated folk culture with the rituals of "Heaven and man" beliefs and set up rituals and music to communicate with the gods with pictorial symbols to regulate the rules and regulations of society. Thus, the ritual culture of the formation of folk rituals was transformed into the "ritual" culture of the Shang Dynasty with the statute, although the ritual culture can be traced back to the era of tribal clan culture in primitive society, the "Heaven-bestowed royal authority," and the social and national systems of rituals and rites to regulate. Formation of early Chinese folklore image-making in the symbolism of ritual culture, the formation of rituals and music, rituals, ritual law, and interpretation into the

Chinese ancient to slavery social and cultural system, from the sacrificial rituals and music ritual culture, to highlight the ancient Chinese society of the “Mandate of Heaven” theory of the narrative appeal (Figure9) .



Figure 9 Shang dynasty: Hui and Lei patterns / Fire pattern on the mouth of a tripod in the late Yin Shang period

Source: Guo Lianfu, Ding Tao, Zhu Gejia, Tianjin Education Publishing House, first edition, Traditional Chinese Patterns , 1998,p75

1.4 The symbolic narrative of "Unity of man and nature" in the images of the ritual system during the Western Zhou period

The Western Zhou period is the ancient ritual era of ancient China in which there was a change of kingship and a change of the old and new “ritual system,” in which the culture was built up, transformed, changed, reconstructed, and perfected, and the clan ritual system was established, the kingship system was created, and the ritual laws and regulations were enacted.

People in the Western Zhou Dynasty inherited and developed the concept of “Heavenly Mandate” on the basis of the concept of “Heavenly Mandate” of people in the Shang Dynasty, and put forward the idea of establishing a corresponding relationship between “Heaven, Man and Things” and emphasizing on the heavenly virtues of the system of rituals, that is, “matching Heaven with Virtue”. The idea of “matching heaven with virtue” was put forward (Wu canxin, 2015) .Heavenly virtue became the central symbol. That is, heaven is the representative of nature, and people offer sacrifices to gods their ancestors in accordance with protocol artifacts and infuse the culture of artifact-making with morality and indoctrination as a social and spiritual constraint to promote social development.

According to the records in "Yizhou Shu: Zuo Luo Jie," during the Western Zhou Dynasty, the construction of Zhou's capital city included temples and altars of varying sizes for the rituals of worshipping Heaven, reflecting a prosperous society centered around ritual practices. The "Zhouli" documents specifically detail the hierarchical requirements of social rituals for the sizes of royal capital cities, the construction of city walls, the scale of palace complexes within the city, artisan workshops, ritual vessels, the number and layout of temples, and their dimensions. "Guoyu: Chuyu Xia" also records differentiated ritual constraints for the worship of Heaven and Earth by the emperor, princes, and ministers. The ritual system of the Western Zhou Dynasty encompassed various aspects of social life and institutionalized the "Heaven-bestowed royal authority," reflecting the era's distinct and strict hierarchical system and the social status of the monarchy. The rulers of the Western Zhou Dynasty used rituals to regulate people's behavior and uphold the cultural norms of a slave society, thereby reflecting the formation of ritual culture during the Western Zhou period, which persisted through to the State of Lu in the Spring and Autumn Period, the hometown of Confucius.

During the Western Zhou period, the slaveholding elites established a political and cultural system centered on ritual practices. They enforced strict hierarchical distinctions and maintained state rituals and laws through ceremonial culture to uphold royal authority. Their worship of celestial deities prioritized "spirits before rites," asserting "Heaven's mandate" over humanity to sustain monarchical rule. By the late Western Zhou period, aristocratic norms of rank and etiquette led to a decline in ritual and music, yet the concept of "Heaven and humanity" persisted in sacrificial rites. Bronze ritual vessels adorned with images of celestial beings symbolized the waning authority of the monarchy. Western Zhou's iconography and inscriptions conveyed a strong belief in celestial governance and legalistic political religion, crafting cultural symbols and narratives that traced back to the "Heaven and humanity" ideology found in the Book of Changes (Zhouyi). Ritual and banquet utensils served as mediums through which aristocrats could promote personal political agendas, imbuing these artifacts with special significance, known colloquially as "vessels conceal rites" (Zuozhuan). The establishment of ritual and music systems, along with the implementation of ritual consortships, disseminated the cosmic worldview of "Heaven and humanity united" through politicized sacrificial activities. These symbolic artifacts not only directly described a world governed by "Heaven's mandate" but also served as metaphors and symbols of societal realities, reflecting ancient interpretations and aspirations for cosmic order dictated by celestial decree.

In the "Xici" of the Book of Changes (Zhouyi), it is said that in ancient times, King Fu Xi, as ruler of the realm, observed the celestial phenomena above and the geographical features below. From this vantage, he derived principles from Heaven and observed details from all creation. He then began to use the Eight Trigrams, seeking insights from divine revelations to govern and oversee all things.

In ancient texts on utensils and objects, there exists the concept of "making utensils according to images." The Book of Changes (Yi Jing), which includes the Rituals (Li) and the Classic of Changes (Yi Jing), encompasses the ancient Chinese philosophical idea of statecraft. It advocates treating tangible utensils like abstract symbols, simulating, analogizing, and symbolizing natural phenomena to express deeper meanings. "Making utensils according to images" refers to the symbolic connotations of images, where utensils are implements with celestial uses, serving practical purposes. That is, the images are formed in heaven, and the shapes are formed on earth. Ancient humans integrated their cosmological views of humans and the universe into specific narratives of the "way" to articulate intentions, thus encompassing fields such as historical sociology, cultural studies, philosophy, and more. From a semiotic perspective, the Eight Trigrams originated from ancient sacrificial cultural practices, representing the ancient spiritual and cultural products of "Unity man with nature" symbolizing predictions about society, the natural world, and other phenomena, extending into the present day. (Dong, Y., & Li, Y., 2024)

In the Book of Changes (Zhou Yi) (Figure10), the six hexagrams represent the eight basic diagrams, involving the concept of "unity of heaven and humanity" and using "-" and "--" as symbols, with "-" representing yang and "--" representing yin. The names include Qian (three), Kun (life), Zhen (three), Xun (three), Kan (three), Liang (all), Dui (three) etc. These eight hexagrams mainly symbolize eight natural phenomena: heaven, earth, thunder, wind, water, fire, mountains, and marshes. They are the primitive symbols reflecting concrete phenomena in nature and human society.

Secondly, the design concept of "making utensils according to images" in the Book of Changes advocates treating tangible utensils like abstract symbols, simulating, analogizing, and symbolizing natural phenomena to express deeper meanings. The design concept of "making utensils according to images" has had a profound influence on the ancient Chinese philosophy of designing objects with symbolic meanings. In the system of the Book of Changes, Taiji, Two Principles, Four Symbols, and Eight Trigrams constitute the fundamental structure of the universe.

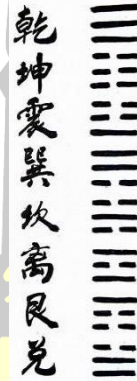


Figure 10 The Eight Trigrams of the Book of Changes (Zhou Yi) Image
Source: Zhang Cisheng, Tianjin Yangliuqing Painting Society, Chinese traditional auspicious allegory diagram, Tianjin, 1990,P6

During the Zhou dynasty, which succeeded the Shang dynasty and was predominantly focused on agriculture, the growth of crops depended on soil, sunlight, water, and the changing seasons. Therefore, the concept of "providence" became crucial for human survival through agricultural cultivation, leading to the formation of a societal spirit centered around tUnity of man and nature. In representations of "heaven" as the sun in images from the Western Zhou period of ancient China (Figure11) , the depiction evolved from the mysterious, formidable, and majestic style of the Shang dynasty to a more realistic and gentle demeanor, reflecting a reverence for and spiritual pursuit of sun worship. Under the strict hierarchical system of the Western Zhou, it was believed that human conduct should align with natural laws and heavenly mandates. This was regulated through ritualistic culture to govern relations between humans and nature and among individuals in society, embodying the principles of the king's authority and cosmic order according to "the way of heaven." Therefore, the system of rites and music served not only to maintain social order but also to alleviate conflicts among social classes, seeking harmony between individuals and social order.

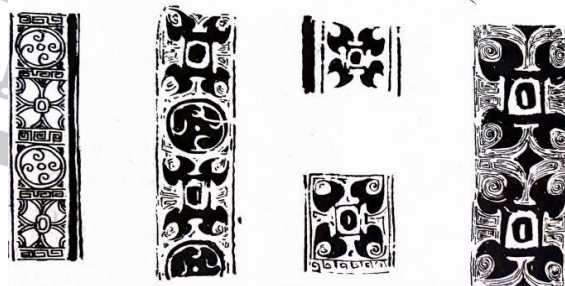


Figure 11 Image of the Sun with circular vortices
Source: Wu Shan, decorative patterns of past dynasties in China 1,People fine arts press,1988, P232

"The Book of Rites: Royal Regulations" states that the Son of Heaven uses seven ancestral temples, Princes use five, high officials use three, and scholars use one, thereby formalizing a hierarchical societal system through ceremonial regulations. This is why in the 18th year of Duke Zhuang as recorded in the "Zuo Commentary," it was said, "Different positions entail different rites." The "Record of Rites" further describes the jade ornaments used by different ranks during the Western Zhou period: the Son of Heaven uses jade cong, the Senior Lord uses jade discs, marquis use jade huang, and earls use jade jiang, serving as typical ceremonial jade items. The ritual culture stipulated that jade cong was one of the "six ritual vessels" used in sacrifices to heaven, earth, and the cardinal directions.

Therefore, the symbolic representation of ritual culture in the Western Zhou period illustrates the narrative domain of ancient Chinese cultural semiotics evolving from royal "rituals" into a national societal ritual culture. However, during the late Zhou Dynasty, the hierarchical system of social status within the symbolic system of ritual culture underwent a process of rise and decline. (Xue, C., 2015). The images of jade ornaments for kings, ministers, and scholars highlighted social hierarchy, gradually breaking away from standardized usage differences, thus preventing the formation of normative regulations regarding social order based on the images of "ritual vessels" of different ranks. This phenomenon was termed "the collapse of rites."

During this period, around the late Zhou Dynasty (approximately 571-480 BCE), Laozi offered differing perspectives on the hierarchical social culture structured by ritual music and ceremonial practices. Author of the "Dao De Jing," Laozi proposed the concept of "Dao" as the fundamental source of all things and the objective law governing their transformations, advocating the idea of effortless action ("wu wei") that achieves harmony between heaven and humanity. This philosophical shift influenced the subsequent history of traditional Chinese visual arts and cultural semiotics.

Throughout history, the ornamentation of artifacts remained closely intertwined with politics, economics, culture, and royal authority. Ancient people expressed their reverence for nature through ornamentation. During the agricultural era, they depended on weather patterns for their livelihoods, believing that clouds and rain determined harvests. They also associated clouds and thunder with circles and squares, symbolizing the control of forces between heaven and earth. (Figure12) When combined with solar images, these symbols represented the ancient Chinese cosmological view of the unity of man and nature, reflecting the spiritual values of the Western Zhou dynasty society towards "unity of heaven and humanity" and the political concepts of imperial power.



Figure 12 Western Zhou dynasty, Thunder image fire image

Source : https://www.sohu.com/a/253543944_273954.2024

1.5 The symbolic narrative of "Unity of man and nature" in the images of ritual music and the ritual-legal culture during the Spring and Autumn, Warring States, and Qin dynasties

The Spring and Autumn period and the Warring States period marked the first major period of transformation in Chinese history. With the gradual decline of the authority of the Zhou royal court, states such as Qi, Chu, and Qin grew increasingly powerful. The Zhou king lost practical control over the political realm, leading to social unrest as feudal lords began to appropriate imperial rituals and music for their own use, neglecting proper rites and customs. The Ji clan, holding the rank of senior officials, conducted the "Ba Yi" dance in their courtyards, reserved traditionally for the emperor's ceremonies. The Ji Sun clan even performed ancestral rites at Mount Tai, a privilege previously reserved for the emperor alone. Such disruptions in the hierarchical order of Zhou society were seen as a direct challenge to imperial authority, leading to a crisis in the ritual-based political system. To maintain social order, people had to rely on the system of Mannersto regulate their behavior and ensure stability in society.

During the Warring States period, various schools of thought such as Confucianism, Legalism, Yin-Yang and Five Elements philosophies engaged in vigorous debate, ushering in a period of intellectual diversity in early China. Confucius, traveling among the states, advocated "Restrain your selfish desires and restore etiquette," compiling the "Spring and Autumn Annals" based on the rituals of the Western Zhou dynasty in the state of Lu. This led to the Han dynasty's "Book of Han ▪ Bibliography of Arts" describing Lu as a place where "rites and literature are abundant, and historians are well-versed in law," thereby upholding the system of rituals and music.

In the Spring and Autumn era, when ritual systems crumbled and Confucianism flourished, the ethical and moral values shaped by ancient Chinese ritual culture were articulated through Confucius' teachings of "ren" (benevolence) and "li" (ritual). Simultaneously, thinkers of the time such as Laozi, founder of Daoism, propagated ideas like "man follows the earth, earth follows heaven, heaven follows the Dao, and the Dao follows nature," while Zhuangzi's philosophy, stating "Heaven gave birth together with me, and all things are one with me," laid the groundwork for the later concept of the Untity man with nature in the natural order of the universe.

The "Introduction to the Hexagrams" in the Book of Changes states: "With the existence of heaven and earth, there come all things; with all things, there come male and female; with male and female, there come husband and wife; with husband and wife, there come father and son; with father and son, there come ruler and minister; with ruler and minister, there come above and below; with above and below, there arise rites and music." This passage encapsulates once again the deep-seated symbolic and semantic characteristics, mechanisms, and paradigms of traditional Chinese image art and cultural symbolism. It traces the development from the ritual culture of the Shang and Zhou dynasties to the Confucian "li" (ritual and propriety) culture of the Spring and Autumn period. The construction and narrative of Chinese semiotics established "ren" (benevolence) and "li" (ritual) as ethical and spiritual contexts within the discourse of image cultural symbolism. Thus, we observe the historical development of the core of ancient Chinese image cultural symbolism.

During the Warring States period, the concept of "Unity man with nature" was expressed and disseminated through various symbolic systems. This included the Yin-Yang and hexagram drawings, hexagram star symbols, Huashan rock paintings, and bronze vessel images, which held significant positions in contemporary culture's cosmological and celestial symbolism. The Huashan rock paintings in Chongzuo City, Guangxi Province, represent an important cultural heritage from the Warring States to the Eastern Han Dynasty, illustrating the enduring pursuit of the ethical relationship between heaven and humanity by ancient ancestors. This continuity of the concept of unity of heaven and humanity from the Warring States to the Eastern Han period reflects the societal spiritual worship and profound reverence for the sun god as the symbol of all things, demonstrating the interplay between human destiny, the natural world, and cosmic intentions. It encapsulates the spiritual essence of ancient Chinese thought from ancient times through the Western and Eastern Han dynasties, deeply rooted in Chinese ancient society as a pillar of human thought.

The spiritual values of the concept of "Unity of man and nature " encompass a rich array of cultural paradigms associated with the relationship between heaven and humanity. During this era, numerous narratives and appeals concerning the relationship between heaven and humanity became thematic subjects in image-based artistic culture. Ancient humans interpreted their existence in relation to celestial phenomena such as constellations, the sun, moon, and other natural cosmic occurrences, linking human destiny and societal well-being to phenomena like thunder, clouds, rain, wind, and snow, seen as omens of prosperity or disaster. This formed the narrative of sacrificial rites, music, and ritual etiquette, evolving into a spiritual worldview centered on harmony with "heaven's mandate." This narrative semantic became foundational to the ritual and legal culture of the Spring and Autumn periods and the Warring States, illustrating how the ancestors of this period revered the cosmos and natural world. The value system of spiritual beliefs and worship is revealed in the images below. For example (Figure13) , the rock paintings depict figures, animals, a dagger hanging from the waist, and a circular image with a star inside, reflecting ancient reverence and awe for the universe and nature.



Figure 13 Combination of images of Huashan rock paintings in Guangxi during the Warring States period

Source: Zuojiang Huashan Rock Painting Research Report Collection. The first volume / Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Department of Culture, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Bureau of Cultural Relics, ed. Nanning Guangxi Science and Technology Press, 2015.11, p65.

During the early Warring States period in ancient China, scholars systematically observed the movements of the sun, moon, and five major planets, categorizing the fixed stars into what became known as the "Twenty-Eight Mansions." These were divided into four spatial regions: east, south, west, and north, representing humanity's basic understanding of the cosmic order. Discovered in the early Warring States tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng at Leigudun in Suizhou, Hubei Province, China, were lacquer-coated wooden chests adorned with depictions of the Twenty-Eight Mansions. At the center of these depictions is a bold character "斗" (Dou), with a dragon on one end and a tiger on the other, making it the earliest and most complete representation of the Twenty-Eight Mansions found in China to date (Figure14) .

The establishment of the Twenty-Eight Mansions system was of significant importance for determining the cycles and positions of the sun, moon, and five planets, as well as for the development of calendars. From an astrological perspective, this system reflects ancient beliefs in fate and the cosmic order, embodying a metaphysical concept of celestial mandate. However, the images depicted reveal a scientific and early materialistic understanding of the cosmos by China's ancient ancestors, characterized by dialectical thinking. This perspective challenges the simplistic attribution of celestial events solely to metaphysical forces.

Through this simple materialistic perspective, the construction of "heaven's will" as a concept in human society's ritual, music, etiquette, legal, and cultural practices embodies images aimed at both understanding the universe scientifically. Although these images were crafted to propagate the legitimacy of the social system under the doctrine of harmonizing heaven and humanity to convey the "mandate of heaven," it cannot be denied that they reflect humanity's positive drive to comprehend the cosmos and pursue scientific progress. Thus, the depiction of the Twenty-Eight Mansions constellation charts represents the nascent astronomy of ancient China.



Figure 14 Lacquer Clothes Box Cover with Twenty-eight Patterns, Zeng Houyi Tomb, Suizhou, Hubei, China

Source: Guo Lianfu Ding Tao, Dictionary of Chinese Patterns, Tianjin Education Press, 1988, p122

During the Spring and Autumn Warring States periods, numerous myths, legends, and allusions revolving around "heaven" served as textual and artistic representations in social, spiritual, and cultural contexts. Archaeological evidence from this era, such as the Jinse images from Chu tombs, silk paintings of mythical figures from the Warring States, and lacquer boxes adorned with cloud patterns, illustrates the transmission and evolution of the concept of "harmony between heaven and humanity." (Zhuang, H., 2024). The Shan Hai Jing mentions, "Yi shoots down the nine suns, which turn into scorching flames." Yi subsequently shot down the suns, displaying exceptional military prowess. He conquered nine tribes with bird totems and six tribes with snake totems. His feat was mythologized as shooting down the nine suns to eliminate six disasters. The depiction of "heavenly and human" themes during the Warring States period thus reflects societal spiritual aspirations and supports the ideologies of regional lords. The (Figure15) "Yi shooting the sun" is one of the earliest cultural depictions of the celestial-human harmony found on artifacts from that time.

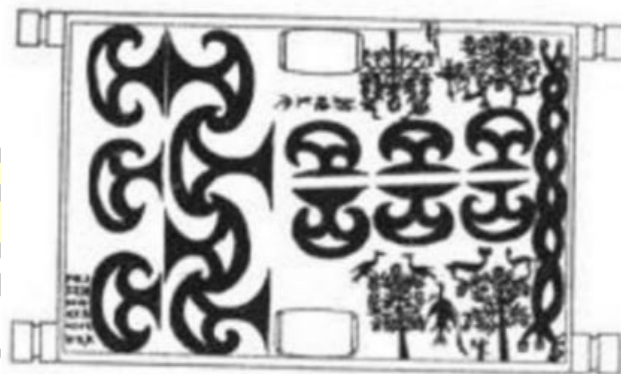


Figure 15 Lacquer Clothes Box Cover of Zeng Houyi's Tomb in Suizhou, Hubei (Houyi Shooting the Sun)

Source: Guo Lianfu Ding Tao, Dictionary of Chinese Patterns, Tianjin Education Press, 1998,, P122

Furthermore, the unearthed Jinse silk panel from the Chu tombs at Changtai Pass during the Warring States period depicts the first ancestor deity of Chu, the fire god. At the center of the panel stands a figure, part human and part animal, representing the spiritual concept of "harmony between heaven and humanity,"

prevalent in Chu society. In the ancestral deity is depicted wearing a bird-shaped crown with wings behind it, holding gourd-shaped objects in both hands, each grasping a dragon. Adorned in a robe with wide sleeves, this figure embodies a regal presence akin to that of a ruler in Chu culture (Figure17) .

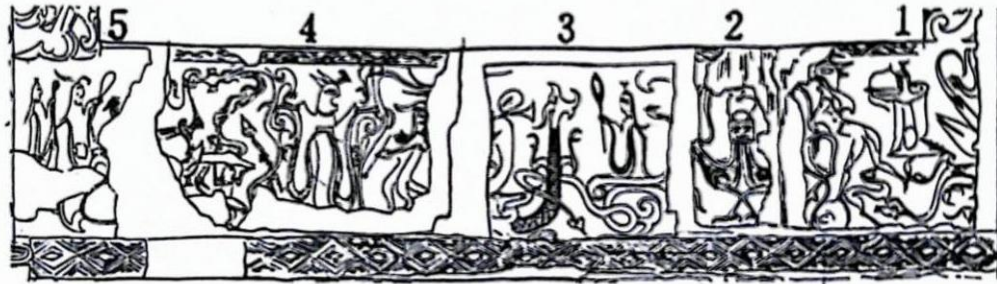


Figure 16 Jinser head pattern of the Chu tomb at Changtai Pass of the Warring States period, Henan Province (partial)

Source : Guo Lianfu Ding Tao, Dictionary of Chinese Patterns, Tianjin Education Press, 1998, P125

The Chu people revered the phoenix and associated themselves with the Yan Emperor, venerating sun gods, fire deities, and the southern constellation host Phoenix. The custom of honoring the phoenix among the Chu people is related to their ancestral worship and primitive totemism. Therefore, both the sun god, the Flame Emperor, and the fire deity, Zhurong, were objects of their worship. The Chu people symbolized their royal authority with "heaven" as a narrative social symbol, also originating from the cultural roots of ancient human survival by worshipping heaven and spirits. In ancient China, the spiritual "Unity of Man and Nature" was rooted in ancient clans that worshipped totems such as flying birds, the sun, ghosts, and feathered humans. (Zhang, M., & Liu, E., 2021) This formed the concept of social folk spiritual aspirations, reflecting the idea of "mandate of heaven" in the literature and visual arts of the Spring and Autumn Periods and the Warring States Period, expressing the ancient human ancestors' contemplation of "heavenly way" as "human way," with profound ancient philosophical spirit, exploring the relationship between humans, nature, society, and the universe, reflecting the pre-Qin period ancient human "heavenly way" concept of fatalism thought.

พหุ ม ประ โท ชี เว



Figure 17 Image of the Imperial Dragon
Source: Changsha Museum , Hunan, China

During the Warring States period, the states of Chu, Qin, Qi, Yan, the Three Jin, Zhongshan, Lu, Zeng, and others encompassed over forty counties and cities across the north and south. Archaeological findings from more than eighty regions reveal that ancient lacquerware from Chu, Qin, and Zeng predominated, marking significant discoveries in archaeology. Warring States lacquerware marked a shift from bronze objects of the Shang and Zhou periods to flourishing everyday items. Favorable natural conditions in both northern and southern regions promoted the cultivation of lacquer trees, facilitating the development of lacquer craftsmanship in multiple areas. Nobles favored these crafts for daily use. Influenced by both Central Plains culture and local traditions, Chu's lacquerware production reflected a southern aesthetic with depictions of northern motifs such as dragons and phoenixes, all reflecting the concept of "Unity of man and nature." Chu culture, characterized by regional distinctiveness, often revered the sun, with ancient clans worshipping fire deities as folk customs. The worship of sun gods and fire deities, intertwined with long-term habitation along the Yangtze River system, led to the phoenix becoming an emblem of solar divinity, depicted in varied and symbolic forms. This diversity in artistic representation during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods served as the foundation of Chu's varied artistic forms, aligning closely with the spiritual ideals of "heaven and nature" prevalent during the Warring States era.

Historical texts record in the "Classic of Mountains and Seas: Southern Volume Three": "In the mountain of Danxue, there is a bird resembling a chicken, adorned with five colors and patterns, named the Phoenix." According to the "Compendium of Arts and Literature": "The chicken symbolizes accumulated yang energy, a southern symbol. When the sun rises, the chicken crows. The Chu people are descendants of Emperor Gaoxin and the fire deity Zhurong, later aligning themselves with the descendants of the Yan Emperor. The sun deities, fire gods Zhurong, were their objects of worship." "The Book of Baihu-tong: Five Elements" states: "It is said that the Phoenix gathers five colors and becomes a symbol of celestial beings, also representing the spiritual and cultural symbols of southern Chinese society." These examples illustrate that during the Warring States period, the Chu State's 'Unity of Man and Nature' ideology stemmed from ancient sun worship by

tribal ethnic beliefs. The Phoenix became a national symbol and emblem, portrayed in artifacts with a divine, graceful, and lively anthropomorphic image. These spiritual beings transcend the nine heavens and fly across the Kyushu. The Phoenix and Feathered Man both stem from the ideological concept of "Unity of Man and Nature."

(Figure17) This spiritual doctrine elevates from worship of the spiritual realm to the understanding of the universe and nature. In ancient, simplistic cosmological beliefs, it was thought that the world consisted of five elements: metal, wood, water, fire, and earth, each interacting in cycles of generation and restraint, correlated with the rise and fall of dynasties. According to this theory, each element is represented by a divine spirit: Metal by the White Tiger, Wood by the Azure Dragon, Earth by the Yellow Dragon of the Big Dipper, Water by the Black Tortoise, and Fire by the Vermilion Bird. These four gods guardians symbolize the narrative of the "Unity of Heaven and nature," incorporating celestial worship and the observation of the 28 constellations in astronomy into mythological creation as cognitive understanding.

During the Warring States period, regional lords engaged in fierce conflicts while advancements in craftsmanship continued to expand. The technological progress enabled cultural development in artisanal creations, with numerous northern Warring States lords utilizing the pragmatic images of bronze technology artifacts, departing from the ritualistic bronzeware images associated with the "collapse of rites and music" and "heaven-bestowed royal authority." The political and economic realities of the Warring States era, centered on governance and agricultural and hunting economies, remained influenced by the concept of "mandate of heaven," holding historical significance. From an art historical perspective, the symbolic narrative of images directly conveys meaning, reflecting the shared spiritual and cultural values of ancient pre-Qin society. This underscores the continuous transmission of social spirit through the cultural attributes of symbolism. In the natural ecological environment of the southern Yangtze River basin, under the "Unity of Man and Nature" theory, conditions for crafting artifacts reflected a diverse artistic representation, characterized by its ethereal and dynamic nature. The images and patterns of Warring States artifacts thus depict a spiritual realm that reveres celestial phenomena and the ideal emotions of human destiny, transcending the narrative functions of language and written symbols to become carriers of human societal concepts. The artistic representation of artifacts during the Warring States period vividly narrates the spirits of heaven, earth, and supernatural beings, with their forms and motifs directly referencing the doctrine of "mandate of heaven," thus continuing the ancient philosophical and cultural essence of "Unity of Man and Nature."

However, the ancient worship of the mandate of heaven has shifted towards humanity's pursuit of an ideal "heavenly State," reflecting a transition in human spiritual consciousness from external constraints like "heaven-bestowed royal authority" towards an aspiration for the ideal of "heaven and humanity." This shift focuses on the inner pursuit of human destiny and intrinsic will. It has prompted the cultural narrative of artisanal craftsmanship to evolve into a symbolic narrative of "heaven and humanity" images in art.

During the Spring and Autumn period, the decline of the slave society governed by the "heaven-bestowed royal authority" prompted Confucius to advocate for "self-restraint and the restoration of ritual," emphasizing "ren" as the foundation of politics and morality. He promoted the compassionate heart, advocating for societal

order through the principles of "self-cultivation to establish oneself, and helping others to achieve; not imposing on others what you yourself do not desire." This ethical framework formed the basis of "li" (ritual propriety) and "zhengming" (rectification of names), aiming to uphold social norms and ethics through values such as filial piety, fraternal respect, loyalty, benevolence, forgiveness, trustworthiness, kindness, diligence, respectfulness, gentleness, warmth, moderation, deference, fostering a culture of "ren" (benevolence) and ethical conduct (Figure18) .

Confucius compiled the "Five Classics," laying the foundation for Confucian cultural thought in China, centered around the "ren" (benevolence) culture. Simultaneously, in his "Spring and Autumn Annals," Confucius stated, "In ancient times, the sages and benevolent ones created the Book of Changes in order to follow the principle of conforming to the nature of life; to establish the way of heaven, Yin and Yang, the way of the earth, namely the soft and the hard; the way of humanity, that is, benevolence and righteousness", thereby illustrating the unity of "Heaven, Earth, and Humanity".



Figure 18 Han Dynasty Bronze Bronzes and Bricks with Feathered Figures of the Gods of the Sun and the Moon

Source : Guo Lianfu Ding Tao, Dictionary of Chinese Patterns, Tianjin Education Press, 1998, P4

In 221 BC, King Zheng of Qin conquered the six states and established a centralized, authoritarian state uniting China. During the Qin Dynasty, a period characterized by polytheistic beliefs, the concept of "Tianren" (Heaven and Man) was prominently expressed through artifacts like the tile image of the sun, depicted as a swirling fireball, symbolizing "the pervasive radiance of sunlight." (Figure19)



Figure 19 Warring States, Qin Wadang

Source : Guo Lianfu Ding Tao, Dictionary of Chinese Patterns, Tianjin Education Press, 1998,p291

The images of Qin Dynasty artifacts such as lacquerware, sculpture, architecture, chariots, clothing, and bronze ware did not entirely depart from the basic pattern of "Tianren" (Heaven and Man) aspirations of the Warring States period. Instead, they leaned towards a trend closer to realistic art. They exhibited the solemn and sharp characteristics inherited from the Central Plains culture of Shang and Zhou bronze ware, as well as the elegant and graceful styles of Chu and Shu cultures. This synthesis of Northern and Southern artistic styles integrated concrete and decorative art forms. Qin Dynasty tile images used symbolic narratives and even employed direct textual symbols for representation (Figure20) .



Figure 20 :Qin Dynasty Wa Dang Yangbird

Source : Guo Lianfu Ding Tao, Dictionary of Chinese Patterns, Tianjin Education Press, 1998,p292

When artifacts go beyond practical utility and are used to express and convey specific meanings, they become "symbolic." Drawing from natural images of humans and objects, these artifacts symbolize narratives, sometimes directly employing textual symbols for representation. As a means of propagating the culture of "Unity of man and nature," the spiritual, intellectual, values, and concepts embedded in the images of artifacts construct the narrative function of conceptual cultural "semiotics." In doing so, they have created a rich and diverse history of semiotics in ancient Chinese culture. In pre-Qin folk cultural arts, adherence to the narrative principle of "where there is an image, there is meaning" empowered symbols with universal human cultural values. In the cloud and mist patterns on the lacquer box represent the paradigmatic archetype of "Heaven and Man." This demonstrates that visual representations within cultural spaces often invite diverse interpretations beyond the literal meanings of texts themselves (Figure21) .Its a multi-disciplinary broad narrative. (Titova, A. V. 2018).

In the pre-Qin era, the symbolic semiotics of visual arts existed in a broad interdisciplinary narrative. Early Chinese symbol history interpreted texts through images. Roland Barthes, a French scholar, opposed Western academic immersion in pure structuralist studies of semiotics, suggesting that semiotics should not be confined to the combination and analysis of symbols, structures, and systems alone. He proposed a deconstructive semiotics, indicating that semiotics possess multi-dimensional layers and spatial theories. Texts are not ultimate meanings but woven fabrics requiring exploration through deconstructive textual concepts. This approach reveals the evolution from ancient Chinese rituals and music culture to Confucian benevolence and ritual culture during the Spring and Autumn periods and the Warring

States period. Images in pre-Qin Chinese visual culture symbolize interdisciplinary historical, aesthetic, sociological, and philosophical communication, reflecting the cultural semiotics of the "Heaven and Man" context in China. This narrative quality has been a driving force in the transmission of cultural semiotics across generations, rich in deconstructive value and significance.



Figure 21 Lacquer Box with Cloud and Air Pattern

Source: Tian Zibing, Wu Shusheng, Tian Qing History of Chinese Patterns. Beijing: 2003. pp143

Part 2. The evolution of the symbolic narrative of "Unity of man and nature" in the images of cultural symbols from the Western Han to the Ming and Qing dynasties

2.1 Confucian Cultural Symbolic Narratives of "Unity of man and nature" in Western Han Dynasty Image

The Western Han Dynasty represented one of the peaks of ancient Chinese culture, establishing the unified Han Empire. During this period, the empire expanded over vast territories, accompanied by technological advancements, cultural and economic development, and a highly centralized governance system centered around Confucian values. The society emphasized the spirit of benevolence and ritual associated with imperial authority. Zhang Qian's missions to the Western Regions opened up the Silk Road, fostering connections between the Han Dynasty and various states in the Western Regions, embodying the grand unity of diverse ethnicities under the Han cultural .

The image arts of the Han Dynasty in ancient China flourished as a period of profound development in the conceptual and spiritual aspects of art. They embodied the ethical values derived from Confucianism's "Harmony between Heaven and Humanity" philosophy, permeating with the spiritual essence of Confucian teachings. Reflecting the Han cultural ideals of unity between Heaven and humanity, aesthetic consciousness, and artistic creation principles, Han Dynasty art holds a pivotal position in the history of Chinese aesthetics and art history, influencing both preceding and subsequent periods.

During the Western Han Dynasty, the philosopher Dong Zhongshu proposed the philosophical concept of "Harmony between Heaven and Humanity" in his work "Chunqiu Fanlu." He believed that the conduct and benevolent governance of a

country's ruler would manifest auspicious signs or warnings of disasters in celestial phenomena. Observing celestial phenomena to predict the fate of the nation, interpreting clouds and atmospheric conditions to assess advantages and disadvantages, Dong used celestial signs to guide decisions regarding the fortunes of states and individuals. The concept of Harmony between Heaven and Humanity is extensively recorded in ancient literary works. For instance, in "Songs of Chu • Distant Travel," it reads, "Sending the feathered man to the Vermilion Mound, he does not remain in his former homeland." The commentator Wang Yi explains, "When people attain Dao, they sprout feathers and wings." The scholar Hong Xingzu adds, "The feathered man refers to a flying immortal." Unearthed from the Shang tomb in Dayangzhou, Xing'an County, Jiangxi Province, the jade-carved feathered man, with its "high hooked nose" and bird-like human appearance, resembles the image of a celestial being, commonly referred to in later periods as the "flying deity." The feathered man symbolizes the Confucian "Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues" and the "Harmony between Heaven and Humanity" is a forecast appraisal of "virtue," auspiciousness, and disasters for the emperor and the common people. During the Han Dynasty, the state promoted Confucian ethical and cultural doctrines centered on benevolence and ritual. These teachings served as the guiding principles for the imperial system and ideological framework throughout successive dynasties in Chinese society, shaping both the direction of imperial authority and societal values. In the Italian Renaissance, liberation from medieval religious beliefs initiated a cultural advancement centered on science and technology for societal progress. Similarly, in China, an ethical culture has been the spiritual foundation, fostering a continuous tradition of craftsmanship and technological culture. Both share a common goal of identity. Throughout Chinese history, depictions of craftsmanship and artifacts have been imbued with Confucian ethical perspectives, reflecting anthropological considerations. This has constructed paradigms of images regarding ancient human interpretation of material culture, as well as perspectives on humanity and the universe. Since the Western Han Dynasty, Confucianism has exclusively promoted the Five Constant Virtues of benevolence, justice, propriety, wisdom, and faithfulness, in an effort to impose moral standards on society through the making of artifacts. Through the narrative context of ethical cultural symbolism, this naturally leads to the integration of the Spring and Autumn Ritual Code with the "Loyalty and Filial Piety" spirit of the Confucian tradition into artistic themes, eventually giving rise to the burial ritual of the Western Han Dynasty, "Death as Life." Under the concept where Confucius once used landscapes and pine trees as metaphors for virtue, the practice of using natural images to symbolize the spiritual demeanor and moral sentiments of ancient sages became a prominent feature of traditional Chinese cultural art.

During the Warring States period, Qu Yuan of Chu wrote in his "Li Sao": "Matching loyalty with fragrant herbs, and entrusting the virtues of gentlemen to dragons and phoenixes," fostering the pursuit of honoring individuals and esteeming the virtuous in Western Han Dynasty China. Han dynasty portrait stones often served as crafted texts extolling sagacity and virtue, adhering to Confucian cultural norms of propriety, righteousness, and social ethics. Artifacts in Han culture had to align with these standards; only when in harmony with ritual were they considered rational. By the Han dynasty, the prevalent art of portrait stones embraced Confucian ideals of

reverence for heaven, virtue, and tUnity of man and nature through the theory of correspondence between heaven and man. Excavations across Henan, Sichuan, Jiangsu, Shaanxi, Anhui, Hubei, Shanxi, Yunnan, Guizhou, and Liaoning provinces have unearthed images reflecting Han society's emphasis on conforming to divine will, venerating spirits, and upholding the virtues of filial piety, benevolence, righteousness, and propriety.

As depicted in the mural on the rear wall of the Xiaotangshan Shrine in Changqing, Shandong (Figure22) , the upper left features high-level chariots drawn by four horses. In the middle section, there is a Confucian depiction of "Confucius Meeting Laozi": Confucius and Laozi facing each other respectfully, accompanied by numerous disciples. The lower part of the mural showcases various splendid carriages, drumming carriages, cavalry officials, and drummers, vividly portraying the virtues of loyalty, filial piety, propriety, and righteousness. The complex interlaced patterns and bands within the mural are also interpreted by experts as symbolic representations of the division lines in the cosmic world.

During the Western Han Dynasty, the concept of "Unity of man and nature" and the theory of "heaven-human interaction" injected Confucian ideals of benevolence, ritual, righteousness, ethics, and good governance into a standardized image paradigm. This constructed a narrative where Han culture intertwined with cosmic will as an ethical cultural symbol that has persisted for millennia, shaping societal spirit and moral standards. Into the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the folkloric images of heaven, sacred deities, and Confucian sages within Chinese ancient architecture were widely utilized in architectural carving arts, embodying the Confucian ethical and cultural symbols of "unity of heaven and humanity." This heritage of traditional Chinese cultural art images and narrative, based on Confucian ethics, constitutes a precious historical and cultural legacy of Chinese folkloric symbolics.

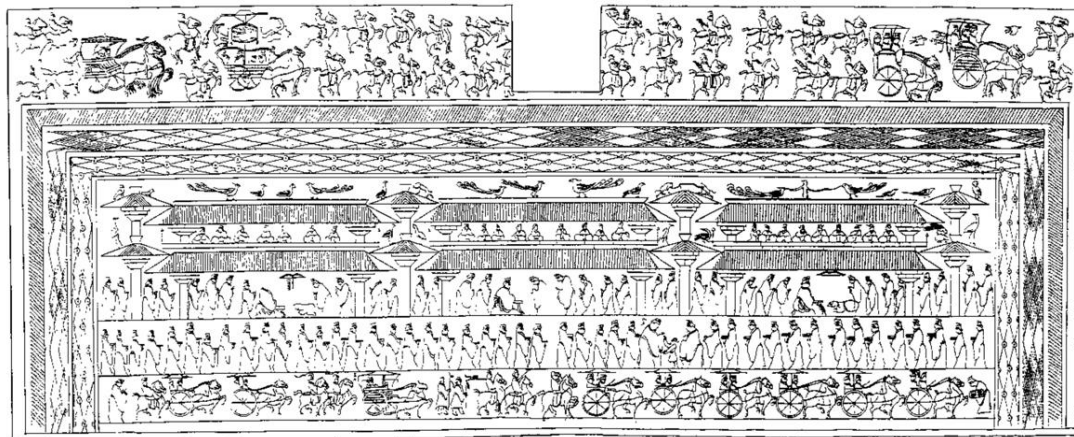


Figure 22 Han Dynasty portrait on the back wall of the ancestral hall in Changqing, Shandong Province

Source: Xin Lixiang, A Comprehensive Study of Han Dynasty Picture Stones.
Beijing: Cultural Relics Press, 2000.8.P105

2.2 Wei Jin Dynasties, the image of “Unity of man and nature” symbolic narrative of Buddhist culture

From the Eastern Han to the Wei-Jin Northern and Southern Dynasties period, Buddhism flourished upon entering the Central Plains of China, leading to a blend of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, forming a convergence of philosophical and cultural ideas. He Yan and Wang Bi pioneered the Xuanxue (Neo-Taoist) school, while Ruan Ji and Ji Kang advocated "transcending conventional teachings and following natural spontaneity." Later, Le Guang and Pei Yue proposed the idea of "not departing from natural spontaneity within conventional teachings." Guo Xiang believed that all things in nature arise naturally without a governing force, existing and perishing independently, and he introduced the concept of the "realm of mystery" where things find unity within (Figure23) .

The concept of "Unity of man and nature" became a prevailing spiritual ideology in society, particularly propagated through Buddhist cave art that integrated architecture, sculpture, and painting. This influenced the universal values in both northern and southern regions, shaping societal ideals.

In ancient Chinese pre-Qin history, there was a trend of mystical studies (Xuanxue), and Tibetan Buddhism was introduced from India. During the Wei, Jin, Northern and Southern Dynasties, Indian Tibetan Buddhist scriptures entered the Central Plains through the Western Regions. Through the transmission of Bodhidharma, Huike, Sengcan, Daoxin, Hongren, and Huineng, known as the "Six Patriarchs of the Eastern Land" or "Six Ancestors," Tibetan Buddhism became mainstream in both northern and southern Chinese societies. Huineng's Zen teachings in Chinese Buddhism, especially the Platform Sutra (Tanjing) of Shakyamuni's teachings, represent a fusion of Buddhism and Confucianism. This work inspired the development of humanity's inherent nature and the concept of karma, promoting tUnity of man and nature (Figure24) . It emphasized charitable deeds and righteousness as paths to salvation, teaching that virtuous actions bring positive responses from heaven and earth, while evil deeds lead to negative consequences.



Figure 23 Western Wei Feitian Image
Source: The Commercial Press



Figure 24:Northern Wei A flying figure holding a pipa obliquely
Source:The Commercial Press

Buddhist cultural narratives also influenced China's craftsmanship culture, particularly in the ancient artifacts of the Wei and Jin periods and their subsequent artistic representations in artifact images. These were significantly shaped by the Buddhist teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha. Even Buddhist decorative patterns and images evolved into a symbolic narrative of Buddhist cultural motifs, forming a stylized depiction of artifact images rooted in Buddhist culture.

2.3 Sui, Tang, and Song Period Images “Unity of man and nature” Confucianism and Buddhism Cultural Symbol Narrative

During the Sui and Tang dynasties, a period characterized by the unification of China's northern and southern territories, the intellectual landscape inherited from the Northern and Southern Dynasties continued to thrive, with Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism holding comparable status. Confucianism advocated benevolence and goodness, Buddhism promoted the accumulation of merits, and Daoism emphasized self-cultivation. Nevertheless, Confucian political and cultural ideals predominated throughout this era. This period explores the orthodox spiritual concepts in the regions of northern and southern China, interweaving issues of human nature with social and cosmic perspectives. It emphasizes a humane philosophical pursuit of goodness and truth harmonizing with heavenly principles, which became the guiding consciousness of ancient Chinese societal, cultural, and artistic expressions (Figure25) . This worldview determined the spiritual values underlying social, political, economic, and folk cultural symbols of the era.



Figure 25 Tang Dynasty stone carvings: Flying Apsaras, Buddha statues, and musicians' motifs.

Source: Guo Lianfu Ding Tao, Dictionary of Chinese Patterns, Tianjin Education Press, 1998, p158

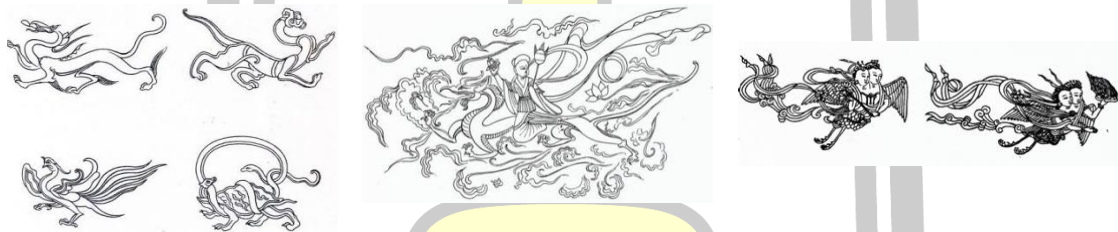


Figure 26 : Four Gods carved in stone in the Sui Dynasty/Chutang Riding the Dragon and Flying to the Sky/Song Dynasty Architectural Decoration Common Life Bird Pattern

Source: Guo Lianfu Ding Tao, Dictionary of Chinese Patterns, Tianjin Education Press, 1998, p564; 167; 373

As seen in the (Figure 26), Buddhist stone carvings, murals, and decorations from the Sui, Tang, and Song periods mutually reference the doctrine of "Unity of Man and Nature," reflecting ancient human reverence for destiny. Their forms evolved from religiously fixed patterns to those of social and folk art, reflecting how Buddhist art during the Sui, Tang, and Song dynasties was closer to or directly derived from an idealized world reflecting social realities.

During the Tang Dynasty, the Daoist Sun Simiao proposed the theory of "Yin-Yang Five Elements" and "Unity of Man and Nature," explaining the thirteen methods of nurturing life through human meridians. Tang continued the tradition of metaphysical thought, using celestial phenomena to predict societal trends, while preserving ancient cloud and atmospheric images in art to signify destiny, ethics, and auspiciousness, which circulated widely among the populace. Tang culture integrated Eastern and Western influences, yet the concept of "Unity of Man and Nature" shaped imperial and folk cultural symbols, embodying a cultural paradigm under the belief in

celestial-human resonance during the Sui and Tang periods. This concept remains a prominent narrative in the history of Chinese images.

As depicted in the above illustration, the tripartite Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism cultural unity in ancient China during the Sui, Tang, and Song dynasties all underscored the societal and cosmological view of "Unity of Man and Nature." The succession of imperial authority did not alter the transmission of societal spiritual ideologies. Moreover, from the perspective of constructing cultural symbols through artifacts, attire, and architectural image arts rooted in Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist conceptual frameworks, it is undeniable that these narratives constitute the narrative texts of traditional Chinese visual arts. They embody a decisive role in elevating the spiritual values and concepts within the Chinese folklore and cultural semiotics of image art.

2.4 Ming and Qing Dynasties Images "Unity of man and nature" Folk Culture Symbolic Narrative

From the reign of Emperor Shun to the Ming and Qing Dynasties, successive emperors in China adhered to the spiritual and ideological concept of "Unity of Man and Nature." They upheld ancient traditions unchanged over thousands of years. In imperial attire, the Twelve Symbols adorned their clothing (Figure 27), with the dragon motif symbolizing the imperial family. This ensemble encapsulated the entirety of Chinese cultural values: views of nature (sun, moon, stars, mountains, fire, symbolizing the grandeur and breadth of the emperor's vision), sacred beliefs (dragon, phoenix, representing the profound contemplation of monarchs), perspectives on survival (white rice, Metaphorically based on agriculture), ethical principles (ancestral rites emphasizing loyalty and filial piety), and political ideals. It served as a symbolic expression of the hierarchical view of imperial authority as ordained by heaven, conveying societal values through cultural symbolism.

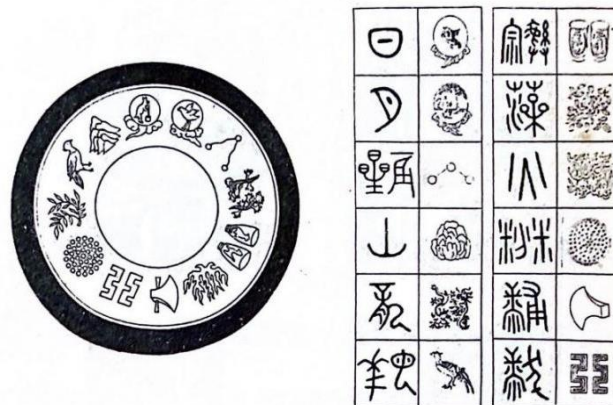


Figure 27 Twelve Chapter Image

Source : Guo Lianfu Ding Tao, Dictionary of Chinese Patterns, Tianjin Education Press, 1998,p6-7

During the Yuan, Ming, and Qing periods, depictions of the "Unity of Man and Nature" often appeared in ceramic paintings, reflecting the blending of Manchu and Han cultures. These images also defined decorative characteristics across different periods of the Qing Dynasty. This diversity and variability exemplify how the concept of "Unity of Man and Nature" is reflected in narrative artistic symbols, symbolizing the spiritual narrative of vitality and spiritual power between heaven and earth. In the artistic representation of the Twelve Symbols, patterns like stars and

cloud motifs served not only as visual adornments but also as a means for artists to convey the concept of harmony between heaven and man. Through the depiction of cloud motifs, profound ideas about the ever-changing nature and perpetuity of the natural world were expressed, evolving into auspicious cloud patterns that returned to everyday life, symbolizing the pursuit of happiness and auspicious living. In the images of utensils from the Ming and Qing periods, cloud motifs became a stylistic element of folk arts and crafts, reflecting their significant role and function in the cultural expression of "Unity of Man and Nature" across diverse ethnicities within society.

During the Southern Song Dynasty, the philosopher Zhu Xi posited that Principle (li) is the fundamental essence of the world, arising within all things and existing inherently. He proposed the concept of "unity of Principle and Qi," asserting that Principle resides within Qi. His philosophy emphasized "preserving Heavenly Principle and extinguishing human desires," setting up a dichotomy between Heavenly Principle and human desires and constructing a new doctrine of "unity of Heaven and humanity." Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism positioned itself as orthodox Confucian thought, revitalizing Confucianism and becoming the official philosophy during the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, profoundly influencing Chinese society and traditional cultural symbols.

Zhu Xi's "Heaven and humanity" perspective from the Southern Song period continued to be a cornerstone of Neo-Confucianism in subsequent eras, alongside Zhou Dunyi's "Taiji" theory, Zhang Zai's "Qi is the basis" doctrine, and the teachings of Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi. These integrated Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist ideas into a comprehensive philosophical system that informed ancient Chinese civil service examinations. Figures like Wang Yangming and Wang Fu-chih also propagated the concept of "unity of Heaven and humanity."

In Wang Yangming's School of the Heart philosophy, the concept of "Qi" was central. Wang Yangming viewed "Qi" as a bridge and intermediary between the mind and objects, Principle and nature. He considered "Qi" not only as substance but also consciousness, phenomenon, and essence—a crucial link facilitating communication between the mind and the physical world. Artistic representations often employed cloud motifs borrowed from natural cloud formations, symbolizing the fluidity and change inherent in Wang Yangming's "School of the Heart" philosophy, where "Qi" embodies the flow and transformation of moral practice and spiritual activity. For instance, Wang Yangming posited that "Qi is the circulation of the moral mind," signifying how moral cognition manifests and realizes itself through "Qi."

พหุบัน ปณฺ ทิโต ชเว

Part 3. The homogenous transmission and evolution of the "Unity of man and nature" cultural symbol in the images of artifacts from the Haihun Marquis State and traditional Chinese images

3.1 Cultural symbols of "Unity of man and nature" in the images of Haihun Marquis State

We can perceive human cognition of objective phenomena from ancient and pre-Qin myths of "Unity of man and nature," as well as from artifacts of the Haihun Marquis State depicting the sun, moon, clouds, and atmosphere. Through these images, we see the inheritance and extension of the artistic representation of "Unity of man and nature." This cultural heritage of conceptual history in Chinese image art involves the symbolic language and cognitive rhetoric of image art consciousness. It not only relies on ancient models interconnected with historiography but also accumulates narratives from different regions, languages, and thoughts.

In exploring the historical study of cultural symbolism, we can analyze its simultaneous trajectory of extension and variation. This involves the complex interrelationship between the unity of cultural symbols and their extension and variation over time, highlighting the sociocultural concepts and narratives that determine the propagation of symbols. Through comparisons with pre-Qin symbolic models, we discover causal relationships and cultural implications of similarity and difference, forming an interpretative framework of semiotic construction. This investigation delves into the intricate historical development and interconnection of "unity of Heaven and humanity" myths, ancient history, social images, artistic concepts, and cultural symbolism.

From ancient times to the pre-Qin period, through the transmission and extension of cultural symbols in Western Han Dynasty pictorial art depicting the concept of "unity of Heaven and humanity," to the persisting and popular images in artifacts across successive societies, including motifs of the sun, birds, clouds, stars, and lightning, reflecting the ancient reverence for the external cosmic world and natural ecology. These symbols constitute narratives of human societal spiritual concepts, evolving from ritualistic cultural symbols towards the context of socio-legal cultural semiotics. This continuity persists to this day.

Based on the above diagram, it is evident that in ancient China and the pre-Qin era, the conceptual construction of symbolic art history played a crucial role in the formation, evolution, and transmission of dominant Confucianist symbolic cultural studies, as well as Taoist and Buddhist cultural symbolic studies. Therefore, we can further analyze the narrative of Han Dynasty cultural symbols. In the images from the Haihun Marquis State (Figure 28), symbols of heaven and earth such as the sun, moon, and clouds commonly depicted on exquisite artifacts excavated from the Haihun Marquis tomb reflect the ancient worship of the universe and understanding of the laws governing heaven and earth's movements. These symbols serve not only as decoration but also as concrete manifestations of the "Unity of man and nature" ideology.

The intricate patterns on artifacts from the Haihun Marquis state also depict animals like the Azure Dragon, White Tiger, Phoenix, Black Tortoise, Golden Crow, Jade

Rabbit, and Toad, each holding special symbolic significance in Han Dynasty thought, reflecting reverence for nature among ancient people.



Figure 1: Lacquer Case with Flowing Clouds
Source: Haihun Marquis state Museum

In the Danglu artifacts depicted in the illustration below (Figure29) , the Golden Crow and Jade Rabbit are significant figures from ancient mythology, where the Golden Crow symbolizes the sun and the Jade Rabbit symbolizes the moon. The ancient reverence for the sun and moon has deep roots: the sun was seen as the source of all things, providing light and warmth, while the moon was associated with phenomena like waxing and waning, seasonal changes, imbued with mystical power and symbolic meaning. The presence of the Golden Crow and Jade Rabbit not only reflects ancient worship of the sun and moon but also conveys their understanding of natural cycles and the continuity of life.

The images of the Golden Crow and Jade Rabbit are often depicted together, symbolizing the harmony of yin and yang, the alternation of day and night, and the cycles of life and death among other natural laws. Additionally, other animals in the Danglu patterns, such as the Azure Dragon, White Tiger, Phoenix, and combined form of the Black Tortoise and Snake, first appeared in the Eastern Han period and hold significant symbolic meanings in ancient culture. The Azure Dragon represents the east, the White Tiger represents the west, the Phoenix symbolizes auspiciousness and happiness, while the Black Tortoise is associated with water and life. These combinations of animals showcase the awe and reverence ancient Han people held towards various forces and spirits in nature.

The depictions of animals like the Golden Crow and Jade Rabbit in the Haihun Marquis Danglu reflect the meticulous observation and profound understanding ancient people had of nature, as well as their reverence and worship of natural forces. These patterns are not just artistic expressions but also represent the ancient contemplation and exploration of the universe and life. The moon and Jade Rabbit depicted in the image express an idealized narrative of ancient humans' aspirations towards the heavens: placing earthly hopes in the moon and Jade Rabbit as symbols of human survival and longing. The Danglu images narrates the relationship between heaven and nature, portraying animals and plants as conditions for existence intertwined with celestial intentions in ancient human societies. In Figure , the bird represents the yang energy, embodying the sun, which determined the fate and survival of ancient humans. This embodies the socio-cultural spirit of "harmony between heaven and humanity" in the Western Han period.

From the images, it can be seen that all three depict ancient sacrificial culture, where the sun, Jade Rabbit, yang bird, and the growth of plants depending on the sun form

the cosmology and naturalism of human spiritual worship. From the Yin and Shang to the Western Zhou period, the sacrificial culture evolved into ritual music, etiquette, and ceremonial culture, still retaining the ancient human spiritual values of not defying "heaven's will." During the Western Han period, the political-religious system of "heavenly mandate" arose from the theory of "harmony between heaven and humanity," continuing into the royal spiritual and cultural orientation of the Han Dynasty and later periods. The appearance of the sun, moon, Jade Rabbit, and yang bird figures in the Haihun Marquis Danglu reflects the worship of ancient ancestors for the phoenix bird since ancient times, originating from the bird's proficiency in flying freely between heaven and earth. Therefore, ancient people believed it possessed mysterious powers to command the wind and rain and traverse between heaven and earth.



Figure 2: Haihun Marquis car and horse artifacts DangLu
Source: Haihun Marquis state Museum

The narrative of symbolic depiction in the image of "Unity of Man and Nature" is also displayed. Among them, Danglu exhibits distinct "Heaven and Man" patterns, using figurative realistic forms to portray the visage of "Heavenly Gods (Figure30)." As depicted, features such as brows, eyes, nose, and mouth are X-shaped, with bilateral eyes, a gourd-shaped nose resembling a human face, a tiger-shaped mouth with double jaws resembling twin dragons, showcasing the Western Han craftsmen's narrative style in "Heaven and Man" cultural images using symbols like dragons, tigers, scroll motifs, clouds, and human faces. From the following image, the "Heaven and Man" images can be seen, dating back from ancient times to the Western Han, already stylized into a narrative spiritual context as a cultural symbol of human ideology. The "Heaven and Man" images had become a mature social symbol in ancient China by the Western Han period, simultaneously perpetuated in the folk artisan culture of royal heritage. (Ye, S., 2010)



Figure 3: Haihun Marquis car and horse artifacts DangLu

Source: Haihun Marquis state Museum

In the "Huangdi Neijing · Suwen": "The earth's qi rises as clouds, the sky's qi descends as rain. Rain originates from the earth's qi, clouds originate from the sky's qi." Ancient people used cloud qi to depict natural sky scenes, believing that natural cloud qi promotes growth. It can be seen that in the pre-Qin period, "qi" mainly symbolized concepts of cosmic and internal human vitality. However, by the Western Han period, people preferred to anthropomorphize this concept, using it to explain the theory of "Harmony between Heaven and Humanity" through visual representation. Qi gradually became a visible phenomenon with spiritual significance for humanity.

"The Records of the Grand Historian" records that Emperor Wu dispatched Taoist scholars to seek the legendary Penglai Island in the sea. They reported that Penglai was not far, but because they could not find the qi of Penglai, they were unable to reach the immortal island. Consequently, a specialized official position of "Qi Watcher" was established to gaze at the sea and await the appearance of Penglai Island. "Observing Qi" thus became an important occupation.

Cloud qi patterns deeply reflect the Han people's pursuit of harmony between the cosmic yin and yang qi, embodying their aspirations for posthumous spiritual elevation, reflecting contemplations on life, and encompassing the Confucian belief in the eternal regeneration of all things (Figure31) .



Figure

4:

Haihun

Marquis

lacquerware

Source: Haihun Marquis state Museum

The Bo Shan stove unearthed from the Haihun Marquis state derives its name from the legendary sea island of "Bo Shan," symbolizing the pursuit of immortality and spiritual transcendence (Figure32) . This cultural artifact reflects the Han dynasty's

reverence for both natural and supernatural forces, as they sought harmony with the cosmos and spiritual purification through the burning of incense. In their lifetime, ancient people utilized this method to seek unity and harmony with the universe's natural order, expressing and practicing their cosmological and existential beliefs through material culture.

In Zhuangzi's "Great Master," during the ritual to sacrifice to the heavens, it is said, "The Yellow Emperor obtained it, to ascend into the clouds and sky." The "cloud steps and stone stairs" metaphorically describe ascending stone steps to higher places, while "cloud chambers" refer to the residences of hermits or monks in ancient times. During the Chu-Han Contention, Liu Bang, the Han Emperor Gaozu, expressed in his poetry, "A great wind rises, clouds flying high, might extending throughout the realm, returning to my homeland. Where can I find brave warriors to guard the four corners?" This passionate declaration looked up to the sky and sang a long song of aspiration, embodying the majestic spirit of the Han dynasty's "Unity of Man and Nature," influencing later generations profoundly.

Moreover, in the Tang dynasty, the poet Yuan Zhen used clouds as a metaphor for "love". Using the clouds of Mount Wu as a metaphor for his boundless yearning for his beloved wife illustrates how clouds have symbolized auspiciousness, beauty, elevation, and aspirational ideals throughout Chinese history. The cloud motifs of the Han dynasty served as distinctive artistic symbols recording the spiritual thoughts of ancient humanity.



Figure 5: HaihunMarquis artifacts Boshan furnace
Source: Haihun Marquis state Museum

The artistic images depicted on lacquerware unearthed from the Haihun Marquis state directly reflects this cultural trait. For instance, black lacquer boxes and chests adorned with gold leaf feature intricate designs closely linked to celestial phenomena such as the sun, moon, and stars. Scholars suggest these images serve as detailed records of ancient solar eclipses, illustrating how early civilizations used astronomical observations to communicate with the heavens, reflecting their reverence for celestial cosmology (Figure33). In summary, the narrative of "Unity of Man and Nature" in the Haihun Marquis culture encapsulates pre-Qin historical legacies, embodies the doctrine of "correspondence between heaven and humanity" across generations, and catalyzes the fusion of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism in later Han culture.



Figure 6: HaihunMarquis artifacts astronomy image
Source: Haihun Marquis state Museum

3.2 The homogenous transmission and evolution of the "Unity of man and nature" cultural symbol in the images of artifacts from the Haihun Marquis State and the folk images of the Yangtze River region

The Haihun Marquis state, situated in the GanPo River system, connected the southwestern Yangtze River basin with the central-southern regions of ancient China. From ancient times to the Western Zhou period, its societal and folk images symbols of "Unity of Man and Nature" constitute one of the origins of traditional Chinese culture. This cultural legacy influenced the local social and cultural fabric in the southern territories under the Western Han Dynasty, including the Yuzhang Commandery situated in the Poyang Lake water system. The artistic images on artifacts from Haihun Marquis exhibits a continuity with the artisan cultures of the southwestern Sichuan cultural circle and the central-southern Chu cultural circle along the Yangtze River region. Thus, archaeological findings reveal that the "Unity of Man and Nature" images from Haihun Marquis appears in similar cultural and artistic patterns of folk customs and stylistic forms of artifacts across the Yangtze River region, indicating a shared and evolving cultural and artistic conception of "heavenly-human" values.

The folk artisan culture, influenced by regional cultures north and south of the Yangtze River system, is reflected in the artistic depictions on imperial artifacts of the Western Han Dynasty. The narratives of royal and marquis images in artistic representations are constructed upon the cultural differences in artisan production across northern and southern regions, showcasing both the unity and distinctiveness of heavenly-human cultural elements between folk and imperial cultures. This highlights the narrative cultural symbols of the "Unity of Man and Nature" in the artistic depictions of Western Han society's artifacts as a construction of homogeneous co-construction in cultural semiotics based on Confucian cultural traits of the Han imperial court.

The study employed field methods to collect and organize historical literature, seeking evidence from the following images: the ancient concept of "Unity of man and nature," which flourished during the Western Han Dynasty and extended into the artistic expressions of the Haihun Marquis state. These images express the Han Dynasty's idealized spiritual pursuit and societal values imbued with astronomical and meteorological significance. Throughout the Han Dynasty, the Confucian doctrine of "harmony between heaven and man" persisted, urging imperial governance under the ethical governance of benevolence, serving as a pursuit of social and moral ideals. This concept of "Unity of Man and Nature" originated in the Han Dynasty and continued through the Sui, Yuan, and into the Ming and Qing periods, as depicted in Figure X. Both the images of Western Shu and Central-Southern cultures in the Yangtze River basin share similar spiritual and ideological values of heaven and man, observed in their cultural symbols. By comparing and analyzing images from the Shu and Chu cultures during the Warring States to Han Dynasty with those of the Haihun Marquis state, we discerned a consistent cultural lineage in their depiction of the unified spiritual concept of "Unity of man and nature."

3.2.1 Comparison of cloud pattern images

Symbols are an integral part of social culture, bearing specific symbolic meanings and cultural connotations. As a narrative symbol, cloud patterns encapsulate

the Han Dynasty's reverence for supernatural forces and longing for a better life. Particularly prominent during the Han Dynasty, cloud patterns adorn lacquerware, jade artifacts, and bronze objects unearthed from the Haihun Marquis State. These patterns appear not only on funerary items but also on everyday objects, indicating their wide application throughout Chinese history.

Through these cloud patterns on artifacts, we can construct a narrative tableau of ancient ancestors' lives, beliefs, and spiritual values. For example, the cloud patterns on lacquer coffins unearthed from the Changsha Mawangdui site within the Chu cultural sphere not only embellish the coffins but also narrate the deceased's expectations for the afterlife and pursuit of eternal life. Similarly, contexts such as lacquer coffins unearthed from Yangzhou in the Yangtze River region, brocades with cloud patterns from Shu, and Meiping vases with imitation rhinoceros horn cloud patterns from Jizhou illustrate the narrative context of symbolic storytelling, imbuing cloud patterns with cultural connotations of "heavenly and human" discourse. Thus, cloud patterns depict a dynamic historical panorama of the "heavenly and human" concept, reflecting Han people's aspirations for auspiciousness and reverence for cosmic natural forces. Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty suppressed the Hundred Schools of Thought and exclusively honored Confucianism, advocating the concept of "heavenly and human resonance" with the warning of auspiciousness and adversity. He governed society's ideology through the implementation of the "Three Bonds and Five Constants" ritual and legal system. Cloud patterns symbolized the Han people's aspirations for auspiciousness; they also reflected an idealized heavenly realm and its overall sanctified power and momentum, embodying vigorous vitality.

Cloud patterns express reverence for vitality and cosmic natural forces, portraying a dynamic historical panorama of the "heavenly and human" concept. Below is a chart for empirical verification:

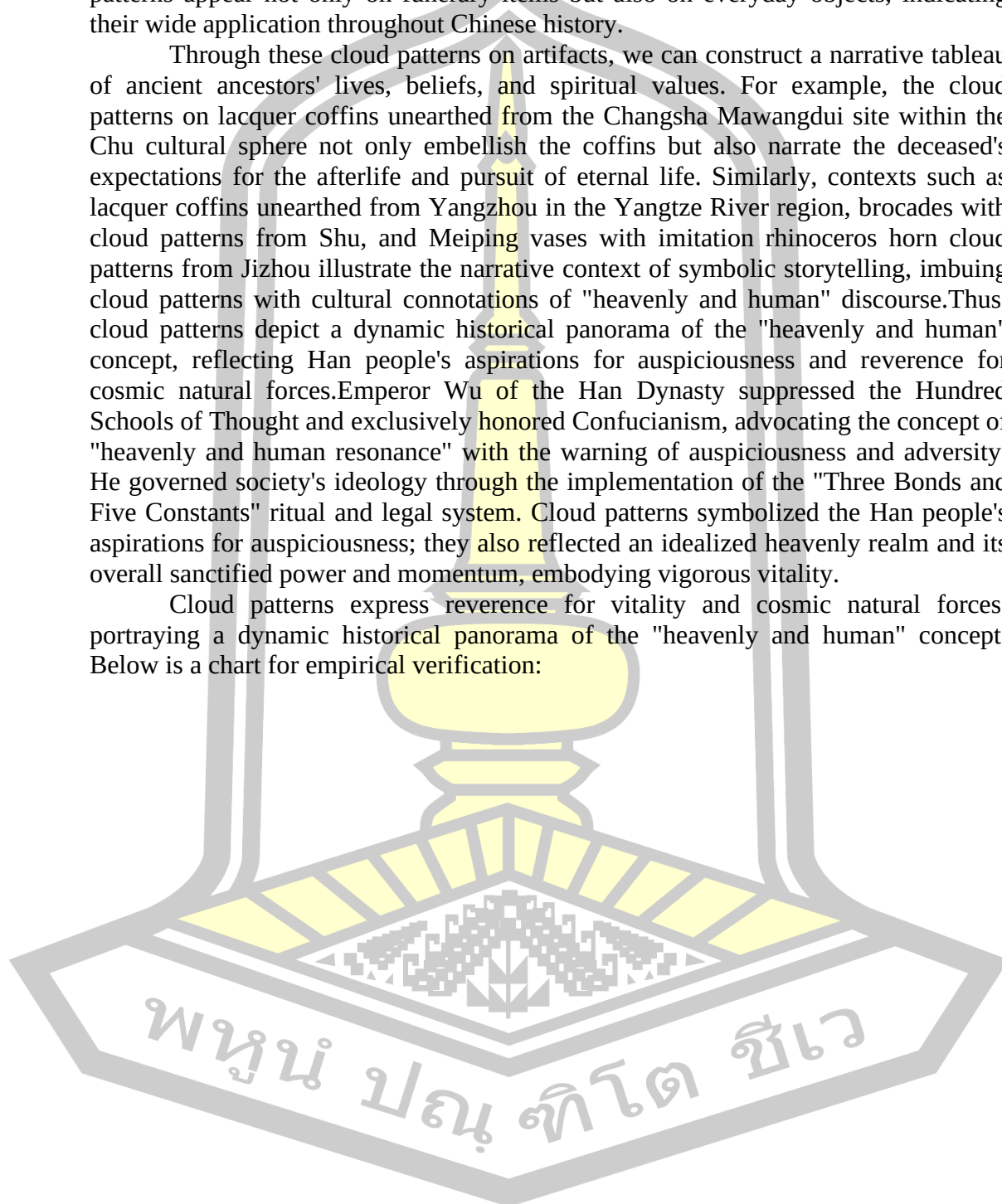
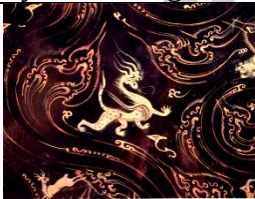
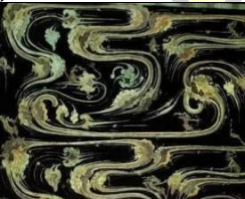


Table 1 Comparison of Cultural Symbols of Haihun Marquis Artifacts and the South-Central and Southwest Regions of the Yangtze River--Chushu Cloud Images

			
Cloud Image of Artifacts of the Haihun Marquis State (Yuzhang County, GanpoWater System, Yangtze River)			
 Lacquer images of clouds and beasts on a lacquer trousseau excavated in Yangzhou (Yangtze River Region) Source:Li Zongyue et al., editors, Chinese Art Through the Ages, P210	 Lacquer coffin with images of clouds and air unearthed at Mawangdui, Changsha (Yangtze River Region) Source:Hunan Provincial Museum	 Lacquerware with Cloud Pattern (Yangzhuang Han Tomb, Yizheng, Yangzhou, Jiangsu) (Yangtze River Region)	 Sichuan Cloud Pattern Brocade (Yangtze River Region) Source: Official WeChat Public Number of Sichuan Tourism Promotion Center
 Mural Painting of Cloudy Air in the Tomb of the King of South Vietnam in Xianggang, Guangzhou (Guangdong of the Ganxiang tributary of the Yangtze River) Image source:	 Lacquer Ear Cup with Hooked Cloud Pattern Unearthed from Tomb No. 1, Mashan, Jingzhou, Hubei (Yangtze River Region) Source: Jingzhou Museum	 Lacquer Cup with Painted Cloud Patterns and "Jun Xing Wine" (Tomb No. 3, Mawangdui, Changsha, Hunan), Yangtze River region Source: Hunan Museum	 Jizhou Kiln Imitation Ticked Rhinoceros Ruyi Cloud Pattern Plum Vase (Gan Poyang Tributary of the Yangtze River Region) Source:https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/5G8s7g3_U0gLygGe_rYelw. 2024.

Based on the above (Table1) the cloud images of the Haihun Marquisate exhibits a conceptual cultural symbol morphology similar to the cloud images of the Yangtze River Basin and its six provincial and municipal regions. The images paradigm and cultural narrative are analogous, reflecting a "homogeneous co-construction" relationship between the Haihun Marquisate and the folk cultures of various regions along the Yangtze River Basin. From the perspective of semiotic cultural theory, conceptual images art embodies a shared spiritual concept that transcends regional cultural limitations, possessing an inherent drive for universal inheritance and dissemination. This phenomenon is one of the reasons behind the cultural semiotics of the "Unity of man and nature" theory.

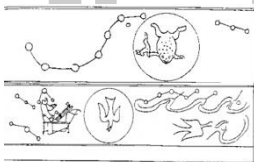
3.2.2 Comparison of Sun, Moon and Star Images

With its unique symbol system, the sun, moon and star images reveal the ancient people's knowledge of all things in heaven and earth and their exploration of the laws of operation of the universe. These images were not only used for astronomical observation, but also had far-reaching cultural and religious significance. The "Huainanzi" elucidates the process of cosmic genesis, beginning from the boundless void of the Dao, through the movement and differentiation of Qi, ultimately forming heaven, earth, yin-yang, and the four seasons. This cosmological exposition is imbued with empiricism, showcasing the profound understanding and exploration of the Han people.

Ancient Chinese celestial maps were not only used for predicting weather and agricultural production but were also widely applied in divination and sacrificial activities. For instance, at the Mozu Yanpai rock painting site in Sichuan, symbols such as animals, human figures, sun, and moon are depicted, recording scenes of tribal life including dances, hunting, and rituals. These carvings are revered as "heavenly books engraved in stone," embodying the ancestors' aspirations for knowledge accumulation and cultural transmission. They served as crucial means for ancient humans to acquire life experiences.

From the Shang and Zhou dynasties to the Western Han dynasty, celestial symbols like the Milky Way and cloud patterns combined with sun, moon, and other elements formed a narrative of the cosmological unity of "heaven and humanity." The use of celestial symbolism in artifacts such as ritual bronzes symbolized beliefs in the heavens and stars, seeking auspiciousness. This culture of artifact creation through celestial symbolism became a principle in artisanal culture, symbolizing royal and folk cultural consensus. Comparisons were drawn between the artifact images of the Haihun Marquisate and local patterns like Milky Way, vortex, and grain motifs.

Table 2 Comparison of Cultural Symbols of Haihun Marquis state Artifacts and Sun and Moon Images of Chu and Shu in the South-Central and South-Western Yangtze River Region

Haihun Marquis state Artifacts Image, Sun and Moon				
The Shu cultural belt of south western				
	Sichuan Moshidu Petroglyphs Sun, Moon and Stars Source : https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/x-JR8NfBXGftCr24mwGplQ	Fuxi and Nüwa Bricks, East Han Dynasty Source: Chengdu Museum	Lacquered box with three-legged crow in Zenghouyi Tomb Source: Hubei Provincial Museum	Sun God Bird Gold Leaf Unearthed at Jinsha Ruins in Chengdu, Sichuan Province Source : https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/htGg_GzsDiQCNxdsLcRIHA.2024.6.20
				
The Middle and Southern Chu cultural belt	Changqing Xiaozhi Shantang Sky Image Source: Han Dynasty Picture Stone	Changsha Mawangdui Pali Painting of the Sun and Moon Source: Hunan Provincial Museum	Lacquer Clothes Box Source: Hubei Provincial Museum	Changsha Mawangdui Astronomical Breath Miscellaneous Occupation Chart Source: Hunan Provincial Museum
The Central Plains Cultural				
	Nanyang Han Portrait Stone Three-legged Crow	Nanyang Han Portrait Stone Source: Nanyang	Ming and Qing Dynasty Dragon Robe sun Pattern Source:	The Sun and the Moon in the Song Dynasty's Baoxiang Guanyin Picture

Belt	Source: Nanyang Han Portrait Stone	Han Portrait Stone	Dingning Provincial Museum	Source: https://mp.weixin .qq.com/s/6nUbC TrlNv3LibwjhU Wpfg.2024
------	---------------------------------------	-----------------------	----------------------------------	---

The image above (Table2) illustrates the ancient Chinese concept of "Heavenly-Human" spirit expressed through the sun and moon. In ancient times, this included myths such as Hou Yi shooting the sun, and artistic motifs like flame patterns, whirl patterns, and Shang-Zhou bronze ware. During the Spring and Autumn periods and Warring States period, this concept continued with jade artifacts depicting myths like the jade rabbit of Chang'e flying to the moon. Later in the Tang dynasty, depictions of "flying celestial beings," "feathered humans," and "sun birds" further symbolized this concept. From ancient times, the sun and moon served as totemic symbols for northern and southern clans, evolving into a cultural symbol representing tUnity of man and nature across different ethnic groups in regions such as Central Plains, Southern and Southwest China by the Han dynasty. The images of the sun and moon in the artifacts of the Haihun Marquis state shares similarities with the Yangtze River Sichuan culture, Chu culture, and Yellow River Central Plains culture, indicating the mature contemporary narrative of the cultural symbolic construction of the "Heavenly-Human" concept during the Han period.

3.2.3 Fish image comparison

In ancient societies, fish were among the earliest objects of totem worship, revered as vessels for divine spirits. Initially, fish were honored as gods of water and rain, as recorded in "Emperor King Chronicles," where the Yellow Emperor encountered a large fish during his travels on the Luo River, leading to sacrifices and subsequent rainfall. This elevated fish to symbols of omnipotence. In texts like "Classic of Mountains and Seas," mythical creatures like manyao fish and ying fish were depicted with fish bodies and bird wings.

In "Zhuangzi," it is mentioned, "In the Northern Ocean there is a fish; the name is Kun; it is a bird." Additionally, the "Shu Wang Annals" describes the ancestor of the Shu king, Can Cong, who was later renamed Bai Guan. Fish Fu, who spanned three generations and lived several hundred years each, was deified and immortal, and his people followed him. Fish Fu Tian at Jian Mountain, Tao Xian, who is still a native.

Ancient books elaborate on the symbolic significance of fish in reproduction and fertility and use them as military symbols and symbols of solidarity. Later, idioms such as "surplus year" and "carp jumping the dragon gate" imply luck and promotion, enriching the connotation of fish culture. These traditional customs and cultures span eras and continue to this day, becoming a unique part of folklore.

The Yangtze River Basin is one of the sources of ancient Chinese civilization. The history and culture of the Yangtze River system also include important graphic symbols, narratives, and regional hydrographic cultures in ancient times, including the Pre-Qin and Han dynasties. The process of evolution is symbolized by the fish culture totem, an image symbol, from colored pottery face fish lines, Warring States copper pot fish hunting maps to Han Dynasty Yangtze River water system regional fish patterns. Therefore, the royal utensils and image art also reflect the direction of the Western Han Dynasty's Yangtze River regional culture, "Tianren

View," social folk craftsman-made value orientation. Haihun Marquis state artifacts image art ideas also include narrative categories of folklore art from Sichuan and Chu.

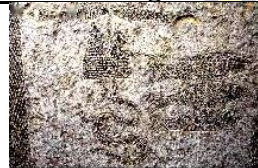
Table 3 Haihun Marquis artifacts and the western Sichuan and south-central region of the Yangtze River - fish images



Haihun Marquis artifact fish image



Jade Fish, Late Spring and Autumn Period (Yangtze River Chu Culture)
Source: Late Spring and Autumn Period tomb excavated at Xiaojiahe, Meteor County, Hubei, China



Han Painted Brick of Hebei Going on a Trip
Source: Excavated in Yangzi Mountain, Chengdu, Sichuan, China



Yangzi, Chengdu, Sichuan, harvesting fishing and hunting portrait bricks
Source: Xinlixiang, Comprehensive Study on the Stone Reliefs of the Han Dynasty. Cultural Relics Press. p309



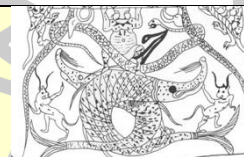
Sarcophagus with Three Fish Sharing Heads
Unearthed from Cliff Tomb No. 2 in Zhangjiakou, Hejiang, Sichuan (Yangtze River Shu Culture)
Source: Sichuan Provincial Museum



Lacquer Ear Cup with Three Fishes from Phoenix Hill, Jiangling, Hubei (Yangtze River Chu Culture)
Source: Jingzhou Museum, Hubei



Painted Lacquer Pellet with Phoenix and Fish
Source: Hubei Provincial Museum



Changsha Mawangdui Palau Painting of Arowana Fish
Source: Harvested fishing and hunting bricks



Tang and Song Dynasty Fish Decoration Ceramics
Source: https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/_biz2024.6

The above images demonstrate (Table 3): firstly, the visualization of the Haihun Marquis State and the regional cultures of Shu and Chu within the Yangtze River basin, influenced by their natural environment, have standardized the symbolic cultural narrative of fish patterns. This has constructed a unified model of fish culture symbols shared between Haihun Marquis State and the Yangtze River basin region. Secondly, from the fish culture model, propagated north and south along the Yangtze

River, it formed the image paradigm of Chinese ceramics, establishing one of the origins for narrative cultural symbols of auspicious meanings in folk art.

3.2.4 Featherman Image Comparison

The ancient images narrative of the "Heaven-Man" embodies a paradigm of representative symbolization, constructed by the "Feathered Man" and "Flying Immortal," collectively forming the idealized spiritual world of "Heaven" in the Haihun Marquis State. The Feathered Man cultural narrative within the images of the Feathered Man persists from ancient times to subsequent generations, becoming a social spiritual value concept of "Unity of man and nature" consistent with local folklore and aristocratic Feathered Man cultural narratives across the Yangtze River basin. The Feathered Man serves as a symbolic and representative cultural icon of "Heaven and Man Unified," forming a significant ideological artistic cultural narrative in the artifacts of Haihun Marquis of the Western Han Dynasty. The textual narrative concept formed by the artistic representation of the "Heaven-Man" images has continuously influenced the inheritance and dissemination of spiritual thought and consciousness in ancient society. From the images of artifacts in the Yangtze region, we can discern the cultural narrative of "Heaven and Man Unified," where the Heaven-Man symbol became the spiritual transmission of ancient Chinese fatalism and laid the foundation of traditional Chinese culture. We analyze the textual and narrative semantic similarities and differences of "Heaven-Man" culture from the following case studies.

These signs fully demonstrate that the images of feathered figures existed within the daily living environment of people at that time. Feathered figures not only existed within the objective reality but also extended into the temporal and spatial system of the afterlife. In various forms of artistic representation such as objects, clothing, sculptures, and other stylized arts, feathered figures often appeared alongside celestial gods like the Heavenly Emperor, Thunder Lords, Rain Masters, Wind Masters, and the Mother of Lightning, collectively forming a mysterious and solemn celestial realm. The idealized narratives of feathered figure motifs serve as exemplars of human reverence for the divine and adherence to the natural order of the universe, showcasing qualities that transcend earthly concerns and approach the principles of heaven. These images not only bear witness to the social life and religious beliefs of the time but also serve as a demonstration of the cultural visualization of human historical studies. Below is a chart to analyze the feathered figure cultural phenomenon familiar in ancient China along the Yangtze River, confirming the identity of images and artistic symbols in the royal culture of Haihun State and local folk cultures with the cosmological doctrine of "Heavenly Humans."



Image of a “feathered man” on a lacquer object from the Haihun Marquis State
Image

Source : Haihun Marquis State Site Museum



Feathered Man in
Huashan Rock
Painting,
Ningming County,
Guangxi, China
Source: Yang Xin,
Ban Zonghua, Wu
Hong, etc.: Three
Thousand Years of
Chinese Painting,
Foreign Languages
Publishing House,
1997 edition



Shang Dynasty
Jade Sculpture
Feathered Man
Source : Jiangxi
Provincial Museum



Lacquered Shield
of the Warring
States Feathered
Men of Jiangsu
Source: Jiangsu
Yizheng Museum



Feathered Man in
Lacquered Coffin
from Zenghouyi
Tomb, Warring States
Period
Source: Hubei
Provincial Museum



Hubei Warring
States
Lacquerware
Phoenix and Bird
Feathered Man
Source: Hubei
Jingzhou Museum



Feathered Man on
Palm Painting at
Mawangdui,
Changsha, Hunan
Province
Source: Hunan
Provincial Museum



Eastern Han
Dynasty,
Sichuan, Pixian
County,
Xinsheng
Township,
Painted Stone
Feathered Man
Source:



Eastern Han Dynasty
Picture Brick
Feathered Man
(Pengzhou, Sichuan)
Source: Sichuan
Provincial Museum



Han Yu Bottle
Feathered Man

Source:

<https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/v123Wo6osodEnX2GxMaRSA.2024.10>



Tang Dynasty
Bronze Mirror
Feathered Man

Source:

<https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/v123Wo6osodEnX2GxMaRSA.2024.10>



Yuan Dynasty
Dunhuang
Mogao Cave
Mural Flying Sky
Patterns

Source : Guo

Lianfu Ding Tao,
Dictionary of
Chinese Patterns.

Tianjin

Education Press,
January 1998 P5



Feathered figure from
a cliff tomb in Xinjin,
Sichuan (Han
Dynasty)

Source: Sichuan
Provincial Museum

Table 4 The uniformity evident in the above images of feathered figures indicates that various regions within the Yangtze River basin were similarly influenced by fatalistic spiritual beliefs (Table 4). The concept of "Unity of man and nature" took shape in Western Han society as a cosmological view encompassing heaven, earth, and humanity, evolving into a thematic narrative in local artisanal cultures. This "mandate of Heaven" ideology became a spiritual cornerstone of traditional Chinese culture and a textual theme in artisanal and material cultures.

3.3 The construction of the "Unity of man and nature" cultural symbol in the images of artifacts from the Haihun Marquis State

The construction of the cultural symbol theory of "unity of heaven and humanity" in the images of the Western Han Dynasty Haihun Marquisate is as follows: First, it inherits the historical and cultural heritage of pre-Qin China, a continuous ancient "heaven and humanity" spiritual culture. Second, under the Han Dynasty's reverence for Confucianism, Dong Zhongshu introduced the theory of Yin-Yang and Five Elements' cosmic resonance into Confucianism, continuing the philosophical concept of "unity of heaven and humanity" from the pre-Qin period. The "Three Bonds and Five Constants" formed the primary spiritual ideology of Western Han society. Third, the spiritual consciousness of "unity of heaven and humanity" in the Western Han Dynasty became a spiritual value concept for successive generations of Chinese society after the Han Dynasty. It merged with Buddhism, which began in the Eastern Han and prospered in the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties, constructing the connotation of Chinese image historiography, aesthetic concepts, Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, social and cultural spiritual philosophy, and national customs and folk culture for thousands of years. It continued the traditional ideological concepts and spiritual pursuits of ancient Chinese people for thousands of years. Its inheritance and dissemination of the "heaven and humanity view" have always been in the forms of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, influencing contemporary society, and becoming the spiritual values of "homogenization" in Chinese traditional culture.

In recent years, domestically, there has been the introduction of the "Fourfold Evidence Method" (based on transmitted historical records, unearthed documents, anthropological oral and intangible cultural heritage, archaeological artifacts, and images) to explore the dissemination and evolution of images based on cultural symbolic media. (Ye Shuxian. "Narratives of Objects: The Fourfold Evidence Method in Exploring the Origins of Chinese Civilization." The artistic representations of cultural symbols of Confucian ethics in the artifacts of the Marquis of Haihun Principality illustrate its vitality in the transmission of Chinese traditional cultural society over generations. The homogenization of the Marquis of Haihun Principality's images and the "Heaven and Man Unified" symbolic culture in traditional Chinese images cannot be explained without considering the intrinsic structural relationships within the symbolic cultural perspective of ethical spiritual culture in image art and the value of its historical transmission. In the multidimensional field of symbol studies of the ethical culture of the Marquis of Haihun Principality's artifact image art, it is examined from the perspective of structuralism to empirically prove the material and non-material cultural systems of image art in the material culture and non-material culture systems of artifact image art under the artisan culture of successive Han societies in China. It explores the ethical cultural symbolic core text of the image art of "Heaven and Man Unified" in Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism and the dominant concept of cultural symbol studies in multiple fields. Image art possesses strong ideological cultural symbols and is the carrier of the multidisciplinary anthropology of material and spiritual worlds in social humanities disciplines.

The narrative context of the Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist "Unity of Man and Nature" theory holds significant academic and cultural semiotic value in the context of indigenous internationalism. The artistic images of artifacts from the Haihun Marquis state serves as a medium for Confucian ethical traditional culture, emphasizing "illustrating the Dao" as a means to promote virtue in social thought. Liu He, the Haihun Marquis, articulated his spiritual aspirations based on Confucian ideals such as "the scholar aims for the Dao" (Analects of Confucius, Li Ren), aligning with Confucius' self-description: "Aspire to the Dao, base oneself in virtue, depend on humanity, and engage in the arts" (Analects of Confucius, Shu Er). Liu He even prioritized "heavenly Dao" over temporal power, following Confucius' dictum: "In the morning, hear the Dao; in the evening, die content" (Analects of Confucius, Li Ren). This perspective provided Liu He's personal interpretation from marquis to emperor and back, reflecting the Confucian ethos of governance emphasizing Dao over political authority.

Various Confucian schools of thought uphold Daoist teachings of the sages, all prioritizing "Dao lineage" over "political lineage" for societal governance and the assessment of power. Hence, the cultural model encoding the relationships of "benevolence," "ruler," and "altar" within Confucian ethics underscores the spiritual core of ancient Chinese societal ethics and cultural semiotics. An analysis across multiple domains within structuralism can thereby capture three hierarchical levels of qualitative narrative contexts, thus constructing a practical semiotics of ritual ethics and cultural symbols :

First layer of ethical cultural encoding: Ren and Dao, namely Confucianism's values of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and sincerity, as articulated by Confucius: "Establishing proper positions under heaven, and practicing the great

Dao of the world," involving the dissemination of Han Dynasty Confucian philosophical and aesthetic cultures.

Second layer of encoding: Jun De, referring to the centralized governance system's embodiment of "virtuous rule." Xunzi advocated "skillfully organizing governance over people" as the way of rulership, with benevolence and propriety as the essence of governance, elucidating political, cultural, economic, folk, and social aspects of the Han Dynasty's reverence for Confucianism.

Third layer of ethical cultural symbols: Social folklore, or sociological perspective, based on Laozi's notion: "Man follows the Earth, the Earth follows Heaven, Heaven follows the Dao, and the Dao follows Nature," which signifies natural laws. This perspective became a Confucian belief in coexistence of humans and society, worshipping the way of nature and the cosmos. It shaped Han Dynasty cultural transmissions including rituals, folk customs, and creative culture.

Summary

This chapter involves the evolution and qualitative process of cultural variables across five historical periods:

Firstly, in primitive society, ancient humans progressed from celestial worship to the reverence of nature, constructing a cultural semiotics of totem worship and the "unity of heaven and humanity".

Secondly, in the slave societies of Xia, Shang, and Zhou, ancient humans employed ritual and music to fulfill the rituals of gods and ancestors, establishing a cultural semiotics of "heaven-bestowed royal authority" under ritual systems and state institutions.

Thirdly, during the Spring and Autumn periods and Warring States period, advocates emerged for the concept of "heaven and earth coexist with me, and all things are one with me", underpinning a cultural semiotics of "unity of divine authority" in ritual, music, and institutionalized cultures. Confucius advocated for "ren" (benevolence) and "li" (ritual), promoting a culture of benevolence and ritual that became the cornerstone of imperial governance and the Confucian cultural semiotics, solidifying the intrinsic qualities of Chinese culture.

Fourthly, during the Qin and Han dynasties, Dong Zhongshu advocated for "interaction between humans and heaven", using celestial phenomena to predict the virtuous rule of emperors, forming a Confucian cultural semiotics of familial and national cultural views, and the Confucian rites and laws. From the Eastern Han to the Wei, Jin, Southern, and Northern Dynasties, Buddhism rose, and its highest realm was "heavenly State", which changed the social and spiritual orientations of Confucianism, leading to a unified ancient society where Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism were the leading spiritual values.

Fifthly, during the Sui and Tang dynasties, Taoism revered Laozi as the ancient king, advocating for "yin-yang and the five elements" and "unity of heaven and humanity", forming a guiding spiritual orientation of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism in Chinese ancient history from the Sui and Tang dynasties to the Ming and Qing dynasties.

The history of ethical cultural semiotics in Chinese art images emphasizes the cultural concept of "Unity of man and nature" The cultural exposition of "Dao" (Way) and "De" (Virtue) in Laozi's Tao Te Ching illustrates that Dao represents the cosmic order, while De embodies its cultural manifestation, emphasizing the need for

profound insight. Dong Zhongshu's advocacy of governing based on celestial phenomena and the metaphysical discussions of Buddhism during the Wei-Jin period all demonstrate the formation of the cultural symbol of "Unity of Man and Nature." This influence extends to the ethical cultural semiotics of Chinese art images, where the principle "objects carry the Dao" serves as the narrative pathway for cultural semiotics.

The most crucial reason why the dissemination of artifact images can transcend time and space and break through the geographic limitations of the South and the North is the transmission and dissemination of culture. They are characterized by homology, continuity and consistency. From the Xia, Shang, and Zhou ritual and music culture to the Confucian ethics of benevolence and propriety in the Spring and Autumn period and Warring States period, and the legalism emphasized by Xunzi, which evolved into the ethical and cultural symbolism of the Confucianism in Western Han Dynasty, thus forming representative cultural symbols of Chinese social politics. The symbolism of the Haihun Marquis State includes Western Han social politics, agricultural economy, natural ecology, folklore, royal culture, etc., enriching the cultural semiotics of conceptual art in China, embodying the core values of traditional Chinese ethical culture. Historical studies of Haihun Marquis State symbolism reveal that the Han Dynasty's artistic images of Haihun Marquisate artifacts has a historical position in the continuity of Chinese cultural semiotics from pre-Qin to the Ming and Qing dynasties, transitioning from ancient Chinese society's craftsmanship of artifacts in sacrificial culture to historical studies, philosophy, sociology, aesthetics, communication studies, and other social fields, spaces, and layers of cultural narrative paradigms, involving various sectors of society and forming a cultural heritage value with anthropological and historical significance. Through the exploration above, it can be concluded that :

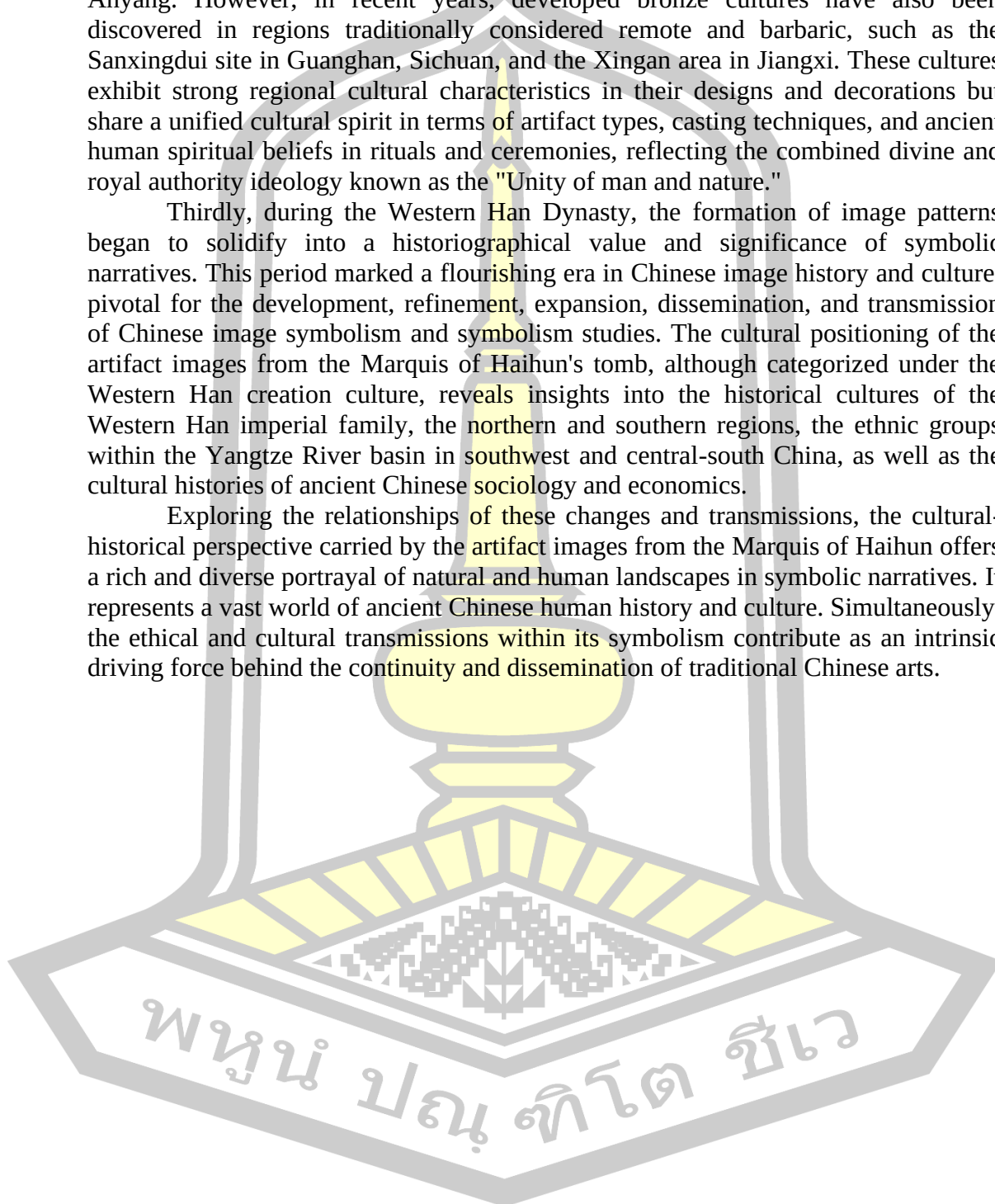
Firstly, image art serves politics, reflecting political consciousness, and the most distinctive artistic forms of each era invariably mirror social politics and spirituality. This principle is evident in other ancient civilizations worldwide, such as ancient Egypt's temple carvings and sphinxes, which are symbols of divine and royal authority narratives. However, their cultures flourished in specific periods without forming a continuous political system. In contrast, China's "Unity of man and nature" culture, represented since the Xia and Shang periods by ritual and hierarchical systems reflecting slave society's divine authority concepts and social hierarchies, persisted through Zhou rituals and Confucianism. This ideology retained its sacred and supreme status within imperial authority until the Ming and Qing dynasties. Despite decline from the Western Zhou to the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, the royal images of feudal society, symbolized by dragon and phoenix motifs, displayed vigorous vitality from Qin and Han through to Ming and Qing times, spanning millennia and influencing various ethnic minorities throughout dynastic rule. It became a hallmark symbol narrative of royal and folk cultures.

Secondly, the cultural art of image symbolism in China exhibits both diversity and unity. China, with its vast territory and diverse ethnic groups, boasts varying histories, societies, economies, and cultures across different regions, resulting in cultural and artistic diversity. Yet, due to the inclusive nature characteristic of the Chinese nation, there has been extensive and frequent exchange and integration of cultural arts between northern and southern regions as well as among various ethnic

groups. Artifacts often reflect a unified cultural spirit. For instance, during the Shang Dynasty, bronze culture flourished, with extensive bronze artifact groups predominantly found in the central plains region centered around the Shang capital at Anyang. However, in recent years, developed bronze cultures have also been discovered in regions traditionally considered remote and barbaric, such as the Sanxingdui site in Guanghan, Sichuan, and the Xingan area in Jiangxi. These cultures exhibit strong regional cultural characteristics in their designs and decorations but share a unified cultural spirit in terms of artifact types, casting techniques, and ancient human spiritual beliefs in rituals and ceremonies, reflecting the combined divine and royal authority ideology known as the "Unity of man and nature."

Thirdly, during the Western Han Dynasty, the formation of image patterns began to solidify into a historiographical value and significance of symbolic narratives. This period marked a flourishing era in Chinese image history and culture, pivotal for the development, refinement, expansion, dissemination, and transmission of Chinese image symbolism and symbolism studies. The cultural positioning of the artifact images from the Marquis of Haihun's tomb, although categorized under the Western Han creation culture, reveals insights into the historical cultures of the Western Han imperial family, the northern and southern regions, the ethnic groups within the Yangtze River basin in southwest and central-south China, as well as the cultural histories of ancient Chinese sociology and economics.

Exploring the relationships of these changes and transmissions, the cultural-historical perspective carried by the artifact images from the Marquis of Haihun offers a rich and diverse portrayal of natural and human landscapes in symbolic narratives. It represents a vast world of ancient Chinese human history and culture. Simultaneously, the ethical and cultural transmissions within its symbolism contribute as an intrinsic driving force behind the continuity and dissemination of traditional Chinese arts.



CHAPTER III

The narrative of Confucian ethical cultural symbols in the images of artifacts from the Haihun Marquis State

Introduction

This chapter discusses the influence of philosophical thought in Confucianism on Chinese society during the Han dynasty through three sections. The first part examines the emergence of cultural symbols related to Confucian ethical values as depicted in artifacts from the State of Haihun marquis. The second part explores the interactive narrative between Confucian culture in the Haihun Marquis State and the traditional ethical culture of local customs along the Yangtze River. The third part investigates how the consensus-based ethical culture in the images of the Haihun Marquis State is inherited within the discourse system of "Confucian ethics" in the Western Han dynasty. The aim is to construct, narrate, and propagate the philosophical cultural symbols of "Confucian ethics" in the Western Han dynasty, demonstrating how Confucian philosophical culture served as a meta-language for aesthetics, sociology, and communication and its impact on the construction and narrative of ethical cultural symbols in ancient China.

Part 1: The emergence of Confucian ethical cultural symbols in the images of artifacts from the Haihun Marquis State

1.1 The Philosophical and Cultural Background of Confucian "Ren" and "Li" in the Western Han Dynasty

The origins of Chinese philosophical thought can be traced back to the prehistoric "Heaven and Man" concept of ancient times. This philosophical system was initially closely tied to primitive totemic religions. As society evolved, ancient humans gradually began to emphasize rational inquiry in their social practices, transforming the notion of "divine authority bestowed by Heaven" into a culture of sacrifices, rituals, and etiquette that governed social order. During the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties, the theory of the Five Elements regarded metal, wood, water, fire, and earth as fundamental elements that mutually constrained each other within Heaven, Earth, and the natural world. Meanwhile, the concepts of Yin and Yang and the hexagrams in the "I Ching"⁴ symbolized the dialectical relationships among Heaven, Earth, thunder, water, fire, and mountains, reflecting a primitive dialectical worldview.

During the Spring and Autumn period, the concept of "Heaven and Man" faced challenges from atheistic perspectives. Confucius positioned "ren" (benevolence) as a core understanding of society, Heaven, nature, and the world, redefining the traditional notion of divine authority. He framed the interaction between "Heaven's Way" and "Humanity's Way," advocating for impartiality and moderation in actions,

⁴ I Ching: The one of the classic texts of Chinese literature, was originally used by ancient Chinese diviners to predict future fortunes and misfortunes. Since the Han Dynasty, it has been revered as one of the "Five Classics." The text employs a systematic set of symbols to describe the changes in things, reflecting the philosophical and cosmological views of classical Chinese culture.

and promoting a straightforward dialectical materialism through a balanced comparison of opposing views.

Following this, Mencius argued that to attain supreme authority and win the support of the people, one must earn their recognition; thus, through benevolence and righteousness, one can gain the world. In contrast, Xunzi believed that Heaven and the natural world operate according to their own laws, independent of human will. Mozi advocated that speech and behavior should adhere to the norms of propriety, addressing the ideas of consistency and authenticity within cultural standards.

The early Confucian sages emphasized the importance of rituals and the debate over names and realities, systematically analyzing these categories to construct an ethical cultural symbol system closely related to the dialectical relationships among nature, society, and the universe. Thus, the Confucian concept of "ren" and "li" (ritual propriety) in the Western Han Dynasty formed a complex symbol system that expresses and maintains social order through ethics and rituals.

Confucius's "ren" serves as a central symbol, representing love and respect in interpersonal relationships, while "li" concretely embodies these moral principles, regulating behavior and social interactions. The Confucian symbol system encompasses personal moral cultivation and extends to state governance and social structure, shaping and sustaining societal stability and harmony through the dynamic interplay of these symbols.

Barthes' theory of semiotics emphasizes the multiple meanings of cultural symbols and the dynamic nature of cultural narratives. Within this framework, the concepts of "ren" (benevolence) and "li" (ritual propriety) in Confucian culture can be viewed as cultural symbols that not only embody ethical norms but also reflect deeper meanings related to social order and cosmology. This exploration delves into the relationships among nature, humanity, and society, framing them as dialectical connections that involve a systematic significance between the organic categories of philosophical thought.

The early sages analyzed these key conceptual categories to grasp their intrinsic philosophical interpretations, allowing the symbols within Confucian philosophy to be continuously reinterpreted and reconstructed across different historical periods and social practices. This process resulted in a dynamic cultural narrative system. This system embodies the core ideas of ancient China in aesthetics, sociology, and communication studies. Although these modern disciplines did not exist in antiquity, the philosophical reflections of Confucian thought provided a profound cultural foundation and a semiotic core for these fields. Consequently, a systematic cultural symbol core and philosophical concepts of narrative have emerged, establishing a deep-rooted system of meaning.

1.2 The philosophical paradigm of the craftsmanship in creating Confucian ethical cultural semiotics during the Western Han Dynasty

The Confucian teachings of benevolence and ritual in the Western Han Dynasty were derived from Mencius's inheritance of Confucius's doctrine, historically referred to as the "Way of Confucius and Mencius." During this period, Dong Zhongshu reencoded the core ideas of benevolent governance and the doctrine of the means from Confucius and Mencius into a unified semiotic system, using the cosmological framework of yin-yang and the Five Elements to illustrate the "correspondence between Heaven and Man."

The Confucian principles of the "Three cardinal principles and five constant principles,"⁵ along with the concepts of "Heaven's Way" and "Humanity's Way," served as ethical guidelines that underpinned social order and political legitimacy. For instance, the Han Dynasty's "exclusive promotion of Confucianism" emphasized the idea of benevolent governance, drawing on the interrelated relationship between Heaven's Way and the kingly way, as well as the unity of nature and humanity. This reflects the philosophical understanding in Confucianism that seeks to align one's "human way" with "Heaven's way," suggesting that individuals should integrate their understanding of natural laws into their lives.

Every cultural practice can be seen as a symbolic act, with meanings that extend far beyond their superficial functions. For example, in the "Analects: On Rites," the phrase "Those who engage in rites align with the timing of Heaven, are grounded in the seasons of Earth, honor the spirits, and resonate with human hearts" illustrates the multilayered symbolic significance of "ren" (benevolence) and "li" (ritual) in Confucian culture. Culture serves as a cognitive medium through which the moral standards of the people are understood, using the symbol system of benevolence and ritual to design concepts like "Heaven-bestowed imperial authority" and the "Three cardinal principles and five constant principles."

This Confucian ethical spirit elevates the design of artifacts to embody the principles of self-cultivation, family management, and state governance. The philosophical spirit of "ren" and "li" manifests in a design that harmonizes with the timing of Heaven and is grounded in the conditions of Earth, encapsulating the concept of "Utensils to carry the Dao."

Thus, the spirit of Confucian thought influenced the cultural production of artifacts in Western Han society. The images of these artifacts was imbued with the narrative of Confucian doctrine, emphasizing that "where there is an image, there must be meaning, and where there is meaning, it must lead to the Way." The narrative semantics of the artifacts from the Haihun Marquis's State carry the spiritual values of Western Han Confucian culture precisely because the crafting of these artifacts adhered to the Confucian cultural norms established by the imperial authority. The themes and narrative content of the artifacts must follow the formalized patterns of social Confucian ethics, serving as the "Meaning" and "Dao"⁶ of the artistic images. Through this, one can uncover the historical remnants of Confucian culture and the spiritual values of benevolence and ritual within the artistic images of artwork production in the Western Han Dynasty.

In the bamboo slips unearthed from the Haihun Marquis's State, over 600 slips of the "Classic of Filial Piety" were found, documenting the Confucian concepts of "filial piety," "parental respect," and "brotherhood," primarily recorded in a question-and-answer format that reflects Confucian spiritual thought. This collection represents one of the richest finds of bamboo slips in China. Additionally, 500 slips of Confucius's "Analects" were discovered, comprising one-third of the current text. The

⁵ Three cardinal principles: Refer to the special moral relationships between ruler and subject, father and son, and husband and wife.

The five constant principles: Its benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trust—serve as behavioral guidelines for regulating and standardizing interpersonal relationships among rulers and subjects, fathers and sons, brothers, husbands and wives, and friends.

⁶ Dao: Moral sentiment, The values of a certain society or class (lifestyle).

"Book of Songs" slips, dating from the Western Han period, contain 305 poems, along with 300 slips of the "Book of Rites," mostly individual pieces from Emperor Xuan's reign. There are also 200 slips of the "Spring and Autumn Annals" and over 180 slips of "Divination." These texts convey the core values of Confucian thought and the guiding principles of social practice through symbolic narratives, offering profound insights into the concepts of "Tao" and "Virtue" and possessing significant value for exploring the rich heritage of Confucian culture.

From the perspective of Roland Barthes' cultural semiotics, we can see that Confucianism in the Western Han Dynasty was not only a system of philosophy and moral education but also a complex web of symbols. This system disseminated and practiced various cultural symbols—such as ritual vessels, texts, and institutions—within society. (Barthes, R., & Rifat, S., 1998)

In the bamboo slips of the "Classic of Filial Piety,"⁷ (Figure 34) there are descriptions of five disputatious ministers, suggesting that the imperial power and governance would not be lost as long as they adhered to the principles of benevolence and ritual, indicating that governance based on these principles does not shy away from contentious ministers. The slips of the "Book of Rites" emphasize the importance of respecting one's superiors and caring for one's loved ones, which leads to a sense of righteousness akin to the value of life itself. Additionally, the slips of the "Analects" include the saying, "The wise find joy in water, while the benevolent find joy in mountains." The artifacts from the Haihun Marquis's State embody this cultural symbol system. They transform the abstract ethical concepts of Confucian doctrine into tangible cultural practices through visual and textual representations, effectively bridging philosophical ideas with everyday life.

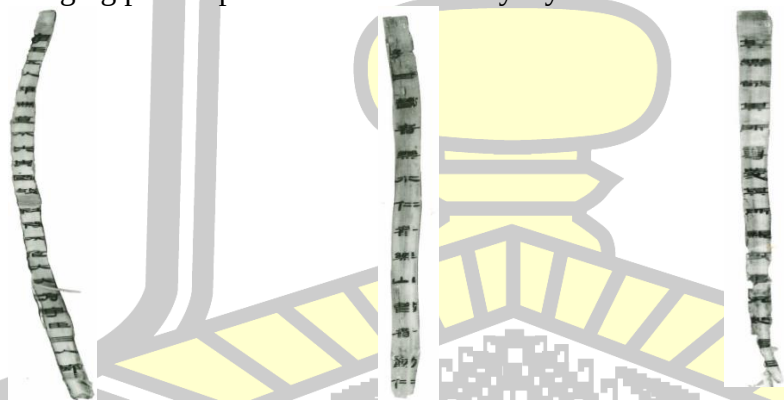


Figure 28: Bamboo slips unearthed from Haihun Marquis state
Source: Haihun Marquis state Museum

These symbolic systems not only played a role in regulation and education within contemporary society but also became important carriers of Confucian thought in subsequent cultural transmission. Consequently, although the artifacts and bamboo slips from the Western Han dynasty's State of Haihun Marquis were geographically distant from the imperial capital, they nonetheless reflect the values of a royal member who embraced the Confucian principles of "benevolence and propriety" as societal ideals. This reverence for the relationship between "ruler and subject" and the

⁷ Classic of Filial Piety: It is a book that teaches the Confucian principle of filial piety, with filial piety as its core, elaborating on Confucian ethical and moral thought. The entire text contains over 1,800 characters, making it the shortest among the Thirteen Classics, yet it remains a distinct scripture in its own right.

path of "benevolence and propriety" underscores the significance of the "Three cardinal principles and five constant principles" in the permeation of the Western Han dynasty's authority and its various societal realms. The design principle of "utilizing objects to convey moral teachings" not only demonstrates respect for Confucian thought but also serves as the materialization of cultural symbols.

This influences the culture of craftsmanship, as the images and inscriptions found in Western Han artifacts communicate norms of social ethics and morality through their formal and content-related interplay. It is evident that in the craftsmanship of Western Han artifacts, "images" and "meaning" are interconnected; they may exist independently or coexist, with one often serving as the primary focus of narrative expression. Whether textual or visual, both mediums adhere to a structured order of language and individual expression within the process of human symbolization, fully showcasing dialectical thinking. This transformation becomes a materialization of "Utensils to carry the Tao" or the spirit of the Tao itself. Furthermore, the semiotics of Confucian culture emerged as a rich narrative form within the creative culture of Western Han society, reflecting the integration and continuity of cultural symbols on both material and spiritual levels.

1.3 The narrative of Confucian ethical cultural symbols in the artifacts of the Haihun Marquis State

Symbols serve to carry meaning; there are no symbols without meaning, nor is there meaning that requires no symbolic representation. Any meaning must be communicated through symbols, and culture is understood as a collection of related symbolic activities within a society. The Confucian culture of benevolence and propriety during the Western Han dynasty distinguished hierarchical orders through the symbolic activities of ritual and rank. Liu He, the Marquis of Haihun, is a historical figure with both royal and marquis status, whose image is often debated in historical texts. Although he reportedly held the title of emperor for a brief 27 days, he was deposed due to misconduct, an event that appears particularly intense and brutal in the historical narrative of power struggles during the Western Han dynasty. However, historical records also note that Liu He defended himself by quoting passages from the "Book of Filial Piety" at the time of his deposition, suggesting he was not as frivolous or unlearned as described in the texts. In fact, this reveals that Liu He was well-versed in Confucian classics and held Confucian teachings in high regard.

From the archaeological finds of bamboo slips, ritual music instruments, and medical tools in the Haihun Marquis State, it can be inferred that Liu He was not the tyrannical ruler portrayed in history. The northern state of Lu (present-day Shandong Province) is known as the birthplace of Confucius and was also where Liu He lived. The influence of Confucian culture on Liu He's character and sentiments is evident. As a member of the royal family and a marquis, he would have been expected to embody Confucian virtues, adhering to the teachings of Confucius. Therefore, the critical remarks made by Huo Guang regarding Liu He should be seen as a form of reproach.

The lacquered screen and dressing mirror unearthed from Liu He's tomb (Figure 35), featuring images of Confucius, suggest that Liu He held a life philosophy shaped by the Confucian doctrine of "benevolence and propriety." The artwork on the mirror—depicting the East Prince, the West Queen Mother, the Four Symbols (Azure

Dragon, White Tiger, Vermilion Bird, Black Tortoise), and cranes—shifts from expression to interpretation, reflecting Liu He's multifaceted personal cultivation and spiritual aspirations. This multifaceted significance of cultural symbols embodies both personal belief and an attempt to seek harmony within the social culture.

The renowned art historian Wu Hong suggests that by at least the first century, the practice of depicting historical figures on screens had already been established. This artistic form serves not only as a visual delight but also as a medium for cultural transmission, intertwining the stories of historical figures with conceptual culture. Material culture conveys meanings related to social norms and moral education. In the use of screens, the design of their placement around seating areas or beds transforms the images from mere decoration into always-visible educational tools. This layout enhances the effectiveness of communicating the stories of historical figures, allowing viewers to engage repeatedly with these instructive themes in their daily lives, thereby deepening the social internalization of cultural symbols. This object, a dressing mirror and screen placed in front of Liu He's bed over 2,000 years ago, has depictions of Confucius, Yan Hui, and inscriptions narrating Confucius's life on its back panel. Roland Barthes emphasizes how cultural symbols influence our interpretation of cultural phenomena through their "readability" and "writing." Analyzing the case of the Marquis of Haihun, we can see that ancient allegories often used mirrors as a means of self-examination and reflection on one's behavior. Confucius said, "Choose the good and follow it; correct the bad." The culture of benevolence and propriety is the essence of Confucian thought. The images of Confucius on the dressing mirror appear to communicate that the collapse of ritual and music culture during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods resulted from a loss of benevolence and propriety, leading to social turmoil. Confucius's idea of "self-discipline and return to ritual" is grounded in benevolence and serves as a guiding principle for conduct, applicable from rulers and ministers to commoners.

Thus, Confucian thoughts on benevolence and propriety became Liu He's guiding principles in life, reflecting the royal family's adherence to Confucianism. The teachings of ancient sages became the "grammar rules" for personal cultivation and behavior standards, illustrating the materialization of Confucian thought within the political norms and moral systems of the Chinese nation. This narrative, constructed through symbolic texts, allows us to reflect on the world of meaning. Through the specific images and textual expression of artifacts, a profound cultural value system and spiritual pursuit are conveyed, revealing Liu He's complex identity and inner world as both a member of the royal family and a scholar. As shown in Figure 36.

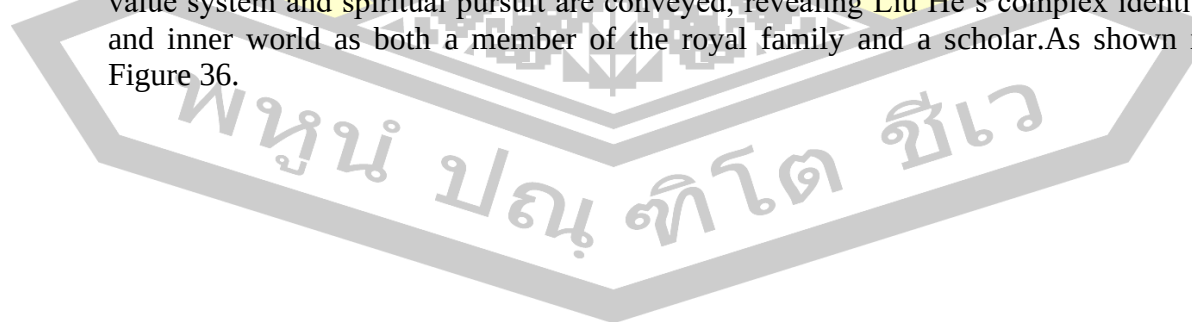




Figure 29 Confucius' disciple's lacquered mirror

Source: Haihun Marquis state Museum

In ancient image art, the narrative that combines images with text reconstructs a new narrative text by merging visuals with meaning. This approach reflects the conceptual culture of image art more perfectly, highlighting the guiding role of social normative spirits in shaping human thought. Consequently, the narrative of conceptual cultural symbols aligns with and embodies a cultural value system that resonates with societal ideologies and universal principles. This elevates a more complete spiritual conception and significance of cultural symbols. The narrative of image art that reflects Confucian spiritual concepts constructs a symbolic narrative system involving the interplay of person, image, and Dao. This is not merely a simple combination of images and text, but rather a reconstruction of cultural meaning that forms a new narrative text. It aims to convey more complex and multi-layered cultural information through the complementarity of visuals and text. The transition from marquis to emperor in the case of the Marquis of Haihun reflects political changes without altering the Western Han's commitment to "exclusive respect for Confucianism." This undoubtedly positions Confucius' teachings as a guiding principle for governance. The Marquis understood that effective governance lies in leading by example, cultivating oneself, and following the path of "benevolence." The philosophical dialectic presented in the "Doctrine of the Mean" illustrates the relationship between governing society with a benevolent heart. During the Spring and Autumn periods, Confucius stated, "If a person is not benevolent, what use is ritual? If a person is not benevolent, what use is music?" In the "Analects," Confucius defended the culture of ritual and music, integrating benevolence into the system of rites. This transformation established a conceptual system of ritual culture imbued with benevolence, where the form of rites is converted into the essence of benevolence, serving as the core application of social spiritual culture.

Dong Zhongshu, a prominent Confucian scholar of the Western Han Dynasty, proposed the policy of "suppressing the hundred schools of thought" to meet the political needs of a unified state. He sought to integrate Confucian "moral governance" with Legalist "rule of law," establishing the principles of "Three cardinal principles and five constant principles" as moral and social order guidelines. This approach was grounded in the mandate of heaven and the concept of "heaven and humanity responding," aiming to regulate and constrain power within society, transforming into a normative spiritual ideology. Dong's policy of "suppressing the

hundred schools, exclusively venerating Confucianism" was both a political strategy and a cultural symbol repositioning, placing the ideas of benevolence and ritual at the core of national governance.

The content and expression of symbols are mutually reinforcing. The implementation of this policy signified the communication of the spirit of ritual through the symbol of benevolence, as the essence of ritual is not always present and requires various artifacts and images for symbolic expression. Thus, the principles of "Three cardinal principles and five constant principles" and "rule of law," as interpreted through rituals, became the regulations of social culture.

Swiss philosopher Ferdinand de Saussure pointed out that symbolic rituals, ceremonial forms, and language are all systems of signs that express ideas. In the context of the Western Han's Haihun Marquis, the image of Confucius reflects a narrative rooted in the cultural symbol of "benevolence and ritual." The pre-Qin ritual and music culture was not an empty set of ceremonies, but rather an evolving system of ritual culture, leading to a transformation in cultural narratives.

Confucius infused the concept of benevolence into the culture of ritual and music, advocating for the idea of "restraining oneself and returning to the rites as a form of benevolence." He emphasized the importance of personal inner cultivation. In the "Analects," Confucius states, "Do not look at what is not ritual, do not listen to what is not ritual, do not speak what is not ritual, and do not move without ritual." This reflects the transformation of the external societal rituals of the pre-Qin era into a normative framework for inner spiritual and moral cultivation during the Western Han period.

This internalized culture of benevolence and ritual transforms the narrative content of ritual and music into a cultural semiotic theory centered on the spirit of benevolence. It forms the essential structural framework of ancient Chinese ethical cultural semiotics. The pre-Qin ritual and music culture was not merely an external manifestation of rites and laws; the infusion of benevolence granted it deeper representational significance. The "collapse of rites and music" during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods stemmed from the absence of benevolence as the core of ritual culture. Focusing solely on the external aspects of royal political rituals without considering the internal cultural significance of benevolence can lead to cultural decay.

Therefore, it is essential to inject the spirit of Confucian benevolence into the semantic narratives of cultural symbols and social values to revitalize the ritual culture of that era. The philosophical reflections and teachings of early Western Han thinkers like Lu Jia, Jia Yi, and Confucius were embraced by the Han dynasty's royal family as guiding principles for governance. Dong Zhongshu advocated for the adoption of the "exclusive veneration of Confucianism"⁸ policy by the Han dynasty, thereby establishing a system of rites. This indicates that while ritual culture represents external forms, benevolence serves as its internal core. Although ancient Chinese political systems underwent social changes, the culture of benevolence from Confucius and Mencius has been transmitted for millennia, forming the foundation of conceptual cultural semiotics in traditional Chinese image art.

⁸ Exclusive veneration of Confucianism: This refers to the Western Han Emperor Wu accepting Dong Zhongshu's advice to elevate Confucianism as the state ideology and suppress other philosophical schools. This policy aimed to unify thought and strengthen the authority of the Confucian moral framework in governance.

During the Wei, Jin, and Southern and Northern Dynasties, Confucianism merged with Buddhism and Daoism, resulting in a cultural synthesis known as Confucian-Buddhist-Daoist culture, which dominated the trajectory of traditional Chinese culture. Each of these cultural traditions employed the Confucian concept of benevolence and ritual as a spiritual symbolic system, forming the traditional spiritual and cultural core values of Chinese society throughout the ages. This integration also contributed to the historical and cultural significance of the conceptual semiotics of traditional Chinese art.

From the perspective of semiotics, symbols represent the institutionalized and standardized spiritual ideas of humanity, functioning within certain conventional frameworks. They thus become a form of cultural consensus, commonly referred to as social "ritual systems" and "laws." In a sense, the construction and narrative of traditional Confucian ethical cultural semiotics not only pertain to the spiritual orientations of imperial culture and folk culture but also reflect the dialectical relationship between the two.

Part 2: The narrative of Confucian ethical cultural symbols in the images of artifacts from the Haihun Marquis State, and the ethical cultural symbols of the northern and southern regions of the Yangtze River

2.1 The narrative of Confucian ethical cultural symbols in the northern regions of the Yangtze River

During the Western Han Dynasty, Confucianism was established as the dominant state ideology, a policy that had a profound impact on social life in both northern and southern regions, as well as in multi-ethnic areas. This framework regulated the folk spirits and cultural thoughts of various ethnic groups, shaping a cultural symbolic domain centered on the core values of benevolence and ritual. In the realm of folk images and art, allegory and expressiveness became the primary means of visual communication. The pursuit of auspiciousness, the symbolism of good fortune, and the avoidance of evil formed the core narrative of the semiotics of conceptual culture within the visual arts.

During the Han Dynasty, the Confucian doctrine of benevolence and ritual became the textual context for symbolic narratives. This was established through the "homogeneity" of the entire social system to determine meaning. This order of benevolence and ritual was not only prevalent in imperial culture but was also abundant in folk culture, where the "benevolence" cultural framework served as a social custom. As a result, the visual arts of the Western Han reflected the rich humanistic landscape of social realities and showcased the vibrant narratives of social ethical culture.

During this period, concepts such as loyalty, filial piety, benevolence, and righteousness became the core language of mainstream culture. These ideas not only inspired literary and artistic creation but also left valuable historical materials in the widely circulated phrases of "Three Bonds and Five Constants." The image stone culture of the Western Han provides precious resources for studying the conventions of social customs and political history of that time.

For instance, in the "Records of the Grand Historian: Biographies of Fan Sui and Cai Ze," (Figure36) a narrative depicted in Han image stone art illustrates the story of King Zhao of Wei sending Xu Jia to the State of Qi, with Fan Sui

accompanying him. Fan Sui, however, was suspected of leaking confidential information to Qi and was punished with broken ribs. In Fan Sui's moment of despair, Xu Jia felt compassion, disguised himself as a destitute person, and offered him clothing to reconcile past grievances. When Fan Sui next met Xu Jia, Xu Jia knelt and apologized, showcasing the virtues of benevolence and righteousness between ancient scholars. This images aims to highlight the social activities of Confucian culture, particularly the principles of "benevolence," "righteousness," "ritual," "wisdom," and "trust." The pinnacle of "benevolence" is expressed as "sage," representing the virtue of the wise. As shown in the figure 37.



Figure 30 Fan Sui and Xu Jia, excavated from the Tanghe Knitting Factory in Henan. Source: "Han Dynasty Image Stones," Wu Zengde, Beijing Cultural Relics Publishing House, June 1984, First Edition, p. 137.

The story of "The Ugliness of Wuyan" narrates the tale of a woman from the State of Qi who, due to her unattractive appearance, struggled to find a husband. (Figure 37) However, she boldly approached King Xuan of Qi, expressing her willingness to marry him. She elaborated on the various issues facing Qi and the potential causes of the state's decline, proposing corresponding reform strategies. King Xuan recognized her governance ideas and implemented measures such as dismantling extravagant platforms, abolishing female musicians, rejecting flattery, eliminating useless adornments, selecting capable military personnel, enriching the state treasury, streamlining bureaucratic processes, and welcoming straightforward and honest advisors.

These actions prioritized national governance, ultimately leading King Xuan to marry the ugly woman as his queen. Later generations concluded that the prosperity of Qi was entirely due to her talents and virtues. This aligns with Confucianism's emphasis on the importance of both virtue and talent—where true worth is measured by character and ability, not appearance. In the story of the Ugliness of Wuyan, her virtues were ultimately recognized and celebrated, demonstrating that genuine value often transcends superficial qualities. This reflects Confucian values that stress the significance of morality, ritual, loyalty, and ethical ideals. These elements are concretely embodied in her experiences, making her story an important practical example of Confucian thought in terms of individual and societal roles.



Figure 31 The Ugliness of Wuyan (copy), Wu Family Shrine, Jiaxiang, Shandong.
Source: "Han Dynasty Image Stones," Wu Zengde, Beijing Cultural Relics Publishing House, June 1984, First Edition, p. 137.

The image stone "Bo Yu Weeping for His Mother" profoundly illustrates the theme of familial relationships in traditional Chinese ethics (Figure 38). It depicts Han Boyu's sorrow as he reflects on his elderly and frail mother, unable to bear the thought of punishing himself. This conveys the deep love and filial piety a son holds for his mother. The story not only highlights the strong emotional bond between a mother and her child but also symbolizes the core values of "ren" (benevolence) and "yi" (righteousness), reflecting a dialectical consideration of human relationships within the framework of ritual propriety. Han Boyu's sorrow is not merely a personal expression of regret; it represents a profound self-awareness of traditional moral ethics.

Through concrete emotional experiences and ethical behaviors, the image stone materializes the intrinsic value of filial piety, demonstrating the profound significance of moral connotations. This artistic representation not only reflects the obligations and responsibilities inherent in Confucian teachings but also emphasizes the close connection between inner emotions and moral ideals. Han Boyu's sorrow thus becomes a symbol of love and filial piety, allowing the values of traditional ethics to be conveyed and deepened through this emotional embodiment.

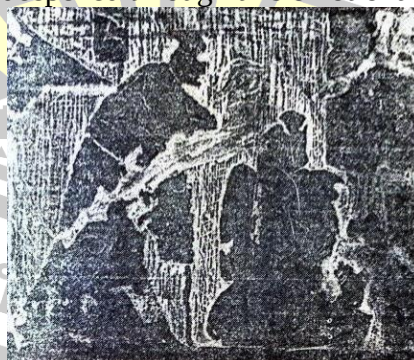


Figure 32 Bo Yu Weeping for His Mother, Wu Family Shrine, Jiaxiang, Shandong.
Source: "Han Dynasty Image Stones," Wu Zengde, Beijing Cultural Relics Publishing House, June 1984, First Edition, p. 150.

"The Story of Ding Lan and the Wooden Man" reflects the spirit of filial piety during the Han Dynasty. In the story, Ding Lan carves a wooden figure to symbolize his father, expressing deep admiration for this representation. When he discovers his neighbor, Uncle Zhang, drunkenly beating the wooden man for no reason, Ding Lan, in a fit of rage to protect his father's image, kills Zhang. After the incident is revealed, the authorities capture Ding Lan. At the time of his execution, he kneels to bid farewell to the wooden man, and remarkably, the wooden figure sheds tears, with blood even streaming from its eyes. This spectacle moves the officials, resulting in the commutation of Ding Lan's death sentence.

This story profoundly illustrates the Confucian ethical principle of "the father as the guiding authority for the son," emphasizing the significance of filial duty. Ding Lan's reverence for and protection of the wooden figure, which symbolizes his father, showcases his deep emotional bond. The scene of the wooden man weeping symbolizes the power of filial piety that can move the heavens and the earth. Consequently, "The Story of Ding Lan and the Wooden Man" becomes a classic tale of filial duty, highlighting the close relationship between loyalty to family and moral ideals (Figure39) .

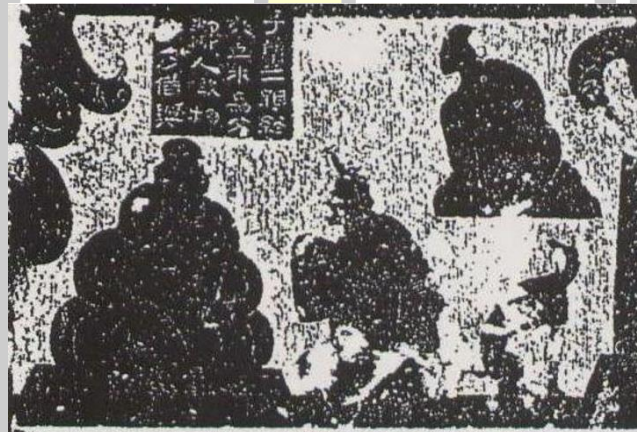


Figure 33 Ding Lan and the Wooden Man, Wu Family Shrine, Jiexiang, Shandong

Source: Han Dynasty Image Stones by Wu Zengde, Beijing Cultural Relics

Publishing House, June 1984, First Edition, p. 151

From the four figures presented, we can see that Han society adhered to Confucian "Benevolence" culture, narrating the spirit of the state and the faith in the imperial political system based on Confucian ethics as a governance strategy. The Han Dynasty's policy of "exclusively honoring Confucianism" became a common social demand for stability and harmony, leading to increasing social and economic prosperity. The Confucian principles of "Three cardinal principles and five constant principles" were illustrated through Han Dynasty image stones, serving not only an educational function but also acting as a legal framework for social ethics and morals.

This narrative approach, using images to convey ideas, replaced the need for verbal expression, allowing visual art to carry the value of conceptual spiritual thought. It can be said that ancient Chinese image art transcended mere practical significance, transmitting the social spirit of Confucian culture of benevolence and propriety and forming symbolic cultural representations. The four images exemplify

the semiotic narrative of early Confucian ethics in northern Han China, highlighting the significance of these symbols in reflecting the era's values.

2.2 The narrative of Confucian ethical cultural symbols in the society of the southern regions of the Yangtze River

The confluence of pre-Qin cultures in the Yangtze River and Yellow River basins was influenced by the geographical, ecological, and cultural characteristics of these regions. Together, they nurtured the profound foundation of Chinese civilization and culture, becoming an indispensable part of the Western Han royal culture. The folk craftsmanship culture of the southern Yangtze River basin, under the influence of Confucian ethics, clearly illustrates the mutual blending and influence of Shu and Chu cultures in terms of social customs and ethical culture.

The concept of "ren" (benevolence) in Confucian culture, beyond serving as the core of social politics and spiritual culture, also embodies the function of internalizing ritual systems into moral character. It demonstrates the influence of Confucianism in political education through the carriers and mechanisms of ethical culture.

In ancient times, many clan tribes in the northern and southern Yangtze and Yellow River basins regarded birds as totems. Since the pre-Qin era, birds have been seen as symbols of the sun god, leading to a reverence for bird culture. By the Western Han period, the image of birds gradually evolved into that of the phoenix, which became a cultural symbol representing moral standards in both the northern and southern regions of China, as well as a stylized symbol in various artifacts. This evolution reflects the fusion of folk culture and Confucian royal culture, with the phoenix symbolizing female virtue and the role of queens in the southern folk society of the Yangtze River basin.

Alongside the dragon, the phoenix holds a significant position in the culture of imperial authority. As a symbol of ethical spiritual culture, the phoenix's images represents Confucian concepts of ethics, encompassing virtues such as filial piety, fraternal love, tolerance, kindness, and diligence, as well as the moral principles of "Three cardinal principles and five constant principles."

The emergence of the phoenix totem marks the unity of folk culture and royal culture in the semiotics of ethical culture, thereby forming a social spiritual narrative model of "unified Confucian principles." By comparing the royal culture of the Western Han's Haihun Marquis State with the phoenix totem in the southern regions of the Yangtze River, we can observe commonalities between the two.

For instance, lacquerware excavated from the tomb of Mo Shu, a concubine from Jiangsu, features designs of wild geese, which, as seasonal birds, symbolize order. During the Western Han period, this image was often made into wild goose lanterns. In stone carvings depicting Confucius meeting Laozi, Confucius is portrayed holding wild geese, representing trust. Additionally, a lacquer shield with phoenix motifs unearthed in Jiangling, Hubei, represents bird-foot deities. Han bronze vessels also bear inscriptions of "lucky geese," indicating that geese were viewed as symbols of good fortune.

This demonstrates that phoenix culture was widely employed in the folk image culture of the southern Yangtze River region, becoming a narrative of societal craftsmanship and spiritual culture. The royal phoenix of the Western Han embodies a shared spiritual cultural value that resonates within both folk and imperial cultures. Thus, an image-based narrative under Confucian ritual law emerged, reflecting the

intrinsic essence of "virtue" culture, showcasing that the semiotics of ethical culture in traditional Chinese culture is based on "Three cardinal principles and five constant principles" for education and dissemination. This has constructed a family and national cultural spirit in Chinese traditional culture, where the phoenix and dragon serve as symbolic motifs (Figure40).



Figure 34: Lacquerware featuring wild goose images excavated from the tomb of Mo Shu in Jiangsu.

Source : Guo Lianfu Ding Tao, Dictionary of Chinese Patterns, Tianjin Education Press, 1998,p137)

Thus, it is evident that the conceptual cultural symbols reflected in the images of royal ceremonial vessels trace their roots back to the pre-Qin historical culture and the cultural spirit of the folk society during the Western Han period. In ancient times, the narrative of the divine right of kings as a "unity of heaven and humanity" transformed in the Han dynasty into a symbol system of legal and monarchical authority, namely, the symbols of ritual law culture. These symbols showcase the semiotic significance of cultural narratives in the secular spirit of society across the northern and southern Yangtze regions, marking a shared value of spiritual concepts throughout history.

The deconstruction of symbols pertains not only to textual meaning but should also delve into the realm of essential significance, revealing how Confucian ethical semiotics encompasses the historical culture of social evolution. It reflects anthropological cultural information from the history of ancient human development, including social politics, technological economy, folk life, regional nature, and cultural arts. This culminates in the formation of a symbol system that holds historical and cultural heritage value.

2.3 The "homogeneous co-construction" of the narrative genes of Confucian ethical symbols in the Haihun Marquis State and the traditional folk customs of the Western Han Dynasty

In traditional Chinese culture, Confucian ethical cultural symbols embody an anthropological spiritual culture. Through a deconstructive semiotic approach, one can deeply explore its metalanguage texts and reveal the interplay of cultural information across multiple levels. Although symbolic culture reflects a spiritual pursuit that transcends the real world, it is subject to historical, geographical, political, economic, and folk influences, leading to variations through the changes of social development. Therefore, within a specific historical and spatial context, it becomes possible to analyze the internal information coding of image cultural semiotics.

This involves structuralist analysis of cultural symbols, but a purely textual interpretation is insufficient. It is essential to employ deconstructive cultural semiotics to reflect the social thoughts, ideological consciousness, and the construction of image schemas within normative contexts during a particular historical period. Yermolayev transitions from linguistics to semiotic cultural narratives, distinguishing three levels: the deconstruction and analysis of schematic hierarchies, the analysis of normative social institutional regulations, and the analysis of usage-level social spiritual concepts.

It is evident that the image schemas of crafted culture encompass these three levels of decoding, particularly the cultural semiotics and narrative at the normative and usage levels. This indicates that the royal cultural symbol narratives of the Western Han period share a unified cultural identity with traditional folk cultural symbol narratives, jointly constructing the foundation of Confucian ethical culture in Western Han society.

The images of artifacts from State of Haihun Maquis encapsulates the primitive linguistic elements of both the southern Yangtze and northern Yellow River cultures. This stems, first and foremost, from the fact that royal artifacts reflect the craftsmanship traditions of local folk artisans, resulting in a distinctive narrative style in images. These artifacts are deeply rooted in the historical legacies of ancient beliefs in "unity of heaven and humanity" and "worship of deities," as well as the influence of regional folk spiritual concepts during the Western Han Dynasty.

Secondly, the craftsmanship of folk artisans during the Western Han was heavily influenced by the imperial policy that promoted Confucianism as the sole doctrine. The Confucian ideals of the Yangtze River basin had evolved into a widespread cultural orientation in society. Both imperial culture and folk customs adhered to Confucius's teachings of "benevolence and propriety," which constructed the ethical culture of the Western Han around the principles of "Three cardinal principles and five constant principles." This ethical framework became a guiding spiritual value in the folk societies that followed, thus establishing the genetic conditions for the evolution of Confucian ethics into the core of Chinese traditional culture.

Moreover, from the Eastern Han to the Southern and Northern Dynasties, the culture of benevolence and propriety derived from Confucius and Mencius permeated the spiritual values of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism in post-Han China. This fusion formed a semiotic system of traditional Chinese cultural images centered on "benevolence and propriety," embodying the cultural symbols of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. This process of cultural interpretation represents a mutual integration between the image culture of the Haihun Marquis State during the Western Han and the folk art images of the southern Yangtze River region, resulting in a "homogeneous co-construction" of Western Han societal ethical symbols. The image paradigms of the folk society in the Western Han, rich in implied cultural significance, also serve as historical documentation of the narrative structure of Chinese cultural semiotics based on the Confucian concept of "benevolence and propriety."

Part 3: The synchronic transmission of Confucian ethical cultural symbols through the images of artifacts in the Haihun Marquis State

At specific historical stages, the symbol systems shaped by culture, which possess the distinctive characteristics of the era, evolve alongside social changes, leading to the transformation of social ideologies and cultural thought. Emerging social consciousness and cultural forms intermingle with past cultural symbols, imbuing these era-specific symbols with the value of inheritance. Ancient clan totem symbols, the images of fish, humans, and deities from the original Yangtze River basin, as well as the "taotie" motifs from the Shang and Zhou dynasties, all require the support of societal spiritual values. As society develops, if cultural symbols cannot form spiritual concepts with universal appeal across dynasties, it would be difficult for them to be passed down to the present. However, after societal changes, only cultural symbols rooted in human consensus and shared ideological concepts can continue to be transmitted and evolve. While the narratives of cultural symbols will inevitably undergo shifts and transformations through different historical periods, the cultural significance carried by these symbols, particularly those rooted in Confucian concepts of benevolence and ritual (ren and li), will continue to be passed down. This persistence is rooted in the fact that Confucian ethical symbols have become an internal driving force for cultural transmission—one that transcends geographical boundaries, ethnic divisions, and historical epochs. These symbols thus serve as both a social order and self-regulation, contributing to the formation of timeless cultural values. The images of the Haihun Marquis State encapsulates Confucian ethics and ritual (ren-li) within a synchronic framework that bridges historical and societal contexts. This enriches the narrative context of Chinese iconography and Confucian ethics in the history of the visual arts and provides empirical evidence of the internal driving force that allows Chinese ethical cultural semiotics to transcend societal changes and continue to evolve.

3.1 The Transmission and Evolution of Confucian Culture from the Haihun Marquis State and the Ethical Cultural Symbols of Folk images from the Western Han to the Ming and Qing Dynasties

During the Western Han Dynasty, Confucian culture, centered on the principles of benevolence and ritual (ren and li), became dominant and began to integrate with the Buddhist and Taoist cultures of the Wei, Jin, Southern, and Northern Dynasties. This fusion gave rise to an ethical spirit that combined the three teachings of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, further shaping the semiotics of ethics in traditional Chinese culture, with Confucian benevolence and ritual at its core, as well as the history of Chinese ancient images. Since the Western Han period, the Confucian culture carried by the artifacts and images of the Haihun Marquis State has been passed down through successive dynasties, continuing into the Yuan, Ming, and Qing periods. This paper analyzes and compares the image of the phoenix, which embodies both Confucian benevolence and ritual culture as well as folk culture in the artifacts of the Haihun Marquis State, with the Buddhist phoenix culture of the Wei and Jin periods, the later Confucian phoenix culture, and the artistic and cultural concept of the phoenix in the Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, exploring their similarities and differences.

3.1.1 The Phoenix Culture in the Buddhist Murals of Dunhuang Mogao Caves during the Northern Wei Dynasty

During the Northern Wei period, the Mogao Caves in Dunhuang, as a significant representation of the cultural heritage at the western end of the Hexi Corridor in China, accumulated cultural influences across several historical periods, including the Northern Dynasties, Sui, Tang, Five Dynasties, Western Xia, and Yuan Dynasties. Over time, this cultural amalgamation formed one of China's most important treasures of Buddhist art. With a total of 735 cave temples, 2,415 Buddhist sculptures, and wall paintings covering an area of 45,000 square meters, the Mogao Caves stand as the largest and most richly adorned Buddhist art site in the world. Every brushstroke, every sculpture, and every image in Dunhuang art not only reflects but also conveys cultural significance, embodying the spirit and philosophy of the era and serving as a crucial witness to the history and culture of the time.

Chinese visual art and culture gradually evolved from the rough, primitive style of the pre-Qin period to a more refined aesthetic approach. Both the phoenix images of the Western Han period and those of the Northern Wei period were significantly influenced by the depiction of flying celestial beings, presenting an ethereal, dynamic, and stylized cultural pursuit. These artistic transformations reflect the deep impact of Western Shu and Chu cultures on the evolution and transmission of Buddhist culture during the Northern Wei period. The phoenix images in Northern Wei wall paintings feature tail feathers that flow gracefully upward, resembling flames, with the overall form suggesting a celestial flight. These images absorbed significant Buddhist elements, particularly the scene of Shakyamuni's Nirvana, where numerous birds and beasts spread their wings and mourn, symbolizing compassion and the cycle of reincarnation. This also echoes the ancient Chinese philosophical idea of "the Unity of Man and Nature."

These images are not merely artistic representations; they are condensed cultural symbols. As Roland Barthes pointed out in his theory of cultural semiotics, the meaning of images and symbols is not fixed but exists in a constantly shifting cultural context. Each phoenix image transcends its surface visual appearance and becomes a cultural text, carrying multiple layers of cultural meanings and historical value. Across different historical periods, these images serve not only as a transmission of artistic form but also as a medium for cross-temporal cultural dialogue, linking disparate philosophical systems and cultural backgrounds while offering diverse interpretive possibilities.

Furthermore, the phoenix images found on the lacquerware of the Marquis of Haihun also demonstrate the continuation and transformation of this cultural symbol. These images not only reflect the social trends of the time but also carry profound cultural connotations. Through the analysis of these symbolic motifs, one can trace the evolution and fusion of cultural symbols across different historical periods, revealing the diversity of cultures and the cross-temporal blending of cultural elements, continuously imbued with new meanings through the threads of history and culture. As shown in (Figure 41).



Figure 35 Phoenix Pattern in the Buddhist Wall Paintings of the Northern Wei Dunhuang Mogao Caves

Source: Guo Jianfu. Dictionary of Chinese Patterns. Tianjin Education Press, 1998, 1st Edition, p. 49.

3.1.2 Phoenix Pattern Culture in Tang Dynasty Clothing

In the Buddhist murals of the Tang Dynasty, the depiction of the phoenix was extraordinarily ornate, and this style was also carried over into Tang clothing. Compared to the garments of the Sui Dynasty, Tang clothing was more graceful, reflecting the unique aesthetic tastes of the prosperous Tang period. The artistic style of the Tang Dynasty, particularly in Dunhuang art, showcased a perfect fusion of traditional Central Plains art and foreign influences. The phoenix image not only reflected the unique regional culture of Xinjiang but also signified the gradual integration of divine symbolism into human life. Over time, the phoenix symbol began to transcend its role as merely a religious or mystical emblem, becoming closely connected with people's everyday lives and their pursuit of happiness.

For example, the phoenix-shaped hairpins (known as fengxing buyao) (Figure 42) were an important ornament in Tang clothing, and historical records indicate that women from various social strata, including aristocratic ladies and dancers, wore these accessories. This suggests that the phoenix motif in Tang society had become a popular fashion symbol, rather than merely a sign of power. In classical texts such as the Taiping Yulan and Tongdian, the use of the phoenix image in Tang fashion is widely documented, indicating its status as a symbol of style. Whether in clothing or on artifacts, the phoenix motif was widely used, laying the foundation for its subsequent use in various artistic domains. The phoenix image in the Tang Dynasty, as reflected in its cultural context, was not only a vehicle for religious belief but also a manifestation of secular aesthetics and social trends, creating a unique intersection of culture and art.



Figure 36: Phoenix hairpin head of Tang Dynasty

Source: : <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/SlQuhNjCAfEm2U0TVOEIKQ>.2024.11

3.1.3 The Phoenix Motif in Song Dynasty Architecture

The Song Dynasty was an era of cultural prominence, marked by the implementation of policies that emphasized civil governance over military power. Academic and cultural pursuits were highly valued, with the establishment of the Taixue (Imperial Academy) at the central level and a proliferation of academies across the country. Notable institutions included the Lushan Bailudong Academy, the Nanjing Yingtianfu Academy, and the Tanzhou Yuelu Academy. As the imperial court relocated southward, the economic focus of the Song Dynasty shifted from the northern to the southern regions. Due to military disruptions from northern minority regimes, the northwest Silk Road was cut off, and the maritime "Ceramics Road" became an important route for foreign trade and a key economic source.

As a result, in terms of artistic creation, Song Dynasty works were less grandiose than those of the Tang Dynasty. The ideological shift during this period marked a transition from aristocratic to more common cultural influences, from official historiography to folk culture (Tian Zibing, Wu Shusheng, & Tian Qing, 2003). Therefore, the phoenix, as a cultural symbol widely recognized by both the folk society and the imperial court, became deeply connected with Confucian ethical culture, serving as a significant reflection of the ceremonial and ritualistic values of the time. The image of the phoenix was extensively used in architecture, clothing, and various decorative arts (Figure43).

In the Song Dynasty, the phoenix's design became more realistic, closely reflecting the life needs of folk society. It gradually inherited the process of the phoenix's evolution from the royal court to the common people, a tradition that began in the Tang Dynasty. This shift reflected a transformation in the cultural symbolism of the phoenix, from representing the imperial virtue of the empress to symbolizing the values of loyalty, tolerance, gentleness, and humility—qualities that represented idealized female virtues in folk culture.

The Song Dynasty also focused on the beauty of everyday life, giving rise to a unique aesthetic flavor. While Song aesthetics inherited the moral principles of the Sui and Tang Dynasties, elevating Confucian doctrine to the supreme "Heavenly Principle" (Tianli), which required unconditional adherence, the Song people also introduced a new aesthetic of simplicity, detachment, and subtlety. This new aesthetic, which went beyond rigid rules and norms, marked the beginning of a more reserved and conservative cultural approach.

In specific artistic representations, the phoenix in Song art often featured a crown shaped like a ruyi (a ceremonial scepter), a short and thick beak, slender eyes, long legs, and a flowing tail, with each feather carefully detailed. The phoenix was commonly placed on rooftops in architecture as a symbol of protection and auspiciousness, expressing folk desires for peace and good fortune. Decorative patterns such as "Phoenix Playing with Peonies," "A Hundred Years of Harmony," and "Happy Encounters" became increasingly formulaic during the Zhenghe period, and the phoenix's association with beauty and good fortune was fully realized in these motifs.



Figure 37 Phoenix in Song Dynasty Architecture

Source: Guo Lianfu, Ding Tao, Dictionary of Chinese Patterns, Tianjin Education Press, 1998, p. 57.

3.14 Phoenix Culture in Yuan Dynasty Ceramics

During the Yuan Dynasty, influenced by the bureaucratic system, the image of the phoenix was frequently used to decorate homes and utensils. In the ceramic production process, the phoenix motif displayed an artistic style that was free-spirited and vibrant. This style abandoned the opulence and refinement of the royal court, instead presenting a more rustic and robust representation that reflected the simplicity and ruggedness of folk society. It also conveyed rich ethnic characteristics and the spirit of folk culture. The widespread use of the phoenix motif in art reflected the deep integration of Confucian ethics and cultural teachings across all levels of society. Through the phoenix image, themes of harmony and moral ideals were communicated (Figure44) .



Figure 38 Phoenix on Yuan Dynasty Ceramics

Source: Guo Lianfu, Ding Tao, Dictionary of Chinese Patterns, Tianjin Education Press, 1998, p. 59.

3.15 Phoenix Culture in Ming and Qing Decorative Arts

During the Ming and Qing dynasties, phoenix culture, as a significant symbol in traditional Chinese art, highlighted the core values of Confucian ethical culture. The symbolic meaning of the phoenix merged with the Confucian concept of benevolent governance, representing the idea that rulers, while holding supreme power, also bore the responsibility of guiding the people toward harmony and prosperity. The phoenix thus became a symbol of China's "benevolence and ritual" (renli) culture and an emblematic representation of social spiritual values.

These symbols formed the backbone of Chinese folk traditions and social culture, and the representative image paradigms of these Confucian ethical symbols underscored the importance of family as the fundamental unit of society. Family ethics were seen as the cornerstone of maintaining social order. In this context, the phoenix occupied a prominent place in decorative arts related to weddings and family matters, symbolizing marital harmony and family unity. This symbolism not only reflected Confucian teachings about the relationship between husband and wife but also conveyed the moral duties and societal expectations placed on family members.



Figure 39 Phoenix in Ming and Qing Architecture / Phoenix on Qing Dynasty Ceramics

Source: Guo Lianfu, Ding Tao, Dictionary of Chinese Patterns, Tianjin Education Press, 1998, p. 59.

As we can see from the above (Figure 45), "Phoenix" culture has been a symbol of spiritual beliefs and moral culture for thousands of years. Throughout millennia of cultural accumulation and transmission, it has consistently maintained its original form and context as a symbolic representation. The phoenix has become a representative symbol of the folk and social cultures of different regions, including the Yellow River and Central Plains cultures, as well as the Yangtze River, Shu, and Chu cultures. It is a highly dynamic and vital symbolic culture.

In ancient times, the phoenix was a totem associated with the sun god, and during the Spring and Autumn Period, phoenix motifs retained the meaning of divine worship. In the Qin and Han dynasties, the phoenix was one of the four sacred creatures depicted on the imperial crown and in ancient architecture. After the Sui and Tang dynasties, it became a symbol of the emperor and empress, and its significance spread to the common people, symbolizing benevolence, rituals, love, and auspiciousness in folk culture.

From the Song Dynasty onward, the phoenix motif became widely used in architecture, clothing, utensils, and other decorative arts. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, phoenix patterns were extensively applied to architecture, furniture, ceramics, metalwork, and apparel. Across historical periods, the phoenix motif

transcended its temporal context and became a highly enduring cultural symbol. It evolved into a narrative emblem of Chinese benevolence and ritual (renli) traditions, symbolizing virtues such as kindness, generosity, warmth, humility, frugality, and respect—core elements of social morality.

The phoenix thus serves as a narrative symbol of Confucian ethical culture. Its enduring presence across hundreds of years of dynastic history is a testament to its ability to function as a cultural signifier that continues to resonate today. The phoenix, as a symbol of social virtues, embodies the idea that material reality in human society can be transformed into a world of symbolic and spiritual culture. This process helps to form an anthropological concept in which heaven, earth, humans, and things are unified, all under the guiding principles of Confucianism. The Confucian ethic of "benevolence and ritual" transcends historical, regional, and ethnic boundaries to form a universal standard of spiritual and moral values—a harmonious ideal upheld by Confucian culture.

3.2 The value and significance of the inheritance and continuation of Confucian ethical cultural symbols through the images of artifacts in the Haihun Marquis State

The core concept of Confucian culture, as passed down through the generations, is an anthropological ethical culture that is uniquely characteristic of traditional Chinese culture. Confucianism, with its enduring influence, has developed a shared spiritual and intellectual framework across various historical societies. This constitutes a universal Confucian cultural value system that forms the foundation of traditional Chinese visual arts as a conceptual cultural semiotics. This is a distinctive feature that sets Chinese cultural semiotics apart from other cultural semiotic systems.

The study of the visual arts from the Western Han period, particularly the images associated with the Marquises, marks the formation of the Confucian ethical cultural symbol system in China, a rich and mature historical process. The history of Confucian ethical cultural symbols reflects the social and political systems, economy, culture, and folk customs of particular historical eras. The ethical aspirations of the ancients were the conscious and material expressions of human society within the spirit of Confucian ethics. In this context, the material world of human society is transformed into a symbolic world through visual narratives, thus forming an anthropological cultural heritage that holds historical and cultural significance.

Confucian ethical culture, with its guiding principles of "benevolence" and "righteousness", has the potential to transcend history, geography, and ethnicity, creating a universal consensus on social norms and rituals. This enables the construction of a cultural orientation that maintains a coherent, cross-temporal spiritual value system, despite societal changes.

The material culture of the Haihun Marquis state reflects the social and political spirit of the "exclusive respect for Confucianism", with Confucian teachings on benevolence and ritual establishing a foundation for the ethical and sociocultural norms of Chinese society. During the Western Han period, Confucianism's concepts of benevolence and ritual encompassed a recognition of "humanity". Confucius' disciple Yan Yuan asked about the path to benevolence, and Confucius responded: "Self-restraint and adherence to ritual constitute benevolence. If one practices self-restraint and adheres to ritual for one day, the world will return to benevolence." Confucius integrated benevolence into law and governance, emphasizing that the

recognition of virtue must come through self-discipline and be incorporated into social order and legal frameworks. The emphasis on social morality and legal enforcement—"self-restraint" and "return to ritual"—was essential to forming a benevolent society.

This reflects Confucian idealism's affirmation of the political forms of social ritual and law. Subsequently, Confucianism split into two schools: Mencius emphasized the cultivation of virtue, while Xunzi focused on the importance of law and ritual. Later legal traditions in China benefited from Confucian teachings on "benevolence and ritual," which helped shape and regulate imperial rule, social order, and ritual norms, as well as the cultural customs of ancient peoples.

Thus, Confucianism provided Chinese society with a distinctive ethical culture and humanistic philosophy. It shaped the direction of the spiritual consciousness in ancient society, laying the foundation for cultural transmission through the ages. Confucianism remains a meta-language for cultural norms that still influences both ancient and modern societies. Today, it continues to be a valuable anthropological and historical cultural heritage, embodying spiritual wealth that can be inherited and passed down.

The image and art culture of the Haihun Marquis State preserves the connotations of Confucian benevolence and ritual as cultural symbols. The culture of benevolence and ritual regulated the social laws of the Western Han period, becoming a mechanism for constructing philosophical ideas through visual semiotics. The Western Han royal family learned from the fall of the Qin Empire, emphasizing Confucian governance based on virtue and ritual laws, while using both ritual and law as complementary systems in the state's social and ethical order. This reinforced the continuity of Confucian spiritual values in Chinese society for thousands of years. The main cause of the enduring mainstream social consciousness in China is the Confucian system, which established a humanized philosophical culture blending politics and religion. Confucianism "politicized" the ancient concept of "Unity of man and nature", replacing royal power with imperial authority, and eventually substituting imperial sovereignty with Confucian doctrine. This development formed the philosophical theory of governance through a dialectical relationship between Confucian ritual and law during the Western Han period, profoundly influencing Chinese social culture. It transformed Confucian philosophical culture into a unifying framework for national politics and social religion, where the concept of "humanity" was realized under the unified cultural principle of benevolence and ritual. This contributed to the formation of the "Confucian Doctrine of Unity" in Western Han society, marking the essential cultural nature of Chinese traditional culture, which became the narrative text for the creation of visual cultural symbols.

The artifacts of the Haihun Marquis State reflect the owner's burial philosophy, symbolizing the human connection with objects through Confucian ethical culture. The semantic meaning of these artifacts as cultural symbols demonstrates the owner's talent in Confucian scholarship and his emotional cultivation. The orientation of the crafted artifacts reveals the owner's status as a royal figure, his Confucian intellect, and his spiritual ideas, which serve as markers of identity, giving rise to new textual meanings. This process leads to the creation of cultural semiotics with human spiritual concepts at its core, forming the characteristics of cultural symbols that embody social consciousness. According to

Russian semiotician Yuri Lotman, "Dialogue is the fundamental characteristic of the semiotic domain." (Piet Troop & Peter, "The Semiotic Domain: A Study of Culture Semiotics", Zhaoxinggui's translation, Dagger Symbols and Media, 2013). The image and art culture of the Haihun Marquis State encapsulates the cultural essence of the Western Han royal family, along with the regional cultures of the Yangtze River basin, Shu culture, Chu culture, and the folk traditions of both the North and South. The Qin dynasty attempted to unify China through a legalistic culture but ultimately collapsed. In contrast, the Han dynasty unified China under the ideals of Confucian benevolence, ritual, and virtuous governance, which led to four centuries of development. The differing cultural concepts of Confucianism and legalism led to different political systems. Cultural semiotics, to be effective in guiding social ethical order and state governance, requires conditions of "cultural development, political enlightenment, and wealth and strength." Only under these conditions can cultural semiotics contribute to the transmission of societal and political values.

3.3 The Semiotic Value of Confucian Culture in the State of Haihun Marquis and Traditional Chinese Culture

First, The Recontextualization of Confucian Culture in the Image Art of the State of Haihun.

Confucianism governs the state through the principles of "benevolence and propriety," with its classical texts referred to as "scriptural studies," serving as the "national religion" of China for thousands of years. This doctrine was established by Confucius and his disciples, with Mencius expanding upon the cultivation of human nature and Xunzi refining the institutional aspects of Confucianism. As a result, the ideals of benevolence and propriety have formed the foundation of Chinese ethical culture, which has been transmitted for over 2,000 years since the Western Han Dynasty. In the historical context of the State of Haihun, the words of Liu He, the Haihun Marquis, along with references to Confucius's life as a mirror for self-reflection, illustrate the connections between the artifacts and the cultural legacy of Confucian "Three cardinal principles and five constant principles". The bamboo slips containing requests made to the emperor and expressions of loyalty provide insights into the cultural significance of Liu He's artifacts, demonstrating the close relationship between the image art of Liu He and the semiotics of Chinese Confucian ethics. It can be said that the spirit of Confucian benevolence and propriety embodied by the Haihun Marquis not only represents the moral standards upheld by the Western Han royal family and folk society but also reflects the Confucian values that guided the imperial authority. Confucianism served as the ideological foundation of the Western Han political system, establishing Confucian teachings as a central spiritual belief within society and ultimately forming a value system centered around ethical culture as a core aspect of traditional Chinese culture.

During the era when the Western Han Dynasty upheld Confucianism as the supreme doctrine through the principles of the "Three Bonds and Five Constants," Confucius affirmed the governance of the state through propriety and deference. Both the elite and the common people embraced Confucius's culture of benevolence and propriety as the foundation for constructing their national spirit. This cultural framework established the moral standards and behavioral norms for the royal families and nobles, serving as a guide for discerning the ethical conduct expected of individuals.

As a royal noble, Liu He led a life characterized by extreme caution in both word and action, adhering strictly to the norms and moral standards of Confucian culture. This restraint can be attributed to the binding influence of these ethical principles. Moreover, from the logical structure of Confucius's philosophy, it follows that without the proper establishment of names and roles, success in any endeavor becomes difficult. The idea that "when rituals and music do not flourish, laws and punishments lose their effectiveness," along with the notion that "what is said must be acted upon," underscores the necessity for individuals and society to adhere to the Confucian philosophical perspective that positions ethics as the foundation of social order.

The historical materials related to Liu He of the State of Haihun Marquis, along with the cultural information reflected in the artifacts and their images, all narrate the spirit and values of Confucian ethics embodied in the culture of benevolence and propriety upheld by the Western Han royal nobles. Therefore, it can be concluded that the cultural relics of the State of Haihun Marquis represent a substantial and empirical contribution to our understanding of Confucian cultural and social thought during the Western Han period, holding significant value as part of China's historical and cultural heritage (Figure46) .



Figure 40 Fragment of a wooden slip depicting Liu He's expression of fealty
Source: Haihun Marquis State Museum

Secondly, The Confucian culture of benevolence and propriety during the Han Dynasty laid the foundation for the core values of traditional Chinese culture. The visual narratives of Confucianism in the State of Haihun consistently reflect the spirit of benevolence and propriety upheld by the Western Han nobility. Throughout the evolution from the slave society of ancient China to the feudal society of the Qin and Han dynasties, Confucianism infused the ethical teachings of Confucius with the cultural frameworks of rituals, music, and legal systems, shaping the spiritual and ideological orientations of ancient Chinese society.

The spirit of Chinese Confucian culture has influenced the character of a multi-ethnic nation, giving rise to the principle of "do not impose on others what you do not desire for yourself," which embodies the anthropological consensus of universal moral values. This indicates that traditional Chinese culture possesses a capacity for integration and assimilation, contributing to the formation of a unified multi-ethnic state. Additionally, the visual arts in Chinese craftsmanship became a rich narrative text, reflecting the diverse ideational history of ancient humanity.

At the core of the traditional cultural values in China lies the ethical teachings of Confucius centered on "benevolence" and "propriety." Analyzing the relationship between these two concepts reveals their distinct but interconnected goals: Confucian "benevolence" serves as a standard for social moral norms, while "propriety" establishes the legal principles of social order. The former promotes harmonious coexistence within society, and the latter governs political conduct in accordance with the law. Thus, Confucian culture of benevolence and propriety evolved into a doctrine of familial and national ethics in ancient China, guiding the art of craftsmanship and visual culture as a narrative form that is both respected and upheld through the ages. This framework has become an enduring spiritual belief with anthropological cultural value, shaping the core values of traditional Chinese culture that have been collectively upheld by the Chinese nation for thousands of years.

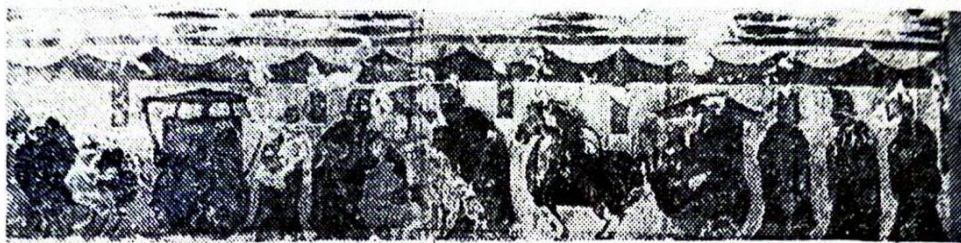


Figure 41 Han Dynasty Portrait Stone Confucius

Source: Han Dynasty Image Stones by Wu Zengde, Beijing Cultural Relics Publishing House, June 1984, First Edition, p. 151



Figure 42 :Statues of Confucius through the ages (Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing)

Source: : <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/vVTIBLHXjMhMrjivk4afdw.2024.11>

Thirdly, the repositioning of the cultural symbolic significance of Chinese Confucian ethical concepts in visual art is involved. In the Analects, particularly in the section on governance, Confucius states: "Benevolence is realized through propriety, and governance is based on virtue (Figure48) ." When propriety is viewed as an internal norm, it serves as a symbol in a deconstructive narrative, signifying the moral culture surrounding benevolence and virtuous governance. Conversely, when the culture of propriety is seen as an external social norm, its significance as an ethical cultural symbol manifests in the form of state laws.

Clearly, although the first system of symbols belongs to the narrative of the original language, the generation of symbolic meaning actually arises from the second system. This is precisely the aim of the narrative of Confucian ethical cultural symbols. It consists of meanings indicated by the original language—namely, cultural symbols—forming a dual-layered system structure that combines segments from the second system with language. While there are differences in their aggregative and divisive qualities, the narrative of Chinese visual cultural semiotics is often not textual in nature; instead, it aims for an infinite text, creating new meanings through the extension of the text.

If the signifier of the first system can transform into the meanings or implications of an infinite text, then the symbols in visual art can expand the conceptual cultural significance of these symbols. Therefore, it can be argued that in Chinese visual art, the narrative of Confucian concepts of benevolence and propriety promotes the culture of benevolence and propriety as the moral and legal framework for successive societies, constituting two systems of symbolic semantics and their interconnected conceptual spiritual culture. Without this dual system, it would be impossible to construct the meanings of conceptual symbols, and ethical cultural symbols would also struggle to establish themselves.

The key point here is the use of "propriety" as the language of Confucianism, serving as a code for interpretation and a standard for assessing matters. In his writings during the Spring and Autumn period, Confucius embedded profound principles in subtle expressions, using specific cultural symbols to convey his evaluations of various political and personal activities, thereby regulating different forms of expressive behavior. Cultural symbols became a conscious framework for governing human society, facilitating the communication of benevolence and propriety to maintain the interdependence between social groups and imperial authority, ultimately shaping social structures and their associated spiritual concepts and laws.

The mechanism of these symbols operates through an essential and consensus-based culture that is accepted by successive societies. It requires a semiotic framework that possesses anthropological and ethical cultural significance, leading to a conscious application in society. The intrinsic driving force behind the construction of symbols is the emergence of ethical culture, which forms the core values of social mechanisms and narratives. Therefore, when the images of artifacts from the Haihun Marquis State encapsulates the idea of "storing propriety within objects," reflecting the narrative context of Confucian benevolence and propriety, it embodies the significance of Confucian ethical semiotics.

In other words, the value of the Confucian ethical semiotics within the artifact images of the Haihun Marquis State lies in the sociological meaning of the narrative transition from propriety to law. The significance of these symbols constructs a framework for moral constraints and social legal systems, creating a mutual mechanism of benevolence and propriety. This allows the internal domain of symbols to organically form a semantic structure with the conceptual images of ancient China. Furthermore, this establishes Confucian ethics as a model for the propagation of social conceptual semiotics, providing a context for exploring the semiotics of social ethics in Western Han society as reflected in the artifact images of the Haihun Marquis State.

Fourth, the Repositioning of Confucian Philosophical Culture in Image Art. In the pre-Qin period, Confucius, taking Laozi as his teacher, referred to him as the "Dragon" and articulated, "The Dao produces one, one produces two, two produces three, and three produces all things." This philosophical thought, rooted in a simple understanding of natural society and the universe, posits that "humans model themselves on the Earth, the Earth models itself on Heaven, and Heaven models itself on Nature." It regards philosophical concepts as the Dao, from which all things are born, asserting that everything returns to its roots, ultimately leading all things back to the Dao. Laozi's philosophy thus initiated the philosophical spirit of traditional Chinese culture, with the pre-Qin era characterized by an ancient natural worship that saw "Heaven and Humanity as one." This evolved into the divine worship of the Shang and Zhou dynasties, emphasizing the dialectical interdependence between society and individuals, as well as between humans and nature.

Confucius's concept of benevolence in Confucianism does not deny "Heaven's Mandate" or "spirits"; rather, it employs the divine mandate to underscore his teachings on "ren" (benevolence) and advocates for governance through virtue. He emphasized the rule of the sage kings, placing greater importance on the relationship between people and society. As he said, "Governance should be based on virtue." For instance, "When the northern city is in its place, all the stars surround it," illustrating that if governance is rooted in virtue, society and the state will flourish like the Big Dipper among the stars, emphasizing a human-centered worldview that seeks harmony and balance between individuals and society, which also introduces elements of simple materialism.

Confucius's grandson, Zisi, advanced the concept of the "Doctrine of the Mean," promoting the idea of "holding to both extremes while utilizing the mean," which suggests that within contradictions, one should choose the middle path to achieve harmony. "Heaven and Earth provide the conditions for growth, and only through utmost sincerity can one fully realize their nature. By fully realizing one's nature, one can understand human nature; by understanding human nature, one can comprehend the nature of all things." The ability to understand the nature of things enables one to appreciate the transformations of Heaven and Earth, which aligns with the dialectical thought encapsulated in the phrase "Heaven and Earth are interrelated."

Here, "the mean" refers to the intrinsic factors of things, while "yong" implies universality, advocating for adherence to internal norms without transgression. This philosophical thought on establishing state systems requires compliance with the laws of nature without exceeding their bounds. As Confucius stated, "If the ruler desires goodness, the people will be good." This encapsulates the philosophical spirit of self-cultivation, family harmony, governance, and the pacification of the world that has influenced later generations.

The Doctrine of the Mean discusses the interrelations among human spirit, community relations, and the structure of the state. Confucius said, "The governance of civil and military affairs does not depend on specific strategies. If a person is virtuous, governance thrives; if a person is lost, governance ceases." Therefore, a gentleman must cultivate himself and reflect on his life, care for his parents, understand others, and comprehend the natural order. This includes a dialectical relationship: first, when people follow the Dao, state governance flourishes; second,

when individuals adhere to the Dao through self-cultivation, they meet the standards of virtue, leading to an understanding of governance on both personal and state levels.

The academic community lacks extensive research into the philosophical spirit within Confucian ethics. Yet, Confucius's teachings are rich in dialectical reasoning, addressing matters, individuals, and national policies by penetrating the essence of things and the laws of internal change and development. They analyze the authenticity of phenomena, advocating for interpretations of social issues based on benevolence, harmony, and trust, thereby seeking to reconcile the relationships among benevolence, propriety, humanity, society, and imperial authority. Consequently, Chinese material culture reflects Confucian ideals, shaping the intrinsic values of philosophical thought in the semiotics of Confucian ethical culture within the conceptual art of images.

Summary

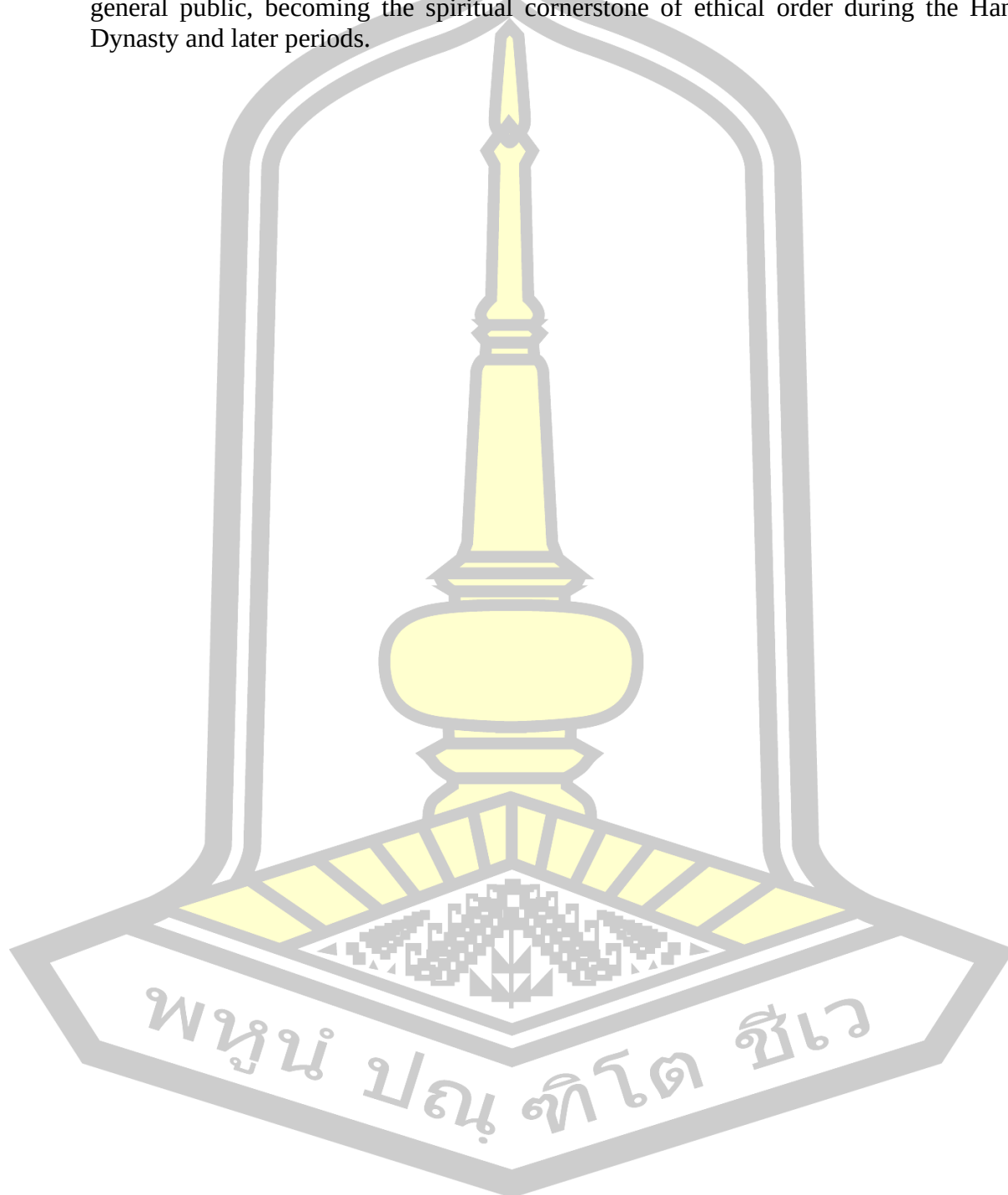
This chapter begins by exploring the Confucian ethical symbols found in the artifacts of the Haihun Marquis State from the Western Han period, focusing on the social order and moral values carried by the concepts of "benevolence" and "ritual". These symbols not only reflect the core ethical concepts of Confucianism but also demonstrate how the Western Han period's idea of "Unity of man and nature" was culturally transmitted through material symbols. This method of transmission, through the design style and symbolic meaning of physical objects, materializes abstract ethical ideas and forms a cultural narrative system. In particular, the large number of excavated texts, such as the *Xiaojing* (Classic of Filial Piety) and *Lunyu* (Analects), showcases how Confucian culture used material symbols for education and social regulation.

Next, the chapter delves into the regional expressions of Confucian culture, with particular attention to how the cultural symbols in southern China, such as bird totems, integrated with Confucian ideas. In this region, images of birds, including the phoenix, served as symbols of ethical culture, representing Confucian values such as loyalty, filial piety, and benevolence. The Han Empire adopted Confucianism as the state ideology with the policy of "upholding Confucianism exclusively" (*dizun ruxue*), which was implemented not only in the northern political systems but also permeated southern folk customs and craft culture. This made the Confucian concepts of "benevolence" and "ritual" a cultural consensus throughout the entire empire.

The transmission and evolution of Confucian ethical cultural symbols are examined through the social changes from the Han to the Ming and Qing dynasties. By comparing the artistic depictions of the phoenix over time, the chapter analyzes the continuous evolution of Confucian "benevolence" and "ritual" in visual arts. During the Yuan Dynasty, the phoenix symbolized national harmony, while in the Ming and Qing periods, it was incorporated into decorations for weddings and family life, becoming a symbol of family ethics and social harmony. The transmission of Confucian ethics is reflected not only in the symbolism of material objects but also in the continuity of cultural beliefs and the spirit of the times.

Finally, the chapter showcases the unique interpretation of Confucian philosophy found in the artifacts of the Haihun Marquis State. Centered on the rites and music system, a moral code for personal self-cultivation and governance was formed, which was symbolically expressed through material objects. As a result, Confucian ethics became a spiritual system that was both practical in governance and educational in interpersonal relationships.

Overall, this chapter, through a semiotic analysis, reveals the profound embodiment and historical influence of Confucian ethical culture in the material remnants of the Haihun Marquis State in the Western Han period. Confucian ethics, transmitted through symbolic objects, gradually moved from the royal court to the general public, becoming the spiritual cornerstone of ethical order during the Han Dynasty and later periods.



CHAPTER IV

The aesthetic characteristics of Confucian ethical cultural symbols through the images of artifacts in the Haihun Marquis State

Introduction

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on the artistic evolution of ancient Chinese aesthetic thought during the pre-Qin period, with an emphasis on how the concept of "theocracy unified," ritual and music culture, and Confucian ethical values were reflected in the art of the time, revealing their profound cultural connotations. Through the analysis of these artistic forms, it is explained that the artistic representations of ancient Chinese artifacts not only symbolized imperial power but also served as a visual reimagining of Confucian thought and its social order.

The second part conducts a comparative analysis of the images found on artifacts such as gold, jade, and lacquer items excavated from the State of Haihun Marquis, focusing on their uniqueness within the aesthetic cultural paradigm. By comparing these images with the folk images cultures of the northern and southern regions, the study empirically identifies the aesthetic features of the cultural symbols of ancient China embodied in the artifacts from Haihun Marquis. It further analyzes how these artistic forms reflect the spirit of Confucian ethical culture in the transmission and dissemination of art, while also revealing the shared structural and symbolic relationship between them and the folk images cultural symbols of the later Han period in the Yangtze River basin. Therefore, this chapter covers the aesthetics of the Western Han dynasty, royal aesthetics, the Chu and Shu cultures of the southern Yangtze River region, and the folk artistic and ethical symbolisms of the Western Han dynasty, while exploring their role in shaping ancient Chinese aesthetic concepts. This constitutes the main argument discussed in the chapter.

Part 1: The aesthetic characteristics of the cultural symbols of "theocracy unified" in ritual music and ceremonial systems during the pre-Qin period

1.1 The Cultural Characteristics of "theocracy unified" in Ritual, Music, and Aesthetic images in Ancient Times

In ancient primitive societies, the images of artifacts symbolized the human cosmos and the natural world, representing "heavenly will" and the worship of deities, with all things evolving into divine cultural interpretations. In the Chinese mythological system, numerous deities controlled the fate of humanity, such as Pangu creating the world, Fuxi inventing writing, Nuwa repairing the sky, Emperor Jun as the grandson of Huang Xin, Shennong tasting herbs, the ancestral figure Xuanyuan, Donghuang Taiyi, the water god Gonggong, and the fire god Zhurong, among others. These mythological stories are a vital part of the spiritual and traditional culture of the Chinese nation, carrying profound historical significance.

In the Zhengzhou Dahelin site of the central Henan region, dating back to the mid-Yangshao culture, painted pottery has been discovered featuring images of the sun, revealing the spiritual worship of the sun by ancient humans. This worship

phenomenon can be traced back approximately 5,000 to 6,000 years, evidenced not only by the depiction of sunbird images but also by twelve sun motifs surrounding colorful pottery designs. These patterns vividly showcase how ancient people symbolized "heaven" as "divine," thereby merging "the divine" with "humans," leading to the evolution of myths and legends surrounding human veneration. In the northeast regions of Gansu and Qinghai, the Majiayao culture, with historical origins dating back to about 5,000 to 4,000 years ago in the Neolithic era, produced pottery adorned with images of divine frogs, which also held symbolic meanings of the divine. These patterns reflect the ancestors' acute awareness of their natural environment and encapsulate their profound wishes for survival and reproduction. Given the harsh conditions and low survival rates of ancient times, they yearned for reproductive capabilities as robust as that of frogs. Facing frequent natural disasters, they also aspired for a life force that transcended nature; the amphibious nature of frogs provided them with more opportunities for survival in the face of floods and other calamities. As pottery was decorated with these images, the artifacts began to transcend their utilitarian purposes, embodying richer cultural connotations. From an artistic perspective, these colorful pottery pieces are characterized by rigorous compositions, rhythmic lines, and patterns that carry profound spiritual meanings, thereby showcasing unique artistic qualities.

The "divine-human" images have undergone four distinct stages throughout the Neolithic era. Firstly, the early and middle stages of divine-human images are characterized by a figurative style, often depicting figures in dance, reflecting ancient sacrificial practices or the totemic culture of clans (Figure 43). Secondly, during the early to middle periods, the artistic representation of divine-human heads exhibits a diverse and vibrant style. These transformed figures reflect early humans' infinite idealization of and artistic creativity regarding divine beings, with aesthetic concepts that continue to resonate today. Thirdly, the decorative style of divine-human images marks a mature period in its artistic evolution, where the figures possess an artistic beauty, indicating the accomplished status of the divine-human images. Lastly, the geometric variation style of divine images primarily features triangular shapes, highlighting a narrative approach toward a more formalized and simplified symbolism of divine images. This progression in the art of divine-human representation contributes to the roots of abstract artistic aesthetic styles in Chinese artifact images. By examining the diverse artistic characteristics of collected colorful pottery featuring divine-human figures, we can analyze the aesthetic spiritual orientation of divine-human culture.

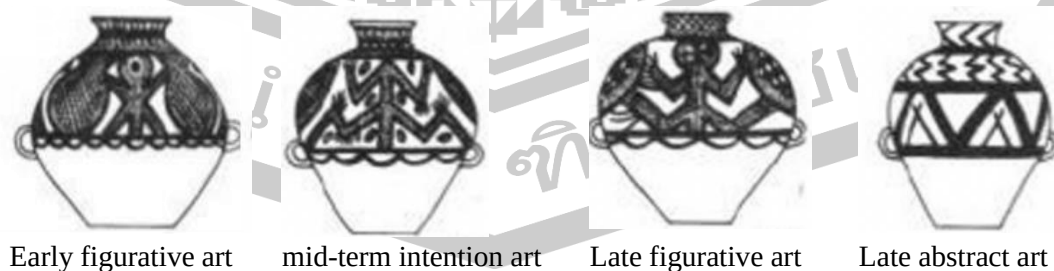


Figure 43: The Neolithic Age of China's primitive society: the artistic evolution of "divine-human" images in Majiayao, Gansu

Source: Guo Jianfu. Dictionary of Chinese Patterns. Tianjin Education Press. 1st Edition 1998. p73

As evident from the above illustration, the images of divine-human figures in the decorative patterns of artifacts from primitive societies presents a prayer to the heavens or a connection with natural elements (such as land, the sun, or the seeds of life) through their extended postures and surrounding symbols. These images are not merely artistic works; they serve as carriers of ancient religious beliefs and mythological narratives, reflecting the contemporary concepts of animism and polytheistic worship.

At the same time, from an aesthetic cultural perspective, the evolution of divine-human images in the illustration—from four limbs in the early stages to two limbs later on—demonstrates the artistic development from the figurative to the abstract. This evolution reflects the exploratory phase of ancient human beings in observing and representing the objective world through artistic creation. The divine-human figures show humanity's growing concern for itself, gradually forming a mature reflection on the relationship between humans and their self-identity, which is also one of the early manifestations of symbolism in art. The aesthetic ideas of totems in primitive times tend to transition from figurative expression towards a stylized geometric composition in artistic aesthetics, shaping the unique linguistic characteristics of colored pottery images. This transformation has influenced the pattern styles of later image arts. The reason for this shift lies in the fact that "divine-human" culture became an essential component of spiritual worship and aesthetic values in ancient society. It originated from the ritualistic and totemic culture of the Neolithic era and gradually evolved into a part of the ritual and music culture of "divine rights" during the later slave society. These artistic images not only standardized the worship culture of "divine authority" in the production of artifacts but also carried significant meaning for social inheritance and evolution.

The reason why "worship" is regarded as a "matter of national significance" is that the object of worship—the deities—serves as a moral force and spiritual support that upholds the existence of political power. Essentially, sacrificial rites represent an externalization of religious beliefs; state-sponsored rituals serve as ideological tools for the ruling class to deify the monarchy and consolidate their power. From the early stages of civilization, religious authority was wielded by the rulers, and the combination of divine authority and political power became a tool of state governance. When "government decrees are proclaimed as the will of the gods, they achieve supreme authority."

Notably, in the images of artifacts from the Han dynasty's Haihun Marquis State, there remains evidence of the cultural inheritance of the "divine-human" aesthetic paradigm. This shows the evolution of the "divine-human" images from the colored pottery of primitive society to the artistic representations of the Han dynasty, such as the "winged human," "Eastern King," and "Western Queen Mother," which all exemplify the transmission of ancient Chinese "divine-human" cultural art. Additionally, during the reign of Emperor Wu of Han, there are records of "immortal paths" and "divine humans," featuring flying dragons and clouds that delicately paired the divine with the celestial, illustrating the connection of riding clouds and flying dragons to traverse the seas.

1.2 The Aesthetic Cultural Characteristics of "Theocratic unity" in Ritual Music and Ritual Systems during the Shang and Zhou Dynasties.

The Shang Dynasty is the first dynasty in China with direct written records, and its culture and politics are closely linked to the concept of "divinity." Rulers communicated with deities through divination, sacrifices, and prayers to seek protection and guidance, thereby establishing a unified belief in divine authority and a relatively flexible and orderly social structure. The Shang continued the slave system of the Xia Dynasty, marked by a clear class hierarchy. According to the "Appended Statements" of the I Ching, "In ancient times, the King of the Bao Xi clan ruled the world by observing celestial patterns above and terrestrial laws below, studying the markings of birds and beasts and the suitability of the land, drawing on personal experiences and the external world, thus he initiated the Eight Trigrams to connect with the virtues of the divine and resonate with all things." Centered around "divine authority," the Book of Rites states, "The Yin people revered the gods and led the people in serving the gods, prioritizing ancestral worship over ritual, and punishment over reward." The ruling class of nobles and feudal lords held the exclusive privilege to participate in divination and worship of heaven and earth, while ordinary citizens could only engage in simple religious ceremonies, and slaves were either the property of the nobles or used as sacrifices.

The aesthetic characteristics of the decorative forms and images on ceremonial bronze vessels from the Yin Shang period predominantly exhibit symmetrical patterns, with an artistic style that is both mysterious and fierce, featuring complex and rigid images. These large, heavy vessels profoundly reflect the contemporary concepts of "ritual systems" and the divine mandate of authority. Among them, motifs such as the taotie (also known as the human-faced beast) (Figure 50), kui, and thunder patterns are typical representatives of this era. These designs serve to convey heavenly will as a moral instruction for rulers and subjects. The taotie motif symbolizes divine beings and the protection of royal power, used in sacrificial ceremonies to delineate social hierarchies. From the late Shang to the early Western Zhou periods, the artistic aesthetics of artifact images primarily display a sharp style that evokes majesty and sanctity, symbolizing cultural identifiers within a society governed by "divinely granted authority" in ritual laws, ultimately evolving into symbols of the state.

The initial images of the taotie motif can be traced from the aforementioned Gansu colored pottery, evolving into the formalized images on Shang Dynasty bronze vessels. It features a beast face with a head but no body, a style that continued through the Shang and Zhou periods, and later influenced the simplified beast face patterns of the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods. In the Han and Tang dynasties, it further evolved into frontal depictions of beast heads, referred to as "beast face portraits." This indicates the ongoing cultural transmission of beast worship, which culminated in a richer array of "divine" images in the Ming and Qing periods. From the bronze patterns unearthed in the Haihun Marquis State, it is clear that the beast face motif transformed into an aesthetic style of "divine-human" images, which had become highly simplified and symbolically narrative. The use of spiraling curves in these "divine-human" forms could also suggest depictions of "water deities," linking to the local craftsmanship of the Western Han along the Yangtze River. In contrast to

the sharp, ornate, and meticulously designed beast heads of the Shang and Zhou periods, the beast faces on the Western Han bronze artifacts from Haihun Marquis show a shift towards naturalism and secularization (Figure 51), reflecting the aesthetic demands of figurative art. Scholars believe that the beast face motif, with its symmetrical composition, should be interpreted as representing divine upper limbs, rather than merely a beast head. The images of the beast face in the Western Han period signifies a move from the ritualistic motifs of the Shang and Zhou to more everyday, human-centric representations. Over time, this narrative style evolved, rooted in both the folk art traditions of China's northern and southern regions, embodying the aesthetic values and cultural significance of the images. It thus became part of a cross-historical, cross-regional, and cross-ethnic visual paradigm, forming the foundation of traditional folk culture and the symbolic language of ancient Chinese mythology.



Figure 44 Animal mask image

Source: Tian Zibing, Wu Shusheng, Tian Qing, History of Chinese Patterns. Beijing: 2003. pp70



Figure 45 Gilt animal mask image

Source: Haihun Marquis State Museum

The Western Zhou period marks the formation of China's ritual and music culture, with the "ritual-music system" being stricter than in the Shang period. It represented the recognition of power, with "ritual" being used to strictly control the feudal lords, ensuring their submission to the Zhou king's leadership. "Music" served as a means of communication between the nobility and the common people, fostering social development and political stability. The bronze art of this period serves as a testament to China's transition from a slave society to a feudal society. With the development of Western Zhou ritualism, the aesthetic definition of artifacts also underwent a shift. The rigid decorative techniques of the past gave way to a pursuit of harmonious realism, with a focus on elegant and distinctive decorative styles as the new aesthetic. The kui dragon motif gradually diminished, while the auspicious birds, symbolic of divine communication between heaven and earth, became the dominant

images. The **Lv's Spring and Autumn**⁹ Annals states: "Before the rise of an emperor, heaven must first show a sign to the people below... During King Wen's time, heaven first revealed fire, and a red bird carried a scroll of divine writing to the Zhou altar."

(Figure52) The phoenix motif became one of the primary symbols of this period, as shown in the artifacts. This confirms that under the guiding principle of "Yin revered culture, Zhou valued simplicity," the style of bronze art became dignified and elegant, with flowing, harmonious patterns and a reserved emotional expression.



Figure 46 Phoenix in the Western Zhou Dynasty

Source: Tian Zibing, Wu Shusheng, Tian Qing, History of Chinese Patterns. Beijing: 2003.pp98

Compared to the Shang, the Zhou people held the ritual system in even greater esteem, leading to a significant increase in the number of inscribed bronze vessels, with rich and varied content. While inheriting the characteristics of the Shang period, these artifacts also demonstrate notable transformations. The inscriptions on bronze vessels recorded information about the authority of the nobility, social order, and legal systems of the time. The unique "jinwen" script on ritual bronzes indicates that writing gradually replaced pictorial narratives, becoming the primary means of communication. Although the use of written symbols came later than the ancient pictographs, the maturity of the characters as semantic symbols reflects their advanced development. Traces of pictographs remain, showcasing the transition of writing from a practical tool to an aesthetic form, marking one of the key origins of Chinese calligraphy. These inscriptions on Zhou bronzes highlight the standardization of characters, the evolution of pictographs, the symbolism of aristocratic culture, and the emergence of calligraphic art. Together, these factors shaped the foundation of ancient Chinese calligraphic aesthetics, reflecting the advanced development and innovation of society and culture at the time. As shown in the (Table5).

⁹ Lv's Spring and Autumn (吕氏春秋): A collection of essays on political theory in the late Warring States Period, totaling 26 volumes and 160 articles. The content covers a wide range of topics, mainly Taoist Huang-Lao thought, and also incorporates the opinions of hundreds of pre-Qin scholars including Confucianism, Ming Dynasty, Dharma, Mohism, Agriculture, and Yin and Yang. It is a representative work of miscellaneous schools and the origin of ancient Chinese books.

Table 5 Shang Dynasty. Bronze vessels from the Shang and Zhou periods bear inscriptions with characters like "li" (ritual)



Xiaochen yu Zun, Shang Dynasty

Source: Yan Zhibin Research on Bronze Inscriptions of the Shang Dynasty. Shanghai.2013. .p50



Large Yu Ding, Western Zhou Dynasty

Source: Shanghai Painting and Calligraphy Publishing House. Enlarged version of the inscription on the large pot. Shanghai Painting and Calligraphy Publishing House. 2008. p1



Xianhou Ding, Western Zhou Dynasty

Source: Zhu Fenghan. Ancient Chinese Bronze Ware. Tianjin.1995. pp:11



Mao Gong Ding, Western Zhou Dynasty

Source: Tang Lan. Complete Works of Tang Lan. Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House.2015. p363



Therefore, the ritual culture of sacrificial vessels and musical instruments from the Yin and Shang dynasties, extending to the ritual and ceremonial culture of the Western Zhou period, all relied on divine worship and ritual music as the ceremonial expression of "divine mandate of kingship." These rituals formed a standardized social system, which categorized society into different ranks, including kings, nobles, commoners, and slaves. The emphasis was placed on venerating the gods and royal authority as part of the rites, while the laws regulated the distinction of social hierarchies, reinforcing the principles of respect for authority and the hierarchical order. This created a shared cultural consensus of ritual and musical virtues among the ancestors of the Shang and Zhou dynasties. These virtues not only maintained the spiritual framework of the upper and lower social classes in the community and the state, but also manifested as a semiotic narrative within ritual practices and artisan

images. At the same time, the written records of divine worship further corroborated the role of visual art and literary works in reflecting the ideological and spiritual orientation of society during this period.

1.2 The aesthetic characteristics of the "Theocratic unity" in the ritual music and ceremonial system images of Shu and Chu cultures during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods

Starting from the Spring and Autumn period, the collapse of rituals and music, along with the decline of the Zhou royal family, made it impossible for the Zhou dynasty to effectively control the various vassal states. As a result, a century-long war broke out among these states. During this time, the State of Chu emerged victorious and continuously expanded in all directions. The political, economic, and cultural development of the Shu-Chu civilization was directly or indirectly influenced by this. The success of the Chu king can be attributed to King Zhuang of Chu, who valued virtue, strictly governed himself, and sought to win people over with rituals.

In Chinese traditional culture, "li" (ritual) is not a concrete concept but refers to actions that can be perceived by others. In the *Shí Míng*¹⁰, "li" is defined as "the embodiment of order, the means of fulfilling one's duties." In the *Shuō Wén Jiě Zì*¹¹, it is described as "the way of conduct, which serves to worship deities and bring blessings." The original meaning of "li" lies in maintaining order and regulation. Rituals and music are also integral parts of Chinese aesthetics and the foundation of Confucian aesthetics that later dominated Chinese philosophy. Confucius and other Confucian scholars interpreted "li" through an ethical and moral lens, proposing the idea of "self-restraint in accordance with ritual" and stating that "the superior man is guided by righteousness, while the inferior man is guided by profit." He also promoted the principle of "do not do unto others what you do not want done unto yourself," a moral thought rooted in benevolence (ren) and filial piety (yi).

This approach reflected the social and moral spirit of ancient China that emphasized "righteousness" and was aligned with the hierarchical and ritualistic requirements of the Shang and Zhou dynasties, which were believed to be based on divine authority. The ritual-based relationship between society and moral values thus became a central component of Confucian ethics. As a result, the Confucian view of "li" laid the foundation for a cultural paradigm in Chinese image aesthetics, influencing the aesthetic direction of Chinese visual arts for generations to come.

1.2.1 The Chu aesthetic culture in the central and southern regions of the Yangtze River system

From the Zhou Dynasty to the Spring and Autumn Period, Confucius and others recorded the original poems of the Book of Songs (Shijing), a collection of 305 poems divided into three thematic categories: Feng, Ya, and Song. The Song section mainly consists of ceremonial songs sung during major rituals and sacrifices by the

¹⁰ *Shí Míng* (释名) : The *Shí Míng*, written by Liu Xi during the Eastern Han Dynasty, is a specialized work of philology that primarily seeks to explore the origins of words. It mainly employs phonetic interpretation as its method and is the first book in the Chinese language dedicated to explaining the reasons behind the naming of things.

¹¹ *Shuō Wén Jiě Zì* : It is a linguistic reference book compiled by the Eastern Han scholar and philologist Xu Shen. It is the earliest Chinese dictionary systematically analyzing the structure of Chinese characters and investigating the origins of words.

Zhou kings and various feudal lords, often promoting the mandate of heaven and the achievements of ancestors. For example, Hao Tian You Cheng¹² emphasizes the idea of the divine right of kingship. The Shang Song includes hymns for ancestral temple rituals, which serve as blessings. Later, during the Warring States period, the poet Qu Yuan of the Chu State authored the Chu Ci (Verses of Chu), which includes works such as Li Sao (The Lament), Jiu Ge (Nine Songs), and Zhao Hun (Summoning of Souls). The Chu Ci absorbed the essence of the ancient folk songs of the Chu State (modern-day Hubei province) in the southern region of the Yangtze River system. These poems often dealt with myths, divine beings, and legendary figures, expressing the people's worship, love, and grief towards gods. For example, the long poem Tian Wen (The Heavenly Questions) addresses a variety of social and historical myths, the rise and fall of dynasties, and the natural world, such as the division of heaven and earth, the changes in Yin and Yang, the sun, moon, stars, and the fluctuations in the fate of saints, the powerful, and the warring states. The poem reflects the spiritual orientation of Chu society during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, when the cultural ethos was shaped by the "unified divine power" embodied in ritual and music. Literature and art during this period were closely connected, with visual arts also reflecting societal and political cultures as narrative texts. Images were created as symbols and narratives of ideological and artistic expression. The artistic traditions of this era, through their visual representation, conveyed an aesthetic that integrated the divine and the social, portraying an understanding of human society as united with the divine. For example, in the artwork depicted in (Figure 53), the aesthetic imagination of the Chu people's belief in the power of shamans and spirits is evident, reflecting the divine-right culture that characterized their worldview.

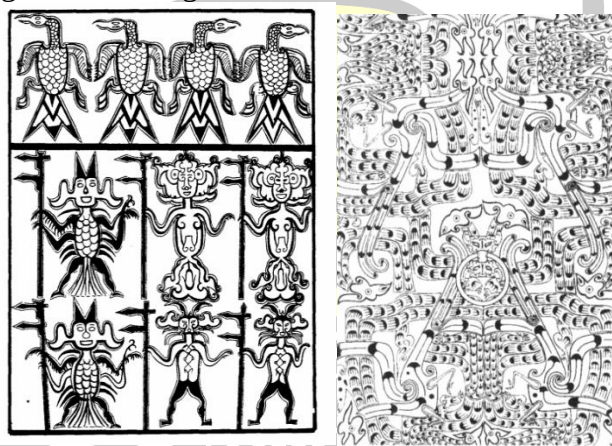


Figure 47 The lacquered coffin god Chu

Source: Guo Lianfu, Ding Tao, Dictionary of Chinese Patterns, Tianjin Education Press, 1998, p. 111.

¹² Hao Tian You Cheng: A poem from The Book of Songs. This is a song to worship King Cheng of Zhou Dynasty

The Southwest Shu aesthetic culture in the Yangtze River system

Shu culture dates back to 4,500–5,000 years ago, emerging during the late Neolithic period to the mid Western Zhou period. By the Eastern Zhou period, about 2,500 years ago, it had merged with the Ba-Shu culture, and during the Qin and Han periods, it integrated into Chinese civilization. Influenced by the metaphysical Daoist concept of "wu wei"¹³, the people took pleasure in religious rituals and entertainment. According to the Book of Han, "the fertile lands of Ba-Shu are watered by the Yangtze," while the Book of Rites notes that "the Yin people revered the gods, leading the people to serve the gods, prioritizing the spirits before ceremonies." Academic research suggests that the Sanxingdui culture may have originated from the descendants of the Xia dynasty's Yu the Great, as described in the Book of Documents ("Mount Min directs the Yangtze, with the eastern part separated as the Tuo River"), indicating that the people of Ba-Shu inhabited the areas between the Yangtze, Min, and Tuo Rivers in the Xia dynasty. Furthermore, the Book of Documents (Mushu Oath) records that the ancient Shu State was one of the "Eight States" participating in the oath of the Zhou. This reveals that the Ba-Shu people had already begun to merge with the Huaxia people during the Xia and Shang dynasties, making Ba-Shu culture one of the sources of Chinese culture. The bird-shaped motifs and mask worship in ancient Shu civilization not only reflect reverence for nature and ancestors but also indicate a belief in supernatural forces. These elements are manifested in the ritual and music culture, such as the bird-shaped motifs and masks on the bronze artifacts of Sanxingdui, which represent the ancient Shu people's veneration of gods, ancestors, and their understanding of life and the cosmic order.

The ethereal and mystical aesthetic culture of Bashu (the Sichuan and Chongqing regions) is distinctly different from the solemn, elegant, and divine aesthetics of the northern Central Plains. While both cultures are related to the worship of gods, they present contrasting spiritual and cultural values. The southern culture emphasizes the harmony between gods and society as the core of its folk aesthetic and spiritual worldview. This manifests as a romanticized, idealized artistic expression that conveys a sense of transcendence and the mystical universe, creating an aesthetic of illusion, ethereality, and grace. An analysis of divine images in the Shu-Chu regions of the Yangtze River system reveals motifs such as the Kui dragon, divine beasts, Taotie patterns, human-animal hybrids, divine birds, and divine serpents. The aesthetic of southern ethereal mysticism stands in stark contrast to the more reserved and elegant divine aesthetics of the northern Central Plains. These distinct cultural expressions reflect the unique social and spiritual values of each region. In the southern aesthetic, the harmonious relationship between gods and society is central to its folk customs and cultural identity, while in the north, the emphasis is on solemnity and reverence, reflected in their own divine representations and rituals (Figure 54).

¹³ wuwei: Terminology of Taoist thought in the pre-Qin period of China, refers to the monarch not fighting with the people



Figure 48 Spring and Autumn King's Head and Snake Body Jade Ornament Image
Source: Guo Lianfu, Ding Tao, Dictionary of Chinese Patterns, Tianjin Education Press, 1998, p. 154.

This jade artifact has an outer diameter of 3.8 cm, with two similar pieces bearing the same design. Both sides are decorated with a motif of a human head with a serpent body. The human head is shown in profile, wearing circular earrings, and the body resembles a scaled serpent. These figures are believed to represent divine beings, often associated with the mythical figures Fuxi and Nuwa. As recorded in the Xuan Zhong Ji (玄中记), "Fuxi has the body of a dragon, and Nuwa has the body of a serpent." Fuxi, the god of creation, is regarded as the cultural ancestor and a patron deity who brought prosperity and order to society. He holds a profound influence on the origin of Chinese civilization and its social development. Nuwa, the creator of humankind and the goddess who mended the heavens with molten stone, represents the foundational religious ideas of ancient societies, explaining the origins, reproduction, and survival of humanity. The artistic landscape of the Warring States period presents a new and distinct style, largely influenced by the fusion of Shu (Sichuan) art and Chu culture. As evidenced by the Warring States bronze art inscriptions and waterway conquest images (Figure 55), these artifacts depict scenes of conquest, production, and fishing, revealing an aesthetic that is both free-spirited and vibrant, yet grounded in a sense of depth and grandeur. The artworks reflect a unique aesthetic that is bold and colorful, yet maintains a sense of authenticity and powerful elegance.

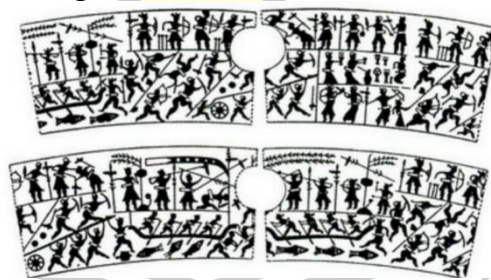


Figure 49 Land and water occupation map
Source: Tian Zibing, Wu Shusheng, Tian Qing, History of Chinese Patterns. Beijing: 2003. pp117

In summary, regarding the aesthetic styles of Chinese bronzeware, the Shang Dynasty emphasized the divine right of kings, resulting in an aesthetic characterized by a fierce and intimidating beauty. In contrast, the Zhou Dynasty prioritized ritual governance, striving for elegance and refinement. Bronzeware played a significant role in sacrificial rites and rituals during the late Shang and early Western Zhou periods, symbolizing the pinnacle of the slave-based society. As ritual vessels, bronzeware played a key role in ceremonial practices while also embodying the principles of ritual laws and governance. The inscriptions on these vessels became symbols promoting the divine right and power of the aristocratic slave owners.

1.2.2 The "Theocratic unity" of Central Plains culture during the Qin and Han dynasties, the cultural inheritance and continuation of rituals, music, etiquette images and aesthetics

The aesthetic trends of Han Dynasty art largely stemmed from Chu culture. The cultural heritage of Chu and Han traditions in the arts showed clear continuity and inheritance, both in content and form. Without understanding this key connection, it is difficult to fully explain the fundamental characteristics of art in the Western and Eastern Han periods. The artifacts unearthed from this era reflect the pursuit of the Three Principles (San Gang) and the Five Constants (Wu Chang)¹⁴ of Western Han royal thought. Their images were influenced by the established symbolic forms of pre-Qin northern art and the aesthetic traditions of southern Chu culture. This reflects the transition in Han society's aesthetic ideas from abstract, symbolic art to a more figurative, realistic approach. By analyzing and comparing the social and folk aesthetic tendencies in the images of artifacts unearthed from the Yellow River region, the Yangtze River region, and the southwest during the Western Han period, we can construct an understanding of the aesthetic and cultural characteristics of Han royal images. This analysis shows the deep connection between the symbolic language of Han royal artifacts and the broader cultural and aesthetic trends of the time.

The construction of the aesthetic characteristics of the Haihun Marquis artifacts can be described as follows: On one hand, influenced by the transformation from a slave society to a feudal society, the aesthetic tendencies of pre-Qin northern culture—characterized by mysticism and authority—shifted towards a more realistic approach. This transition involved a movement from severity and solemnity to a more vivid and lively expression. At the same time, under the influence of the Chu cultural sphere, the imperial aesthetic concepts of the Western Han dynasty combined both dignified elegance and a pursuit of lightness and vitality. These aesthetic shifts reflect the value orientations of Western Han society and the development of an aesthetic cultural paradigm in image-based narration, which was guided by the real-life values of the time. During the Qin and Han dynasties, theism remained one of the dominant social and spiritual values, as well as a key component of popular culture. The customs of venerating deities and spirits remained prosperous, with figures such as

¹⁴ Three cardinal principles and five constant principles :The Three Principles (三纲) refer to the hierarchical relationships in traditional Chinese ethics: the ruler and subject, the father and son, and the husband and wife. The Five Constants (五常) refer to the five core virtues: benevolence (仁), filial piety (义), propriety (礼), wisdom (智), and trustworthiness (信). Both the Three Principles and the Five Constants represent the ethical standards of ancient times. These principles were foundational in shaping the moral and social order of traditional Chinese society.

Emperor Liu Bang of the Han likening themselves to a "dragon" or a "god," embodying the concept of divine right to rule. From the reign of Emperor Wu of Han onward, rituals and music associated with the worship of deities became formalized as part of state ceremonies, with continuous offerings to the sun and moon. This practice also led to the flourishing of sorcery and mystical arts, with shamans playing an influential role in society. Divine culture permeated Han society, and even during the Eastern Han period, emperors consulted omens and prophecies when making national decisions or appointing officials. They used these divinations to predict the outcomes and consequences of their choices, further elevating the role of spirits and supernatural beings in governance. This belief in divine power supported the notion of "divine rule," reinforcing the concept of a unified divine authority over the empire. The practice of issuing prophecies and divinations was even institutionalized, similar to modern legal frameworks, perpetuating the pre-Qin concept of "divine mandate" for kingship. The idea of the "Unity of man and nature" from the slave society continued into the Han Dynasty, where the veneration of deities and the belief in "divine right" played an integral role in both religious and political life, shaping the ceremonial and legal systems of the imperial court and influencing the spiritual and moral orientations of Western Han society.

The social and spiritual values of divine worship in the Western Han Dynasty led the people to believe in the heavenly State and spirits, considering death as a transition to the heavens, viewing death as part of life. As a result, the practice of elaborate burial customs emerged in Han society. This belief evolved into a focus on both the social realities and the resurrection of the souls of ancestors in the heavenly realm. This became a key part of the folk culture and imperial culture, influencing the creation of symbolic images.

One category of divine images involves sacred birds, dragons (Figure56) , tigers, and other deities symbolizing "divine power" as the rulers of the celestial heavens and the starry skies. For example, the "Three-Legged Bird of the Sun" represents the moon's cyclical changes, which, due to the inability of ancient humans to scientifically explain the regular waxing and waning of the moon, were instead expressed through lunar mythology. The ancient belief held that the moon dies and is reborn each month, changing its appearance twelve times, illuminating the earth with its monthly renewal. Another example is the depiction of the Eastern Azure Dragon (Qinglong) and Western White Tiger (Baihu) constellations, as well as the Vermilion Bird (Zhuque) and Black Tortoise (Xuanwu) in Han dynasty stone carvings. The "Twenty-Eight Mansions" image, mentioned in earlier sections, was unearthed from a lacquered box lid at the tomb of Marquis Zeng (Hubei), containing 28 star names. This star system is recorded in the *Lu's Chunqiu* , compiled around 239 BCE, and some of these star names were already present in oracle bone inscriptions from the Shang Dynasty. Among the twenty-eight constellations, the Azure Dragon and White Tiger were part of this system. According to ancient belief, the moon's orbit was thought to take 27 and a half days, and the twenty-eight mansions were divided into four main directional star regions: East, South, West, and North, known as the "Four Offices" (Si Guan), each managed by a deity associated with seven mansions. The Azure Dragon ruled the East, the Vermilion Bird the South, the Black Tortoise the North, and the White Tiger the West. These "Four Deities" governed their respective star systems, with the Azure Dragon and White Tiger specifically influencing the

cosmic order and the trajectory of the dragon and tiger constellations. The theory of "divine power unifying all" was an aesthetic orientation that showcased the ancient astronomical and theological worldview, giving rise to China's conceptually driven visual arts rooted in celestial mythology. This belief system not only structured the universe but also influenced the creation of astronomical mythological art in ancient China.



Figure 50 Three-legged bird/White tiger constellation/Canglong constellation
Source: Gu Ying. Research on auspicious patterns in Han portraits.2015.p69-75

The second category involves "divine humans" who, as the rulers of the celestial heavens and the "divine power" over the cosmos, serve as auspicious deities for humanity, governing human survival (Figure 57). Examples of this can be seen in myths such as The Big Dipper and the Emperor's Chariot, The Heavenly Emperor and Fuxi and Nüwa, and The Eastern King and the Western Queen Mother, which depict the Heavenly Emperor ("Taiyi God") driving his chariot through the universe. In these myths, the Heavenly Emperor embraces Fuxi and Nüwa, uniting them as a couple and establishing them as the ancestors of humanity. According to Wang Fu's *Qianfu Lun* (written during the Eastern Han Dynasty), Fuxi, who "tied knots to make nets," was the "predecessor of the hundred kings," teaching people to fish, while Nüwa created humanity by shaping males and females out of clay. When the sky collapsed and the Earth was torn apart, Nüwa repaired the heavens with stones, ensuring humanity's survival. Afterward, Nüwa secretly consumed Fuxi's immortality elixir, becoming an immortal and ascending back to the heavens, eventually transforming into the goddess who flies to the moon. The Big Dipper, since ancient times, has attracted attention as it occupies the central position in the sky and is regarded as the king of the stars. The *Shiji* (Records of the Grand Historian) explains that "the Dipper is the Emperor's chariot, moving at the center," reflecting ancient observations of astronomical laws. During the Han Dynasty, the doctrine of "the resonance between Heaven and humanity" (Tian Ren Ganying) remained influential. Guo Pu, in his *Shanhai Jing Tuzi*¹⁵, mentions "the immortality tree, whose longevity covers the heavens and the earth; seek the elixir from the Western Queen Mother" and refers to the immortality elixir that the Queen Mother of the West possesses. Only Hou Yi¹⁶, a legendary archer, is able to obtain this elixir, reinforcing the belief in immortality in Han society.

¹⁵ *Shanhai Jing Tuzi*: It is an academic work with independent character. It reflects the understanding of "The Classic of Mountains and Seas" by scholars represented by Guo Pu in the Han, Wei and Six Dynasties, and reflects their world view, natural history, auspiciousness and exotic views.

¹⁶ Hou Yi: Legend has it that a strong man during the reign of Emperor Yao once shot down nine suns when the ten suns were rising together;



Figure 51 Beidou and Diche

Source: CXin Lixiang.Comprehensive study of 's Han Dynasty portrait stones.
Beijing: Cultural Relics Publishing House, 2000.8.p180



Figure 52 Hou Yi shoots the sun/Emperor of Heaven and Fuxi Nuwa/Prince of the East and Queen Mother of the West

Source: CXin Lixiang.Comprehensive study of 's Han Dynasty portrait stones.
Beijing: Cultural Relics Publishing House, 2000.8.p275-259.

As seen in the above (Figure58) , the aesthetic characteristics of Han culture are deeply rooted in the value system of deities as the spiritual embodiment of society. This belief system became a defining cultural trait of Han Dynasty iconographic art. From earlier chapters in the history of ancient Chinese image, it is evident that ancient images were rooted in totem worship. These images predated written language and became narrative symbols for human existence and record-keeping. Iconographic art and symbolic narratives have continued throughout history as a means of expressing human spiritual pursuits, including the ideals of kingship, society, ethnicity, and regional culture. The aesthetic culture of the southwestern and central-southern regions along the Yangtze River during the pre-Qin period shares similarities with the culture of material creation. This cultural development resulted from the merging of the Western Shu culture and the Central-Southern Chu culture, shaped by the migration of ancient clans. It represents the evolution of regional aesthetic cultures. Consequently, the aesthetic culture of the Yangtze River basin in southern China differs from that of the Yellow River region in the north, with each developing its own unique regional aesthetic style and distinctive characteristics. This divergence in aesthetic orientation highlights the cultural diversity and regional differences in China's ancient civilizations.

Part 2: The Images of Artifacts from the Haihun Marquis: Aesthetic Study of the "Theocratic unity" Ritual and Legal Symbols

2.1 Overview of the Types of Artifacts from the Haihun Marquis State

The main artifacts discovered from the State of Haihun Marquis include metal objects, jade items, lacquerware, and others, highlighting the narrative and aesthetic orientations of image art cultural symbols during the Western Han period. This analysis examines the types and the contextual semantics of the aesthetic cultural symbols in image art, interpreting the intended and connotative meanings within the iconographic narratives of Haihun Marquis State artifacts. Specifically, it explores the "signified" meanings that transcend the original literal meanings of the visual symbols, and analyzes the constructed cultural semiotics of human spiritual consciousness through these narrative symbols. The study also explores the convergence and divergence of aesthetic values conveyed by the images of different artifact types, reflecting both the similarities and differences in the cultural symbols of gender and cultural identity.

Furthermore, the paper investigates the semiotics of the imperial Confucian culture during the Western Han period, which emphasized the supremacy of Confucianism, and delves into the construction of the visual and aesthetic cultural symbols of the Haihun Marquis State's image art. Among the more than 1,200 artifacts recovered and currently restored for research from the site, approximately 320 pieces were selected for analysis based on their typicality in shape, images, and cultural connotation. These primarily include bronzeware, lacquerware, jade items, and chariot and horse fittings. The data is presented in the (Table6) below:

Table 6 The Aesthetic, Category, and Symbolic Cultural Data of Artifacts Unearthed from the State of Haihun Marquis

Symbol category	Main utensil shapes	Images symbol paradigm	Symbol Signification
Bronze art culture symbols	Ewer with a Handle、Warming Tripod Cauldron、Bronze Goblet、Spoon、Cauldron、Cooking Vessel、Incense Burner、Boshan Furnace、Bronze Figurine or Bronze Weight、Lamp、Bronze Mirror etc.	Cloud dragon patterns, realistic animal patterns, geometric patterns, and many other abstract forms are used for etiquette, sacrifices, and daily life images. The artistic style uses sharpness as the beauty and presents a concrete aesthetic style.	The cultural characteristics of sacrificial rituals, including the religious authority culture, the emotional and ideological thoughts of the Western Han royal family, the nobles, and the titleholders, as well as the regional historical cultures and social customs of the Southern and Northern regions, are embodied in cultural symbols
lacquerware art culture symbols	Lacquered Shield、Bell and Chime Rack、Box、Se (a traditional Chinese plucked instrument, similar to the zither)、Musical Chariot etc.	Flowing cloud patterns, geometric patterns, dragon and phoenix patterns, fish patterns, and plants are all multi-image shapes; figures, animals, etc. present concrete realism, etc. The graphic image art style takes illusion and elegance as the aesthetic paradigm.	The Western Han Dynasty is characterized by Confucianism's "Heaven and Man Responding" divine culture, as well as the folk customs and craftsmanship cultures of the Southern and Northern regions. It also encompasses the lacquer art cultural symbols of the

			Changyi area in the Gan, Po, and Yuzhang commanderies.
Jade art culture symbols	Belt hooks, jade pendants, jade rings, jade swords, jade walls, sword ornaments, seals, jade bottles, daily utensils, etc.	Dragon pattern, chi pattern, animal face pattern, curly grass pattern, cloud pattern, breast nail pattern, phoenix pattern, swirl pattern, many abstract shapes	The divine culture serves as the main framework, embodying the characteristics of Central Plains culture, Southwest Shu culture, and South-Central Chu culture. Its continuity, transmission, and interpretation are reflected in the narrative of cultural symbols during the Western Han Dynasty.
chariot and horse equipment art culture symbols	Danglu, yoke, horse bit, horse bridle, shaft ornaments, copper bells, shaft ornaments, etc.	Cloud patterns, mountain stone patterns, dragon patterns, phoenix patterns, tiger patterns, birds, sun and moon patterns, toads, jade rabbits, cloud patterns, and chariot and horse shaft patterns are decorative patterns, mostly characterized by decorative aesthetics.	The narrative of cultural symbols based on the hierarchical system of honor and rank in the ancient royal family and noble titles.

The data collection on the aesthetic cultural symbol text paradigms, object forms, and cultural symbol meanings of the artifacts from the State of Haihun reveals the following inherent characteristics of the aesthetic cultural symbols:

The first is the images of bronze artifacts: Ritual vessels from the Shang and Zhou dynasties to the pre-Qin period were transformed into practical objects during the Western Han Dynasty, with many of them being utilitarian items for daily life. This is a characteristic of the bronze artifacts from the State of Haihun Marquis in the Western Han. Due to the societal need for practicality, the aesthetic cultural symbols in these images developed a style that combines both decoration and figuration, emphasizing humanity's spiritual pursuit in relation to its existence within society. The second is the images of lacquerware: Following the Warring States period, the Western Han Dynasty marked another peak in the development of ancient Chinese lacquer art. The lacquerware of the State of Haihun integrates aesthetic styles from the Qin, Chu, and Shu cultures, forming a unique Southern regional lacquer craftsmanship with an elegant and dynamic aesthetic. For example, the cloud patterns on the lacquerware evolved from the cloud-dragon motifs of the Chu and Qin states, creating a distinctive, stylized pattern in the Western Han State of Haihun. The images of the objects carries grand and mystical aesthetic cultural symbols, reflecting the human pursuit of the concepts of "Heaven and Man" and "divine authority," as well as the spiritual world ideal of humankind. The third is the images of jade artifacts: Based on the jade art of the Warring States period, there was further development during the Western Han, with high-relief and openwork carvings. The depiction of nodular motifs is an elevation of jade carving techniques and aesthetics. It continues the early jade art style associated with "divine grant of kingship," using "Heaven" and "Man" as symbolic narratives. The jade images of the Western Han Dynasty emphasizes a delicate and graceful aesthetic style. Jade artifacts, primarily valued for their practicality, replaced the ritual and ceremonial objects of the pre-Qin period. Jade adornments symbolized the virtues of the noble gentleman and served as a representative cultural symbol of the royal family, reflecting the narrative function and value of virtue ethics in the image of Western Han jade artifacts. Finally, the

images of chariots and horses: Composed of metal, lacquer, painting, and inlaying techniques, these objects represent a craftsmanship aesthetic culture. Although the chariot and horse were means of transportation, they were also a cultural symbol of political "identity" within the hierarchical system of the Western Han royal family. The patterns on the chariots and horses from the State of Haihun Marquis exhibit both abstract and figurative artistic styles, reflecting a utilitarian, pragmatic value orientation. These symbols narrate the political culture of the Western Han royal family and the daily life of noble families in the mid to late Western Han period. Based on the existing archaeological images and cultural and historical data of the Haihun Marquis State, through analogy sorting and classification, we conduct a detailed analysis of various types of artifact images and deeply explore their symbolic aesthetic values. It will help to better understand the important position of the Haihun State in the historical and cultural context and its profound influence on the development of aesthetic culture in later generations.

2.2 Aesthetic Analysis of the "Theocratic unity" Ritual System in the Images of Metal Artifacts from the State of Haihun Marquis

Over 3,000 metal artifacts have been excavated from the State of Haihun Marquis, many of which are still undergoing restoration. These artifacts encompass a wide range of items, including ritual vessels, musical instruments, weapons, and daily utensils, primarily reflecting the cultural characteristics of the pre-Qin Western Zhou to Western Han periods. They not only showcase the artistic features of various cultural spheres, such as the Central Plains culture, Chu culture, Shu culture, and Western Regions culture, but also preserve elements of the "Unity of man and nature" and "divine-right" cultures found in the spiritual consciousness of pre-Qin society. Although the symbolic artistic concepts and cultural symbols from different pre-Qin periods and regions continued to exist in historical transmission, during the Western Han period, the imperial policy of "solely honoring Confucianism" effectively unified the cultural differences between the northern and southern regions. This gradually dominated and formed a new system of aesthetic cultural symbols. Aesthetic culture, through Confucian virtues and ethics, constructed the spiritual ideals of society's individuals, permeating the mind and creating everyday objects to fulfill personal desires and needs.

2.2.1 The origin of the aesthetics of etiquette and cultural symbols of metal utensils

Metal artifacts played a crucial role in ancient Chinese society, especially in sacrificial activities, where they carried rich cultural and religious significance. The concepts of "Tianren" (Heaven-and-Man) and "divine-right" are central in this context, reflecting the relationship between humans and gods as well as the legitimacy of rulers. As seen in the Records of the Grand Historian (Han Shu, Wu Di Ji), these concepts were fully embodied in Emperor Wu of Han's sacrificial activities, where he used symbols like the "white unicorn" and "gold" to highlight the close connection between the state and the divine. During the Shang and Zhou periods, bronze artifacts were classified as ritual vessels and musical instruments, forming part of the ritual and music culture used in sacrifices. These objects not only represented material wealth but also symbolized the identity and authority of the nobility. The bronzes of this period showcased the ruling ideology of "the mandate of heaven" (the divine right of kings), which reinforced the position of the ruler. However, with the societal

upheavals during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, which led to the phenomenon of "collapse of rituals and music," the function of bronze artifacts gradually shifted toward daily life items, such as food and wine vessels.

Among the metal artifacts from the State of Haihun, we can observe gold items influenced by Xiongnu culture, such as the "horseshoe gold" and "unicorn's hoof gold." These objects not only reflect material culture but also symbolize Emperor Wu of Han's ideal of "unifying China." The burial goods found in the State of Haihun convey the cultural symbols of the Western Han imperial family's "divine-right unity." At the same time, the bronze artifacts from the State, under the influence of centralized authority culture, display unique aesthetic values.

The idea of "the mandate of heaven" proposed by the Han philosopher Dong Zhongshu, along with the Confucian concept of "Tianren Ganying" (Heaven-and-Man's resonance), views the ruler as the executor of the "heavenly mandate" and emphasizes the control of power through moral virtues. Dong Zhongshu stressed that "the king follows heaven," advocating that governance should be grounded in virtue, which provided a cultural foundation for the creation and use of metal artifacts. These objects not only embodied the legal spirit of "benevolence" and "ritual" but also integrated the profoundness of Central Plains culture, the dynamism of Southern Chu culture, and the elegance of Southwestern Shu culture, forming the conceptual art of the bronzes from the State of Haihun Marquis.

These unique aesthetic features gradually took shape against the backdrop of the mutual penetration and transmission of multi-ethnic cultures in the Yangtze and Yellow River basins. Under the influence of Confucian culture, the images of Han dynasty artifacts established a symbolic narrative system centered on Confucian virtues, reflecting the profound connotations of the aesthetic culture of metal artifacts from the State of Haihun Marquis.

2.2.2 Aesthetic Characteristics of Artistic Cultural Symbols in Metal Artifacts

The form of the metal artifacts from the State of Haihun directly influenced their images and artistic characteristics. These artifacts not only adhere to the principle of "every image must have meaning" but also form a unique narrative text and aesthetic paradigm. The images of these artifacts primarily features deities, animals, clouds, and scrolling vines, with patterns dominated by S-shaped and symmetrical designs, conveying a sense of movement and grace. The design of the metal objects includes full-frame compositions such as horse and chariot gear, dragon and phoenix motifs, mythical beasts for daily use, and divine or human vessels, all of which create a symbolic narrative system through images.

These images often symbolize the worship of divine authority, such as the swastika patterns representing the eternal connection between heaven, earth, and humanity. The dragons, phoenixes, tigers, and black tortoises depicted on Han dynasty roof tiles reflect the ancient people's desire for divine protection and a blessed life. These cultural symbols evolved from the artifact images of the pre-Qin period and extended into various fields such as architecture, clothing, and more, from the Western Han period to the Ming and Qing dynasties, becoming significant narrative texts. By analyzing the metal artifacts in the "Theocratic unity" cultural narrative of the State of Haihun Marquis, we can summarize several key aesthetic features.



Figure 53 Bronze mythical beast/Bronze animal face scroll/bronze button clock
Source: Haihun Marquis state Museum

1. Single-Form images Aesthetic Symbolic Narrative

This narrative style features dynamic depictions of a single deity or mythical beast as the central subject, combining the dignified and graceful decorative styles of both the northern and southern regions. It is commonly seen in the decorative patterns of bronze and silver artifacts. For example, as shown in Figure 64 Bronze mythical beast, the bronze mythical beast fully embodies this style. The dynamic form not only showcases the craftsmanship of the artisan but also conveys the worship of deities and the reverence for natural forces, as the mythical beast carries both mythological and religious symbolism. The image of the mythical beast is not only an artistic expression but also a form of worship toward supernatural powers. Such an image might be used as a protective item, believed to ward off evil and disasters, and it symbolizes the ruler's control over divine power and their belief in the supernatural world.

2. Symmetrical images Aesthetic Symbolic Narrative

This narrative style follows the symmetrical principles of nature, incorporating facial depictions of deities and mythical beasts, complemented by decorations of animals and plants, creating a harmonious aesthetic form. This design is widely applied in Western Han daily utensils, with the intention of emphasizing the harmonious relationship between life and nature. For instance, the symmetrical patterns on some everyday items are not only visually appealing but also rich in symbolic meaning. As shown in (Figure 59) Bronze animal face scroll, these symmetrical motifs are not merely decorative; they convey a deeper connection between the human world, the divine, and the natural world.

3. Hybrid images Aesthetic Symbolic Narrative

Through arrangements such as parallel, stacked, circular, or interwoven designs, this style of design showcases the ancient concept of the connection between "heaven and humanity" as well as the influence of "divine authority." This aesthetic characteristic emphasizes the relationship between the "divine," "human," and the "beautiful world," reflecting the ordered system of "divine right" or "heavenly mandate." As cultural symbols, the images in this narrative are imbued with meaning through deities, animals, and plants, illustrating humanity's pursuit of ideal beauty and carrying the legacy of pre-Qin ritual and music culture. For example, bronze vessels such as the bronze bound bell (Figure 64 bronze button clock) use symbolic narrative to organically integrate artistic aesthetics with religious beliefs, social systems, and other cultural connotations. This fusion highlights the interplay of aesthetics with deeper spiritual and societal values.

2.2.3 Empirical Data and Variables of the Aesthetic Symbolism of Metal Artifacts in the State of Haihun Marquis

Symbols have cultural characteristics, and culture, in turn, has ethnic characteristics. Therefore, symbols are first generated within specific ethnic cultures. The Han Dynasty was a historical period of social integration among multiple ethnic groups. The fusion between different regional ethnicities became the root of the dissemination of aesthetic craftsmanship in artifacts. During this time, the blending of diverse cultures and traditions influenced the design and decoration of artifacts, forming the foundation of the aesthetic spread in material culture.

2.2.3.1 The Differential Variables in the Transmission of Regional Cultural Histories in the Aesthetics of Artifacts from the Pre-Qin to the Western Han Period

The Western Han Dynasty spanned across the northern and southern regions of China. The unique geographic environments and socio-economic structures of different areas nurtured a rich and diverse range of ethnic cultures. With the migration and settlement of clan populations, cultural interactions and mutual permeation between different regions led to the fusion of southern and northern cultures. This integration of multi-ethnic cultures with Han Chinese culture gave rise to a diversified, localized, and distinctive craft culture in the Western Han period. Through continuous transformation, inheritance, evolution, and dissemination, this culture directly influenced the formation of aesthetic symbols in the image arts of both the northern and southern regions.



Figure 54 Western Zhou Dynasty phoenix bronze handle/Warring States period, Panyu pattern shop title ring/Bronze Boshan furnace from the Western Han Dynasty
Source: Haihun Marquis state Museum

As shown in the image (Figure60), these bronze artifacts were all unearthed from the State of Haihun Marquis. Despite the similarities in their form, the aesthetic orientations of craftsmanship and the historical variables of image art they reflect differ greatly due to differences in time and region. A comparison of the Western Zhou Dynasty bronze kettle with phoenix bird motifs, the Warring States bronze pot with coiled serpent patterns and ring handles, and the Western Han bronze Boshan incense burner reveals that rulers expressed their "Son of Heaven" identity through images. The image on these artifacts often employs mythological stories and religious symbols to emphasize connections with divine mandate and deities, such as celestial mountains, sacred beasts, dragons, and phoenixes. On one hand, these works reflect the royal iconographic concepts of the Western Han period; on the other hand, they also incorporate influences from regional cultural traditions. For example, phoenix motifs from Chu culture, mountains and flowers from Shu culture, and the exotic

deification of Central Plains and Western Regions cultures are all reinterpreted in these artifacts. This reveals the fusion and transmission of regional cultural roots, such as those of Shu, Chu, Central Plains, and Western Regions cultures, and forms the contextual variables of the aesthetic inheritance of cultural symbols in the image art of Haihun Marquis artifacts.

2.2.3.2 The cultural symbolic aesthetics variables of the ancient Southwestern Bashu migrating towards the central-south

The Bashu Bronze Civilization predates the Shang Dynasty culture of the Central Plains (Yinxu culture) by no later than 2000 BCE. The Bashu civilization reached its peak from the late Warring States period to the Western Han Dynasty, becoming an important component of China's multi-dimensional and unified civilizational development. The migration of indigenous tribal groups to the south and their integration with the central-southern Huaxia peoples led scholars in the pre-Qin period to regard it as the cultural legacy of the "Southern Silk Road" connecting Sichuan with Western Asia. This process influenced the royal aesthetic culture within the territories of the Western Han Dynasty. The aesthetic symbols of Bashu bronze culture had a profound impact on the bronzeware culture of the Haihun Marquis State. For example, the five-branch bronze lamp from the Haihun Marquis State and the bronze sacred tree unearthed at the Sanxingdui site in Western Sichuan exhibit highly similar shapes, reflecting the fusion of royal Han Dynasty artifact culture with the craftsmanship of Western Sichuan (Figure61) .

Bronze artifacts from the Bashu region possess distinct local symbolic characteristics. For instance, the bronze sacred tree and branching lamps from the Sanxingdui site in Sichuan feature forms and decorations that clearly carry the unique mythological and religious symbols of the Bashu region. The shape of the sacred tree, in particular, reflects the Bashu people's worship of tree deities (Figure62) . As cultural exchanges between the Bashu region and the Central Plains of Huaxia deepened, the symbolic content of bronze lamps gradually transitioned towards a more universal ritualistic culture. For example, the bronze branching lamp unearthed from the Haihun Marquis tomb in Nanchang has a simpler design, with decorative patterns becoming more geometric and rational. The symbolic meaning of these lamps is more closely tied to ritual systems and daily practicality.

As cultural migration and fusion continued, the decoration of lamps became increasingly simplified. Examples such as the bronze lamps in the shape of the Fusu tree from Luobowan in Guangxi and the thirteen-tiered bronze lamp from Wuwei in Gansu place greater emphasis on symmetry and balance in their designs (Figure63)

(Figure64) , reflecting the influence of Central Plains culture. These design structures suggest the complexity of rituals and the differentiation of social classes. All of these examples reveal that, during the migration of the ancient Southwestern Bashu people towards the central-southern Huaxia regions, the fusion of Bashu and Central Plains cultures not only enriched the forms of artifacts but also facilitated the shared development of cultural identity and artistic styles. This highlights the characteristics of ancient Chinese civilization's multi-cultural evolution throughout history. As shown in Figure.



Figure 55



Figure 56



Figure 57



Figure 58

Figure 55 The bronze branching lamp unearthed from the tomb of Liu He, the Haihun Marquis, in Nanchang, Jiangxi, Western Han Dynasty

Figure 56 The bronze sacred tree and branching lamp from the Sanxingdui site in Sichuan. Western Han Dynasty

Figure 57 The bronze lamp in the shape of a Fusang tree unearthed from Tomb No. 1 at Luobowan, Guixian, Guangxi, Western Han Dynasty

Figure 58 The thirteen bronze branching lamps unearthed from the Leitai Han Tomb in Wuwei, Gansu, Eastern Han Dynasty.

Source: <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/XxESGfwOZ3o80nm5GC3qXw2024.10>

2.2.3.3 The Variable of Symbolic Aesthetics Under the Integration of Confucian Ethical Culture in the Western Han Dynasty and the Cultures of the North and South

The cultures of the South and North jointly constructed the cultural and civilizational identity of the Chinese nation, beginning with the unification of the territorial domain during the Qin and Han dynasties. This unification facilitated the integration of northern political culture and southern agricultural economic culture. Although the Yangtze and Yellow River water systems each had their own distinct cultural characteristics, under the pre-Qin spiritual cultures of "Heaven and Man" and "Divine Authority," Confucianism did not reject these ideas but instead interpreted "Heaven and Man" and "Divine Authority" as a framework for imperial power, emphasizing "moral governance" as the basis of societal order and law. This led to the creation of cultural symbols and narrative texts through the folk customs and craftsmanship of both northern and southern societies.

Confucian ethical virtues, as the shared spiritual values of regional communities, became the driving force behind the interpenetration, integration, and transmission of regional cultures between the South and North during the Western Han period. This helped unify the political structure of Western Han society. Under such conditions, both royal culture and regional folk cultures' craftsmanship and aesthetics were required to conform to the Confucian ideals of moral beauty. As Confucius said, beauty is "the reason why sages are sages." The concept of the "sage" is central to Confucian aesthetics and serves the political culture of "divine authority and unity" under imperial power. It emphasizes inner character and moral qualities as expressions of beauty, with the "Doctrine of the Mean" serving as the ideal for harmony between individuals and society, people and nature, and humans with the social reality. As a result, the folk craftsmanship aesthetics of both the South and

North during the Western Han period were strongly influenced by social utilitarianism. The comparison between the royal cultural artistic symbols and the regional cultural artifacts of the North and South shows their unity, providing empirical evidence of the aesthetic orientation of Confucian ethical virtue culture symbols (Figure65) (Figure66) (Figure67) .



Figure 59 The Haihun marquis utensils phoenix



Figure 60 Jiangling Chu phoenix



Figure 61 Xi'an Phoenix WaDang

Source : Haihun Marquis state Museum/Guo Lianfu Ding Tao, Dictionary of Chinese Patterns. Tianjin Education Press, January 1998 P65, p46

From the aesthetic cultural orientation and comparison of the Phoenix motif images above, it is evident that the "huang" (phoenix) symbol, as the embodiment of the virtues and ethics of the empress as the mother of the empire, also contributed to the cultural concept of virtue, benevolence, propriety, chastity, and filial piety, particularly in the southern and northern folk societies, where the phoenix became a symbol of feminine virtues. The shared ethical and royal aesthetics of the Haihun State and the folk aesthetics of the South and North reflect the same cultural essence. This unity is aligned with the aesthetic orientation of craftsmanship during the Western Han dynasty, which had to conform to Confucian principles such as the "Three cardinal principles and five constant principles" as the foundation for societal order and laws, expressed as aesthetic symbols in conceptual art.

Therefore, the ideology of society determines the narrative of artistic image symbols. When it aligns with the cultural ideals, it is regarded as beautiful; when it contradicts them, it is seen as the opposite. This formed the foundation for the cultural symbolism of the South and North in the Western Han period, and the unity of regional economics and folk cultures. Confucianism played a decisive role in consolidating any forms of deviation, acting as a unifying force, and shaping image-based artistic cultural symbols. These symbols were underpinned by human ethical semiotics as core spiritual values, facilitating a horizontal, cross-regional cultural blending and integration. This was the main factor behind the cultural diffusion across the South and North.

2.2.3.4 The Variable of Cultural Symbolic Aesthetics Under the Mutual Permeation of the Yangtze, Yellow Rivers, and the Multinational Cultures of the Western Regions

Under the spiritual and historical-cultural conditions of the pre-Qin "Tianren" (Heaven-Human) concept and the "Divine Right" ideology, the cultures of the ancient Southern Yangtze River system, particularly the Upper Western Shu culture and the Chu culture of the middle reaches of the Yangtze River, formed a mutual permeation and fusion of multi-ethnic cultures. Despite this fusion, each culture retained its own

ethnic aesthetic characteristics, shaped by local geographical and economic conditions. However, the "Tianren" and "Divine Right" cultural ideals remained the spiritual pursuit of the multi-ethnic cultures in the south. The craftsmanship of these regions presented an aesthetic symbolization characterized by divine, ethereal, dynamic, and beautiful images, embodying a mystical and graceful style. In contrast, the Central Plains Han people, guided by the political culture of Heaven-Human Divine Right and imperial power, formed an ancient sacrificial and ritual culture that shifted toward the social order of Chinese imperial authority based on benevolence and propriety. This cultural framework resulted in craftsmanship that displayed a solemn, majestic, and elegant style in its aesthetic symbols. At the same time, during the Western Han period, the empire's territories spanned the regions of the Yangtze and Yellow River basins. Emperor Wu of Han expanded the empire's borders, opening pathways to the Western Regions and the ancient Persian Empire in the West. This led to a flourishing of trade and cultural exchanges between the Western Han and the Eurasian world, with goods and cultural artifacts flowing between the West and China. The introduction of ancient Persian (Iranian) culture and European culture into the Northern and Southern regions of China, coupled with the spiritual and aesthetic beliefs of the Eurasian peoples, contributed to the spread of these aesthetic values within Western Han society. This facilitated the formation of an open, inclusive aesthetic concept in traditional Chinese culture, which embraced multiple cultural influences. As a result (Figure 68), the image-based artistic aesthetics of the Western Han period manifested a multifaceted, integrated Han cultural aesthetic spirit, which absorbed and blended local minority and foreign cultural elements. Thus, the images in Western Han artifacts carry a pluralistic connotation, shaped by these diverse influences. This is the underlying cause of the multi-dimensional value concepts inherent in the image aesthetics of Western Han artifacts.



Figure 62: Cultural symbols of camels, big-horned sheep, and cloisonné wave-patterned artifacts

Source : Haihun Marquis state Museum

2.2.4 Quantification and Qualitative Results of the Cultural Symbolism of Metal Artifacts' Image Aesthetics

2.2.4.1 Quantification of Symbolic Information Results

First, Analysis of the Causal Variables of Folk Symbol Culture in the Aesthetic Paradigm of Metal Artifacts' Form and Design in the Western Han Dynasty. The aesthetic cultures of the "Dragon" and "Phoenix" motifs in metal artifacts from the southern folk societies of the Yangtze River region differ from those of the Central Plains folk societies of the Yellow River region, shaped by the influences of geographic and social cultures. The "Dragon" and "Phoenix" motifs in the southern region are characterized by elegance, liveliness, and beauty, while those in the northern region are more dignified, refined, and majestic. Although there are

differences in aesthetic styles and spiritual orientations, both share a cultural symbolism rooted in the "unified divine authority" theory. This suggests that the social consciousness and ideological framework of the time played a key role in determining the aesthetic orientation of image art and cultural symbolism.

Second, analysis of the Regulatory Variables of Confucian Cultural Symbolism and Ritual Norms in Metal Artifacts' images. Analyzing the relationship among Confucian culture, local regional culture, and foreign cultures, the narrative paradigm of the Western Han Dynasty's metal artifact images art and aesthetic symbolism is primarily driven by Confucian ethical and cultural principles. Confucianism, with its emphasis on ritual and law, forms the central framework of the ethical cultural semiotics in the Western Han Dynasty. It serves as the intrinsic "meaning" of the narrative in the symbolic paradigms of both southern and northern local cultures of the Western Han. Confucian culture, through its rituals and norms, constructed the subject of ethical cultural semiotics, regulating and constraining the unity of regional cultural symbols from both the northern and southern regions of the Western Han and the textual paradigm of symbolic narratives.

2.2.4.2 Qualitative Results of Symbolic Analysis

1. Qualitative Analysis of the Artistic Cultural Symbols in Metal Artifacts of the Haihun Marquis State

Through the concrete images of "vessels," the abstract concept of the "Dao" is revealed. In this context, "artifacts" primarily refers to the metal ritual vessels of the Haihun Marquis State. The bronzeware of this period is filled with symbolic and semiotic language, transcending the boundaries of ordinary materiality. The Western Zhou Ding vessels, for instance, reflect the narrative of the "Dao" within the "divine authority" culture. These vessels serve as cultural symbols, embodying the art of vessel images. This demonstrates that human social life transforms everyday utilitarian objects into artistic patterns, images, and forms as semantic elements. The artistic appeal of vessel images is thus converted into a cultural semiotic narrative, which enters and elevates the spiritual realm of humanity. This is integrated into the regulation of daily human behavior.

The bronze artistic aesthetic culture of the Haihun Marquis State symbols is rooted in the material vessels that carry the ritual, music, cosmological, and divine authority culture as well as royal culture. These symbols merge with human spiritual emotions and directly connect humans with the heavens and the earth. This forms the idealized spiritual world of Confucian "Heavenly-human resonance" and presents an aesthetic culture that reflects harmony between humans, nature, and society, as well as an idealized divine and supernatural realm. As an orientation of the Western Han royal craftsmanship aesthetic cultural symbols, it constructs the vessel images art as a narrative of human emotional and spiritual worlds. This represents the spiritual values at the core of Chinese aesthetic images and semiotics.

2. Aesthetic and Ethical Cultural Symbolism of the Haihun Marquis State's Bronze Artifacts

After the Spring and Autumn period, the ritual and music culture based on bronze, associated with divine authority, began to decline. By the Western Han period, bronze art was gradually replaced by lacquer art. During this time, Confucianism infused the ethical culture into the pre-Qin ritual vessels' divine authority concepts. The bronze artifacts of the Haihun Marquis State in the Western

Han period marked a departure from the pre-Qin bronze images that worshiped the gods, instead emphasizing the harmonious relationship between humans and the cosmos. These artifacts began to reflect narratives of royal governance, human ethics, and the pursuit of beauty as an ideal. Confucianism used the "Heavenly-human resonance" of celestial phenomena to predict the prosperity, disaster, survival, and demise of imperial power. The images of these ritual vessels now carried symbolic cultural semiotics with functions such as bringing good fortune and warding off disasters.

Such cultural symbols are not derived from causal relationships but rather from the subjective associations that satisfy human psychological needs. These symbols are built within the framework of ethical cultural concepts, with the symbolic value not being a direct cause-and-effect but an "intended meaning" within the symbolic narrative. This narrative generates a guiding force that reshapes people's spiritual world and ideological values, acting as a collective cultural symbol recognized by society. Confucian aesthetic cultural symbols thus become materialized representations of the "unification of imperial power" spirit. They embody the spiritual and cultural ideal of Confucianism, guiding belief in virtues such as "benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trust" (the "Three Bonds and Five Constants") as the core of social ethics. These ideals shaped the spiritual pursuit of a harmonious relationship between humans and society, which is also reflected in the Haihun Marquis State's bronze craftsmanship, where virtue is embedded as the symbolic narrative of the artifacts.

The cultural symbols of Confucian ethics and aesthetics are the collective choice of society's aesthetic and public spiritual beliefs. They possess both cognitive and educational functions, guiding the symbolic narrative context of the bronze artifacts from the Haihun Marquis State. Confucian ethical aesthetics represent a cultural symbol that evolves from individual use to social use, showing a process in which aesthetic symbols can transcend geographical and cultural boundaries. The "self-use" narrative of the individual, the subject of aesthetic symbols, also becomes "other-use," meaning it can be accepted by diverse ethnic groups, showing the universal spiritual value of Confucian ethics as an aesthetic worldview. At the same time, metal bronze artifacts from the Haihun Marquis State, such as bronze lamps, chariot and horse fittings, and banquet vessels, reflect a humanized aesthetic orientation. These objects not only demonstrate the exquisite craftsmanship and artistic standards of Western Han artisans but also highlight the human-centered aesthetic values embodied in Confucian ethical culture. This aesthetic orientation became a common cultural cognition shared by the imperial family and society at large. The era of the Western Han Dynasty saw a new chapter in the history of art, technology, and culture, demonstrating the cultural value of realism as the aesthetic spirit of the time, confirming the historical trajectory of a society rooted in pragmatic and universal ethical values.

2.3 Aesthetic Analysis of the Jade images and "Theocratic unity" Ritual Culture Symbols of the Haihun Marquis State

During the Western Han Dynasty, jade became both a ceremonial object and a daily necessity, symbolizing nobility and virtue, reflecting the jade culture. Jade became a symbol of traditional Chinese virtues and one of the representatives of Chinese spiritual civilization and aesthetic culture. Zhou Li Zheng Yi and Shuo Wen Jie Zi record that jade was regarded as a manifestation of heaven and earth, as well as a symbol of virtue. The Book of Songs and Qu Yuan's Nine Songs both praise the beauty of jade. In the Eastern Jin Dynasty, Ge Hong mentioned in Bao Pu Zi that jade was a rare substance, often considered a magical elixir. Confucius proposed that jade possessed "eleven virtues," laying the foundation for jade culture as a core ethical symbol. Guan Zhong compared jade to the "nine virtues" of a gentleman, including benevolence, wisdom, and righteousness. Shuo Wen Jie Zi explains jade as "the beauty of stone," representing the wisdom and morality of a gentleman.

During the Han Dynasty, Dong Zhongshu, who championed Confucianism as the dominant ideology, linked jade with royal authority. Emperor Wu of Han, a strong proponent of Confucianism, saw jade as a symbol of the gentleman. Confucianism's Three Bonds and Five Constants became the mainstream of social moral culture. Confucius's concept of "moral comparison" connected the material symbol of jade with virtue and ethical culture, thus establishing a model of cultural symbolism in ancient China. This model became the dominant spiritual and ideological framework for society.

During the Western Han Dynasty, jade became both a ceremonial object and a daily necessity, symbolizing nobility and virtue, reflecting the jade culture. Jade became a symbol of traditional Chinese virtues and one of the representatives of Chinese spiritual civilization and aesthetic culture. Zhou Li Zheng Yi and Shuo Wen Jie Zi record that jade was regarded as a manifestation of heaven and earth, as well as a symbol of virtue. The Book of Songs and Qu Yuan's Nine Songs both praise the beauty of jade. In the Eastern Jin Dynasty, Ge Hong mentioned in Bao Pu Zi that jade was a rare substance, often considered a magical elixir. Confucius proposed that jade possessed "eleven virtues," laying the foundation for jade culture as a core ethical symbol. Guan Zhong compared jade to the "nine virtues" of a gentleman, including benevolence, wisdom, and righteousness. Shuo Wen Jie Zi explains jade as "the beauty of stone," representing the wisdom and morality of a gentleman. During the Han Dynasty, Dong Zhongshu, who championed Confucianism as the dominant ideology, linked jade with royal authority. Emperor Wu of Han, a strong proponent of Confucianism, saw jade as a symbol of the gentleman. Confucianism's Three Bonds and Five Constants became the mainstream of social moral culture. Confucius's concept of "moral comparison" connected the material symbol of jade with virtue and ethical culture, thus establishing a model of cultural symbolism in ancient China. This model became the dominant spiritual and ideological framework for society.

Approximately 400 pieces (or sets) of jade artifacts have been excavated from the Haihun Marquis State of the Han Dynasty in Nanchang, with over 40 different types of vessel shapes. The artistic styles and symbolic narrative texts are diverse and abundant in variety. The quantity is considerable, and the shapes and functions of the artifacts vary. The jade designs and images carry rich cultural and symbolic meanings.

2.3.2 The Aesthetic Origins of the Jade Culture in the Haihun Marquis State

During the Western Han Dynasty, the state of Haihun Marquis was deeply influenced by the Silk Road, leading to the exchange and integration of Central Plains culture and the cultures of the Western Regions. Since the Pre-Qin period, with the fusion of northern and southern cultures, jade culture has developed profound symbolic images as a cultural tradition. The jade artifacts from Haihun Marquis show patterns and images related to mythological stories and religious rituals, and these images also reflect the diversified expressions of Confucian virtues and ethical culture. From the perspective of craftsmanship, the level of jade manufacturing in Haihun Marquis reached a high standard. The exquisite craftsmanship enabled the jade art to directly express the social and spiritual functions of jade culture. It not only showcased ethical concepts within jade culture but also preserved the Confucian spirit and aesthetic values within royal culture, providing rich historical materials for future research on the artistic styles and iconographic aesthetics of Western Han jade artifacts.

In the Neolithic and Shang-Zhou periods, jade designs were often centered around beast faces and anthropomorphic figures. During the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, jade patterns included geometric patterns, grain patterns, reed patterns, and combinations with dragon, bird, and beast motifs, commonly seen in items like *bi* (discs), *huang* (rings), *jue* (halberds)¹⁷, and belt hooks. The Qin and Han periods marked the flourishing of Chinese jade culture, inheriting narrative artistic symbols such as "heaven and man" and "divine authority," which are characteristic of jade culture. During the Western Han period, the jade artifacts commonly featured beast-face patterns, coil motifs, and *chi* (dragon) patterns.

The iconographic and symbolic aesthetics of Haihun Marquis inevitably bear the influence of Pre-Qin social ideologies and philosophical spirits. Its aesthetic understanding inherited the spiritual culture of "heaven and man" and "divine authority," forming the aesthetic and cultural values of Western Han iconology. Western aesthetics, rooted in a philosophical pursuit of truth, often expresses itself through realistic, figurative images, characterized by a rational narrative and "meaning" as a form of semiotic culture with real-world, philosophical, and systematic elements. It can also exhibit metaphysical thought. In contrast, the iconographic symbols of ancient Chinese aesthetics from the Pre-Qin to Western Han periods have narrative traits of continuity, perceptibility, and spiritual consciousness. They reveal a humanistic worldview within the cultural symbols of image, with a focus on the relationship between heaven, earth, humanity, society, and the universe. Thus, Chinese ancient iconographic aesthetics differ from Western classical aesthetics as two distinct philosophical cultures for understanding beauty. The aesthetic culture of Chinese iconographic symbolism from the Pre-Qin to Western Han periods represents an idealistic spiritual reconstruction of the universe, society, and reality through the integration of text, narrative, and meaning, becoming a semiotic cultural expression of human ideals.

2.3.3 Images Aesthetic Cultural Symbols of Haihun Marquis State's Jade Artifacts: Variants and Quantitative Study

The historical transmission of social, cultural, political, and economic symbols across different Pre-Qin periods exhibits variations in the variables of regional artifact

¹⁷ *bi* (discs), *huang* (rings), *jue* (halberds): The name of the type of jade

images. This variation is influenced by the mutual integration of regional artifact image from the northern and southern societies. The underlying cause of these variations lies in the different natural and economic conditions of each region, which led to the interpenetration and transmission of local folk cultures and artistic images, forming iconographic symbols as independent variables. These variables include the aesthetic and cultural symbols of craftsmanship from different regions, which in turn act as dependent variables.

Confucian ethics, with its focus on moral virtues, serves as an influential force in shaping the construction of symbolic culture and narrative orientation. It becomes a dominant, restrictive, and regulatory dependent variable in the formation of these cultural symbols. It can be argued that the Pre-Qin historical cultural symbols of "heaven and man" and "divine authority" affected the cultural symbols of consensus across northern and southern regions. At the same time, Confucian ethical culture also regulated the narrative of the iconographic art culture of the Western Han Dynasty. This cultural framework led to the construction of local jade culture symbols through regional craftsmanship, and Confucian virtues, guided by the ritualistic culture of "li" (礼) and "fa" (法), became the inevitable standard for the aesthetic orientation of Western Han society. These virtues governed and standardized the social aesthetic concepts, guiding aesthetic preferences and shaping the spiritual and cultural framework of society.

The aesthetic spirit and cultural ideals thus became integral to social spirit and artifact craftsmanship, marking them as key elements of the Western Han aesthetic cultural symbols. Additionally, the narrative text of the jade artifact image also adhered to these normative cultural ethics of virtue, which ensured the continuity and transmission of jade culture through successive generations of society. A comparative study was conducted on the jade artifacts unearthed from the Haihun Marquis State and similar jade artifacts from the Pre-Qin period, focusing on their forms and structures.

2.3.3.1 Comparative Study of the Temporal Evolution of Jade Artifact Forms in Haihun Marquis State

As shown in the (Table7) below, the decorative patterns and images on jade artifacts from the Pre-Qin to the Han Dynasty exhibit great diversity. Early jade artifacts focused on animal motifs that emphasized power and mystery, especially patterns like ox heads, dragons, and phoenixes. Over time, these motifs evolved into more intricate designs such as phoenix and tiger patterns, which highlighted finer details and symbolic meanings.

Furthermore, the shapes of the jade artifacts shifted from complexity to abstraction. From the simple, heavy forms of the Shang Dynasty to the more complex and varied combinations of the Warring States period, there was a clear advancement in jade crafting techniques. The forms of jade ornaments also gradually evolved from simple geometric shapes to more abstract symbolic images like dragons, phoenixes, and tigers. Jade artifacts were not only used for decoration but also served as symbols of identity and status. For example, jade objects such as the sword guard and jade adornments were often combined with weapons, offering both practical function and symbolic significance. Their use was particularly prominent in rituals related to power and religion.

Therefore, the jade art of Haihun Marquis State, like that of the Pre-Qin period, demonstrates an aesthetic and technical evolution, moving from simplicity to complexity, and from utilitarian to symbolic functions.

Table 7 A Comparison of the Evolution of Jade Artifact Shapes and Art from the Haihun Marquis State and the Pre-Qin Period.

				
Beast-faced jade sword check	Dragon and Phoenix Patterned Zhaoyao-Shaped Jade Pendant	Phoenix-Head Jade Hook	Chi-Patterned Jade Sword Guard	Valley-Patterned Jade Sword Guard
Source : Haihun Marquis state Museum				
				
Shang Dynasty Bull-Head Jade Ornament	Western Zhou Pendant with Coil-Dragon Decoration	Warring States Set Pendant with Hanging Phoenix Motif	Warring States Red and White Jade Tiger Motif	Warring States Valley-Patterned Jade Pendant with Snake-Body Dragon Motif

Source:Guo Lianfu Ding Tao, Dictionary of Chinese Patterns. Tianjin Education Press, January 1998,p148, p149, p152

The jade artifacts from the Han Dynasty, such as those from the State of Haihun Marquis, demonstrate that the phoenix had already become a symbolic paradigm representing traditional virtues, ethical aesthetics, and cultural symbols. From the stylistic evolution of these jade pieces, it is evident that the social culture, philosophical thoughts, and aesthetic concepts of different eras deeply influenced the style of jade images. This reflects the process of the development of Chinese jade culture, transitioning from religious rituals to a more personalized and diversified expression (Table8).

Table 8 evolution of Jade Phoenix images from the Han to the Ming-Qing Dynasties

					
Han Dynasty Haihun Marquis State Jade Phoenix	Wei-Jin and Northern-Southern Dynasties Jade Phoenix	Tang Dynasty Jade Phoenix	Song Dynasty Jade Phoenix	Yuan Dynasty Jade Phoenix	Ming-Qing Dynasties Jade Phoenix
Source : Haihun Marquis state Museum	Source : Shanxi Provincial Institute of Archaeology Collection	Source : Shanghai Museum Collection	Source : National Palace Museum, Taipei Collection	Source : National Museum of China Collection	Source : Palace Museum Collection

2.3.3.2 Comparative Analysis of the Symbolic Aesthetics of Jade Artifacts from the Haihun Marquis State in the Context of Concurrent Northern and Southern Regional Styles

The dragon motif is a symbolic emblem representing political power under the specific cultural concepts of the Chinese nation. In ancient times, it was a totem worship of clans. During the Xia, Shang, Zhou, and Spring and Autumn Periods, as well as the Warring States period, many bronze vessels featured dragon motifs, such as the taotie, coiled dragon patterns, etc. (Huang, W., 2023). The concept of the unity between Heaven and Man, which emphasized divine authority, was passed down to the Western Han Dynasty. Confucianism, with its theory of the resonance between Heaven and Man, formed a cultural framework for imperial authority, emphasizing moral governance through the Three Bonds and Five Constants. From the perspective of Confucian virtue ethics, this cultural framework analyzed the symbolic image created by craftsmen. The images and symbols created by these craftsmen were an aesthetic representation that controlled the ideological landscape of the Han society, serving as a repository for various perceptions of the people. These symbols evolved into new visual patterns and narratives as the times changed. By the Western Han period, in an imperial society that “solemnly respected Confucianism,” regional Confucian virtue ethics became the main narrative force for conceptual image art and cultural symbols. This gave rise to visual and textual expressions across various fields, including craftsmanship, textiles, and architecture. A comparative analysis of

the dragon images on jade artifacts from the Haihun Marquis State and other regions of the Western Han Dynasty explores the aesthetic variations in dragon image, under the royal “unification of divine authority,” between the southern and northern regions of the empire.

Table 9 Comparison of Jade Dragon Artifacts Unearthed from Royal Tombs in Northern and Southern Regions of the Western Han Dynasty

					
Jiangxi Nanchang, Haihun Marquis State, Jade Dragon Stone Cap Seal	Jiangsu Xuzhou, Western Han Chu King Tomb, S- shaped Jade Dragon Pendant	Hubei Suizhou, Zeng Hou Yi Tomb, Coiled Dragon Jade Pendant	Hebei Dingxian, Western Han Zhongshan Huaiwang Liu Xiu Tomb, Jade Dragon	Anhui Province Tianchang City, Trianglewei Han Tomb, Jade Dragon Ring	Beijing Dabaotai, Tomb, Dragon- patterned Jade Pendant
Source: Nanchang Han Dynasty Haihun Marquis State Museum Collection	Source: Xuzhou Museum Collection	Source: Hubei Provincial Museum Collection	Source: Hebei Provincial Museum Collection	Source: Anhui Tianchang Museum Collection	Source: Beijing Dabaotai Museum Collection

From the above (Table9), it is evident that both the dragon motifs in the northern and southern regions of the Western Han Dynasty feature an S-shaped form. However, the Jade Dragon from the Haihun Marquis State and the southern Jade Dragons both exhibit a dynamic, curved shape, while the northern Jade Dragons tend to have curved forms that share both common and distinct characteristics. Overall, the dragon, as a dynamic form, retains the spiritual and divine representation of the pre-Qin dragon.

2.3.3.3 A Quantitative Comparative Analysis of the Aesthetic Symbols of Confucian Ethical Culture

Under the ethical and spiritual culture of Confucianism, which emphasizes benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trust, the phoenix has become a symbol of Chinese virtue culture (e.g., the Tomb of Fu Hao). At the same time, it serves as an emblem of loyalty, chastity, filial piety, and kindness in Chinese folk culture and art, embodying the principles of traditional moral culture. The images and

narrative of birds, phoenixes, and evolved in stages: initially as totems of ancient Chinese clans, then as symbols of divine authority and ritual music in the pre-Qin period, and later, from the Western Han Dynasty onward, as symbols of the Confucian virtues and ethics. From the Sui and Tang Dynasties to the Song Dynasty, the phoenix came to symbolize auspiciousness. During the Song Dynasty, it was said: "The phoenix is the bird of benevolence." In the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the phoenix was widely used in the image arts of material culture and became a symbolic image of traditional Chinese virtue culture. Regions Involved: Jiangxi, Fujian, Guangdong, Yunnan, Guangxi, and other areas in the southern Yangtze River basin, part of the Gan-Yue cultural circle; Hunan, Hubei, Anhui, and other regions in the central and southern Yangtze River basin, part of the Chu cultural circle; the Yellow River basin including Henan, Shandong, Hebei, Gansu, and other areas in the Central Plains cultural circle.

The folk art aesthetics of the phoenix images from the southern and northern regions have merged into the imperial aesthetic culture, symbolizing royal power. This fusion has significant implications for the transmission and evolution of phoenix aesthetics and cultural values across different dynasties, influencing the aesthetic and cultural ideals of successive societies (Table 10).

Table 10 Comparative Analysis of the Schematic Patterns of Phoenix Paradigms in the Western Han Dynasty

				
Jiangxi Haihun Marquis State, Jade Phoenix	Hubei Zeng Houyi Tomb, Jade Phoenix	Jiangsu Chu King Tomb, Jade Phoenix	Hebei Zhongshan Jingwang Tomb, Jade Phoenix	Henan Liang King Tomb, Jade Phoenix
Double Hook Curvature Aesthetic Paradigm	Multiple Circular Hook Curvature Combination Aesthetic Paradigm	Vertical and Horizontal Circular Hook Combination Aesthetic Paradigm	Vertical Directional Circular Hook Combination Aesthetic Paradigm	Circular Curvature Directional Combination Aesthetic Paradigm
Haihun Marquis Museum Collection	Source: Hubei Provincial Museum Collection	Source: Xuzhou Museum Collection	Source: Hebei Museum Collection	Source: Henan Museum Collection

2.3.4 Quantitative and Qualitative Results of the Aesthetic Culture of Jade Artifact image in the Haihun Marquis State

Deconstructivist Analysis and Discussion of the Construction of Jade Iconographic Cultural Symbols in the Haihun Marquis State

The jade artifacts unearthed from the Haihun Marquis State are derived from both northern and southern regional craft cultures. Their aesthetic cultural origins are complex and multifaceted, making it difficult to precisely define. Instead, we can only analyze a specific category or aspect of the artistic and cultural symbols represented in the artifact images. To do so, we must excavate, identify, and substantiate the information contained within the archaeological findings. By applying deconstructivist methods and approaches, we can analyze the various cultural variables and quantitative comparative results in the iconographic and cultural symbols.

It is evident that the image of the Haihun Marquis State artifacts was influenced by pre-Qin image culture aesthetics, Western Han dynasty craft culture, regional folk art aesthetics from both northern and southern China, and, particularly, the Confucian ethics of virtue. This cultural confluence resulted in the creation of a Western Han iconographic culture in which *ren* (benevolence) was considered the highest virtue. For the royal family, this was an unbreakable code—an essential characteristic of royal culture and a rule for the symbolic narrative of imperial power.

Thus, it can be argued that the jade culture of the Haihun Marquis State is a narrative schema rooted in Confucian ethical culture and its symbolism, serving as the textual context for symbolic discourse.

From the above quantitative comparative analysis of jade iconographic aesthetics, several mediating variables can be identified: historical transmission from the pre-Qin era, regional differences between the north and south, the craftsmanship culture of the Western Han, and the influence of Confucian ethics as a dominant and normative variable. Among these many factors, the study reveals a diversified aesthetic orientation in the image art of the Haihun Marquis State, leading to a normative aesthetic conception of the jade image. This conception is not only the dominant and decisive quantitative factor in the symbolic narrative text, but also the key to understanding the aesthetic values of the period.

Confucianism, with its focus on *ren* (benevolence) and *li* (ritual propriety), constructed a universal set of aesthetic values that shaped the imperial system and societal virtues. This notion propelled the Western Han aesthetic narrative paradigm, emphasizing the importance of human spiritual consciousness. It aimed at the "civilizing" function of beauty through human nature and made societal ethics a core of aesthetic culture, serving as the vehicle for moral teachings. By prioritizing *ren* and *shan* (goodness) as core aesthetic principles, Confucianism dominated the construction of artistic symbols and narratives in Western Han craftsmanship and artifact image. Therefore, it is clear that the "benevolence and ritual propriety" culture became the central aesthetic value and emotional appeal of Confucian ethics in Western Han society.

The narrative context of the cultural symbols, such as the jade artifacts from the Haihun Marquis State, all points to Confucian ethics and virtue-based image. This is due to the Western Han society's principle of "exclusive respect for Confucianism" (*dú zūn rúxué*), a policy rooted in the Han Dynasty's adoption of the Qin system,

which emphasized governance through moral virtue (*dé zhèng*) and aimed to learn from the downfall of the Qin Dynasty. By integrating the "Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues" (*sān gāng wǔ cháng*)—centered on the Confucian principles of *ren* (benevolence), *li* (ritual propriety), and legalist culture—the Han Dynasty established a centralized power structure. This *ren* culture then guided the spiritual and ideological consciousness of both northern and southern societies, shaping the moral fabric of the time.

As a result, the Confucian philosophical culture of the Western Han became the dominant force in the formation of a society-wide system that encompassed aesthetic culture, craftsmanship, and other aspects of humanism. This system thus gave rise to a Confucian ethics of virtue, which provided the symbolic framework for the construction of cultural and aesthetic norms throughout the society, further reinforcing the central role of Confucianism in shaping the intellectual and material culture of the Western Han.

The narrative context of cultural symbols such as the jade artifacts from the Haihun Marquis State all points to Confucian ethics and virtue-based image. This is because the Western Han society, with its policy of "exclusive respect for Confucianism," inherited the Qin system and governed the country based on moral virtue. The lessons learned from the downfall of the Qin Dynasty were applied, and the principles of the "Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues" (the Confucian notions of benevolence, ritual propriety, and legal governance) became the foundation of a centralized power system. The culture of *ren* (benevolence) led the spiritual ideology of both northern and southern societies, which in turn formed a system of Western Han Confucian philosophy that dominated aesthetics, craftsmanship, and other social humanism, leading to the establishment of Confucian ethics as a cultural semiotics.

1.The Value of Confucian Ethics and Cultural Semiotics: The value and significance of Confucian ethical cultural semiotics determined the aesthetic orientations and explanations of aesthetic values in Western Han society. The result of this is the construction of a framework for the inheritance of craftsmanship aesthetic values in the visual arts, a framework that persisted for thousands of years following the Han period.

2.The Transformation of Symbolism and Ethical Values: The semiotics constructed by Western Han Confucian aesthetics and ethics evolved from diachronic (historical) semiotics and symbolic narratives into synchronic semiotic narrative analysis and transmission. This transformation reflects a consensus of anthropological spiritual culture, where the ethical and spiritual values that originated from Confucianism provided the intrinsic driving force for the propagation of visual symbols across history, regions, and ethnic groups for millennia.

3.Confucian Cultural Influence on Visual Aesthetics: The image aesthetics of the Haihun Marquis State's artifacts, based on Confucian values of *ren* (benevolence) and *li* (ritual propriety), formed an ethical worldview centered on the "Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues," which reflects the family and state cultural ideals. This perspective was then interpreted as the core value of Chinese traditional folk image art aesthetics. It shaped the transmission of Chinese traditional iconographic aesthetics, forming a continuity of Confucian ethical cultural semiotics throughout history.

4. Western Han Confucian Aesthetics and Its Social Function: Western Han Confucian aesthetics is constructed upon the foundation of Confucian philosophy, which focuses on the relationship between individuals and society. It was developed as an aesthetic and sociological concept, incorporating elements such as beauty, aesthetic appreciation, aesthetic forms, artistic language, and aesthetic spirit. However, within this framework, there remains a lack of a fully independent disciplinary understanding of aesthetics as a field of study. Instead, it has primarily been integrated into humanist cultural semiotics, addressing the ethical and spiritual consciousness of society, leaving the scientific exploration of aesthetics yet to be fully developed.

Based on the iconographic research collected in this section, it can be empirically demonstrated that the aesthetic Confucian ritual culture of the Haihun Marquis royal family, along with the fusion of the cultural elements of the Yangtze River Chu culture, Western Sichuan culture, and Central Plains culture, led to the formation of a cultural semiotics of traditional Chinese art aesthetics in the Western Han period. This semiotics reflects the homogenized value of Confucian virtue ethics and is embodied in the Confucian cultural symbolism found in the image arts of the Haihun Marquis State. Together, they construct the aesthetic and spiritual concept of the image aesthetic ethics of the Western Han period. This process not only represents the historical (diachronic) transformation of images but also contributes to the evolution of Confucian cultural semiotics with a synchronic conceptual understanding. The iconographic formalization resulted in the aesthetic qualities of both vitality and solemnity, creating a unique aesthetic paradigm.

This research empirically demonstrates the goals, functions, and roles of the iconographic aesthetics of the Haihun Marquis artifacts. The image art narrative is oriented by Confucian ritual and ethical values, which further substantiates the aesthetic and spiritual cultural appeal of Confucian ethics within Chinese cultural semiotics.

2.4 Aesthetic Analysis of the Lacquerware Images and "Theocratic unity" Ritual Culture Symbols of the Haihun Marquis State

2.4.1 Cultural Background of the Lacquerware of the Haihun Marquis State

Over 3,000 lacquerware items have been unearthed from the Haihun Marquis State, making it the largest discovery of lacquerware from Han tombs to date. Although these items were initially damaged by tomb robbers, they were preserved due to a natural anoxic environment created when an earthquake in the Poyang Lake region caused the lake water to flood the tombs. The excavated lacquerware includes a wide variety of objects, such as drinking vessels (dings, pots, cups, plates, spoons, bowls), daily living utensils (cosmetic boxes, containers, boxes, tables, cabinets, chests), weapons (crossbows, shields, sword sheaths), musical instruments (qins, se, bell stands), and ritual items (wooden figurines). These lacquerware objects are diverse in type, exquisite in craftsmanship, and rich in symbolism. The unearthed artifacts provide valuable physical evidence for studying the history, region, society, economy, culture, and art of the Western Han period in the Gan-Po region.

By collecting data from archaeological finds and photographing the remnants of lacquerware, scholars have been able to restore and analyze the craftsmanship and aesthetic values of the lacquerware. During the reign of Emperor Wu of Han, the

policy of "abolishing the Hundred Schools of Thought and promoting Confucianism" was adopted, with Confucianism emphasizing the "cosmic resonance" between heaven and man to maintain imperial power through the "rituals and laws." The belief in immortality and the pursuit of the divine became a social trend during the Han Dynasty, which is reflected in the many depictions of deities in the lacquerware of the Haihun Marquis State. This aligns with the spiritual and cultural atmosphere of Western Han society. Under the influence of the "heaven-man" cultural belief and Confucian "benevolence and ritual" culture, Confucian ethical virtues based on "human relations" served as the textual foundation for the iconographic culture of lacquerware art. These cultural symbols, which conveyed ideological concepts, were central to the design of lacquerware. The iconographic and symbolic cultural elements of lacquerware in the mid-to-late Western Han period include: symbols of the "heaven-man" worldview, divine symbols, Confucian ethical virtues, aesthetic craftsmanship, royal symbols, and regional folk symbols from both the north and south. These findings further enrich the study of Western Han lacquer culture and the iconographic and aesthetic symbolism of the Haihun Marquis artifacts.

2.4.3.1 Narrative of the Heaven-Man Cultural Symbols

Ancient "Heaven-Man" culture can be traced back to the worship of the sun bird as a totemic symbol. By the Warring States period, the agricultural and hunting tribes of the Yangtze and Yellow River basins commonly used images such as clouds, flying deities, and divine beings as profound symbols. These images became cultural representations of ancient humans' idealized visions of a celestial paradise and their spiritual pursuits. The Shan Hai Jing (Classic of Mountains and Seas) describes winged humans: "The country of winged people is to the southeast. They are tall, and their bodies grow wings." The Shan Hai Jing also mentions, "There is a country of winged people, and all the people there have feathers." According to the Shan Hai Jing, the people of the winged State have wings, which is further elaborated in the Lü Shi Chun Qiu (Spring and Autumn Annals of Lü): "The place of the winged people is a land of immortality." In the Warring States period, the poet Qu Yuan from the Chu state also referenced the winged people in his poem Yuan You (Far Travel): "I still wish to find the winged people in Danqiu, to stay in the immortal homeland." Han Dynasty scholar Wang Chong, in his work Lun Heng (Balanced Discourse), elaborated further: "To depict the shape of an immortal, with body covered in fur, arms transformed into wings, walking in the clouds, and living for a thousand years without dying." This illustrates that in the minds of Han people, the winged humans were synonymous with immortals, possessing the ability to live forever.

The image of the winged human typically features a human head and body, with wings growing from the shoulders, and feathers on the legs. Their ears are often depicted as prominent. Han Dynasty depictions of the winged humans were rich and varied. In addition to the aforementioned forms, other representations included human head with bird body and claws, bird head with human body, human head with beast body, and humans with feathered wings.

From the Warring States to the Western Han period, the symbolic system of Heaven-Man culture focused deeply on the subtle relationships between heaven, earth, and humanity, constructing grand narratives of natural and cosmic views. These ideas became the core expressive techniques of lacquerware art, laying a solid foundation for thousands of years of spiritual and cultural history in the folk societies

of northern and southern China. By the time of the Western Han, Confucian thought further integrated spiritual aspirations into the philosophical concept of "Heaven-Man resonance." This tradition continued to evolve and develop in the expression of lacquerware image. Specifically, in the lacquer images found in the Haihun Marquis State, we can glimpse a vivid Heaven-Man world. Symbols such as ascension to heaven, winged people, and flying deities not only carry profound aesthetic and symbolic cultural meanings but also showcase the unique aesthetic expressions of lacquer art.

Table 11 Analysis of Heaven-Man Figures and Cultural Symbols in Lacquerware Images

Stylistic Features	Craft Analysis	Theme and Meaning	Images
The dynamic of the flying figure is exaggerated, with the character wearing a headscarf and a short robe with wide trousers, representing a Han Chinese style	The base color is black lacquer, with the figure applied with gold foil, decorated with bright lacquer, and then polished smooth	It is derived from the mythological story of "Bai Li and the Solar Eclipse." The divine figure holds a shield and battles the Bai Li beast, symbolizing the cosmic belief of humanity triumphing over nature and the spirit of righteousness	
The gold foil figure holding a sword has a dynamic posture, appearing to be soaring through the air, giving a sense of lightness and agility	The base is black lacquer, with the figure applied with gold foil, decorated with bright lacquer, and then polished to a smooth, glossy finish	It is derived from the mythological story of "Bai Li and the Solar Eclipse," where the figure wields a sword and fights the Bai Li beast	

The abstracted form of the character features exaggerated posture and facial expressions , with a composition full of movement.	The black lacquer as the base color, the application of gold foil on the figure, and the decoration with bright lacquer are some of the craftsmanship characteristics of high-end lacquerware	The figure's attire and the image of the animal it rides hint at supernatural or mythological traits. This is a pattern derived from ancient mythological stories or sacrificial scenes, symbolizing the longing for immortality, divine protection, and conveying the functions of religious belief, moral teachings, and mythological legends	
The abstraction of the figure, with exaggerated posture and facial expressions , creates a composition full of dynamic movement	The base is black lacquer, with the figure applied with gold foil and decorated with bright lacquer, while the red serves as an accent	The winged human figure symbolizes protection, the expulsion of evil, or the invocation of blessings. It reflects the worship of supernatural forces, with the flying posture representing the ascension of the soul or the freedom of the spirit, expressing a longing for immortality or transcendence	
The gold foil winged figure is dynamically posed, with the body in a state of transformation, soaring into the sky with graceful movement	The base is black lacquer, with red lacquer used to create piled lines. The figure is applied with gold foil and outlined with carved lines, presenting a black underlay with linear drawing. The piece is decorated with bright lacquer and polished to a smooth, glossy	The strange winged figure, in ancient beliefs, represents the idea of the Nine Heavens, with the Nine Heavens symbolizing the afterlife where winged beings guide the departed to ascend to heaven. This image reflects humanity's idealized yearning for the beauty of the heavenly realm and the pursuit of transcendence	

	finish, showcasing multiple levels of lacquerware craftsmanship.		
--	--	--	--

As seen in the above (Table11), it embodies the idealized narrative of humanity's dominant views of the cosmos and nature, becoming a text within the realm of the symbolic culture of heaven and humanity. The referents of the symbols often express the idealized spiritual consciousness of human existence in relation to the real society. The image of lacquerware art reflects the semiotics of heaven and humanity. Its aesthetic cultural paradigm is often oriented toward the divine and the fantastical, influenced by romantic aesthetic ideals. The semiotic aesthetics combine human and naturalistic aesthetics, interpreting human spiritual devotion and pursuits, serving as the aesthetic value orientation of visual symbols.

2.4.3.2. The Symbols of Divine Authority Culture

The lacquerware cultural symbols reflect the spiritual thoughts of society during the Qin and Han dynasties, as well as the pursuit of northern and southern folk cultures. They express the belief and appeal for divine authority, such as the worship of the Heavenly Emperor, deities, and sacred beasts, viewing divine authority as a protector in ancient human values. The compliance with deities to seek auspiciousness as a protective symbol became a ritualized textual narrative within the image symbolism of lacquerware during the Qin and Han periods. The symbols of divine authority reached their peak during the Warring States and Qin-Han periods. An example is the lacquered mirror of the Confucian disciples found in the tomb of the Marquis of Haihun (Figure69) , which includes images of flying birds and beasts along with inscriptions of divine cultural symbols. This indicates the Han royal family's admiration and belief in the divine authority culture of the pre-Qin era. See Figure74. As a spiritual anchor for humanity, ancient Chinese culture, centered around divine beliefs, formed a narrative of image-based symbolic art through the worship of deities. This created the framework and pattern of cultural semiotics in ancient China, with a universal societal spiritual significance. The aesthetic semiotics of divine authority culture shifted from psychology to the ideological control theory, highlighting the meaningful cultural semiotics of societal consciousness.(Zhao, Y., 2023).



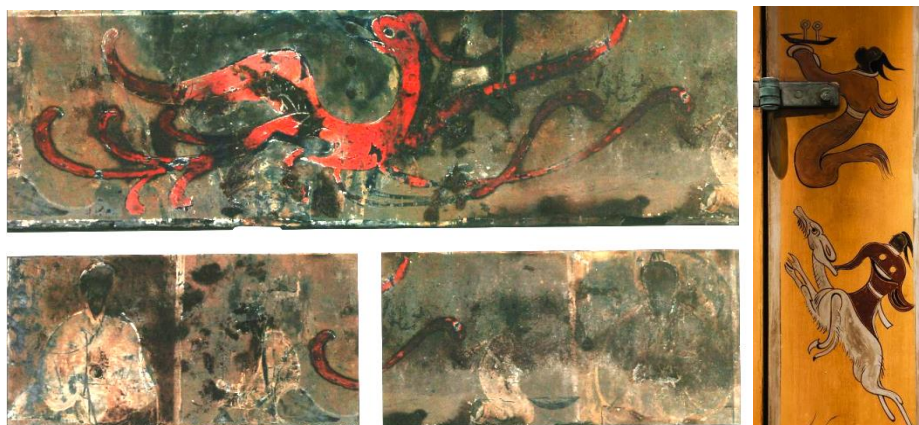


Figure 63 Restored Front View of the Mirror Box - Images of the Phoenix, the East and West King, and Sacred Beasts
source : Haihun Marquis Museum

2.4.3.3 Royal Cultural Symbols

Royal lacquerware culture was also influenced by the pre-Qin (Heaven and Humanity) culture and divine authority culture. It includes symbols such as solar eclipses, ascension to heaven, the four divine creatures (dragon, tiger, phoenix, and qilin), the jade rabbit, and spiritual beasts, which represent the worship of celestial deities. These symbols are interpreted as "divine protection of imperial power," embodying the spiritual and cultural appeal for divine guardianship over the royal family and nobility. They became the textual narrative of cultural symbols for the royal family and aristocratic clans during the Western Han dynasty, as shown in the (Table12) below:

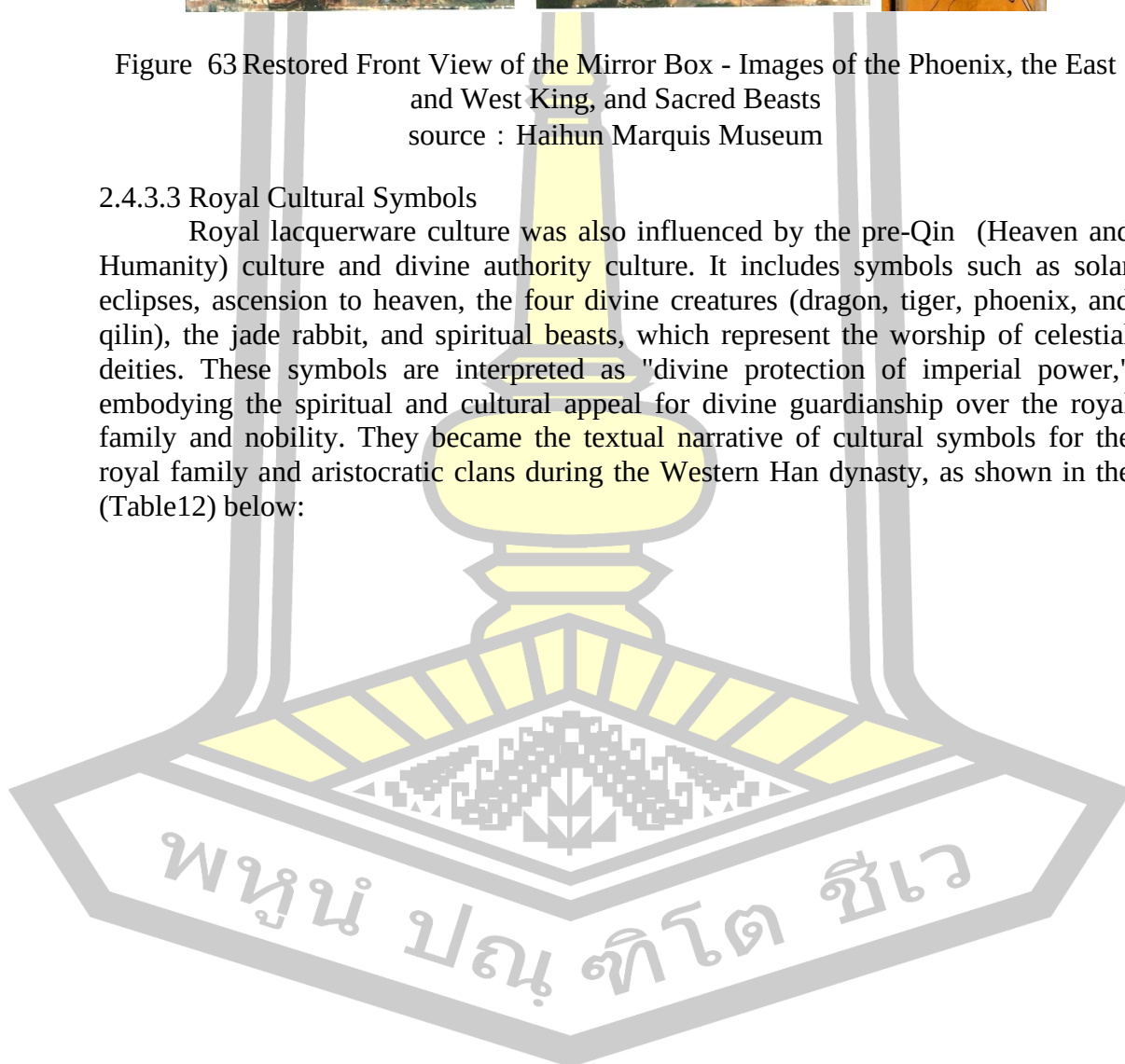
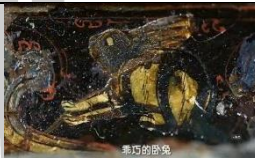


Table 12 The images of winged figures and divine beasts on the lacquerware of the Haihun Marquis State.

Styling features	Theme, meaning	Images
Gold foil feather figure dynamic shape	The strange winged figures, which the ancients believed represented the nine heavens. These winged beings were thought to guide the souls of the deceased to ascend to the heavens.	
The dynamic depiction of a golden foil deer and a figure in motion, running.	It is derived from the mythological story of "Bai Li and the Solar Eclipse."	
The dynamic depiction of a golden foil figure and Bai Li in motion.	In the dynamic representation inspired by the mythological story of "Bai Li and the Solar Eclipse," a golden foil figure is depicted holding a sword, spear, and shield, engaging in a fierce battle with the Bai Li beast. The scene captures the intense combat, with the figure skillfully wielding their weapons against the mythical creature, which might be depicted with a fierce and otherworldly presence. The motion and energy of the battle would be central to the portrayal, showing a moment of struggle between the warrior and the beast.	
A dynamic depiction of a golden foil phoenix bird with its wings spread wide.	The phoenix, in the context of Chu "bird" culture, is also referred to as a divine bird in the realm of immortality. It is similar to the Vermilion Bird (Zhuque) and is one of the Four Symbols in Han dynasty mythology, representing the southern direction and associated with fire. The phoenix symbolizes grace, virtue, and rebirth, often depicted in Chinese art and mythology as a majestic, mythical bird that rises from flames or ascends to the heavens. Its association with the Four Symbols connects it to cosmic balance and harmony.	

A dynamic depiction of a golden foil monster, turning its head back with wings spread wide.	The monster turning its head, in Chu-Han culture, is depicted with a bird's body and a beast's head. This mythical creature symbolizes divine protection, guarding the souls of the departed. It represents a spiritual guardian, watching over the souls of the deceased, ensuring their safe passage in the afterlife. The combination of a bird's body and beast's head embodies both the supernatural and the mystical power to protect and guide.	
A dynamic depiction of a golden foil tiger.	The fierce and menacing tiger, depicted in a battle scene with a human, is one of the Four Divine Beasts. The tiger is shown with its head raised and tail lifted, symbolizing strength and power.	
A dynamic depiction of a golden foil reclining rabbit.	The obedient reclining rabbit, often featured in Han Dynasty lacquer paintings, reflects themes of hunting and animal domestication.	
A lacquer painting of a tiger, with a realistic animal as the main decorative figure.	The scarlet lacquer tiger decoration means no disaster, majesty and prosperity.	
The divine bird Zhuque (Vermilion Bird) often reflects the common Han Dynasty decorative theme of the Four Symbols. This is an early depiction of Zhuque, which symbolizes the southern direction and summer in Chinese cosmology.	The foretelling bird, the Suzaku, guides the owner of the tomb to ascend to heaven.	
Highly decorative, the dragon's face is exaggerated and vivid, with curled	Symbolizing supreme power and divine power, it is often regarded as the symbol of the emperor and the patron saint of the country. The	

manes and long whiskers that enhance its majesty and mystique.	pursuit of freedom and ascension symbolizes a spiritual yearning that transcends the secular world.
--	---

From the analysis of the symbols of Heaven and Humanity culture, divine authority culture, and royal culture symbols, it is evident that the lacquerware image art and cultural symbols of the Haihun Marquis State during the Western Han dynasty were influenced by the legacies of pre-Qin Heaven and divine authority cultures. These symbols encompass the refined ideological consciousness of pre-Qin society and reflect the spiritual pursuit of humanity's aesthetic alignment with destiny, morality, and natural order. They demonstrate how the historical cultural symbols of the pre-Qin period influenced the cultural symbols of the Western Han dynasty, serving as an intermediary variable in the transmission of pre-Qin symbolic narratives to royal culture and Haihun State's artistic aesthetics and cultural semiotics. This process formed the ethical cultural symbol narrative of lacquerware in the royal family and aristocratic states during the Western Han dynasty, as well as the expression of image art aesthetics. It suggests that Confucian cultural teachings became the internal essence and meaning of semiotics, shaping the ideological and symbolic landscape of the time.

2.4.3.4 Analysis of Confucian Virtue Ethics Cultural Symbols

During the Western Han period, lacquerware was primarily used by the royal family and aristocratic nobles. The culture of these objects reflected the dominant social and spiritual culture of Confucian teachings, with specific semiotic elements and characteristics. Confucian virtue ethics and cultural norms shaped and regulated the ideology of Western Han society. The political system, which prioritized Confucianism, became the cornerstone of imperial power culture. At the same time, the discovery of lacquerware fragments with images of Confucius and inscriptions from the Haihun Marquis State, such as a mirror featuring Confucius in a long robe, standing with his hands clasped, alongside his disciples such as Yan Hui, Zi Gan, Zi Lu, Zi Yu, and Zi Xia engaging in dialogues about Confucian principles, provides empirical evidence of early Western Han lacquer art that illustrates the teachings of Confucianism and its central figures.

This discovery also includes written records about Confucius' life, offering new insights into his historical biography. The inscriptions on the lacquerware, written in clerical script, contain dialogues such as "The Master said: 'Self-restraint and returning to propriety is benevolence. The first step is self-restraint and returning to propriety, and the world will follow.' Is benevolence something that depends on others, or is it a matter of self-discipline?" This conveys Confucian ethical principles and the political notion of governing through rites, with Confucius' maxims serving as moral guidance for self-cultivation and discipline. Other inscriptions include the famous: "The Master said: 'Do not look at what is not right, do not listen to what is not right, do not speak what is not right, and do not do what is not right,'" embodying the norms of behavior in Confucian virtue ethics.

The images and inscriptions on the lacquerware mirror are a form of transmitting Confucian teachings, with the texts and images transforming aesthetic symbols into a dominant narrative that governs the spiritual and social order. Through

these symbols, Confucian ritual and virtue ethics became a psychological and cultural semiotics, which regulated the imperial system and controlled the cultural ideology of Western Han society. Thus, Confucian virtue ethics, through the visual and textual cultural symbols, fulfilled spiritual needs and articulated a symbolic narrative of the relationship between individuals and the social world.

This process formed a coherent cycle: Confucianism → virtue ethics → social spirit → cultural symbols → aesthetic meaning. The image-based philosophical narratives of Confucian cultural aesthetics served as a progressive expression of Confucianism, while the Confucian code of rites structured the semiotic text narrative of Western Han society's cultural ethos.



Figure 64 Reconstructed image of the back of the lacquer mirror with Confucius in lacquer clothing, unearthed from the Haihun Marquis State
Source: Haihun Marquis State Museum

From the above image, it can be analyzed that under the Western Han imperial power, which maintained the Confucian principles of the "Three Bonds" and "Five Constant Virtues," the functional direction of the lacquerware images and artistic aesthetic symbols was to construct the ideological and spiritual beliefs of Western Han society. This reflected the cognitive function of Confucian ritual and ethical culture symbols in the Western Han period, thus establishing the narrative function of the image art symbols of lacquerware objects, with Confucian ethics as the foundational norm. Therefore, in the deconstruction analysis of various cultural symbol variations, Confucian virtue ethics culture should be considered the dominant dependent variable.

First, the Imperial Confucian Political Culture Semiotic Narrative System: The cultural symbol expression of the political and legal system based on the "Three Bonds" of imperial power presents an order of royal social ethics and rule of law, with the roles of the ruler, minister, and father. This order facilitates the construction of the state's political system. Therefore, it inherently embodies a system of ceremonial and behavioral conceptual symbols. The imperial culture adopts the Confucian ethics mentioned in the Book of Rites (Liji) — "Rites do not apply to common people, and punishment does not apply to the nobility" — to regulate society. The role of these cultural symbols is to maintain the imperial authority's management over the upper classes through rites, using the "Three Bonds" system as a model for governance. This gives rise to a semiotic system in the imperial political culture, derived from the rites and law. See (Table13).

Table 13 Ethical Texts of Ruler and Subject from the Bamboo Slips Unearthed in the Haihun Marquis State



Lacquer inscription:
"The Southern Marquis Haihun, minister He Mei, is deceased. (The) Emperor has ordered the release of Marquis Haihun, minister He Mei."

Narrative analysis: This inscription indicates that Marquis Haihun adhered to the Confucian social hierarchy of the "Two Bonds" (ruler-subject) and the "Five Constant Virtues," maintaining the relationships of respect and submission within the social structure. It highlights the importance of adhering to Confucian ethical rituals and legal systems.

Ethical culture: The relationship between imperial power and the noble ranks is reinforced, showcasing the Confucian governance model where imperial authority and the hierarchical order of the nobility are maintained according to Confucian principles.



Lacquer inscription:
"The concubine awaits Mei's death, bows twice, and presents this letter. To His Majesty, the Great Emperor."

Narrative analysis: This inscription shows that even within the royal family, both ancestors and descendants strictly observe their political roles and identities, adhering to the Confucian norms of ritual and law, with no room for deviation.

Ethical culture: The relationship between the royal family and its descendants is emphasized, where even in the royal context, the strict observance of ritual, hierarchy, and law is paramount, demonstrating the importance of maintaining the integrity of royal authority and lineage within the Confucian ethical framework.



Lacquer inscription: "I, your servant, Rao, present this letter. Mei, the servant, is deceased."

Narrative analysis: This inscription suggests that Marquis Haihun views his role as a servant to the imperial power, emphasizing a life lived in service and adherence to imperial authority. It reflects the Confucian values of loyalty and subordination, following the norms of the "Three Bonds" and "Five Constant Virtues" within the royal nobility.

Ethical culture: The relationship between imperial authority and its servants is highlighted here, where the servant's role is in accordance with the Confucian social order. The imperial enterprise and the servitude of individuals under the royal authority are central to this ethical culture, with a clear emphasis on hierarchy and the duties of those who serve the state.

The second is the narrative system of folk sociology and cultural semiotics: The "Three Bonds" (Sangu) social order in a rule-of-law society must be guided by the "Five Constant Virtues" (Wuchang) as the moral standards of society. These virtues—benevolence (Ren), righteousness (Yi), propriety (Li), wisdom (Zhi), and trustworthiness (Xin)—are further transformed into the teachings of filial piety (Xiao), brotherly respect (Ti), loyalty (Zhong), forgiveness (Shu), tolerance (Kuan), trustworthiness (Xin), kindness (Hui), diligence (Min), respect (Gong), honesty (Zhi), warmth (Wen), goodness (Liang), thrift (Jian), and modesty (Ran), making "Ren" the moral norm of "Do not do unto others what you do not want done to yourself," and serving as the law to guide social order, which advocates for "self-cultivation and the peace of others." It also emphasizes the unity of human nature and virtue, represented by the concept of "matching names with reality," forming a moral culture centered on loyalty to the ruler, service to the country, and love for family. As a cultural symbol system, it focuses on the relationships between individuals and between individuals and society, regulated by legal management, and establishes a mechanism for restricting human cognition and behavior, with a controlling function for social order. This integrates ethics and aesthetics into Confucian semiotics, becoming an intermediary tool for the spiritual core of folk society, constructing the meaning of "National Learning" as the genetic foundation of traditional Chinese culture and art. This gives rise to narratives of local cultural symbols and images, which are then transformed into a system of virtuous ethics, folk sociology, and cultural semiotics.

2.4.3.5. Han Dynasty Derivative Regional Cultural Symbols

As the royal family of the Western Han dynasty, the Haihun Marquis State, as a branch of the imperial family, adhered to Confucian ethical culture and political orientation, governed by the "Three Bonds" and "Five Constant Virtues" (San Gang Wu Chang) system of rites and laws. The symbols of imperial power served to maintain and derive various regional cultures. In the lacquered art and cultural symbols of the Haihun Marquis State, such as the dragon, phoenix, and tiger, we see representations from the Western Han period, initially symbolizing the four guardian deities of the empire. Over time, these symbols evolved into representations of the emperor, empress, and royal family members.

These images became derivative cultural symbols, and by analyzing the regional cultural symbols of the Northern Yellow River Basin, the Southern Yangtze River Basin, and the Chu culture from the Western Han period, we can reveal the permeating influence of imperial power and legal political culture symbols on folk sociology and cultural symbols.

It is evident that the Confucian virtue ethics cultural symbols of the Western Han dynasty possessed a transformative power that regulated and derived image-based symbols into texts. Through comparative analysis of the lacquer art styles from the royal Confucian aesthetic culture and the narrative patterns of folk ethical culture, one can identify the generation, types, characteristics, styles, and narrative of these image symbols, as well as the regulatory mechanisms of Confucian ethics and the historical cultural sedimentation process. To analyze the images and symbolic patterns of the dragon, phoenix, and tiger in the context of the Haihun Marquis State and Western Han culture:

1.Haihun Marquis State Lacquer Culture Symbols: The lacquer craftsmanship of the Haihun Marquis State is exquisite, featuring black and red lacquer with silver studs on lacquered chests. The images are dynamic representations of deities, expressed as aesthetic cultural symbols. This represents the pinnacle of Western Han lacquerware, reflecting the Confucian spiritual culture of the Western Han royal family, particularly the concept of "the resonance between heaven and man" and folk social beliefs and customs. During the Western Han period, the four guardian deities were depicted in the lacquer culture symbols of the royal marquises, with vivid images that showcased a strong visual aesthetic (Figure71) .



Figure 65 Images on the Lacquered Chest Unearthed from the Haihun Marquis State
Source: Haihun Marquis State Museum

2.Central Plains Cultural Symbols: In present-day Xi'an, at the site of the Weiyang Palace in Chang'an from the mid-Western Han period, there are roof tiles depicting the Four Guardian Deities: the Qinglong (Azure Dragon) on the eastern gate, the Baihu (White Tiger) on the western gate, the Zhuque (Vermilion Bird) on the southern gate, and the Xuanwu (Black Tortoise) on the northern gate. Roof tiles, which began to be used in the Western Zhou period, continued to feature the Four Guardian Deities motif in the Western Han, and this tradition persisted into the Ming and Qing dynasties. Over time, the motif became more decorative and dynamic, with the image culture extending into the field of architectural construction. This demonstrates the diversification of the symbolic expression of dragons, phoenixes, and tigers in various forms (Figure72) .



Figure 66 "Four Guardian Deities" Roof Tiles featuring Dragon, Phoenix, Tiger, and Black Tortoise

Source : Guo Lianfu Ding Tao, Dictionary of Chinese Patterns. Tianjin Education Press, January 1998 P293

3.Western Shu Cultural Symbols: The Western Shu culture, located in the upper reaches of the Yangtze River in the Sichuan Basin, is one of the important sources of ancient Chinese civilization. The number of Han Dynasty tomb murals and stone carvings from Sichuan is the largest in the country, concentrated in the Chengdu

Plain. From the Western Han to the Eastern Han period, images and symbols like dragons, phoenixes, and tigers, though spanning regions and dynastic changes, displayed variations and derivations in their motifs over time. However, the regional cultural symbols of these images still encompassed a narrative context with Confucian ethical cultural symbols.

4.Chu Cultural Symbols: The Western Han Dynasty encompassed the Chu cultural region in the southern part of the Yangtze River Valley, which is present-day central and southern China. Influenced by ancient notions of the connection between heaven, humans, and divine authority, the Western Shu culture, under the influence of Chu culture, contributed to the formation of the multi-ethnic folk culture of the southern regions along the Yangtze River. The Confucian ethical culture of the Western Han, which unified the country, also shaped the societal and spiritual ideology of the Han Empire, thereby establishing the political and cultural framework for much of its territory. Chu culture, as a representative culture of the southern Yangtze River region, played a significant role in shaping the development of regional cultural identities.

2.4.4 Discussion on the Materialization of Western Han Lacquerware Image Art Cultural Symbols

From the evolution of the aesthetic culture of lacquerware image art symbols in the Haihuang Marquis State, it can be seen that under the worship of "divinely granted kingship," the fantastical and romantic artistic style of the pre-Qin period was passed down to the Qin and Han Dynasties, forming an aesthetic concept that blended the heavenly-human-divine authority culture with Confucian rituals and laws during the Western Han period. By the Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern Dynasties, with the introduction of Buddhism, image art shifted from a rough and majestic style to a more refined one, with sculpture art maturing, displaying both a strong yet graceful aesthetic appeal. History led to the peak of craftsmanship in the Tang Dynasty, where image art presented a diversified orientation of both Chinese and foreign art, characterized by a grand, magnificent aesthetic, marking another prosperous period of image art since the Han Dynasty. In contrast, by the Ming Dynasty, image art had transformed into a more refined and delicate aesthetic, embodying elegance and beauty, guiding art toward idealization. The art of the Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties no longer recreated the magnificent, epic glow of the Tang Dynasty, and by the late Qing period, Chinese art had evolved into intricate, fine, and delicate forms, seemingly lacking the grandeur of earlier periods. The aesthetic cultural style of crafted artifacts in image art has fluctuated throughout the ages, forming a rich and diverse historical and material cultural heritage. The world of image art cultural symbols is higher than the real world of humans and society; it is not only a materialized semiotics of humanity but also the semiotics of humanity's spiritual and philosophical world.

Through the deconstruction and analysis of lacquer art, it can be seen that the aesthetic culture of Western Han lacquerware image art and the semiotic structure of Confucian ethical culture formed an integrated system of "images carrying the Dao," blending the external function and goal of the symbols, which merged and interpenetrated, becoming a symbol text and narrative. This structure formed the information data of Confucian cultural semiotics, where the mechanisms of symbol generation are embedded in the symbol text. Both the implicit and explicit signified

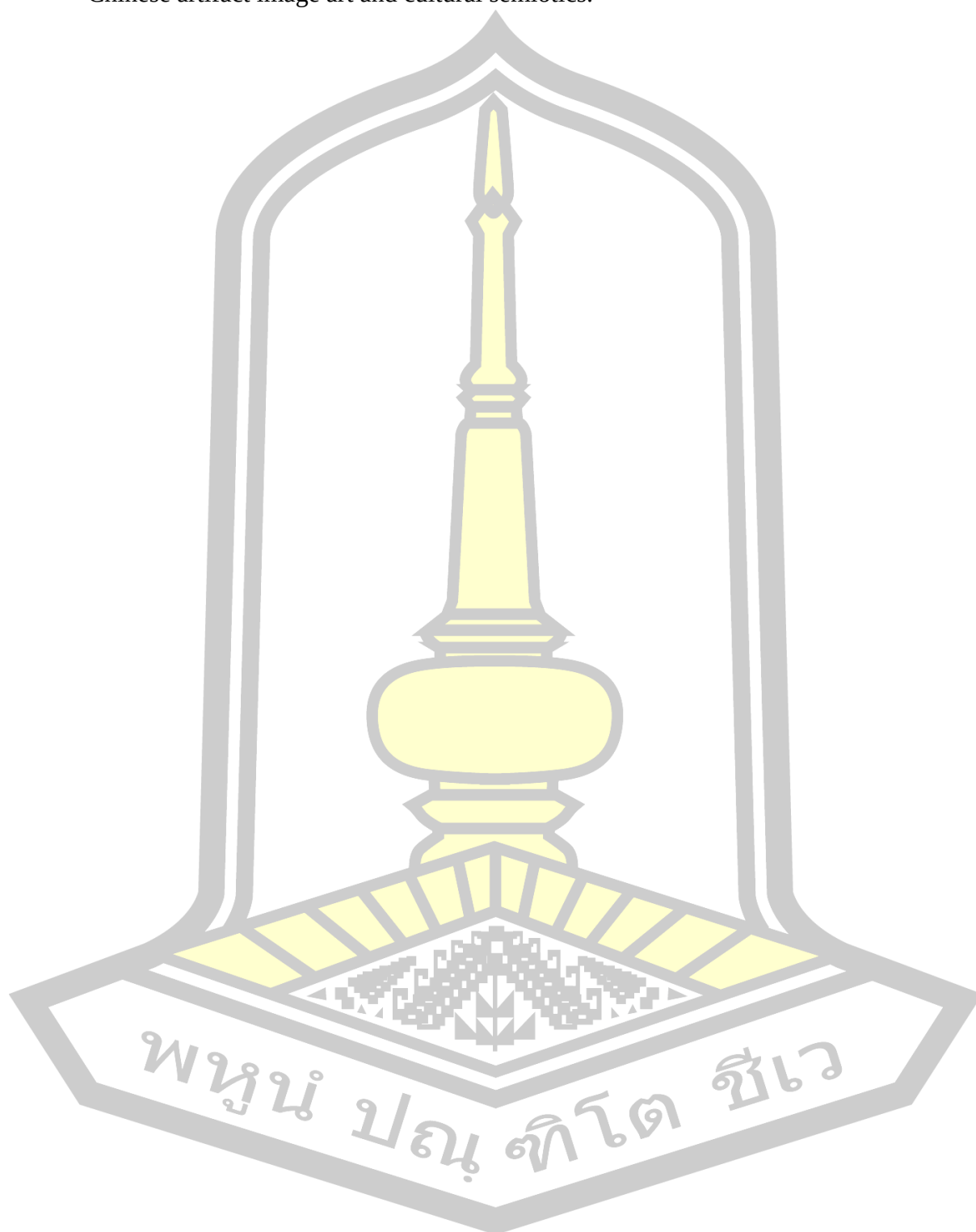
and signifiers of the image symbol text permeate and influence the semiotic information of Confucian virtue and ethical culture, thereby affecting the recognition and regulation of the relationship between humans and the natural society. The externalization of image symbols extends into the cultural and moral system of folklore society and the system of education. Thus, it can be concluded that the lacquerware artifact image art of the Western Han period carries the significance of Confucian virtue, ethical cultural semiotics, and the material and spiritual cultural heritage of the Chinese tradition.

Summary

This section provides an in-depth analysis of the image art of artifacts unearthed from the Haihun Marquis State, revealing the profound influence of the concept of "divine kingship" and Confucian ritual and music culture on the development of aesthetics. Starting with totem worship in primitive society, the paper traces the integration of ritual and art from the pre-Qin period to the Western Han Dynasty and explores how the concepts of "the Unity of Man and Nature" and "ritual culture" shaped the symbolism of artifact images. The artifacts from the Haihun Marquis State, with their diverse image motifs, reflect the political legitimacy of "divinely granted kingship" and the Confucian theory of "heavenly responsiveness," as well as the social and ethical order. They also showcase the blending and divergence of regional cultures between the north and south. Meanwhile, during the Western Han period, the spread of cross-cultural art and its influence on Han art styles, particularly in the process of incorporating the cultural traits of the Western Regions and surrounding ethnic minorities, formed a symbol of openness and diversity in artistic aesthetics. Overall, through the semiotic analysis of artifact image art, it reveals that Confucian ethical aesthetic cultural symbols during the Western Han period conveyed the core values and spiritual pursuits of ancient Chinese society through art forms in the political, religious, and ethical realms. These symbols are the aesthetic core of the semiotics of Chinese image art culture.

The analysis above, based on the case study of metal, jade, lacquerware, and other artifact images from the Western Han Haihun Marquis State, examines how these artifacts reflect the composition of Confucian virtue and ethical cultural symbols. This process represents the evolution from diachronic cultural symbols to synchronic cultural symbols. Image cultural symbols are constructed across various domains and levels, offering a system of artifact cultural semiotics: the linguistic symbol system, the crafted image symbol system, and the historical and literary documentation system. Semiotics, as an anthropological culture, is a materialization of history, and the evolution of its image symbols has three main meanings: the essential core of the symbols, the denotative extension of the symbols, and the causal role of the symbols. Confucian culture, through its system of ritual law, constructed the philosophical framework of social order and ethical culture, forming a social ideological system of virtue ethics semiotics. This represents the value significance in the genealogy of anthropological cultural semiotics, reflecting the standards of human and social relationships and the human spiritual world. The exploration of the royal and folk culture semiotic texts in the artifact images of the Western Han Haihun Marquis State provides an opportunity to analyze the value significance of Confucian

philosophy, aesthetics, sociology, and humanities in the historical study of ancient Chinese artifact image art and cultural semiotics.



CHAPTER V

The images of artifacts from the Haihun Marquis state: A social language narrative of Confucian cultural and artistic symbols

Introduction

This chapter analyzes the role of the artifact images of the Haihun Marquis State in reflecting imperial power, ethical culture, and social reality, emphasizing the cultural narrative function of image art across multiple fields such as politics, economy, and folklore. In the first part, the characteristics of royal ritual and law symbol languages are analyzed, highlighting that image art serves as a visual representation of Confucian ethical spirit. For example, the concept of "the interaction between heaven and humanity" is discussed, symbolizing the sanctification of imperial power in the artifacts of the Haihun Marquis State. The analysis begins with the symbolic narrative of the relationship between ruler and subject, and extends to the symbolic narratives of northern and southern folk cultures, craftsmanship narratives in folk society, and ethical cultural narratives in the craftsmanship of the Haihun Marquis State, thus reflecting the narrative of Confucian cultural symbols in various fields of Western Han society.

In the second part, the narrative of imperial power and social cultural symbols in the Haihun Marquis State is explored. It examines the intermingling of Chu, Shu, Central Plains, and Western Region cultural symbols, which together contributed to the spread of Confucian ethical culture that unified imperial power and society in Western Han society. The extensibility of imperial power symbols in the artifact images is analyzed. This reflects the symbolic narrative characteristics of cultural integration between the north and south of the Yangtze River during the Western Han period and the diverse regional cultures. Through the art of artifacts, the fusion of ritual law, folk customs, and imperial power culture is showcased. The chapter interprets how ritual law culture, through folk art, influenced social consciousness and the unified values of imperial society.

In the third part, the chapter elaborates on the normative role of Confucian benevolent culture symbols, which unify imperial power and society, in state governance and social values. It discusses how the cultural symbols of artifact craftsmanship regulate national rites and folk social spirit through ethical cultural image symbols. This reflects the inherent of the inheritance and dissemination of image cultural symbol narratives, emphasizing how ritual symbols adapt to new social demands and are passed down through changing times. The chapter also discusses the role of Confucian ethical semiotics in shaping social order and promoting the cultural identity of multiple ethnic groups.

Part 1: The Linguistic Narrative of Imperial Power Symbols in the Artifact

Images of the Haihun Marquis State

1.1 The Narrative Paradigm of Royal Confucian "Ritual Law" Symbol Language

The images of the Haihun Marquis State, as a carrier of ideological art culture, can be understood as a cultural paradigm of images, specifically a symbol narrative of Confucian ethical culture. The cultural symbols of the images go beyond the textual meaning of the narrative and human language, reflecting a new form of information expression in images—an interpretation of the human spiritual worldview, transcending the expression of human language. At the same time, the symbols narrate with Chinese Confucian ethical culture as their core value concept, involving the exploration of multiple fields such as ethical culture, symbolic meaning, social spirit, ethical order, and the semiotic relationships and categories of textual meaning. This discussion spans historical cultural and sociological cultural domains, aiming to analyze the essence of Chinese Confucian ethical sociology and the significance of its symbolic narrative. It also serves as one of the pathways to elucidate China's semiotic cultural heritage.

In the Western Han society, Dong Zhongshu enjoyed the reputation of being the "leader of all Confucian scholars" and was frequently consulted by the imperial court when major decisions were being made. Dong Zhongshu's political advocacy of "discrediting the hundred schools of thought and elevating Confucianism" was in line with the Confucian ideals of benevolence and ritual propriety, with "benevolence" as the moral foundation of imperial governance and "ritual" as the order of laws. This formed a cultural system that integrated Confucianism and Legalism within the centralized imperial monarchy of the Western Han, promoting the idea of the unity of the imperial state. Dong Zhongshu proposed a hierarchical social structure, with clear distinctions in social rank, to maintain social order, which in turn led to the establishment of the "Three Bonds and Five Constant Virtues" system to shape the spiritual awareness of the family, state, and world. Meanwhile, the concept of "heavenly-human response" in the pre-Qin and Han periods, which interpreted natural phenomena and celestial events as symbols for governance and societal conditions, served as a means of assessing imperial authority and societal well-being. These concepts directly reflected the narrative language of both royal culture and folk social culture semiotics in the Western Han period.

The cultural artifacts of the Haihun Marquis State reflect the narrative of the monarch-subject relationship in the Western Han imperial court. Haihun Marquis was once an emperor of the Western Han, later becoming a marquis, adhering to the principles of monarch-subject relations and rituals as established by Confucian ethics, specifically the Confucian values of benevolence and ritual propriety. The history of pre-Qin ritual, music, and ceremonial culture, enriched by Confucius' infusion of "benevolence" during the Spring and Autumn period, continued into the Western Han with the "Three Bonds and Five Constant Virtues" culture. This established a framework for the monarch-subject relationship, the father-son relationship, and societal spiritual orientations, creating an unassailable order of "proper naming" and setting ethical moral norms for human relationships based on "benevolence and

ritual." As Confucius stated, "Without ritual, one cannot distinguish between monarch and subject, between superior and inferior, between elder and younger."

The imperial authority of the Western Han, based on Confucian "benevolence and ritual" culture, shaped the idea that the monarch is both the ruler and the father figure of the subjects. This cultural spirit served as a reference for the unified vision of the empire and guided the moral governance of the monarch and the societal moral standards that should be followed by the people. The Confucian spiritual realm formed a mindset for Haihun Marquis, creating an inner world of "internal saintliness and external kingship." With the belief in the spiritual and emotional essence of "benevolence and ritual," he adopted the mission of "taking the world as his responsibility" and sought to cultivate personal virtues and wisdom, aiming for the moral and ethical awareness of imperial authority and societal harmony, thereby achieving the goals of governing the family, the state, and the world.

1.1.1 The Narrative of the "Unity of man and nature" Thought in the Artifacts and Images of the Haihun Marquis State

Dong Zhongshu, a proponent of Confucian doctrine, believed that the morality of a monarch could be foreseen through celestial phenomena, with constellations and clouds indicating omens of prosperity or disaster. He introduced the concept of "heavenly-human response" , which established that the absolute power of the emperor, as the "Son of Heaven," was bound by "divine authority" that could not be violated. This doctrine used celestial signs to restrict imperial power, while the principle of "benevolence and ritual" encapsulated the idea of "do not do unto others what you do not want done to yourself" as the moral governance of the state. This ensured the long-term stability and peace of society. In the artifacts of the Haihun Marquis State, such as the lacquerware with cloud motifs, images of flying humans, and reverence for "heavenly-human response," the celestial phenomena are used as metaphors to signify whether ethical or social norms have been violated. These images reflect concerns for the prosperity or decline of the Han imperial authority and the state.

Thus, the narrative within these images unites heaven, the divine, and the emperor within the "benevolence and ritual" cultural framework. This alignment serves as the "way" of imperial authority, guiding its rule. The concept of "Unity of man and nature" and "divine rule" are intertwined, becoming symbolic elements of Confucian discourse in Western Han society (Figure73) .



Figure 67 Unearthed lacquer from the Haihun Marquis State
Source: Haihun Marquis State Museum

The concept of Unity of man and nature is a crucial idea in traditional Chinese culture, emphasizing the harmonious coexistence between humans and nature, as well as between humans and the cosmos. The design of the goose-fish lamp, which depicts a goose turning its head and holding a fish in its beak, reflects this idea. This design not only represents the ancient people's attempt to achieve and maintain a harmonious relationship with nature and the universe in their daily lives, but also symbolizes the observation and imitation of natural forms. The combination of the goose and fish is not merely a juxtaposition of images (Figure74) ; it is a concrete manifestation of a philosophical concept. Through this form, the ancient people embodied the abstract idea of tUnity of man and nature, imbuing material culture with a metaphysical philosophical meaning. It expresses the interactive and harmonious nature of the relationship between heaven and humanity.



Figure 68The artifacts unearthed by the Haihun Marquis State, the goose fish lamp
Source: Haihun Marquis State Museum

1.1.2 The Narrative of "Virtuous Governance" as a Folk Culture Symbol in Confucianism during the Western Han Dynasty

Under the influence of virtuous governance during the Han Dynasty, which aimed to learn from the downfall of the Qin Dynasty, the policy of restoring and nurturing the population was implemented. Many historical anecdotes opposed the tyrannical rule of the Qin emperor. The stone carvings depicting "Jing Ke's Assassination of the Qin Emperor" celebrated this ideology (Figure75) , reflecting the Han Dynasty's adoption of Confucian benevolent governance as the national system, symbolizing societal progress. The Records of the Grand Historian (Shiji), in the "Assassins' Biographies" section, recorded this historical event to praise Jing Ke's "courage" and "righteousness," which also mirrored the intense struggles during China's unification process. The envoy from the State of Yan, Jing Ke, presented the Qin Emperor with a box containing the head of Fan Yuqi and a map. Following orders to present the map, Jing Ke drew out a dagger and attempted to assassinate the Qin Emperor, a moment famously known as "when the map ends, the dagger is revealed" (图穷匕首见). The dagger struck a copper pillar instead of the Emperor, and Jing Ke was killed. This event reflects the intense struggles during the unification of China by Qin Shi Huang. The Qin Emperor sought to establish centralized power over the entire country and implemented a highly legalistic governance system, which historians often condemn as "tyranny." This harsh rule led to peasant uprisings, such

as the rebellion of Chen Sheng and Wu Guang. In contrast, the Han Dynasty implemented Confucian benevolence and ritual culture, which led to societal stability and development. Stone carvings of this nature, unearthed in the Central Plains region of Henan, indicate that Confucian ethical culture was used to represent the saying “the fall of the Qin, the rise of the Han”.



Figure 69Jing Ke assassinated the King of Qin

Source: Han Dynasty Portrait Stone Wu Zengde, June 1984, Beijing: Cultural Relics Publishing House, p141

1.1.3The Confucian Narrative of Ruler and Minister Ethics in the Marquis of Haihun

The saying "The fall of the Qin, the rise of the Han" reflects the notion that "virtuous governance" was central to Confucius's teaching of "benevolence" as the foundation for righteous governance. The scholar-officials, from the top down, implemented governance through benevolence and ritual, with benevolence serving as the guiding principle and restraint. This formed the Western Han Dynasty's imperial authority, where "virtuous governance" became the legal and ritual system of the state. The "Three Bonds and Five Constants" governing the relationships between ruler and minister were inviolable royal laws, emphasizing that Confucian ethical culture was the primary framework for state governance during the Han Dynasty.

In the lacquerware of the Marquis of Haihun's tomb, inscriptions referring to ministers highlight the Confucian idea of loyalty to the ruler and the prohibition of transgressing proper conduct. The golden hoof-shaped offerings also underscore the virtue of loyalty to the ruler. The Marquis of Haihun's adherence to the Confucian "Three Bonds" reflects a hierarchical understanding of behavior and respect, distinguishing between superior and inferior positions based on propriety.

The unearthed bamboo strips from Qi provide evidence that the Marquis of Haihun was well-versed in the classics, dedicated to scholarship, and demonstrated the emperor's pursuit of Confucian ideals in governing and establishing peace across the realm. In the *Analects*, Confucius states: "To set one's aspirations and pursue life's ideals based on moral principles means to integrate those moral standards into one's actions. A person should build their foundation on benevolence, cultivating compassion and love for others. This is a key reflection of an individual's character and virtue" placing "the Way" as a higher pursuit than imperial power. Confucius also says, "To hear the Way in the morning is worth dying in the evening," indicating that the pursuit of moral and intellectual growth surpasses even the role of a monarch. These thoughts of Confucius became the ethical standards for the Western Han imperial family, including the ruler, ministers, and nobility.

The use of a three- or one-horse chariot, symbolizing the hierarchy of respect and propriety, reflects the importance of upholding boundaries within the royal court. Additionally, the copper mirrors and jade artifacts featuring clouds, phoenixes, and crows from the Marquis of Haihun's tomb exemplify the Confucian principle of "the

resonance between Heaven and man" , which became a spiritual pursuit for the imperial authority to rule the world.

1.2 The Narrative of Social Customs and Cultural Symbols in the North and South Societies

The "Three Bonds" culture of the Western Han Dynasty, as part of the Confucian ethical framework, established a three-dimensional relationship between imperial authority, society, and individuals based on the principles of benevolence , ritual propriety , and legal norms. This Confucian "benevolent-ritual" system provided a moral and legal foundation that shaped the ethical relationships within the social order. The Confucian values of benevolence , righteousness , propriety , wisdom , and trustworthiness served as the core moral principles guiding the governance of the state under a centralized imperial system, creating the "imperial unity" of the Han Dynasty.

This moral system not only promoted social order but also spurred progress and prosperity in various domains such as craftsmanship, technology, and culture during the Western Han period. The "Three Bonds" culture closely connected with everyday life, reinforcing the connection between the governance and the people. The social customs and cultural demands of the time found expression through art, especially the stone reliefs , which serve as valuable cultural heritage, showcasing Confucian ethical values and the ideal of virtuous leadership by the emperor. These images reflect the need for rulers to set a moral example, enriching the social customs of the time and creating a cultural landscape that blends the political and the popular.

Thus, the "Three Bonds" culture during the Western Han Dynasty contributed to shaping a structured, morally grounded society where imperial authority and the well-being of the people were intricately linked, reflecting a cultural landscape where governance, moral virtue, and social life were inseparable.

1.2.1 The Narrative of Technical and Cultural Symbols in the Folk Customs of Northern and Southern Societies

Ancient Chinese technological materials, such as images, were not intended to convey technical information, nor did they focus on proportions. The technological images of the Han Dynasty serve to confirm this misunderstanding. Since ancient times, China has been an agricultural country. Emperor Cheng of the Han Dynasty implemented the "Substitute Field Method" and the "Area Cultivation Method" to promote agricultural development, emphasizing irrigation projects to boost crop yields and improve the people's livelihoods. According to the historical records in 《Han Shu Shi Huo Zhi》¹⁸, Treatise on Food and Finance, the Han imperial family once could not provide four horses of uniform color, illustrating economic difficulties. However, after 70 years of development, the Western Han Dynasty saw its granaries full, and wealth accumulated abundantly.

In the early Western Han Dynasty, the imperial realm stretched across the economically prosperous regions of the Yangtze River basin in both the northern and southern parts of China. The rivers were abundant, and the land was fertile. Sichuan, known as the "Land of Abundance" , flourished due to the unity of imperial power and the well-being of the state. This period saw the flourishing of social, political, technological, and cultural development. The Han Dynasty's stone reliefs reflect the mature social, technological, and cultural landscape under the imperial governance of

¹⁸ Han Shu: Treatise on Food and Finance provides a summary and discussion of the agricultural economy, as well as the fiscal and monetary conditions during the approximately 230-year period of the Western Han Dynasty.

the unified state. By examining agricultural practices, ironworking, and textile technologies, we gain insight into the characteristics of Han agriculture and handicrafts. See the image below (Figure76) .



Figure 70 Coupled Plowing Diagram

Source: Han Dynasty Portrait Stone Wu Zengde, June 1984, Beijing: Cultural Relics Publishing House, p21

The coupled plowing in southern Jiangsu during the Han Dynasty promoted the development of the agricultural economy. It marked the beginning of the application of iron tools in farming techniques, which in turn facilitated social development. We can see that the triangular iron plowshare of the iron plow helped speed up the soil digging process. The V-shaped plow is a technological invention that can be used for tasks such as plowing, land clearing, and digging ditches, among other agricultural activities. The technology of the ox-drawn plow contributed to the expansion of crop cultivation. In ancient times, societies were primarily based on hunting and fishing economies, but this gradually transitioned into a feudal society centered around an agricultural economy, which greatly promoted the development of Han Dynasty society (Figure77) .



Figure 71 Shaanxi Ox Plow

Source: Han Dynasty Portrait Stone Wu Zengde, June 1984, Beijing: Cultural Relics Publishing House, p25

In the Han Dynasty, the northern regions primarily used horse-drawn plows, while in Shaanxi, there appeared a phenomenon of a single ox pulling a single plow. This indicates the progress of the agricultural economy during the Han Dynasty. Agricultural technology had advanced significantly, with the one-plow, one-ox method being implemented in the north, demonstrating a major innovation and breakthrough in Han agricultural techniques and tools, which has continued to be passed down to the present day (Figure78) .



Figure 72 Shandong Iron Smelting

Source: Han Dynasty Portrait Stone Wu Zengde, June 1984, Beijing: Cultural Relics Publishing House, p25

In the Han Dynasty, the iron smelting technology in the Central Plains began to use human-powered bellows, which was a key technology for maintaining high temperatures during the smelting process. This advancement promoted the widespread use of smelting technology and represented a new breakthrough in China's metallurgical techniques. As a result, iron tools became widely used in Han society, supporting the expansion of agricultural land and leading to new developments in farming techniques and crop cultivation (Figure79) .



Figure 73 Jiangsu Textiles

Source: Han Dynasty Portrait Stone Wu Zengde, June 1984, Beijing: Cultural Relics Publishing House, p28

This image reflects the three processes of textile production by three women in the southern part of Jiangsu during the Eastern Han Dynasty (Figure80) , restoring the technical principles of Han Dynasty looms. The stone carving depicts the textile scene in the household of a wealthy family in the Han Dynasty, illustrating the social reality of individual craftsmen and servants in Han households. During the Han Dynasty, the Bashu region was known for hemp textiles, while the Qilu region was famous for silk textiles, representing key textile-producing areas of the time. This highlights the advanced development of the textile industry. Han Dynasty image stones fill the gap in the historical records of China's textile history.

The following image depicts a characteristic ancient building from the Han Dynasty, with both the main and secondary towers on the same pedestal. The phoenix birds on the roof are depicted singing in unison, symbolizing a harmonious dwelling, or representing the folk life of 'peaceful living' and 'abundance.' This reflects the stability of Han Dynasty society and the peaceful, prosperous life of the common people.

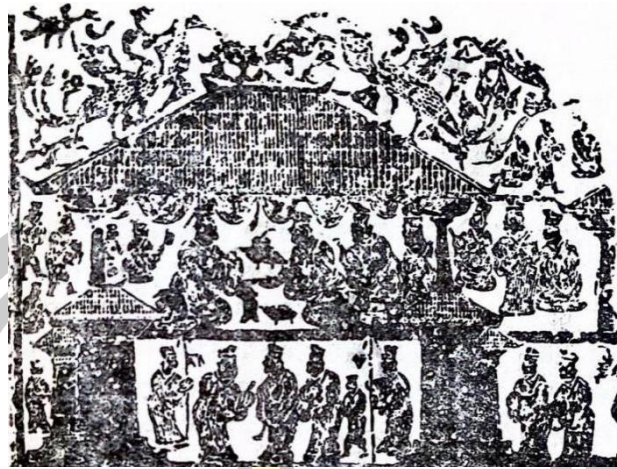


Figure 74 Henan Residential Architecture

Source: Han Dynasty Portrait Stone Wu Zengde, June 1984, Beijing: Cultural Relics Publishing House, p34

From the above image, it is evident that the reason why Western Han society transitioned from hardship to prosperity was due to the exclusive promotion of Confucianism, the emphasis on relaxation and rejuvenation, and the "moral governance" ideology of imperial power. Under this influence, folk customs, technology, and culture flourished. The development of iron smelting technology boosted agricultural economics, and the advancement of textile techniques enriched ancient clothing. Architectural techniques catered to the need for stable living. In the folk society of the Han Dynasty, the relaxation and rejuvenation practices along the Yangtze River basin from both the northern and southern regions promoted the prosperity of Western Han imperial power and folk customs. The fusion of imperial power and society indicates that the Confucian political philosophy found in The Analects of Confucius, specifically in the section Wei Zheng¹⁹, where it states: "Lead them with politics, regulate them with laws; if the people are exempt from punishment and lack shame, lead them with virtue, regulate them with rites, and they will have shame and will be corrected," suggests that moral governance was key to educating the people. Additionally, in The Analects of Confucius, Yan Yuan,²⁰ it is stated: "The ruler is one who is righteous; if the ruler is righteous, who would dare not be righteous?" This highlights that the imperial authority must rely on "benevolent virtue" for society to imitate it, thus fostering prosperity and progress.

1.3 The Ethical, Cultural, and Linguistic Narratives of Craftsmanship in the State of Haihun Marquis.

The artisan culture in Western Han society was influenced by Confucian values of benevolence and ritual, leading to a humanized approach to craftsmanship. This became a distinct linguistic feature in the images of artifacts from the State of Haihun Marquis. When objects expressed meanings beyond mere utility and conveyed certain spiritual concepts, they generated new intrinsic meanings as cultural

¹⁹The main focus is on Confucius' thoughts on "governing with virtue" and the related concepts of politics, morality, and the philosophy of learning.

²⁰ The Analects of Confucius, Yan Yuan showcases the virtue and knowledge of Yan Yuan, one of Confucius' most esteemed disciples, while also profoundly reflecting the core concepts of Confucian thought, such as "benevolence" (仁), "ritual" (礼), and "self-discipline and returning to ritual" (克己复礼).

symbols. These meanings serve as external representations of human spiritual thoughts. The craftsmanship culture of the artifacts from the Western Han imperial court had to satisfy the spiritual demands of both imperial power and folk customs, which together shaped the narrative of Confucian ethical culture. By analyzing four types of artifacts and images related to ethical culture, it becomes clear that the craftsmanship objects, folk tools, and daily utensils closely linked with ethical ideas in the State of Haihun Marquis formed a systematic narrative of ethical culture.

The artistic images of Qin and Han dynasty roof tiles originated from the semi-circular patterns of the Western Zhou period. During the Warring States period, the roof tiles became round in shape. Early studies on roof tiles often focused on their inscriptions. The work *Qin Han Wadang Tuji* ²¹ by Zhu feng during the Qianlong period of the Qing Dynasty, and the 1964 publication *Qin Han Wadang* by the Shaanxi Museum, marked the beginning of a comprehensive study of both roof tile art and inscriptions. The inscriptions found on the roof tiles from the State of Haihun Marquis reflect the influence of Confucian benevolence and ritual culture on both craftsmanship and local folk customs of the Han Dynasty. They also serve as a narrative of cultural symbols representing Confucian ethical principles and the social spirit of that era.

1.3.1 An analysis of the folk artifacts and images of the State of Haihun Marquis

During the Western Han period, the folk motif "everything goes as wished" was widely applied to chariot and horse artifacts. The royal family also adopted this popular design to reflect the admiration for the concept of "benevolent governance" under the backdrop of ritual culture, as well as the pursuit of the social values of a peaceful and prosperous society. This reflects the flourishing of imperial power and a society rooted in benevolence and ritual, alongside the beautiful aspiration for all things to go smoothly. The chariot and horse artifact designs of the State of Haihun Marquis feature a persimmon-stem shape, symbolizing the homophone "everything," highlighting the mature shift of symbolic images in ritual culture towards a more standardized, symbolic narrative art (Figure81) .



Figure 75 The Marquis of Haihun State unearthed persimmon shaped utensils
Source: Haihun Marquis State Museum

²¹ The Illustrated Record of Qin and Han Roof Tiles is an important monograph on the roof tiles of the Qin and Han periods.

Artifacts are not merely material tools; they serve as mediums for ethical behavior. The folk medical tools unearthed from the State of Haihun Marquis also embody profound ethical concepts. The design, use, and symbolic meaning of these tools reflect the Western Han society's understanding of "life and death," "health," and "ethical responsibility." In contrast, daily life utensils place greater emphasis on social norms such as ethics, respect for elders, and love for the young. While there are similarities in craftsmanship between these two categories of artifacts—such as exquisite shapes and superb techniques—their transmission of symbols and meanings differs, reflecting various interpretations and expressions of ethics in different fields. For example, inscriptions on lacquerware, as a form of written record rich in historical and cultural significance, not only serve as signatures for personal items, workshop marks, and basic carriers of the maker's name, but through the exquisite decoration of calligraphy inscriptions, they also elevate the artistic quality of the artifacts. These inscriptions contain rich symbolic meanings and have become important bearers of history and culture. The existence of inscriptions on lacquerware elevates these objects beyond their mere material attributes, transforming them into symbols of spiritual culture. Inscriptions such as “Food officers, be cautious with your words” and “The wine tray, be careful not to speak” convey the people's prayers and admonitions for a better life, as well as auspicious meanings. These cultural symbols are passed down through generations, showcasing the important role of lacquerware inscriptions in cultural inheritance.

In the State of Haihun Marquis, artifacts—whether bronze vessels used for rituals or lacquerware used in daily life—pay great attention to the transmission of symbolic meanings. The designs of these objects often incorporate societal ethical requirements, such as hierarchy, the integration of divine will and human affairs, and the relationship between imperial power and social responsibility. When artisans created these objects, they adhered to a craft spirit that aligned with societal ethics, conveying moral values through exquisite craftsmanship. Through these symbols, artisans expressed their recognition of national and social order. Artisans were not only creators of craftsmanship but also disseminators of ethical concepts. Through the medium of objects, they shaped and transmitted a society filled with order and moral responsibility (Figure82) .



Figure 76The Marquis of Haihun State unearthed Lacquer inscriptions
Source: Haihun Marquis State Museum

Part 2: The Symbolic Narrative of Regional Culture in the Artifacts Unearthed from the Haihun Marquis state

The visual arts of the State of Haihun Marquis reflect various aspects of Western Han society, encompassing real historical materials from fields such as imperial politics, natural ecology and economy, and social folk life. Through the study of these crafted visual arts, one can explore the spiritual foundation and aspirations of ancient human society in Western Han culture. This transforms the narrative of crafted visual arts into a symbolic narrative language of Western Han social culture, representing specific spiritual concepts. The Confucian culture of the Western Han period, with its principle of "conveying the Dao through images," influenced the semantic meanings of artifact images and shaped the values and orientations of social and cultural semiotics in subsequent Han dynasties.

2.1 The fusion of the visual culture of the State of Haihun Marquis state and the cultures of the northern and southern regions of the Yangtze River

The State of Haihun Marquis is located in the Poyang Lake region, connecting the northern and southern parts of the Yangtze River system. It is also linked to the cultural spheres of Southwest Shu, Central South Chu, the Central Plains culture in the northern Yangtze River region, and even the distant Western Regions. The royal artifact culture is composed of multiple cultural influences, intertwined with the craftsmanship culture of the Gan-Po Plain area. As a result, the origins of the artifact images culture are complex and interwoven, with various influences blending together. To interpret the external semantics of the visual arts involved, one must explore how the cultural concept of "Emperor Jizi unifying all under heaven" shaped the royal culture of the Western Han dynasty. This includes the Confucian ethics of benevolence and ritual, governance culture, and folk culture in the image arts of the State of Haihun Marquis, highlighting the social significance of these ethical and cultural concepts within the broader cultural and geographical context of both the northern and southern regions of the Western Han dynasty.

2.1.1 The Cultural Narrative of Imperial Power and Social Symbols in the State of Haihun Marquis.

The Western Han society placed great importance on elaborate burials, seeing them as a means to assess and honor the filial piety and loyalty of future generations. In the State of Haihun Marquis, the customs surrounding lavish burials involved using personal items from a person's life to symbolize a view of death as an extension of life, representing respect and evaluation. This reflected or praised an individual's spiritual realm and emotional pursuits, and was a traditional custom of lavish burials in the Western Han period. It embodies the culture of "filial virtue" in society. From the writing tools and bamboo slips collected by the Haihun Marquis during his lifetime, it becomes apparent that he was well-versed in Confucian teachings and possessed virtuous character and intellectual accomplishments. Although historical records of the Western Han period often cast Liu He in a negative light, the items discovered from his lifetime tell a different story. His study of Confucianism, music, medicine, military weaponry, chariotry, and other areas reveals that the life and deeds of Liu He are far more nuanced than the historical accounts suggest. (Hu, X., & Yuan, M., 2024). It is evident that the Haihun Marquis followed Confucian ethical principles to cultivate himself and establish his rightful name, which reflects the false

historical accounts regarding royal rivalries. Ancient texts such as the *Guanzi* and *Shu Yan*²² classify names into five categories: "The names of people fall into three categories: those who govern, those who are ashamed, and those who are active. The names of things fall into two categories: to correct and to observe." According to these texts, when the names are correct, the world will be governed properly; when names are distorted, chaos follows, and without a name, death occurs. Therefore, the ancient kings valued names greatly. The importance of one's name was considered a major life matter, and it must be "corrected" and "observed." A name that is not properly established leads to chaos, and a person without a name is as good as dead. Thus, rulers, those who value rites, and those who take action must regard the moral integrity and emotional spirit of a person as their honor and purpose in life, or else they are like the dead. It reflects the ancient belief that "name" was used to define identity and evaluate one's life. The artifacts of the Marquis of Haihun reflect the orientation of Confucian ethical culture, showing that he valued the intellectual achievements of Confucianism as real, while the title of marquis was merely symbolic. Although distant from the Han royal family, he still used Confucian virtues of "benevolence and ritual" as a standard for self-reflection, shaping his life and emotions with the principle of "rectifying names." Confucian ethical culture influenced the royal culture and social customs of the Western Han, forming the spiritual concept of "unity of imperial power and society." It also played a leading role in shaping the political culture of subsequent dynasties, while helping to establish the traditional spiritual and cultural values of ancient China. The Haihun Marquis State, as a region in Yuzhang Commandery, upheld the cultural narrative of "unity of imperial power and society," continuing to follow the spiritual and ideological values of the Han royal family. It embodied multiple identities, including "emperor, minister, marquis, and scholar," and aspired to the political ideal of "unity of imperial power and society." The State firmly adhered to the Confucian principles of ruler, minister, family, and state, indicating that the Marquis of Haihun was a historical figure of the Western Han with Confucian imperial ethics. The Haihun Marquis State thus represents an important chapter in the spiritual, philosophical, and cultural history of Western Han society.

2.1.2 The unity of imperial power and society and the integration of Chu culture from the central and southern regions of the Yangtze River

During the Warring States period, the Chu-Han struggle for supremacy over the world took place. In 202 BC, Liu Bang of the Han defeated Xiang Yu of the Chu State and established the Han Dynasty, assuming the title of Emperor Gaozu of Han. He implemented a benevolent and virtuous policy of "restoring and nurturing the people." During the reigns of Emperor Wen and Emperor Jing of the Western Han, Confucian values of benevolence and ritual were used to govern and benefit the people, leading to social and economic prosperity, known as the "Rule of Wen and Jing." Later, Emperor Wu of Han replaced the Qin legalist system with Confucian ethics, expanded the empire's boundaries, and opened the Western Regions, resulting in societal flourishing, known as the "Zhao-Xuan Restoration." The Western Han imperial authority adopted the state policy of "exclusively promoting Confucianism" proposed by Dong Zhongshu, following the Confucian concept of "the interaction

²² *Guanzi*, *Shu Yan* is an important chapter in the *Guanzi* text, primarily focusing on the principles of governing the state, self-cultivation, and how to conduct oneself in life and society.

between heaven and humanity" as a means to monitor the rise and fall of society. The goal was to maintain the social order of the Han imperial power and to consolidate and unify the territories of the Han Dynasty. This included the culture of the Jing-Chu state, which had a history of over 2,000 years, from the Zhou Dynasty through the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, thus becoming an important component of the Han imperial culture. The Chu State, located in the central Yangtze River region and the Jiangnan Plain, roughly corresponding to present-day Hubei and Hunan provinces, was known as Jing-Chu during the Han Dynasty. Hubei's Suizhou, Gucheng, and the Shennongjia area were the regions where Emperor Yan, also known as Shennong, is believed to have lived. These areas represent the transition from the ancient fishing and hunting era to the agricultural age, marking the cultural heritage of early human civilizations. During the Qin and Han periods, the Chu State had an approximate territory of 1 million square kilometers, with a population of around 5 million, accounting for a quarter of the national population at the time. Present-day Hubei was an important cultural center for Han imperial power, with roots in ancient traditions, including the Yangtze River water system's bird and phoenix totems, as well as ceremonial and ritual cultures associated with deity worship from the Zhou Dynasty. This area became the wellspring for China's divine culture, with a rich legacy in romanticism, literature, and artistic expression. Ancient Chinese philosophy was based on the concept of "Dao," which evolved through different interpretations over time. In the pre-Qin era, the philosophy of "Tian Dao" (the Way of Heaven) was central, which later developed into the idea of "Heaven and Humanity in Unity" after the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties, transitioning to the notion of "Divine Power" in subsequent periods. During the Spring and Autumn period, Confucius introduced the concept of "Ren Dao" (the Way of Humanity), focusing on moral standards for individuals. "Tian Dao" was a cosmological theory, while "Ren Dao" addressed moral principles for human beings, together forming two major areas of study in ancient Chinese philosophy: the cosmos and human society. The thoughts on "Tian Dao" and divine authority in the pre-Qin period can be found in Sima Qian's *Shi Ji*²³ with the phrase "the void between Heaven and humanity." In the Western Han period, Dong Zhongshu expanded on this idea, referring to "the interaction between Heaven and humanity" and integrating "Ren Dao" with "Tian Dao." By using "Heaven" and "Divine" to guide human actions, this idea influenced the culture of the central and southern regions along the Yangtze River. This led to the development of cultural images and artistic semantics that portrayed divine and fantastical cultural features, deeply embedding spiritual and cosmic elements in the region's craftsmanship and art. As shown in the picture (Figure 83).

²³ *Shi Ji*, originally called *Taishi Gong Shu* or *Taishi Gong Ji*, is a historical work written by Sima Qian (known as *Taishi Gong*), who served as the Grand Historian during the reign of Emperor Wu of the Western Han Dynasty. The work is written in the form of biographical accounts.



Figure 77 The lacquerware of the Marquis of Haihun, featuring a phoenix and flowing cloud pattern.

Source: Haihun Marquis State Museum

From this, it can be seen that during the Western Han Dynasty, Confucianism regarded celestial phenomena as part of the fatalistic doctrine of "heavenly-human resonance." In the Qin and Han periods, the phoenix and crow from the ancient times of the Yangtze River basin evolved from totems into symbols of divine worship, representing the Vermilion Bird, one of the "Four Symbols" guarding the four cardinal directions. This was later regarded as a spiritual culture of etiquette in the world. In folk culture, the phoenix was called "a symbol of great auspice." At the same time, it symbolized the ethical and spiritual concept of "humanity" in the national and familial culture, embodying a philosophical pursuit that presaged the Confucian imperial governance and the social doctrine of benevolence and propriety. It reflects the Confucian ethical culture of benevolence and propriety under imperial authority, and the spiritual and cultural characteristics of southern and northern societies along the Yangtze River system.

2.1.3 The integration of imperial power and society with the culture of Sichuan in the southwest region of the Yangtze River.

The ethical thought of "divine authority" in Han dynasty material culture has a long history and cultural foundation. As recorded in the Book of Rites (Liji)²⁴, "The people of Yin revered the gods and led the people in following the gods, prioritizing the spirits over rites." In the early formation of the state during the Xia dynasty, there were rituals for worshipping heavenly gods and earthly spirits. By the Shang dynasty, the ancestors had established rituals of worship for gods, accompanied by music and ceremonies, which led to the development of a system of rites and laws. This formed the ancient Chinese culture of the unity between heaven and humanity, a tradition that continued into the Western Han dynasty, where it evolved into the Confucian doctrine of "heavenly-human resonance." A comparative analysis of the divine beast images in the jade artifacts of the Marquis of Haihun and the divine masks from the Sanxingdui culture of Sichuan's Bashu region reveals that the "divine authority" culture of the pre-Qin period continued to influence the Western Han dynasty. Dong Zhongshu's doctrine of "exclusively venerating Confucianism" and his "heavenly-human

²⁴ The Book of Rites provides a detailed record of the political systems and various institutional practices before the Zhou dynasty, as well as the Qin and Han periods. It covers a wide range of ceremonies, including rites for coronation, marriage, funerals, sacrifices, feasts, social interactions, court visits, and diplomatic inquiries.

resonance" theory, as part of the mandate of heaven for imperial power, did not fundamentally contradict the "divine granting of royal power" from the Shang dynasty, but rather represented a continuous thread in the social history and spiritual cultural pursuits of ancient peoples. Both were based on the belief that divine will could not be violated or resisted, and served as the foundation for national laws. Imperial power, according to this belief, had to be exercised through rites and laws, referred to as the "Way of the Emperor," so as not to contradict the ancient concept of "divine granting of the mandate of heaven." This belief system later incorporated Confucianism's "Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues" as part of the mandate of heaven, making Confucian ethical culture a regulatory framework for the imperial family and social order. Over time, through successive generations, the culture of the imperial sacrificial system became the foundational support for China's traditional ethical and spiritual cultural concepts.

In the ethical culture of imperial power and social unity, the doctrine of the mandate of heaven is closely intertwined with the ancient spirit worship culture of the Sanxingdui in Bashu, which is part of the long history of the Yangtze River civilization. The Han Empire, which included the region of Western Shu (Sichuan), formed its social and spiritual culture based on the ancient reverence for divine worship as an ethical foundation. This helped build the cultural history of the "mandate of heaven" in the southwestern and central-southern regions of the Yangtze River basin. This influence shaped Han society, where Confucian ethics, particularly the "Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues," were adopted as the ethical framework for imperial power and social unity. The emperor, revered as the "Son of Heaven," relied on the ideology of divine worship, which also supported the enduring spirit worship tradition of ancient Bashu. Han imperial power, as part of the Yangtze River cultural sphere, inherited and continued the ancient culture of Western Shu, thus creating a fusion of Han culture and ancient Bashu culture. Western Shu culture may belong to the branch of the Xia Dynasty's Yu the Great lineage. According to the "Shang Shu" (Book of Documents) and "Yu Gong" (Tribute of Yu)²⁵, it is recorded that "Yu was born in the Western Qiang with a stone button," and the descendants of Emperor Yu of the Xia Dynasty resided in places such as the "Minmin River" and the area eastward from the Tuo River. The Xia people, who lived along the Tuo River in the Yangtze River basin, were among the ethnic groups that entered the Shu region. Their culture involved rituals to gods and practices of entertainment and enjoyment. When King Wu of Zhou led the campaign against King Zhou of Shang, the ancient Shu State participated and was one of the "Eight Nations of the Pastoral Oath." The artifacts also employed the use of Oracle Bone Script to narrate their stories, later integrating into the culture of the Chinese nation. The Sanxingdui site is believed to be located in the outskirts of the ancient capital of Bashu. The ancestral worship culture of its people influenced the Confucian doctrine of "the interaction between Heaven and Humanity" in ancient China, which was used to validate the emperor's enlightened rule. This concept served as the basis for the "Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues" as social ethical norms, suggesting that celestial phenomena could predict events, thereby bestowing imperial authority with divine legitimacy. Under this belief, neither the imperial power nor society could deviate from the

²⁵ "Yu Gong" is a chapter in the "Shang Shu" (Book of Documents), which describes China's geography, natural resources, and the system of equitable taxation.

prescribed path, ensuring the emperor's rule and the governance of the world. This led to the formation of the spiritual and intellectual culture of the unified Han Dynasty, which became the foundation for the ethical values of successive societies and a vital part of China's traditional historical and cultural heritage.

2.1.4 The unification of imperial power and society and the integration with the culture of the Central Plains north of the Yangtze River.

The Western Han Dynasty established its capital in Xi'an, located in the northern Central Plains. The imperial power was influenced by the ancient history and culture of the north, continuing the centralized authority of the "Han inherited from the Qin system" to unify the empire. However, the royal family, having learned from the fall of the Qin Dynasty, incorporated Confucian ethics, forming a social and political system that combined rituals and laws. As a result, the culture of the northern Central Plains was continued and absorbed into the legacy of Han culture. More importantly, it reflected the distinct characteristics of northern geographical culture, making Han Dynasty cultural and artistic expressions exhibit a strong, robust spirit and style. Emperor Wu of the Han, in order to commemorate the Han general Huo Qubing, who fought against the Xiongnu invasions and ensured smooth communication between the East and the West, built a tomb garden symbolizing the Qilian Mountains as a tribute. According to the "Shi Ji": "The Emperor mourned him and sent the Xuanjia army from the vassal states, from Chang'an to Maoling, to build a tomb resembling the Qilian Mountains." The tomb's stone carvings and mound were designed to symbolize the Qilian Mountains as the resting place for General Huo Qubing (Figure 84). This reflects the grandeur and solid, robust cultural characteristics of the northern regional society during the Han Dynasty. Meanwhile, the Han Dynasty's concept of imperial unity as a societal spiritual belief mirrored the Confucian understanding of the relationship between ruler and subjects, emphasizing family and state ethics. This also showcased the social and historical spirit of the Western Han Dynasty, embodied in the "Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues" as key societal values.



Figure 78 The Horse Trampling the Xiongnu

Source: <http://www.yidianzixun.com/article/0Jxs6kkE> (2024.6.1)

The cultural artifacts of the Han royal family from the Haihun Marquis tomb in the Ganjiang and Poyang Lake area, located in the southern Yangtze River basin, were also influenced by the grandeur of Han culture. The bronze artifacts from the Haihun Marquis tomb contain Confucian ethical concepts of "ritual and law" as well as characteristics of northern culture, reflecting the symbolic narrative of cultural

semiotics that conveys the unification of imperial power and society, and the ideological values of this unified vision. As shown in the picture.



Figure 79

Figure 80

Figure 79 The gilded bronze dragon-headed artifact unearthed from the Haihun Marquis tomb.

Figure 80 Dragon Chariot Image·Han Dynasty ·Stone Carving unearthed in Qufu, Shandong.

Source84: Haihun Marquis State Museum /

Source85: Han Dynasty Portrait Stone Wu Zengde, June 1984, Beijing: Cultural Relics Publishing House, p58

As seen in the above image (Figure85), the cultural symbolism of the dragon under the Confucian principles of benevolence and ritual, and the autocratic imperial authority, exhibits duality. First, the dragon motif functions not only as an image for ritual ceremonies in folk society, symbolizing the veneration of imperial power within the relationships of rulers, ministers, and family as part of national culture, but also evolves into a symbol of Confucian ethics, representing governance by virtue as the foundation of imperial authority and ritual law. This reflects the cultural orientation of the unity of imperial power and society, embodying a collective social spirit and ideological culture (Figure86).

2.1.5 The integration of imperial power, social unity, and Western Region (Xiyu) culture.

Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty sent Zhang Qian as an envoy to the Guangxi region, established four commanderies in the Hexi Corridor, and created the ancient Silk Road, which facilitated economic and cultural exchanges between Central Asia and the Middle East. Within the city of Chang'an during the Han Dynasty, the sound of camel bells was incessant, symbolizing the thriving interaction between the East and the West. The Han Dynasty welcomed a variety of cultural traditions from both domestic and foreign sources. The "Hu" people from the Western Regions influenced Han culture and craftsmanship with their unique ethnic culture, leading to a large-scale exchange, integration, and expansion of cultures. This process resulted in Han Dynasty artifacts and artistic images absorbing traits of Western Region art, enriching the narrative of both Chinese and foreign craftsmanship and images, and fostering the fusion of Han Chinese culture with the multi-ethnic cultures of the Western Asia region.



Figure82.



Figure83

Figure 81 The excavation of horse-hoof-shaped gold from the Haihun Marquis State.

Figure 82 Ancient Persian motif patterns on artifacts from the Western Regions

Source86: Haihun Marquis State Museum

Source87: Ning Xia Museum

Through a comparative analysis of the illustrations (Figure87-88) , it is evident that the fusion of Chinese and Western cultures during the Han Dynasty reflects not only the vast and expansive territories of the Western Han Empire but also demonstrates how the imperial power of the Han Dynasty, under Emperor Wu, showcased a spirit of enlightenment and grandeur. Emperor Wu expanded the empire's borders, unifying the world through the Confucian ethical spirit of imperial authority and social unity, which became the guiding philosophy for governance. This unification of imperial power and society established political openness, social stability, and promoted increasingly prosperous foreign trade and economic growth during the Han Dynasty.

2.1.6 The transmission and propagation of the Confucian ethical culture under the unified rule of the Western Han Dynasty.

During the Western Han Dynasty, the Marquis of Haihun adhered to Confucian principles of benevolence and righteousness as a means of self-cultivation and moral development. His loyalty and submission to the imperial authority can be seen in his tribute of horse-hoof-shaped gold to the emperor. The rulers and ministers of the Western Han Dynasty followed Confucius' teaching that "if the names are not correct, language will not be in accordance; if language is not in accordance, affairs will not succeed," to regulate the behavior and actions of the emperor, ministers, and nobles, thus establishing proper roles. The concept of "rectifying names" referred to the proper laws, where people and matters were defined according to their correct roles, serving as a guideline for maintaining social order. This social order reflected the strict Confucian Three Bonds cultural ethics of emperor-minister relationships. The Confucian ethical culture of the Western Han Dynasty had a profound influence on the spiritual and ideological practices of subsequent dynasties and their royal and social structures.

Confucianism, with its governance of imperial power and regulation of society through ritual and law, unified the world under a cultural framework of propriety. This also shaped the paradigms of traditional craftsmanship in the Western Han Dynasty and subsequent dynasties, influencing the development of material culture. The artistic images of ancient artifacts, including their forms, decorations, and patterns, reflects the values and concepts inherent in Confucian ethics. The narratives conveyed through the shapes, decorations, and designs of these objects carry a shared cultural spirit of benevolence and propriety, embodying the social and ethical context of their time. Objects became symbols for deeper meanings, with the material serving as a vehicle for conveying moral and philosophical ideas. This transformed material

culture into a form of folk art, carrying symbolic meanings tied to societal values. Confucian ideas such as the "Three Bonds and Five Constants" became normative narratives of "the unity of imperial power and society" in both northern and southern regions. These visual representations took on the role of imparting moral teachings, forming what is known as traditional symbolic images culture in Chinese folk art from the Han Dynasty onward.(Castillo, A. 2019).

The tiles belong to a building that was likely constructed as the "Zhaigong" (ritual fasting palace) for the ceremonial fasting rituals held before the imperial ancestor worship at the Changling Tomb. Since there was a "Zhaigong" near the emperor's tomb, it is reasonable to assume that similar "Zhaishi" (fasting rooms) or "Zhaitang" (fasting halls) would also be built in the burial grounds of high-ranking officials. Because the "Zhaigong" and the emperor's tomb temple, as well as the "Zhaishi" and the ancestral hall on the tomb, are interdependent sacrificial structures, the terms "Zhai" (fasting) and "Ci" (ancestral hall) were often used together, and the combined term "Zhaici" or "Shizhaici" became an alternative name for the tomb's ancestral hall (Figure89) .

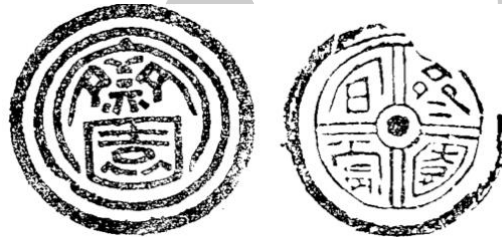


Figure 83 The "Zhaigong" roof tiles excavated from the eastern part of the Changling Tomb of Emperor Gaozu of the Han Dynasty in Xianyang, Shaanxi.

Source:Xing Lixiang, Comprehensive Study of Han Dynasty Relief Stones, Beijing: Cultural Relics Publishing House, August 2000, p73

Based on the above materials, it can be concluded that the folk spiritual culture under Confucian ethics during the Han Dynasty became a standardized cultural narrative shared by the symbolic art history of ancient China. It is Confucian ethics that formed the intrinsic value and driving force behind the development and transmission of image art. Throughout the successive generations, as it continued to evolve, a richer spiritual context and deeper meanings were created, leading to the renewal of the semiotics of images and symbolic narratives. While the cultural semiotics may differ across historical eras, one constant remains: the ideological appeal of the unification of the empire under the ancient emperor, as showcased by Confucian ethics, which has guided the conceptual cultural semiotics of folk art in both northern and southern societies in later generations.

2.2 The Regional Folk Culture Symbolic Narratives in the Artifacts of the Haihun Marquis State

The territorial reach of imperial power during the Han Dynasty spanned across China's northern and southern regions, encompassing multiple ethnicities and folk customs. This included the cultural influences from the Western Regions and Central Plains in the north, as well as from Western Shu and Chu cultures in the south. The vast and diverse regional cultures contributed to a rich narrative of the spiritual concepts in China's pluralistic folk culture and image art. At the same time, regional folk cultures and Confucian ethical culture intertwined and permeated each other.

This mutual influence shaped the narrative under the ideological concept of "the unity of imperial power and society" across the empire, thereby forming a cultural unity between northern and southern folk customs under the framework of ethical culture. Furthermore, within the folk craftsmanship of each region, the integration of imperial power and society reflected the reality of Western Han society. The image culture of the Haihun Marquis State encompasses multiple fields, including royal politics, social history, and agricultural economy, forming a narrative of imperial power and the unity of society under the empire. It presents a broad historical landscape of cultural symbols in the field of sociology, reflecting the sociocultural features of Western Han society.

2.2.1 The Symbolic Narrative of Imperial Political Culture in the Folk Culture of Artifacts from the Haihun Marquis State

Historical records state that after Emperor Liu He was deposed, Emperor Xuan of Han ascended the throne. Fearing that the Haihun Marquis might harbor rebellious intentions, Emperor Xuan sent the governor of Yuzhang Commandery to meet with the Haihun Marquis. Upon seeing his weak and sickly condition, the governor reported this to the emperor, leading the imperial family to restore Liu He to the rank of a marquis. From this, it can be concluded that the political relationship between the Governor of Yuzhang Commandery, the Haihun Marquis Liu He, and the Han imperial family reflects a hierarchical structure where imperial power is supreme. (Wang, G., 2023). This relationship under the centralized power system of the Western Han Dynasty demonstrates that the emperor, local officials, and vassal lords all adhered to Confucian ethical norms. It serves as empirical evidence of the social spiritual orientation of Confucian benevolence and rites, as well as their collective commitment to maintaining the Confucian ethical and political order in the historical context. Under Confucian ethical culture, the theoretical and cultural characteristics of the "unity of imperial power and society" as a cultural symbol of the world make the spirit of the emperor a traditional mechanism and symbolic narrative that constrains society. Meanwhile, Confucian benevolence and ritual propriety serve as the meta-language of these symbols. The ultimate meaning of cultural symbols is constructed through the "Dao", which embodies Confucian ethics, transmitting the foundational language of social order. This language is represented by the Confucian "Three Bonds" and the "Five Constant Virtues", forming the essence of Chinese cultural semiotics. This orientation of values is one of the key modes through which cultural symbols are spread and preserved.

2.2.2 The narrative of social, folk, economic, and cultural symbols in the artifacts of the Haihun Marquis State.

The semiotic perspective of Western Han image art transcends the reality of human society, representing an idealistic world. It is within this elevated narrative context of semiotics that the cultural characteristics of the Haihun Marquis state's iconography are formed.

In the Western Han dynasty, imperial power adopted Confucian benevolence and ritual propriety as its governance ideology, leading to the gradual prosperity of the Western Han society and economy. The folk images from this period reflect the authentic social and folk life under the imperial power of the Han dynasty. See the image below. Han dynasty mural stones often depicted themes from mythology and social reality, and were found across 13 provinces. Among these, Shandong, Jiangsu's

Xuzhou, Nanyang in Henan, central Sichuan, and northwest Shaanxi have yielded many discoveries. These mural stones vividly expressed the true historical events, relationships between rulers and officials, social scenes, mythology, folk life, and more in Han society. They have also become an integral part of the rich and diverse sociological and art history culture of the post-Han period. The developed Yangtze River system in Han dynasty society, coupled with the economic growth, provided a solid foundation for the flourishing of culture and art. This is reflected in the "unity of imperial power and society," which shaped the humanistic landscape of the Han dynasty. The Han dynasty mural stone culture holds a significant place in the history of Chinese iconography. While many of the Han dynasty mural stones depict narratives in a realistic style, the visual texts are not merely descriptive; they often express strong spiritual and ideological appeals. The ancestors' cultural practices have already demonstrated symbolic thinking and methods, establishing a cultural model of narrative meaning in Chinese semiotics.

The "Banquet of Music and Dance" illustration indicates that singing and dancing were required during the performance of sorcery. In spaces such as tombs and other ritual areas for honoring the deceased, song and dance were arranged. The fundamental purpose of these rituals was to portray a bidirectional action directed toward both the world of spirits and the real world. It is undeniable that in the Han dynasty, there was a custom of using song and dance for entertainment during funerary rituals and the mourning of the dead (Figure90) .

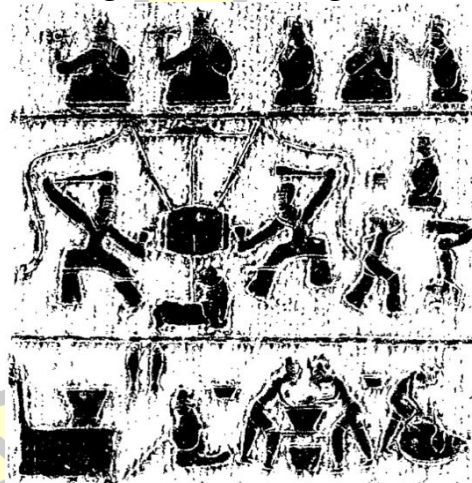


Figure 84 The "Banquet of Music and Dance" illustration, found on the eastern wall of the Shi Shrine at Wulao Wa in Jiexiang, Shandong (Western Stone).

Source: Comprehensive Study of Han Dynasty Mural Stones, by Xin Lixiang, Beijing: Cultural Relics Publishing House, p140

In earlyIn ancestral early halls ancestral, for example, the "Seventh Stone" unearthed halls from the Elderly Care Home (Figure91) , in such as the "Zhi FangSe Townventh, Stone Jia"xianq une Countyart,hed Sh fromandong the Province Elder,ly depicts Care hunting Home scenes in. Z Fromhi the Fang images Town,, the Jia huntedxianq animals County include, rabbits Sh,andong deer Province,, birds the, scenes and depict others hunting. targets The like hunters rabbits use, hunting deer dogs,, and cross birdsbows., The and hunters other use tools dogs to, capture cross thesebows birds, and and beasts arrows. to These capture images these are animals often. combined The with images dep areictions often of combined with the

depictions of the Queen Mother of the West on Queen the Mother same of mural stone. During the pre-Q their period, hunting, especially the hunting West activities of kings on and nobles, was not a leisurely pastime the, same but mural an stone important. ritual During activity the related pre to-Q military trainingin and period sacrificial hunting rites activities. Hunting served both as a form of, military exercise especially and those of the rulers a and nobility, preparation were not merely leisurely for past necessary sacrificial but offerings rather to important ancestors ritual. activities This associated underscores the significant with role military hunting and played in sacrificial rituals practices and. its Hunting broader served cultural and as religious both a importance form. of military training and a preparation for the necessary sacrifices in ancestor worship. This highlights the significance and role of hunting activities.

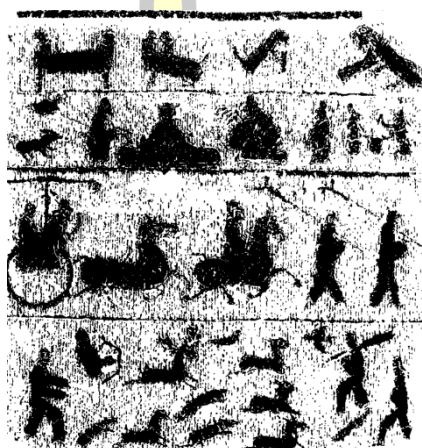


Figure 85the Elderly Care Home, Zhi Fang Town, Jiaxiang, Shandong (Seventh Stone).

Source:Comprehensive Study of Han Dynasty Mural Stones, by Xin Lixiang, Beijing: Cultural Relics Publishing House, p138

2.3 The cultural and artistic images of artifacts from the Haihun Marquis State: Craftsmanship culture and the linguistic traits of social cultural symbols in the Yangtze River folk traditions

The craftsmanship of the image of Emperor Ji of the Haihun Marquis State preserves the original context of folk images. The semiotics of the Western Han imperial image art not only reflects the emperor's culture in the sociological realm of Western Han society but also more significantly reveals the authentic folk life of the Western Han period.

The essence of cultural semiotics consists primarily of the humanities across multiple societal fields, including historical politics, cultural philosophy, social economy, folk art, and more. In a broader sense, semiotics encompasses both the material and spiritual worlds of humanity. Semiotics is the narrative study of anthropology, culture, and civilization.

The Yangtze River basin region from the Pre-Qin to the Western Han period is one of the birthplaces of Chinese Huaxia civilization. The stylized culture formed by the image art craftsmanship of the Western Han period reflects the narrative of Han imperial power and society. In the cultural belt of the Yangtze and Han River plains,

as well as the Gan-Po plain water system, the Haihun Marquis is located within the Chu cultural circle, at the confluence of the northern and southern tributaries. Geographically, it lies in Changyi, the capital of the Yu Province, within the Haihun Marquis State, which is also a place for the transmission of both Northern Confucian culture and Southern Chu culture. (Zou, J., & Yang, X., 2024). The artifact images of this region highlights the historical remnants of Confucian ethical culture, reflecting certain cultural symbols of concepts. These symbols are also influenced by the cultural "narrative" shaped by the convergence of diverse cultures, but the symbolic narrative still satisfies three essential elements: First, conceptual cultural symbols must align with the historical transmission of culture and the spiritual discourse forms of contemporary or historical societal realms, embodying shared values and beliefs. Second, they reflect the distinct craftsmanship cultural characteristics of different regions in the North and South, representing the inevitable sameness and difference of cultural symbols, as well as their inherent, fixed factors. In the context of localized cultural semiotics, these symbols are deeply shaped by the distinctive cultural narratives and the socio-economic forms of the region's shared craft culture. Third, the narrative of image cultural symbols is influenced by the individual's craftsmanship thoughts, spirit, and values, leading to the formation of various types of image symbol narratives through choices and preferences. These three elements together form the contextual narratives of symbolic craftsmanship culture, creating a unity in cultural categories and a diversity in cultural meanings. They illustrate the differences rooted in various historical eras, the geographical and ecological cultures of the North and South, varying socio-economic contexts, and the local ethnic group folk craftsmanship culture. This results in the ever-changing, rich diversity of ancient Chinese cultural symbols, with the craftsmanship and image art of artifacts continually evolving, reflecting historical transformations, rather than being static symbols. It belongs to the dynamic historical transformations and socio-cultural semiotic narratives. However, the inherent driving force that has allowed it to be passed down through the millennia, unchanged at its core, lies in the formation of Confucian values of benevolence and ritual within Chinese cultural semiotics. This framework embodies an anthropological consensus on ethical, cultural, and spiritual values. It has shaped the intrinsic elements of the narrative language of ancient Chinese cultural semiotics, and these elements are the three fundamental factors of craftsmanship culture in Chinese cultural semiotic narratives, all of which follow and adhere to common principles. As a result, it has become the paradigm and standard of Chinese cultural semiotics.

At the same time, it is the normative context and semantics of Confucian ethical conceptual cultural semiotics that regulate the identification of the moral order of benevolence and ritual in ancient society. This has shaped the social and cultural semiotics of the North China Yellow River Basin's Central Plains culture and the South China Yangtze River Basin's Western Sichuan and Chu cultures over the past thousands of years, building a direction toward shared and universal spiritual values. From the perspective of the Western Han Dynasty, in the Haihun Marquis State located in the Yu Province region of the Yangtze River's Gan-Po tributaries, the craftsmanship and image art culture of its artifacts showcase the reverence for Confucianism, the emphasis on Confucian culture in royal culture, and the regional

folk culture. This reflects the spiritual values of the craftsmanship image narrative semiotics of the Western Han period.

2.4 The construction of Confucian cultural semiotics in the central imperial authority society through the images of artifacts from the Haihun Marquis State

During the Western Han period, Confucian ethical culture had already formed a unified pursuit of spiritual values shared by society as a whole. The "Three Principles and Five Constant Virtues" constituted the moral culture followed by the entire society. Confucian culture, in turn, became a consensus culture that unified the diverse regions and ethnic groups of both the North and the South, thereby strengthening the centralization of imperial power and governance in the Han dynasty. This consolidation of imperial rule promoted the stability of the regime and was a significant factor in the development of the society, economy, and culture during the early Western Han period.

The unified cultural semiotics of imperial power and society in the images of the Haihun Marquis' State, centered on Confucian ethical culture as its core value, has been passed down to the present day. This serves as the subject component of semiotic narrative and can be interpreted as the historical and cultural narrative of China's Western Han agrarian civilization, economy, and society. It also represents the paradigm of the "facts or conceptual forms, whose expressions are legally defined and institutionalized" within the unified cultural semiotics of imperial power and society. This has led to the formation of two interconnected systems of unified cultural semiotics of imperial power and society: First the construction of the unified cultural semiotics of imperial power and society, characterized by Confucian ethical culture. Second the transmission of the unified cultural semiotics of imperial power and society, which relies on the inherent vitality constructed by cultural symbols. This vitality, represented by Confucian ethical culture, embodies universal spiritual values with cross-era significance in human society. The meaning of this is rooted in the Spring and Autumn period, where Confucius infused "benevolence and ritual" into the cultural practices of rites and music, due to the "collapse of rites and the decay of music." Rituals, in reality, transformed into laws, and while rituals could no longer constrain the upper-level monarchy, they became a form of violence against the lower classes, leading to a society where order was maintained by force. Therefore, Confucius' concept of "benevolence and ritual" ("Ren Li") and his guidance through virtue ("Dao zhi yi De") can be understood as leading through governance ("Dao zhi yi Zheng"). Confucius explained "benevolence" ("Ren") by stating that rituals are external forms of ceremony, while the internal aspect refers to ethics, specifically human qualities such as benevolence and righteousness. Thus, it is necessary to "overcome oneself and return to ritual" ("Ke ji fu li"). During the Warring States period, Mencius further interpreted Confucius' "benevolence" culture as a human-centered approach, advocating for "benevolent governance" ("Ren Zheng") and the love of the people, which should be promoted from the inner moral foundation to outward societal practice. Confucius' son, Zisi, proposed a system of Confucian moral ethics, incorporating the five virtues of benevolence, righteousness, ritual, wisdom, and integrity, which are aligned with the Five Elements. These represent five internal norms for individuals, or moral laws, that regulate the actions of virtuous individuals and gentlemen. In the hierarchy of human nature, "benevolence" ("Ren") is the character trait of the "sage," with the sage being the highest level. Benevolence serves

as the bridge between sacred wisdom and righteousness. Therefore, Zisi said, "Without intelligence, there is no clarity; without clarity, there is no wisdom; without wisdom, there is no sanctity; without wisdom, there is no benevolence; without benevolence, there is no peace; without peace, there is no joy; without joy, the ruler falls." ²⁶This moral law, when expressed as a textual narrative, becomes the ethical cultural system of Confucianism, which forms the internal driving force that has been passed down continuously for thousands of years.

This led to the formation of a shared cultural semiotics and historical cultural heritage in Han Dynasty China, characterized by the "unity of imperial power and society" that unified the realm. These two interconnected cultural constructions and transmission systems also represent the sociological cultural narrative of the material culture and images of the Haihun Marquis State, with their internal texts and external continuities. The encoding and system of two interrelated and mutually dependent symbols form the internal interactive paradigm of Confucian ethical cultural semiotics in the images of the Haihun Marquis State. This paradigm shaped the "language" norms and narrative symbols of ancient Chinese sociology, centered around Confucian ethics, and also represents an important feature of the unity of imperial power and society as reflected in the cultural semiotics of the Haihun Marquis State.

Part 3: The social value of the cultural symbols of imperial power and society in the images of the Haihun Marquis State.

The cultural demand for the unity of imperial power and society, which has been pursued by successive dynasties, represents the social laws and cultural paradigms sought by imperial power. It encompasses various fields, including social, political, and economic domains, while also balancing social cultural forms. This, in turn, influenced the semiotic narratives of folk craftsmanship and the images of artifacts, serving as a recognition of the spirit of the imperial society. In ancient times, imperial power established strict legal systems to demonstrate the sacred and inviolable nature of imperial authority. Artifacts were not allowed to contradict the constraining principles of imperial power and society, and they were required to uphold the spirit of unity between imperial power and society. These artifacts thus became symbolic representations of the societal values and spirit of the nation, transcending their practical function to evolve into symbols of human spiritual and cultural significance, representing the value of sociological cultural symbols.

3.1 The inheritance and continuation of material culture in the post-Han folk society through the images of artifacts from the Haihun Marquis State

From the pre-Qin to the Western Han period, the dragon, phoenix, tiger, and Xuanwu were revered as the deities of the four cardinal directions. According to the "Records of the Shi Ji: Book of Feng chan shu," these deities were worshiped as the gods of the East, West, South, and North. Since the Western Zhou, architecture has represented human habitation, symbolizing both the stability of living and spiritual pursuits. Roof tiles were believed to protect and ensure the prosperity of the ancient people, reflecting societal prosperity and the sanctity of the royal family. From the Western Zhou to the Western Han and continuing into the Ming and Qing periods,

²⁶ In 1993, the Chu bamboo slips Wuxing (Five Elements), a work by Zisi, were discovered in Guodian, Hubei.

roof tiles symbolized the Confucian concepts of "ritual" and "law", representing the unity of imperial power and society. Among the "four sacred" animals, the dragon motif symbolized imperial power, while the phoenix motif often conveyed social auspiciousness and harmony. The tiger is associated with the majesty of law, while Xuanwu is a fusion of the tortoise and snake, with the tortoise symbolizing longevity and being a water deity. Xuanwu later became known as the True Martial Emperor of the North. The cultural significance of the Four Sacred Beasts reflects the cultural symbolism of the concept of "the unity of imperial power and society" and marks the beginning of a move toward a standardized, conceptual mode of cultural semiotics. The cultural symbolism of the "Four Sacred Beasts" was commonly seen in the early Han period, with the characters themselves directly becoming narrative symbols that conveyed imperial power and societal culture. For example, the phrase "Qianqiu Wansui" (千秋万岁) found on Western Han roof tiles referred to the concept of "imperial unity," symbolizing the perpetual transmission of imperial rule. "Han Bing Tianxia" (汉并天下) likely refers to Liu Bang's defeat of Xiang Yu and the unification of the empire, asserting the supremacy of imperial power. The royal spirit of the southeast, southwest, northeast, and northwest regions is also reflected in these symbols. Phrases such as "Wanqiu" (万秋) and "Changle Fugui" (长乐富贵) reflect the prosperity of Western Han society, serving as symbolic narratives of "the unity of imperial power and society" and the peace and wealth of the empire (Figure 92).



Figure 86 Western Han roof tiles

Source: Guo Lianfu Ding Tao, Dictionary of Chinese Patterns. Tianjin Education Press, January 1998 P293

The roof tile images of the Haihun Marquis State also reflect this cultural unity, where the theory of the unity of imperial power and society dominates the discourse and narrative of folk craftsmanship across both northern and southern regions of China. This cultural tradition has a long history, from the pre-Qin period through the Western Han, and has continued to influence imperial society in later dynasties up to the Ming and Qing, representing the core values of China's ancient craftsmanship culture. Among the "Four Sacred Beasts," the dragon, phoenix, and tiger first appeared on Zhou dynasty artifacts. In the pre-Qin period, they were seen in jade and lacquer ware, as well as in textile patterns. By the Qin and Han dynasties,

these symbols were widely used in architectural roof tiles and later extended to clothing, utensils, temples, and residences. These symbols were not only used by the imperial family but also became emblematic of folk culture in Ming and Qing society.

3.2 The Confucian Cultural Symbols of the Haihun Marquis State and the Narrative Language of Spiritual and Cultural Discourse in the Western Han Society

The Haihun Marquis Liu He respected Confucian ethical culture, which is reflected in his pursuit of the unity of imperial power and society. This pursuit is embodied in the Confucian "Three Bonds and Five Constants" as an ethical framework for social law and moral culture. It served not only as a guideline for the hierarchical order of the ruler, ministers, and nobles but also as the spiritual and moral law in Western Han society, shaping the beliefs of kings, high-ranking officials, scholars, and common people. The Confucian "Three Bonds and Five Constants" culture represents the standards for a law-based society under centralized imperial power, uniting imperial authority and society across the realm. The culture of the unity of imperial power and society maintained the Western Han imperial authority's systemic control over various aspects of Han society, including social politics, economy, culture, and the lives of the people. It became the dominant spirit of ritual law and ideological concept in Western Han society and evolved into a cultural system of ritual law followed by successive dynasties, embodying the principle of "unity of imperial power and society." In Mencius: Teng Wen Gong I, the text teaches society about human relationships: "The father and son have affection, the ruler and minister have righteousness, the husband and wife have distinctions, the elder and younger have order, and friends have trust." This formed a narrative meta-language of sociocultural symbolism, reflecting the foundational ideas of society. Therefore, it can be said that the inception of Western Han Confucian ethical symbols is characterized by a systematic theory of control over human behavior and responsibilities, which also reflects the essence of human nature and determines the spirit of society. The concept of "unity of imperial power and society" is closely related to the idea of "benevolent governance". The pursuit of "benevolence" as a moral ideal for individuals is not enough; it should extend to "benevolent governance" as a means to protect the people and rule the state. The implementation of "benevolent governance," as described in Mencius: Gongsun Chou I, transforms the heart of the benevolent into a political force that influences social governance, becoming the way of ruling that maintains social order. The concept of imperial authority coupled with virtuous governance, or the "unity of imperial power and society," is central to this ideological framework.

3.3 The internal dynamics of "transmission" and "development" of the Confucian cultural symbols in the images of the Haihun Marquis State

The narrative of cultural symbols undergoes transformation due to historical changes. As the social semantics of symbols experience dynamic alienation during periods of societal transformation or historical dissemination, the narrative of ideological cultural symbols also alters its original language. To adapt to the new social spirit, ideological consciousness, and social thought, it must be enriched with new linguistic modalities and semantics in order to continue its transmission and extension. In certain historical periods, some ideological cultural symbol narratives are

unable to be passed on to modern society because their conceptual cultural symbols lack the inherent values that transcend their historical era. As a result, they are eliminated, frozen, and no longer transmitted or recognized by the social spirit. Practices such as the slave trade in slave societies, or the culture of blind loyalty in monarchies where a ruler demands the death of his ministers, and a father demands the death of his son, gradually disappear with societal renewal and transformation. The original cultural semiotic concepts have exited the realm of sociological spiritual thought and ultimately fade into extinction. Cultural symbol narratives are products of specific historical periods and cannot transcend the limitations of historical time. They lack the capacity for transmission across generations and cannot be considered as cultural semiotic narratives for ongoing societal evolution. This can be referred to as a "historical-temporal cultural semiotics." On the other hand, cultural semiotics that transcend the constraints of historical eras and possess a universal, international, shared language of anthropological ethical culture can enable cross-temporal, cross-regional, and cross-ethnic cultural inheritance and dissemination. This is what belongs to "synchronic cultural semiotics." China has always been a nation rich in symbols. Since the Han Dynasty, the social order was constructed according to Confucian ethical cultural logic. The concept of "rectifying names" enabled China's multi-ethnic society to consciously follow the ancient traditional order of "person, family, state" based on Confucian ethical cultural symbols. As a result, Chinese cultural semiotics addresses the universal spiritual culture shared by humanity, becoming the common moral and order value orientation for multiple ethnic groups. Chinese cultural semiotics can even be described as the "History of Chinese Symbolic Thought" in ancient society. Its core, built upon the Neo-Confucian culture, established social order and guidelines for interpersonal relationships, which became the moral principles of successive societies. The Confucian ethical cultural semiotics of Chinese cultural semiotics has undergone over 2,000 years of historical transformation, surviving the test of time. After the sands have been sifted, it remains a vital part of contemporary societal spiritual culture and has become a cultural belief in Southeast Asian countries and regions, demonstrating the vitality of Confucian ethical cultural symbols.

Summary

The Confucian ethical culture of the "Three Bonds and Five Constants" has shaped the cultural semiotics and narrative of imperial unity and ritual law, becoming a symbol of traditional folk culture across northern and southern China. This culture embodies the core spiritual values of ancient Chinese society, with Confucian concepts of family-state relationships and rites unifying imperial power and social order. It laid the foundation for centralized imperial rule, influencing Chinese craftsmanship and extending into contemporary society.

Confucian ethics, through its symbols of imperial power and social rituals, shaped the spiritual and cultural values from the Han to the Ming and Qing Dynasties, influencing various aspects of society, including politics, economics, and regional dynamics. Confucianism naturally impacted regional folk culture and iconographic arts, becoming both a spiritual and material cultural force. It permeated the social consciousness of ancient and modern societies, establishing moral values that guided the formation of imperial governance, benevolent rule, and virtuous society based on the "Three Bonds" and "Five Constants."

The semiotics of Confucian ethics also plays a role in the creation culture within sociology. In the Western Han, Confucian ethics were adopted for eulogy, education, and belief, using rich language to enhance the cultural symbols of the time. Confucianism became the unifying spiritual doctrine of imperial power and society, guiding the multi-ethnic folk groups of China and forming the nation's cultural values. Its dual influence on both imperial power and society shaped human civilization and social norms, holding significant meaning for societal progress.



CHAPTER VI

The construction of Confucian cultural semiotics and its contemporary dissemination

This chapter is based on the broader context of the revival of traditional Chinese culture, providing a comprehensive review of the previous content while exploring the theoretical context, historical inheritance, and contemporary dissemination value of Confucian cultural semiotics. The first section analyzes the narrative systems of cultural symbols from the Pre-Qin to Western Han periods, as well as the evolution of the Western Han image-based Confucian cultural semiotics narrative system. It focuses on the Confucian concepts of benevolence and rites, the legal codes of centralized power through the Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues, the ethical and social regulations embodied in benevolence and ritual, and the encoding of the three-tiered ethical symbols within the image-based Confucian cultural semiotics of the Haihun Marquis State artifacts. The chapter proposes a cultural semiotics of Confucian ethics and culture that encodes moral and social symbols, serving as a reflection of the ethical, legal, and social customs in both the material and spiritual realms of human society, as well as the cultural semiotics of Confucianism's worldview, views on nature, society, and humanity.

The second section discusses the dimensions and spaces of ethical cultural semiotics, as well as the anthropological value and significance of traditional Chinese ethical culture. The third section addresses the dissemination dimensions of Confucian ethical cultural symbols and their space in the revival of traditional culture. It analyzes the internal essence and transmission of Chinese traditional ethical culture, as well as its role in the anthropological intangible cultural heritage. Additionally, it explores the re-practice and re-application of contemporary traditional culture revival.

Part 1: The construction of image symbolism narrative and Confucian cultural semiotics

The "semantic" carried by image symbols reflects the values and concepts centered on the individual, representing self-awareness and the expression of meaning. This, in turn, forms the vocabulary of subjective narrative. It is a "self-expression" textual logical structure, where the creator of the image (the subject) makes a leap in rational understanding or emotional experience, as well as spiritual concepts, towards the object (society). This generates a symbolic process of "meaning" from the subject to practice. The transformation of symbols from "signified" to "signifier" reflects the evolution of subjective symbols, transitioning from symbols expressing concepts to a system of will that represents the semantic meanings of social objects, thus giving rise to an artistic cultural semiotics of image creation. The "subject" of cultural symbols, in its objective statement, also undergoes an alienation of "meaning" from the inner to the "outer."

At the same time, the transformation from diachronic cultural symbols to synchronic cultural symbols is realized. The conditions for this transformation include historical and philosophical backgrounds of symbols, as well as the internal

dissemination conditions of aesthetics and sociology, forming the intrinsic driving forces behind the spread of symbols. The Confucian virtues and ethical culture of China, developed over thousands of years, serve as the logical narrative of image art symbols. They form the cultural system that underpins the spiritual and state ideologies of Chinese folk society and the national polity, both historically and in contemporary times. The evolution from subject symbols to object symbols is the embodiment of how "meaning" of symbols regulates social order and constructs Confucian ethical social cultural symbols, which in turn represents the national cultural spirit and will to create societal harmony.

1.1 The construction of cultural symbols from the Pre-Qin to the Western Han period

From the Pre-Qin to the Western Han period in China, image symbols evolved from the "Heaven and Man" and "Divine Right" ritual and music cultural symbols of the Pre-Qin era to the Confucian "Ritual and Law" cultural symbols of the Western Han period. The semantic meaning of these images shifted from maintaining "divine power" to upholding the imperial authority and societal order. During the Western Han period, Confucianism established the logical structure of ethical cultural symbols, building upon the legacy of the image cultural symbols of Pre-Qin historiography and philosophical culture. Based on the historical development of society marked by the "collapse of ritual and music," a cultural symbol system centered on "ritual and law" was established as the foundation of social order and legal norms. This system was passed down through successive dynasties of the Western Han and beyond, serving as the guiding spiritual and cultural pillar of Chinese ancient folk culture and the nation's political system.

The "Ritual and Law" cultural core in Chinese traditional cultural symbols involves the transition from the Pre-Qin image cultural symbol narrative of "Unity of Man and Nature" and "divine right of kings" to the transmission of the "Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues" culture under the influence of "heaven and human response" during the Western Han period. Confucian culture thus determined or influenced the cultural core of Chinese historiography, philosophy, aesthetics, and social communication since the Western Han, shaping the spiritual orientation of cultural ideas. The role of Confucian culture is the aggregation of the core functions of these various cultural symbols and the creation of symbolic expressions in fields such as historiography, philosophy, and aesthetics. The narrative system of image symbols created in this context represents a combination of the signifier-signified, direct-indirect meanings, and the structure of image symbols and semantics, forming the narrative framework of crafted images.

Confucian cultural semiotics refers to the co-occurrence relationships and symbolic narrative systems of cultural symbols across various fields, forming the overall "text" of these symbols. It aligns with Roland Barthes' concept of the "text" in semiotics, as well as the idea of the internal components of cultural symbols. In this context, Confucian cultural semiotics serves as the expression of cultural symbols across different fields, acting as the textual center with multidimensional spatial layers, encompassing core concepts such as structure, system, and hierarchy. This generates a sociological understanding of cultural semiotics and symbolic narratives. However, the mere categorization and analysis of cultural symbols from the Western Han period using segmentation methods is insufficient. It is also necessary to examine

the "combination axis" of symbols and their correlation with the aggregation of symbols formed by Confucian culture in the representation of cultural symbols across various fields. These two aspects permeate each other within the narrative system of Confucian cultural semiotics. This allows for the construction of a symbolic set and narrative framework that integrates both the symbolic "narrative" perspective and the symbolic "text" perspective. The spatial dimensions of the symbolic set in semiotics play a crucial role in constructing the narrative expression of Confucian cultural symbols in Western Han society and in the social cultural semiotics of subsequent dynasties.

1.2 The construction of the images Confucian cultural symbol system during the Western Han period

The pre-Qin "Unity of Man and Nature" cultural symbol evolved into the "Heavenly Mandate of Royal Power" symbol. This transformation marks the history of image cultural symbols, where primitive sacrificial totem symbols were used to communicate with the divine and establish ritual music. Through rituals and ceremonies, the concept of governance by rites became institutionalized in a slave society, where the divine granted royal power, thus shaping the contextual paradigm of musical instruments and craftsman's image creation. This formed a formalized cultural narrative system of image symbols, which then spread and evolved into the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods. During this time, Confucius, in response to the collapse of ritual and music, established Confucianism based on the principles of "rectifying names and positions," creating a social framework based on Ren (benevolence) and Li (ritual), which regulated society with shared cultural practices, social order, and spiritual values.

This system laid the foundation for the legal and ritual culture of the Qin and Han dynasties, serving as a carrier of ancient human spiritual culture and signifying the importance of Ren and Li. It also set the orientation for the foundational ideas of Confucian thought. This human cultural spirit motivated the Western Han society to formalize and systematize image culture narratives, which gradually spread across various social domains. This process led to the formation of similarities and differences between image art symbols and linguistic symbols. The history of symbolic art, rooted in the image history of pre-Qin and Western Han China, thus constructed the historical trajectory and development of visual arts from ancient to contemporary times. The only differences between them lie in the variation between linguistic texts and image texts, as well as their respective narrative systems. However, both are consistent with the cultural foundation of Confucianism.

Iconology can also be transformed into the textual semantics of linguistic semiotics, surpassing the expression of the world through language symbols. It more effectively reflects both the material and spiritual worlds of human society. From the perspective of ancient times, totem symbols preceded the narrative system of human language symbols. By the Western Han period, the creation of image symbols followed the "civilizing" function of Confucian culture. As a system of visual narrative semiotics, it gave rise to the conceptual cultural symbols of Chinese craftsmanship in image art, which have endured for thousands of years. These symbols are not only material representations but also linguistic signs, serving as a cultural semiotic system created by human civilization in fields such as language, mythology, religion, art, and science. This cultural semiotics represents an N-

dimensional visual art paradigm, distinct from other cultural symbol systems and their characteristics.

During the Western Han period, the essence of semiotics had already evolved into a symbol system presented through Confucian rationalism and cultural narratives. This sought to convey multi-dimensional textual narratives related to benevolence, society, spirit, and other aspects. Historical symbols such as the "Unity of Man and Nature" and the "Divine Mandate of Royal Power" gradually evolved into symbols of Confucian ethical culture within the fields of aesthetics and sociology. These transformations marked the shift of image symbols from diachronic cultural symbols to synchronic cultural symbols that transcended historical limitations, thus giving rise to the history of visual arts.

Images and symbols are two different aspects, but their carriers are shared. That is, Confucian mechanical culture formed the "combinatory axis" of image-symbol relationships, making images a "collective body" of symbolic culture. This allowed images to transform into human spiritual concepts and societal rites and legal order, thereby constructing the system of cultural symbols in Western Han society and the conceptual cultural semiotics of craftsmanship and image art in various social domains.

1.3 The construction of the images Confucian cultural symbols in the artifacts of the Haihun Marquis State

The paradigm and symbolic narrative of Confucian cultural symbolism in the artifacts of the Haihun Marquis State are an inevitable result of the Western Han imperial political system, which was based on Confucianism as the state ideology and the "Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues" as the social laws. As a semiotics of the conceptual artistic images of royal craftsmanship, this system holds an important position and academic value within the field of ancient Chinese Confucian cultural semiotics.

The larger system of Confucian cultural symbols in the artifacts of the Haihun Marquis State encompasses the symbolic systems of pre-Qin cultural image history and the political, economic, regional, folk, and artistic cultural narratives of Western Han society. It can also be said that the conceptual cultural symbols of artifact art images from the Haihun Marquis State are not only a representation of the Western Han royal culture but also a reflection of the Confucian ethical cultural symbol system built and propagated by the ancient ethical doctrines that bridged earlier and later traditions, carrying significant cultural meaning in the context of ancient human civilization.

The Confucian cultural narrative system of the artifact image art symbols of the Haihun Marquis State evolved from the ritual and music-based cultural symbols of sacrificial patterns, transitioning into a reflection of social and historical cultural changes within the context of ceremonial culture in the craftsmanship of artifacts. The spread of the ritual law culture of the Qin and Han dynasties and the Confucian cultural symbols of the Western Han became the material culture system and the intangible cultural semiotic system that constructed, evolved, and transmitted the spiritual principles and values of ancient human societies, as well as the political power and folk cultural semiotics.

This development led to the formation of the artifact craftsmanship image art symbolic narrative system, reflecting the expression of humanistic cultural symbols across multiple dimensions, fields, and layers. These symbols serve as carriers of both the material and spiritual worlds of humanity, offering valuable insights into the cultural semiotics with both local and international perspectives.

The core idea of Confucianism, as articulated by Confucius, is "self-discipline and the return to rituals" and "a scholar's aspiration is to follow the Way," indicating that the Way (Dao) takes precedence over political power in governing society, thereby achieving a state ruled by rites. Confucius thus defined "self-discipline and the return to rituals" as benevolence, saying, "By practicing self-discipline and returning to rituals, the world will turn to humanity." This allows us to explore the Confucian cultural model in the context of the paradigm of the conceptual cultural semiotics of the artifact image art from the Haihun Marquis State during the Western Han. The system of "Object - Ruler - Society" forms the core signifier of the image symbol, incorporating the cultural system of Dao, Human, and Society across three dimensions. This is not limited to the narrative systems of linguistic semiotics or image art semiotics but involves a further exploration of the discourse and academic systems that construct the Chinese cultural semiotic framework.

The essential logic and structure of Chinese cultural semiotics can be examined through a knowledge-based and scientific analysis of the historical evolutionary nodes of Western Han cultural semiotics, which connect the past and future. The case study of the artifact image art cultural semiotics and cultural semiotic narratives of the Haihun Marquis State reveals the cognitive, logical, and communicative dimensions of Chinese Confucian cultural semiotics within the narrative structure of semiotics theory. This semiotic narrative system reflects the Confucian values of benevolence and ritual, which construct a worldview, a social perspective, and a human understanding.

Xunzi²⁷ advocated for human understanding of the natural laws and the transformation of the objective world through "controlling destiny and using it," a concept deeply rooted in Confucian cultural semiotics. This narrative system, built upon Confucian thought, manages the semiotic structure of the narrative model. Thus, the encoding structure of this system should be:

Primary Encoding: The concept of Ren Dao (benevolent way) in Confucianism, based on Confucian teachings, integrates the core values of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trust—known as the Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues. Mencius's idea of "establishing the proper position of the world and achieving the desired outcome" becomes the philosophical culture of Confucianism and influences the sociological culture symbols of the Dao, while also shaping the regional cultures of Northern and Southern China, as well as craftsmanship aesthetics. This forms the core spirit of Confucian cultural semiotics.

Secondary Encoding: The concept of Dao Tong (the Way of the Tao) represents the principle of centralization in governance. Xunzi argued that the ruler's way should "properly arrange governance and practice benevolence," requiring the ruler to embody, follow, and uphold the Way. During the Western Han Dynasty, the

²⁷ Xunzi: He was a famous philosopher, thinker, and educator during the Warring States Period in China, and was also one of the important representatives of the Confucian school.

state ideology of "conferring supreme authority upon Confucianism" became the guiding political principle, which led to the integration of political, economic, and cultural systems under the ritual and legal norms of Dao Tong. This expression of Confucian cultural semiotics follows the narrative paradigm of governance based on ritual law, reflecting the cognitive understanding of the human world and adhering to the laws of social development. It became the Confucian orthodoxy of the state, which was spread and evolved throughout ancient and modern times.

Tertiary Encoding: Dao Ji (Dao and Ji) — Ji represents the material world of human society, while Dao represents the spiritual world of humanity. This is the cosmological, natural, social, and humanistic narrative system in Chinese cultural semiotics. It reflects the anthropological cultural history of multiple spaces in the spiritual world of humanity. It showcases the narrative process of "Unity of man and nature" within the dissemination of ritual and music culture symbols, evolving into ritual and legal culture symbols. This process enriches the construction of traditional Chinese cultural symbols and anthropological ethical culture (Table14).

Table 14 The Semiotic and Narrative System of Artifact images and Artistic Culture in the Marquis of Haihun State

The Narrative Coding of Ethical Social Concepts in the Semiotics of Art and Culture	Construction of Images Art Semiotics	Image symbols and narratives
Cultural Semiotics of tUnity of man and nature	Centered on the concept of "Heaven-Human Unity," it encompasses ancient totemic symbols, metaphysical symbols, folk symbols, and post-Han Buddhist symbols.	1.Geometric Pattern Image: Human continuity concept, artistic and cultural symbol narrative. 2.(Thunder) Image: Cosmic deities concept, artistic and cultural symbol narrative. 3.Cloud and Air Image: Heavenly phenomena concept, artistic and cultural symbol narrative. 4.Milk Nail Image: Constellation theory concept, artistic and cultural symbol narrative. 5.Flying Heaven Image: Heaven and human resonance theory concept, artistic and cultural symbol narrative.

Cultural Semiotics of Theocracy and Unified Authority	The culture of divine-right monarchy, based on rituals and music , formed symbols of sacrifices, deities, and imperial power. This cultural influence extended to the Shu culture, Chu culture, and the Central Plains culture.	1.Taotie Pattern: Divine authority concept, artistic and cultural symbol narrative. 2.Sacred Beast Pattern: Divine-right monarchy concept, artistic and cultural symbol narrative. 3.Kui Dragon Image: Reverence for deities, divine authority concept, artistic and cultural symbol narrative. 4.Cloud and Thunder Pattern: Auspicious heavenly phenomena concept, artistic and cultural symbol narrative.
Confucianism Unified Cultural Semiotics	Centered around the doctrine of ritual and law culture, Confucian governance dominated the cultural semiotics of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, constructing a multicultural narrative system within the traditional cultural semiotics of the Chinese nation.	1.Dragon Image: Artistic symbol of the concepts of ritual, law, and imperial authority. 2.Confucius Image: Artistic symbol narrative of Confucian philosophy and concepts. 3.Deity Image: Artistic symbol narrative of divine-right monarchy and divine protection concepts. 4.Jade Image: Artistic symbol narrative of virtue culture and moral concepts. 5.Phoenix Image: Artistic symbol narrative of ethical virtue and moral culture.
Built together <u>Ethical Social Cultural Semiotics</u>	Based on the "ritual and law" culture, a multidisciplinary cultural narrative system of the traditional cultural semiotics of the Chinese nation was formed.	1.Southern and Northern Folk Customs Image: Art cultural symbols reflecting regional traditions, customs, and lifestyles within the Chinese cultural context. 2.Historiographical Cultural Symbols: Art and cultural symbols used to record and interpret history, preserving the legacy and wisdom of past generations. 3.Philosophical Cultural Symbols: Artistic representations of philosophical concepts that express deeper meanings related to ethics, metaphysics, and worldview, often rooted in Confucianism, Taoism, or Buddhism. 4.Aesthetic Cultural Symbols: Visual symbols in art that convey beauty, harmony, and the ideals of taste and form as represented in

		various artistic traditions. 5.Sociological Cultural Symbols: Symbols that depict societal structures, class, roles, and relationships, offering insights into the cultural fabric and social dynamics of different periods or regions.
--	--	---

Part 2: The dimensions and fields of Confucian cultural semiotics.

During the Spring and Autumn period, Confucius introduced the concept of "Ren" (benevolence), which, alongside the contributions of Confucian scholars such as Zisi, Mencius, and Xunzi, became a shared spiritual concept and philosophical thought in ancient Chinese human culture. It shaped the political, ethnic, and folk history of both the northern and southern regions of China. Confucian ethical culture evolved over centuries, becoming the core and driving force of traditional culture, embodying the moral and legal concepts of ancient humanity. This, in turn, highlights the dimensions and space of Confucian virtue ethics cultural symbols.

Confucian ethics is not an emotionalist virtue ethics; rather, it is a system that uses "Ren" (benevolence) as a dimension to regulate the virtue ethic of "Do not do unto others what you do not want done to yourself." It establishes the "laws" that govern the relationship between benevolence and social moral order, and serves as the foundation of the Western Han Dynasty's policy of "conferring supreme status on Confucianism." This system harmonizes the relationship between the objective world (society) and the subject (individual), forming a unified whole. As a result, the dimensions of Confucian virtue ethics cultural semiotics and semiotic narratives become a humanized spiritual world.

Furthermore, it transcends the boundaries of both the material and spiritual worlds. It gathers diachronic and synchronic symbols into a Confucian virtue ethics cultural ideology within the universal ethical system of humanity. While its emergence has historical, geographical, and ethnic limitations, it holds a more profound significance in offering philosophical ideas and theoretical knowledge of human societal laws and social development processes across different times and spaces. The meaning of Confucian virtue ethics cultural symbols lies in their ability to internalize and disseminate human and societal ideologies and values.

Therefore, the study of Confucian virtue ethics cultural semiotics requires an examination of the dimension of the anthropological ideology inherent in the symbols and their spiritual narratives, as well as interpreting the synchronic cultural symbols within the context of their historical transmission and evolution. This involves understanding the generation of Confucian virtue ethics cultural semiotics, the value meaning in its inheritance and dissemination, and its social significance across different dynasties. This linear combination axis of cultural semiotics, though containing symbols with varying meanings, reflects the cognitive and social order theories that are common to human civilization. It forms the Confucian virtue ethics cultural semiotic narrative texts and symbols with their social significance.

A single diachronic symbol can carry the multiplicity of human society's spiritual consciousness and serve as a vessel for perception. Different interpretations of these symbols embody a shared human belief in the pursuit of an ideal world and the demand for an ethical society. The symbolic narratives of the Western Han Dynasty contain the intrinsic emotional qualities of human ethics. Charles Peirce's concept of "iconic symbols," "indexical symbols," and "symbolic signs" reveals certain regularities in the interpretation of Confucian virtue ethics cultural symbols. The relationship between the "image" and the "way" of a symbol, that is, how semiotics evolves from the ancient human consensus of virtue ethics to a symbolic representation of the understanding of human societal development, constructs the system of traditional Chinese ethical image cultural symbols. Examples include: Confucius's "cultivation of virtue" moral spirit—Confucian virtue ethics cultural symbols—Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist ethical cultural symbols—The ethical culture of Chinese northern and southern regional folk traditions.

2.1 The construction of Confucian cultural symbols from the Spring and Autumn period to the Han Dynasty

The matrix model of virtue ethics cultural semiotics has its roots in semiotics. The evolution and transmission of ethics, Confucian ethical symbols, and related cultural symbols such as Confucian cultural folklore contribute to the formation of a multi-dimensional structure and pluralistic cultural phenomena of national virtue ethics cultural semiotics. This system and cultural value system of Confucian virtue ethics cultural semiotics, along with its societal significance, are outlined as follows:

During the Spring and Autumn period, Confucianism initially developed the concept of "bi-de" (comparison of virtue), using the attributes of natural objects as metaphors for moral and spiritual qualities. Confucius, in *The Analects* (Yong Ye), expressed this idea with "The wise take pleasure in water, the benevolent take pleasure in mountains," reflecting the Confucian "bi-de" theory. In *Xunzi* (On the Practice of Law), Xunzi put forward the "bi-de" theory, stating, "Jade is the symbol of virtue for the noble man." Dong Zhongshu, in *Chunqiu Fanlu*, expanded on the "bi-de" theory, forming a textual expression of Confucian ethical cultural symbols through the "bi-de" concept.

During the Western Han Dynasty, Confucianism established the Three Bonds and Five Constants as the ethical framework for a society governed by rites and laws. It affirmed the hierarchical structure of ruler and subject at the core of ancient Chinese society, with "benevolence" (ren) as the central virtue, alongside other moral ethics such as filial piety, brotherly love, loyalty, forgiveness, trust, humility, and deference. These formed the basis of the Confucian ethical cultural social order and the core of ritual and legal cultural semiotics in ancient Chinese Confucianism.

Third, from the Eastern Han Dynasty onward, Confucianism became the political culture of the state's system of rites and laws. During the Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern Dynasties, the Indian prince Siddhartha Gautama, known as the Buddha, founded Buddhism, focusing on the cultivation of the mind and the doctrine of "benevolent goodness" in relation to the law of cause and effect, which contributed to the widespread flourishing of Buddhism. Meanwhile, Chinese Taoism, inheriting the "Heaven and Human" cultural thought, emphasized the human alignment with the attributes of the cosmos and nature, advocating for the "non-action" (Wu Wei) philosophy where Heaven, Earth, and Humanity are united. This

led to the integration of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, creating a harmonious synthesis in Chinese society where Confucianism governed the state, Buddhism guided the heart, and Taoism cultivated the body. This unity of the three teachings formed the foundation of traditional Chinese ethics, with Buddhist teachings on cause and effect, cultivation of benevolence as virtue, and Taoist emphasis on human cultivation and harmony with nature. The ethical cultures of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism influenced the cultural symbols and narratives of China for thousands of years, shaping the moral and philosophical context of Chinese civilization.

2.2 The diversification of Confucian cultural symbols in the fusion of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism

The conceptual art cultural symbols of China, since the Western Han Dynasty's "Confucianism as the supreme doctrine," have shaped the political culture and social system for thousands of years, creating a society where the "Three Bonds as law" and "Five Constants as rites" form the foundation of family and national spirit. Rites have been central in promoting ethical culture in society, making it an integral part of folk customs. First, in the cultural sphere of the Yellow River Plain in northern and central China and the Yangtze River basin, including the Chu and Shu cultures, the ethical culture of "folk customs" has been shaped into a national spiritual culture. Second, the internal structure and symbolic narratives of Chinese folk culture have contributed to the development of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism as a unified ethical and spiritual value system. From the successive dynasties to the Ming and Qing periods, this has become the folk ethical cultural symbol across various Chinese ethnic groups and regions. It permeated various aspects of society, such as religious rituals, festivals, architecture, craftsmanship, food, clothing, and the arts, leading to the evolution of ethical cultural dimensions and spaces into a widespread, conceptual, and communicative cultural semiotics in society. This gave rise to a semiotic system that integrates the history of semiotics, Confucian philosophy, aesthetics, sociology, and communication theory, reflecting the human cognitive evolution, historical transmission, social civilization progression, and the inherent principles of Chinese image ethics and cultural semiotics. As part of China's traditional cultural heritage, it carries a localized international perspective in human ethics and its cultural semiotics, providing a foundational theoretical basis for the revival of traditional culture in contemporary times.

Part 3: T The dissemination dimensions of Confucian ethical cultural semiotics and the fields of traditional cultural revival

From the image conceptual art of lacquerware, jade, and metal objects in the Haihun Marquis, as well as the semiotic narrative of Confucian ethical cultural symbols, we observe its cross-historical and cross-ethnic synchronic social and cultural semiotic significance. It carries ancient humanity's understanding of the natural universe and spiritual world through "Heaven and Man" cultural symbols, such as the folk cultural symbols of the "divine power concept" from the Shang and Zhou dynasties. This has built a Confucian ethical cultural semiotics that aligns with the historical development of society, based on the ancient human concepts of "Ren" (benevolence) and "Li" (ritual), the "Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues" ethical doctrines, which constructed the social order and the legal system of

the state, becoming a continuous cognitive framework in Chinese society for thousands of years. Meanwhile, Confucian ethical cultural semiotics influenced and permeated the "Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism" culture in later dynasties, particularly from the Eastern Han to the Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern Dynasties. This formed a Chinese traditional cultural semiotic system of social and ethical cultural narrative, encapsulating the idea that "Confucianism governs the world, Buddhism governs the mind, and Taoism governs the body." The image of objects from the Haihun Marquis , displaying the "supremacy of Confucianism" in Western Han society, serves as an intangible cultural heritage of social and ethical cultural symbols. It not only empirically validates the anthropological and cultural academic value of ancient Confucian cultural symbols but also provides practical significance for the revival and dissemination of Confucian virtue culture symbols in contemporary traditional culture.

3.1 The core of the inheritance of Confucian cultural symbols in Chinese traditional culture

The moral and ethical cultural semiotics of Confucianism and its semiotic narrative profoundly reflect its understanding of historical evolution, human philosophical spirit, and social ritualistic order. With "Ren" (benevolence) and "Li" (ritual) as the fundamental cultural symbols, it promoted the laws and driving forces of social and historical development, shaping the evolution of the cultural and spiritual values of state institutions throughout the dynasties. The images of artifacts from the Haihun Marquis , as a means of inheriting and spreading Confucian cultural and artistic symbols, demonstrate the core appeal of the centralized governance system during the Western Han period. Here, the "Dao" (Way) follows the Confucian "Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues," becoming the moral standard for social regions and ethnic groups, and constructing the familial and national cultural system of ancient human society. This process led to the widespread, societal recognition of "Confucianism as the sole respected philosophy" and the transformation of folk customs and traditions. The craftsmanship images of the artifacts from the Haihun Marquis , using "Confucianism and Taoism" as a medium, form the symbolic expression of the narrative of image-based conceptual art. Its core cultural ideas are co-constructed within the semiotics of Western Han society, standardizing the spiritual values and concepts of the Western Han period, and contributing to the evolution and dissemination of the Yellow River, Yangtze River, Western Sichuan, and Chu cultures across the northern and southern regions of China.

From the perspective of the historical transmission of image-based conceptual art semiotics, we observe that since the Western Han dynasty, the artifact images from the Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing periods share similarities and resemblances with those from the Haihun Marquis in terms of decoration, composition, and form of expression. All of these reflect the essential Confucian cultural semiotics of image art, where images illustrate texts, and texts convey the Dao. This indicates that the construction of Confucian cultural and artistic image symbols during the Western Han period had a profound influence on the universal value concepts of China's ancient traditional ethical culture symbols. Throughout the historical process of various dynasties, the application of Confucian cultural symbols in image art continuously expanded, extending from the patterns of artifact production to architecture, culture,

clothing, and other fields, collectively shaping the shared spiritual and cultural heritage value concepts of ancient Chinese society.

Thus, it is evident that the transmission of China's image-based conceptual art cultural semiotics, with Confucian cultural symbols as a turning point, has subsequently influenced the construction of Confucian-Buddhist-Taoist cultural semiotics and the folklore semiotics of various dynasties. This reflects the continuity of the Confucian "Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues" ethical cultural semiotics from the Western Han period, whose vitality has endured for thousands of years. Even in contemporary society, the concept of "virtue" within the "Five Constant Virtues" still forms the basis of modern moral principles, becoming an important narrative that upholds social order and interpersonal relationships. These conceptual cultural images have become the heritage of China's traditional cultural semiotics, continuing their legacy and dissemination across ancient and modern history, as well as across different regions and ethnic groups, for thousands of years.

3.2 The contemporary dissemination space of Confucian cultural symbols under the revival of Chinese traditional culture

On January 25, 2017, the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the General Office of the State Council issued the "Opinions on the Implementation of the Project for the Inheritance and Development of Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture".

The humanistic spirit of the Chinese nation is deeply embedded in its outstanding traditional culture, which encompasses rich and valuable spiritual wealth. This includes philosophies such as striving for consensus while preserving differences, the pursuit of harmony without losing individuality, and the concept of using artifacts to carry moral teachings through Confucian thought. These cultural essences are a concentrated reflection of the Chinese people's ideas, customs, lifestyles, and modes of emotional expression. They have nurtured unique and abundant literary arts, scientific and technological advancements, and humanities disciplines, continuing to exert a profound influence on society today.

In the artifact image art of the Haihun Marquis, the semiotic significance of Confucian culture is deeply connected to the relationship between "artifact" and "Dao." As mentioned in the Book of Rites (Li Ji, Yue Ji): "Virtue is accomplished above, and the arts are accomplished below." Furthermore, the I Ching (Zhou Yi, Xici) states: "What is above is called the Dao, what is below is called the artifact." This highlights the concept of "artifacts carrying the Dao," where the Dao is contained within the artifact, and thus, "the world is governed by the artifact." From the perspective of creative culture, the Dao precedes the artifact in formation. However, from the perspective of cultural value, the Dao is the essence, while the artifact is the application.

From the semiotic perspective, the culture of artifact creation showcases a discourse system of image art symbols, which spans multiple fields such as regional history, political philosophy, sociology, and aesthetics, reflecting human cognition of the world. Image symbols are not only a materialized manifestation of the interaction between humans and nature but also a product of thought. Confucian cultural symbols, as the mainstream symbolic narrative that has influenced the social and cultural forms of successive dynasties since the Western Han, reveal the essence of their context, including their origin, types, and transmission, through a deconstructive

analysis of different symbolic genealogies and cultural connotations. This analysis unveils the core of China's traditional cultural and artistic genes as well as the regularity and value of the symbolic language system.

By deeply exploring the demands for practicality, rituals, education, expression, and the Confucian "family and state" spiritual realm within image symbol culture, we extract a triadic Chinese cultural semiotics system from the analysis of the image symbol genealogy of the Western Han Haihun Marquis : "Ren Dao → Dao Tong → Dao Ji." This semiotics reflects the guiding value concepts of social development and the spiritual world of ancient Chinese people. The spirit of Confucian culture symbols has contributed to social civilization and progress in the human world and history at specific historical periods, complementing social change and the process of civilization, reflecting the intrinsic driving force behind the development of nations and ethnic groups.

The transmission of Confucian semiotics will have a broad impact, spanning multiple dimensions, fields, and levels, becoming an important normative condition for the revitalization of the human community, national civilization, and the future development of countries. It promotes the development of human faith, spirit, moral values, legal systems, national governance, and moral governance. Confucian ethics and cultural semiotics are closely linked to human material and spiritual systems, ecological communities, as well as moral, economic, ethnic, and national ecological systems. Therefore, Confucian semiotics not only leads the progress of human society and civilization but also provides a new academic pathway for the construction of national order and laws, contributing to ethnic harmony and social development, demonstrating its feasibility and significance in the contemporary revival of traditional culture.



Figure 87 Performance of selected excerpts from Confucian classic The Analects
Source: By Daiyijun 2024

The transmission and development of Chinese Confucian ethics and cultural semiotics over thousands of years has proven its vital anthropological and cultural significance. It has a profound social and practical meaning, serving as the academic foundation for the revival of traditional culture in contemporary society. This tradition provides a pathway for the progress and development of Chinese society, offering a practical model for the continued advancement of both cultural and societal practices.

3.3 The dissemination of Confucian ethical cultural semiotics as intangible cultural heritage.

The indigenous Confucian cultural system, which combines both regional and ethnic characteristics, forms the core of the conceptual art cultural semiotics of images. Through centuries of inheritance and transmission, it has established anthropological ethical and cultural values with universal consensus and universal significance. These concepts have become the fundamental traits of anthropological ethical cultural symbols. Semiotics not only reflects the full scope of human material and spiritual worlds, but its connotations transcend human cognition of the objective world, embodying humanity's philosophical exploration and pursuit of cosmology, natural philosophy, social philosophy, and historical philosophy.

The emergence of image symbols predates written language, and their scope extends beyond linguistic symbols and narrative, offering a richer perspective than the textual records of humanity's multi-field historical society. Although linguistic symbols evolve with the passage of generations and image art symbols may disappear over time, rich cultural heritage is preserved in the discovered remnants of ancient human image art. These not only surpass the material value of the art itself but also carry the legacy and transmission significance of intangible cultural heritage. From a certain perspective, these symbolic narratives reflect the ethical cultural significance of China's indigenous culture on the international stage, highlighting the importance of transmitting intangible cultural heritage.

China's Confucian ethical culture, particularly the moral system of the "Three Bonds and Five Constants," has not only constructed the "family and state" spirit as a cultural symbol of the nation and ethnic groups, but also had a profound impact on the social customs and political culture of countries and ethnic groups in East Asia and South Asia. The dissemination of Confucian ethical culture has played a significant role in the social and historical changes in the Asia-Pacific region. It has not only revealed the inherent nature of the transmission of image art's conceptual cultural semiotics and symbolic narratives, but also demonstrated its external, continuous extensibility, becoming one of the genetic components of global ethical cultural semiotics.

Therefore, Confucian ethical cultural semiotics, in the historical and modern societal processes, holds significant practical meaning for the revival and transmission of traditional culture. It endows the discipline of anthropological intangible cultural heritage transmission with profound significance. Originating from the Western Han Dynasty, Confucian cultural symbols have not faded due to the changes of time. On the contrary, they have maintained social order and progress through their guidance of social and humanistic spirit and their application in social governance. The dissemination of Confucian cultural image symbols represents a continuous historical process of the inheritance, practice, and application of traditional Chinese culture, as

well as a new chapter in promoting the spread of Confucian cultural symbols. Faced with the various contradictions and challenges presented by the process of modernization and the globalization of a shared human destiny, it is necessary to inherit the ethical and cultural symbol values of Confucian culture, as well as to revitalize and apply traditional Chinese culture in contemporary society. (Shen, Z., 2024) This is essential for addressing the challenges posed by contemporary socio-economic behavior, humanistic education, and moral construction related to human and societal relationships. Therefore, Confucian cultural symbols hold extremely important practical significance in the revival and reapplication of traditional culture in contemporary society.

The study of Confucian ethical cultural semiotics embedded in the artifacts and images of the Western Han Dynasty's Haihun Marquis state is not limited to an exploration of aesthetic images. It delves deeply into the Confucian ethical and cultural meanings carried by these aesthetic images, as well as how their semiotics contribute to the construction of the trajectory of Chinese traditional culture's dissemination within the field of anthropology. This research reveals the significant position of Confucian ethical culture in history. It has not only influenced the political system, legal frameworks, and social spirit of later Chinese society as image art symbols, but also allowed ethical and moral concepts to transcend the millennium, continuing into modern society.

The formation and development of human thought are inherently social, with their origins, functions, forms, and applications being closely linked to society. Therefore, Confucian ethical cultural semiotics holds significant application and feasibility in the inheritance and practice of traditional culture in contemporary society. The Haihun Marquis State Archaeological Museum provides abundant research resources, offering conditions and guarantees for the application of Confucian ethical cultural semiotics in the contemporary revival and practice of Chinese traditional culture. The specific details are outlined as follows:

Firstly, the academic community has re-examined the image art cultural symbols of the artifacts from the Western Han Dynasty's Haihun Marquis state in both practice and application. These symbols are deeply embedded in the rich heritage of China's intangible cultural heritage, having formed through the accumulation of historical experiences within social groups. As part of social heritage, they carry academic values across various disciplines such as historiography, philosophy, aesthetics, and sociology through different social transmission processes. In recent years, academic research has mainly focused on historiography and aesthetics, with numerous scholarly works dedicated to exploring Chinese traditional culture and the anthropology of China's indigenous ethical cultural art semiotics within the context of international consensus. In the face of constructing the sources, frameworks, hierarchical structures, systems, and evolution of Confucian ethical cultural semiotics in Chinese image art, as well as the studies of semiotics and narratology related to its transformation and reconstruction in dissemination, the study of image art symbols from the Western Han Dynasty's Haihun Marquis state has also become one of the important directions in this academic field.

The Nanchang Haihun Marquis Archaeological Museum has provided the academic community with abundant multidisciplinary research materials from the pre-Qin and Western Han periods, becoming an important base for scholars both

domestically and internationally. The inheritance of cultural symbols is not merely about simple transmission; it is achieved through learning and understanding. Therefore, various academic exchange seminars, archaeological exhibitions, educational activities, and cultural and artistic research initiatives have become crucial bases for the academic community's practical re-utilization, offering the public a symbolic system for action. Examples of this include the educational activities of Confucius Institutes, Han culture study tours, and cultural outreach programs in schools.

These activities not only make schools the main frontlines for inheriting and constructing Chinese cultural symbols but also turn them into incubators for related basic research, frontier exploration, and theoretical construction. At the same time, with the advancement of modern society and technology, the application of digitalization and networking has expanded academic communication, professional teaching, historical culture, and archaeological display, becoming an important avenue for the revival of traditional culture. The study of Confucian ethical cultural symbols in the image art of Haihun Marquis state artifacts involves not only the historical and traditional research of Chinese cultural symbols but also the study of the meaningful symbolic reserves accumulated from heritage resources, which can then be applied in the reconstruction of contemporary social culture.

The inheritance of cultural symbols is not a simple act of replication and continuation; it is realized through learning, practice, and innovation. In this process, various activities such as academic exchange seminars, archaeological exhibitions, educational discussions, and cultural and artistic research play a vital role. These activities not only promote in-depth archaeological research but also advance the modernization of Chinese cultural symbols, integrating the wisdom of ancient civilizations into contemporary society. The Nanchang Haihun Marquis Archaeological Museum serves as one of the key platforms for such practical re-utilization, providing a research base for scholars and offering the public opportunities to directly engage with historical culture.

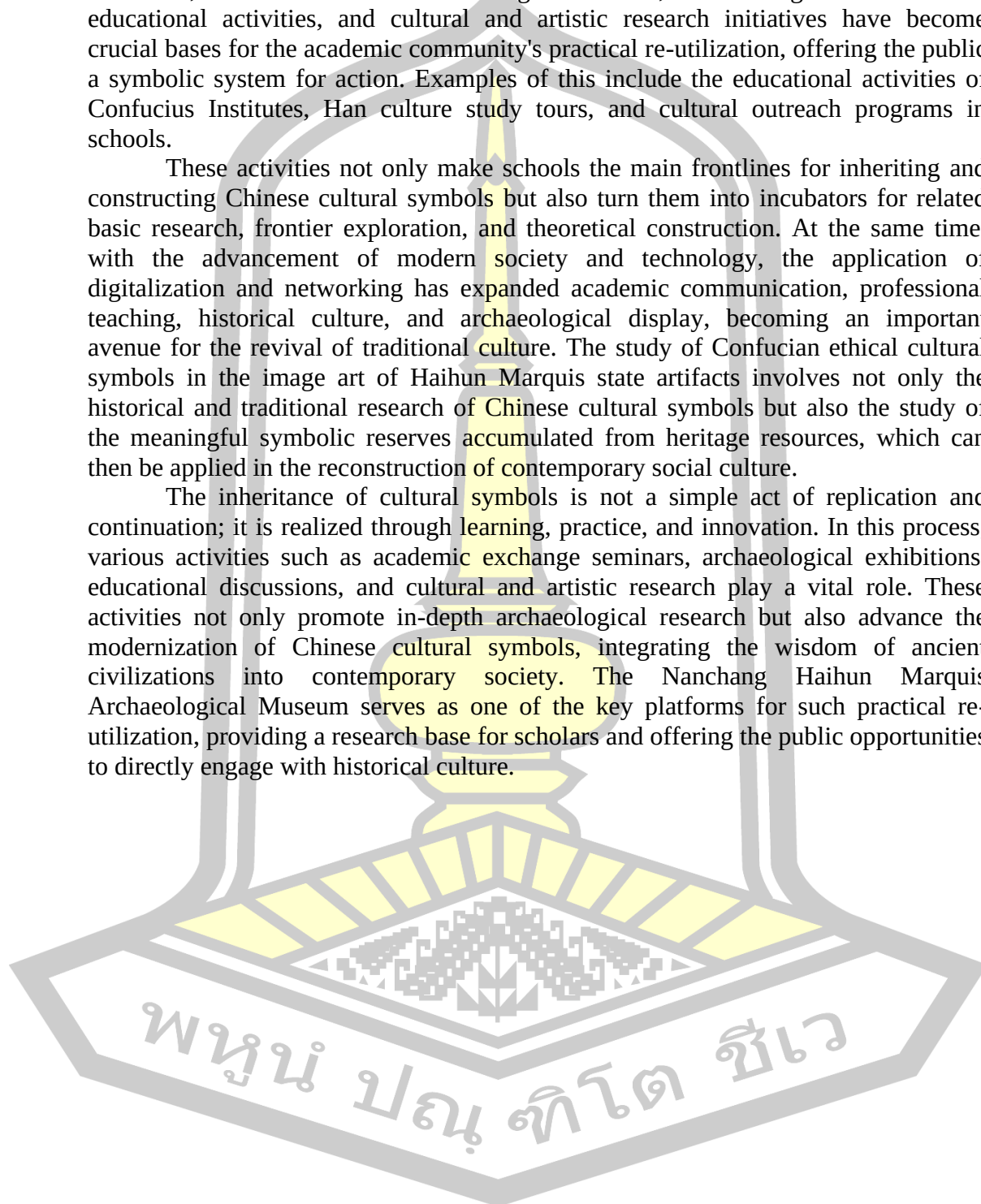




Figure 88 Academic forum on Han culture research related to the Haihun Marquis
Source: Author



Figure 89 Haihun study
Source: Author 2024

The second is the practical application in the industry (Figure95) . The core of the artifacts, images, art and cultural symbols of Haihun Marquis is the etiquette of Confucian culture promoted by the will of the country, but it has been developed and enriched based on the will of the country in various places, and at the same time it has become a Chinese cultural symbol shared by all ethnic groups. It has real social reuse and re-innovation significance. Traditional Chinese cultural symbols that have been accumulated for thousands of years. The cultural symbols of the Chinese nation are a symbolic system jointly created by people of all ethnic groups in the process of common production and life. The interaction process of people is full of the exchange

of symbols. For this reason, "people not only These symbols must be learned and manipulated in order to act as other actors in the 'game'. Anthropologist Sahlins once wrote: "The struggle of non-Western peoples to create their own modern culture destroyed the widely accepted concepts among Westerners of the opposition between tradition and change, custom and rationality. Especially obvious is the destruction of the famous oppositional concepts of tradition and development in the 20th century. "The same goes for China. After a hundred years of modernization, we began to pursue "Chinese-style modernization," that is, with "Chinese characteristics. modernization". This Chinese characteristic needs to be expressed in external forms, and this series of external forms are Chinese cultural symbols. As some scholars said, "The symbolization of Chinese culture is a reverse thinking proposition, that is, to explore and analyze symbols with valuable meaning from the already formed free Chinese culture, and then complete the symbolization of Chinese culture."Creating new Chinese cultural symbols requires not only beginning with historical memory but also re-signifying these memories. The traditional and modern opposition that once prevailed has been dissolved in the postmodern era of knowledge, becoming a core component of reshaping non-Western modern cultures. The current transformation of human society is creating conditions for the revival of indigenous cultures, while new social and economic development models are providing the environment and basis for the creative transformation and innovative development of traditional culture.

In the context of today's "living history," the reuse of cultural and creative industries (Figure96) , where image art symbols are re-applied into fields such as environmental art, advertising, fashion design (Figure97) , and product design (Figure98) , has become an important path for the revival of traditional culture. The process of reapplying these symbols in modern forms allows them to retain their cultural significance while adapting to contemporary contexts, thus ensuring that traditional culture not only survives but thrives within modern society. This dynamic and creative reapplication in various industries contributes to the modern reinterpretation of Chinese cultural symbols and plays a key role in their revitalization within global cultural trends. The fusion of traditional symbols with modern creative practices is a powerful way to bridge the past and the present, enhancing cultural continuity while enabling innovation.



Figure 90 Reapplication of cultural symbols of the Marquis of Haihun
Source: Author 2024



Figure 91 Re-application of images in clothing
Source: ByYangmei 2024

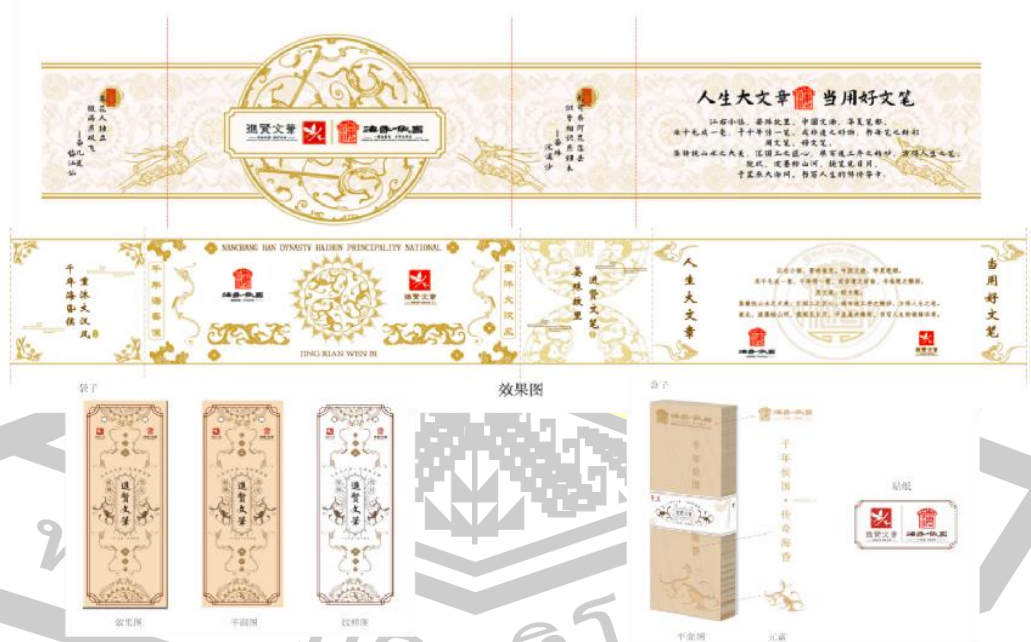


Figure 92 Cultural and Creative Product Packaging Design
Source: Local Culture Research Studio

Table 15 The Diversified Dissemination of Confucian Cultural Semiotics in Contemporary Times

Form of communication	Main performance	Field
Visual arts	Calligraphy, Chinese painting, sculpture, film and television works	Traditional art, public art, film and television creation
Academic research	Academic papers, international seminars, discipline construction	Philosophy, Sociology, Humanities and Arts
Educational promotion	Confucius Institute, Chinese Studies Lectures, and Culture Entering Campus Courses	Higher education, basic education, cultural training
Cultural industry	Cultural and creative products, traditional festivals, theme parks	Tourism, entertainment industry, handicraft design
Digital communication	Online courses, short videos, self-media, VR/AR displays	New media communication, digital art
Social practice	Family traditions and mottos, community culture construction	Family education, community governance
Policy promotion	Traditional culture revitalization projects and cultural exchange activities	Cultural policy, international cultural communication, government projects

The cultural tourism industry, cultural heritage exhibitions, media promotion, and traditional festival activities all serve to meet the demands of both domestic and international cultural industries, reviving and showcasing history, thereby promoting the reapplication of traditional Chinese culture in contemporary society. Cultural symbols' ideological functions have become an invisible yet significant medium for external communication.

The Confucian ethical cultural semiotics of image art from the Haihun Marquis state is an important component of semiotics that explores image symbols with universally shared human spiritual values. In the context of modernization and technological advancement, this semiotics holds significant realist meaning. It represents the original aspiration of China's advocacy for a global community of shared human destiny, and it is a cornerstone for the development of both the nation and the ethnic group. Furthermore, it is the pillar of this study, which aims to contribute to the re-learning and re-practice of traditional Chinese virtues and ethical culture.(An, J., 2023)

Therefore, when constructing contemporary Chinese discourse, particularly in relation to international audiences and historical narratives, we must be adept at utilizing the encoding and decoding of intersubjective cultural symbols. In the process of rebuilding shared cultural symbols of the Chinese nation and its various ethnic groups, we should avoid simplistic representations of traditional symbols and focus on the new characteristics of diverse decoding and scene-based communication. By embracing these features, we can ensure the authentic transmission and meaningful evolution of Chinese culture in the modern world.

Summary

This chapter traces the historical origins and contemporary interpretation of Confucian cultural symbols, illustrating how the symbol system permeates the spiritual core of Chinese culture and evolves into guiding principles for social behavior across different historical stages. The study of image semiotics is characterized by dual focus on both intrinsic narrative (narratology) and external communication (communication theory). In the Western Han Dynasty, the narrative of Confucian cultural symbols was grounded in the "Three Principles and Five Constants", with Confucian virtue ethics and the semiotics of these cultural symbols serving to maintain the centralized political system and social laws and order. This narrative also touches upon the "Heaven and Man" symbol in the historiography of the Western Han period, along with the philosophy, sociology, and the semiotics of "divine power" narratives, aesthetics, and other humanistic fields.

As a result, Confucian ethics and cultural semiotics influenced various regional cultures and social traditions, including the Central Plains, the Southern Chu culture, and the Southwestern Shu culture. Confucian ethics and semiotics of narrative became the foundation of the Western Han Dynasty's cultural vision of "transforming customs and people." From the Western Han onward, the fusion and interpretation of Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist cultures became the spiritual core of Chinese traditional culture, leading to the formation of Chinese ethical cultural semiotics and the universal philosophical and spiritual aspirations expressed through symbols. This became part of the spatial and directional structure of Chinese image and conceptual art narratives over thousands of years, impacting later Ming and Qing dynasties, as well as modern Chinese society.

In this context, the study of cultural symbols represents a local Chinese form of anthropology with an East Asian and South Asian regional international perspective. It embodies a common human consensus on ethical cultural ideas and concepts. In contemporary society, the revival of traditional culture offers a viable path for both academic and industrial exploration, re-application, and the necessary transmission of cultural practices. This ensures the ongoing relevance and significance of these cultural symbols in modern times.



CHAPTER VII

Conclusions, Discussions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The research of this article is titled "Images of Han Dynasty Artifacts, Haihun Marquis state Nanchang, China: Semiotics and Symbolic narrative In the process of revitalization China's traditional culture and modernity." This article is a foundational study that employs qualitative research and interdisciplinary methods. During the research process, a large number of historical images of artifacts from the Pre-Qin to the Ming and Qing Dynasties, along with relevant historical literature, were reviewed. Additionally, we collected firsthand materials from archaeological researchers, including images of artifacts excavated from the Haihun Marquis State. These were then analyzed and organized in conjunction with field image data, forming the basis of this study. The objectives of this research are as follows:

1.To study the historical origins of artifacts, images and cultural symbols of the Haihun Marquis State

By examining the evolution and inheritance relationship between the images of artifacts from various Chinese dynasties and the artifacts of the Haihun Marquis State, it becomes evident that the images of these artifacts was gradually constructed through ancient human understanding of the cosmos and the relationship between humans and nature. This understanding can be traced back to ancient totemic symbols, the bronze ritual and music symbols of the Shang and Zhou Dynasties, and the ritual symbols of the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods. At the same time, the "metalanguage" of the cultural symbols of image art, transmitted throughout successive dynasties, represents an indispensable and foundational cultural source in historical processes. (Cao, S., 2023).These symbols form the basis of the royal culture, folk culture, and Confucian "unity of heaven and humanity" worldview, and lay the groundwork for the semiotics of Confucian rites, music, and legal culture.

Images hold meanings that transcend the texts themselves, serving as narratives that form societal consensus on spiritual values. The material and spiritual domains of symbolic textual meanings can be deconstructed and analyzed through multi-dimensional semiotic systems. This reflects that, over thousands of years, the core of ancient Chinese society's spiritual and folk traditions in auspicious images and cultural symbols lies in human spiritual and cultural symbols. Thus, the world of cultural symbols is not only a heritage of material culture, but also an intangible cultural heritage of human spiritual culture. The world of cultural symbols is, therefore, a world of human historical culture.

The images of artifacts can evolve from the material properties of the objects into intangible cultural heritage in the realm of human spirituality. In other words, the images as a cultural symbol transcends its textual form, becoming a narrative that shapes societal, temporal, and spiritual values. The material and spiritual domains of

symbolic textual meanings can be deconstructed and analyzed through various semiotic systems. Therefore, the world of cultural symbols is not only a legacy of historical culture, but also an intangible cultural heritage of ancient human spiritual culture.

2.To study the value and significance of artifacts, images, Confucian ethics, cultural symbols, narrative philosophy, spiritual culture of the Haihun Marquis State

Influenced by the simplistic materialist philosophy of various dynasties, the Confucian ethical cultural symbol system of the Han Dynasty not only encompassed personal moral cultivation but also extended to governance and social order. Firstly, these symbols shaped and maintained social stability and harmony through their dynamic interactions. In the images of artifacts from the Western Han Dynasty Haihun Marquis State, Confucian ethical symbols, including "Ren" (benevolence) and "Li" (ritual propriety), embody social order and moral values. These symbols not only reflect the core ethical concepts of Confucianism but also demonstrate how the idea of "Unity of man and nature" during the Western Han period was culturally transmitted through material symbols. This transmission method, through the design style and symbolic meaning of artifacts, materializes Confucian ethical thought, forming a cultural symbol narrative system that embodies social ritual and legal order.

Moreover, Confucian culture manifested differently in various regions of ancient China, especially in the southern region, where the bird totem evolved into the phoenix symbol, which became a carrier of Confucian ethical culture. This symbolism carried values such as loyalty, filial piety, and benevolence, making the Confucian ethical concepts of "Ren" and "Li" a cultural consensus across the country. They became symbols of family ethics and social harmony. The inheritance of Confucian ethics is not only expressed in the symbolism of artifacts but also in the continuation of the spirit of the times and cultural beliefs.

The artifacts from the Haihun Marquis State offer a unique interpretation of Confucian philosophy. Centered around the system of rites and music, they formed moral standards for personal cultivation and governance, using symbolic objects for expression. As a result, Confucian ethics became a spiritual system that was both practical and educational in social governance and interpersonal relationships. Confucian ethics, through artifact symbols, gradually spread from the royal court to the common people, becoming the spiritual foundation of ethical order in the Han Dynasty and subsequent periods. This symbolism became the "metalanguage" of aesthetics, social culture, and cultural transmission during the Western Han period. It broadly involved social philosophical and spiritual concepts in history, politics, economics, philosophy, nature, military affairs, geography, and the arts, embodying the ancient human dialectical analysis of Confucian ethics in the worldview and life perspective, addressing the order between humans and nature, and humans and society.

This created a "Ren-Li" philosophical cultural symbol narrative system, which spread as a historical trace of social and cultural symbols in both southern and northern folk traditions. This system provided the foundation for the cultural symbol narrative of unity between folk societies and imperial power during the Han Dynasty and afterward, deeply influencing the cultural symbols of Confucian ethics in the semiotic narratives of societal images across successive dynasties.

3. To study the aesthetic expression and characteristics of Confucianism and cultural symbols in the artifacts and images of the Haihun Marquis State

The images found on artifacts such as metal, jade, and lacquerware unearthed from the Western Han Haihun Marquis State provides a case study that fully reflects the construction of Confucian ethical culture symbols. The artifact images from the Haihun Marquis State were influenced by Confucian ethical thought, which played a guiding role in traditional aesthetic culture. These images are also influenced by pre-Qin material symbols and ritual culture, undergoing a transformation from diachronic cultural symbols to synchronic ones. As these images spread historically, the cultural art shifted from a theological spiritual symbol to one embodying Confucian ethical values during the Han Dynasty, thereby inheriting the tradition of artifact image culture and, at the same time, contributing to the construction of Chinese aesthetic cultural symbols under Confucian ethical concepts. This formed a distinctive feature of artistic aesthetic symbols that are open and diversified. Confucian ethical culture regulated the narrative of conceptual artistic culture in the Western Han, while also forming the construction of cultural symbols by local societies and the craftsmanship of cultural patterns. Whether in royal culture or folk cultural symbols, Confucian rituals and laws became the necessary guiding principles of Western Han society's aesthetic orientation, extending into the humanistic and moral systems of folk society and becoming the dominant force. These principles regulated the aesthetic concepts and orientations of society, making Confucian ethical aesthetic concepts central to both the spiritual culture and the craftsmanship of artifacts. They also highlighted the shared, integrated, and diverse cultural characteristics of both northern and southern regions. In particular, during the process of incorporating cultural traits from the Western regions and neighboring ethnic groups, these artifacts exhibited both an openness and a diversity of artistic aesthetic symbols. However, they also retained the core of Confucian ethical virtues, ensuring unity. This restrained the cultural and aesthetic orientations of craftsmanship in regions such as the Central Plains, Shu, and Chu and evolved into the aesthetic orientation of Chinese image art. One could say that the images of the Haihun Marquis State during the Western Han period marks a pivotal point in the maturation and transformation of Chinese image art. It represents the core values expressed through artistic forms in the political, religious, and ethical dimensions of ancient Chinese society and forms the aesthetic core of Chinese iconography and art symbolism.

4. To study the social and multi-field image art narrative characteristics of Confucianism and cultural symbols in the artifact images of the Haihun Marquis State

The Confucian "Three Bonds and Five Constants" ethical culture depicted in the artifact images from the Haihun Marquis State became a codified expression in the traditional folk symbolic images of both northern and southern regions, continuing to influence society today. This encompasses various fields of images in ancient Chinese society. The Confucian culture of rulers and ministers, fathers and sons, and the system of rituals and laws maintained and unified the order between imperial authority and social groups in ancient China, establishing the social spirit of a centralized political system grounded in the theory of family-state rituals. This led to a distinctive narrative trait in Chinese craftsmanship culture, where Confucian ethical and sociological cultural symbols were used to tell stories through image art.

Under Confucian ethical culture, the ritual culture symbol unifying the imperial power and society became a spiritual value in Chinese folk culture from the Han Dynasty through the Ming and Qing Dynasties. The Confucian ethical doctrine naturally influenced the folk cultures and crafted images arts of various regions, becoming a cultural demand in society's spiritual realm and material culture. The narrative of these symbols can be seen in the material culture of society. The Western Han Dynasty, which upheld Confucian ethical and moral culture, used images either to praise, educate, or promote faith, expressing the narrative of Han society's cultural symbols with rich linguistic meanings. Confucianism in the Western Han served as the official spiritual foundation that unified imperial power and society. The promotion of Confucian benevolence and ritual ethics contributed to the formation of Chinese traditional cultural values for multi-ethnic clans across the northern and southern regions of ancient society.

The social function of Confucian ethical culture symbols lies in their dual constraint on both imperial power and society, shaping a cultural narrative theory that forms the civilizational and normative foundation of human society. In a specific historical and social period, this symbol system held progressive significance for the advancement of human civilization.

5. To study the construction of the Confucian cultural semiotic system and its re-dissemination in contemporary society

The Confucian ethical cultural symbols represented in the artifact images of the Haihun Marquis State in the Western Han Dynasty form a crucial component of the powerful cultural revival gene in Chinese traditional art history. This is embedded in the historical development, inheritance, and evolution of cultural transmission, which shapes the strong revival of Chinese culture. Thus, in the history of the transmission of Confucian ethics and semiotics, there exists a legacy of traditional culture and communication. The study of Haihun Marquis State artifact images offers contemporary academic significance in re-exploring the narrative of traditional Chinese cultural and artistic symbols. Since the Western Han, the fusion and evolution of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism have become the spiritual core of Chinese traditional culture, forming a universal philosophical spirit in Chinese ethical cultural symbols and semiotic narratives. This has become the spatial and directional foundation of the narrative semiotics in Chinese image and conceptual art over thousands of years, contributing to an anthropological consensus with an international perspective within East and South Asia. In the contemporary revival of traditional culture, it holds significant value and necessity for further academic and practical exploration and the communication of culture.

The cultural symbols of artifact images not only possess artistic attributes but also carry the attributes of cultural transmission. The ultimate goal of image symbols is the re-transmission of socially consensual culture. The artifact images symbols of the Haihun Marquis State reflect a fusion of the imperial culture of the Western Han's "exclusive respect for Confucianism" and the folk social culture, becoming a form of societal spiritual culture. The "Three Bonds and Five Constants" regulations influenced the cultural practices of regions such as the Central Plains, Shu, and Chu, shaping the "family-state" culture under the centralized system of imperial authority, which in turn became the narrative cultural symbol of Chinese ethics. With advancements in science, technology, and ecology, the transmission of image art

cultural symbols has evolved from the study of history, Confucian philosophy, aesthetics, and sociology into a digital, informational, and socially integrated modern discipline of semiotics. This transmission now extends beyond the realm of art and permeates various sectors of human society, with the cognitive and narrative functions of image art symbols reaching higher levels of cultural, social, technological, and ecological interdisciplinary communication.

Discussions

Images of Han Dynasty Artifacts, Haihun Marquis state Nanchang, China: Semiotics and Symbolic narrative In the process of revitalization China's traditional culture and modernity. This article, guided by Roland Barthes' theory of deconstructive semiotics, provides an in-depth analysis of the inheritance and development of Confucian cultural symbols in the image art created by ancient Chinese artisans from the Pre-Qin period to the Han Dynasty. By deconstructing the historical evolution of these image cultural symbols, the article further examines the Confucian ethical values embodied in the artifact images of the Haihun Marquis State in the Western Han Dynasty, and how these values influenced the textual narratives of artifact image cultural symbols in the Han Dynasty and beyond. Additionally, the article explores the communicative significance of Confucian ethical cultural semiotics and how it shaped the core value concepts of the folk spiritual and cultural traditions in both northern and southern China. Ultimately, this paper reveals the intrinsic driving force behind the dissemination of Confucian ethical spiritual cultural symbols as the core component of Chinese image conceptual art cultural symbols.

First about discussion of the text, the artifacts of the Haihun Marquis State, Nanchang, China.

Since the archaeological excavation of the Haihun Marquis State in 2011, this significant historical and cultural heritage has attracted widespread attention from scholars both domestically and internationally. Numerous researchers have conducted studies and analyses from various perspectives. For example, Xu Changqing and Yang Jun have focused on the archaeological value of the forms of unearthed artifacts (Xu Changqing, 2017; Yang Jun, 2015). Additionally, other scholars have analyzed the materials and craftsmanship of the artifacts from a cultural perspective (Zhou Yihang, Wang Kai, Guan Li, Huang Xizhen, 2019). Some researchers have also explored the aesthetic value of the decorative forms of these artifacts and their application in modern design (Dai Yu, Liu Wentao, Li Chao, & Xiao Xuejian, 2017).

Furthermore, publishing institutions such as Jiangxi People's Publishing House, Sanlian Bookstore, Jiangxi Education Publishing House, and Jiangxi Fine Arts Publishing House have released monographs, archaeological findings exhibitions, and pictorial collections of unearthed artifacts related to the Haihun Marquis Tomb, providing valuable textual and visual references for this study.

To date, research on the images of artifacts unearthed from the Haihun Marquis State has primarily focused on their physical attributes and their connection to the personal history of the Marquis of Haihun. Some scholars have also emphasized the importance of artifact preservation and restoration, increasing public awareness, and innovative utilization. However, this study shifts its perspective from historical archaeology to the exploration of Han Dynasty cultural and artistic studies. It specifically examines the artifact culture of the Haihun Marquis State within the historical framework of Chinese iconology, considering the ethical and cultural spirit

of the Han Dynasty under the ideology of "Supremacy of Confucianism" and the "Three Cardinal Principles and Five Constant Virtues." The study aims to explore the conceptual images in artifact iconography, arguing that the symbolic world of images transcends the material world and holds intangible cultural heritage value. This interdisciplinary approach represents an innovative aspect of this research.

Secondly, regarding the discussion of concepts, this article draws on the research concepts of "semiotics" and "semiotic narrative," which are helpful for studying the images of the Haihun Marquis State artifacts and their cultural connotations.

This study is guided by Roland Barthes' concept of cultural semiotics, which posits that semiotic systems are open, dynamic, and ever-changing. He argues that semiotic texts and language possess multidimensional layers, providing theoretical feasibility for interdisciplinary semiotic research. Semiotics, as a reflection on the general laws of meaning-making activities, aims to clarify the various cultural phenomena embedded in human expression and the perception of meaning (Holenstein, 2008). Drawing upon the theories of semioticians such as Roland Barthes and Charles Peirce, this paper asserts that artifact images is not merely a material cultural relic but also a symbolic representation of social values and belief systems. The symbols of royal power, ritual norms, and ethical concepts present in the artifacts of the Haihun Marquis State are all signs within a specific cultural context, aligning with the semiotic process of meaning generation (Achim Eschbach & Jürgen Trabant, 1983).

Foreign scholars have contributed significantly to semiotic and artistic discourse. Susanne Langer described art as a "symbolic form of human emotions," while Meyer Schapiro developed traditional iconology into an analysis of artistic symbols. Barthes, in works such as *The Fashion System* and *Camera Lucida*, integrated aesthetics into deeper socio-cultural contexts (Disilvestro, 2006). However, a distinctive feature of Chinese aesthetics is its close connection with human life, its integration with various artistic practices, and its deep penetration into the collective national spirit. Gao Jianping argued that ancient Chinese philosophy has its own aesthetic tradition and proposed five aesthetic categories—beauty, the sublime, filial piety, historical consciousness, and novelty—where the first two primarily pertain to aesthetics, while the latter three involve historical and innovative sensibilities. Li Youzheng, in *Gu Jiegang's Historiography and Historical Semiotics—On the Theoretical Development of Chinese Ancient Historiography*, explored the holistic connections and methodological links between historiography and the humanities from an interdisciplinary epistemological perspective. He advocated for interdisciplinary interaction based on modern viewpoints and scientific methods to establish a new historical science, which he termed "historical semiotics."

In *The History of Ancient Chinese Material Culture: Qin and Han*, Han Guohe highlighted the value of archaeology's integration with other disciplines, arguing that Qin and Han culture evolved from pluralism to unity and that ancient cultural characteristics, influences, and meanings should be examined through material culture (Wu, 2017). Duan Lian, in constructing a narrative art history, pointed out that the objects of artistic representation are not necessarily concrete entities but may also encompass concepts, fantasies, or even transcend the artistic text itself. The studies of these scholars bear similarities to this research and provide valuable references for the present study.

This paper applies the plurality of cultural semiotics to deconstruct the artifact images of the Haihun Marquis State. Through a diversified analytical approach—including historical iconography, Han Dynasty Confucian philosophical thought, semiotic aesthetics, sociology, and communication studies—this research explores the core of Chinese artifact images as a cultural symbol. Semiotic discussions extend into broader fields such as linguistics, art, communication, and philosophy, focusing more on theoretical constructions rather than the analysis of singular cultural objects. The study of ethical and cultural semiotics in the artifact images of the Haihun Marquis State belongs to the domain of China's indigenous cultural heritage. Iconographic semiotics reflects multiple dimensions of social space, including the historiography of celestial, human, and divine power from the Pre-Qin to the Western Han period, Confucian philosophical culture, aesthetics, and sociology. These elements form a complex system of cultural semiotics and narrative text structures with multiple levels, genealogies, and schema.

This study seeks to uncover the historical status, spiritual value, and transmission of meaning embedded in the images of the Haihun Marquis artifacts within an anthropological cultural framework. The conceptual images in these artifacts embodies the ethical and cultural semiotics of Western Han Confucianism, revealing ancient humanity's understanding and pursuit of ethical consciousness in the spiritual realm. These artifacts reflect universal ideological structures that have contributed to human civilization's ethical and legal frameworks. Furthermore, the transformation of Han Dynasty cultural symbols from a diachronic historical context into a synchronic anthropological cultural sign system demonstrates the progression of collective human knowledge.

In a broader sense, Confucian ethical and cultural semiotics represent a universal human value system, possessing a cross-regional and cross-ethnic anthropological ethical dimension. This also aligns with the modern concept of a shared future for humanity, making it one of the fundamental cornerstones of contemporary global cultural and ethical discourse.

In the process of Chinese-style modernization, when constructing the contemporary Chinese discourse system in both international and historical contexts, it is essential to skillfully utilize the encoding and decoding of intersubjective cultural symbols. In reconstructing shared cultural symbols across different ethnic groups and regions within China, we should abandon simplistic representations of traditional symbols and focus on the new characteristics of diversified decoding and contextualized dissemination. Within the Confucian classics of Chinese culture, the ethical and cultural semiotics of the "Three Cardinal Principles and Five Constant Virtues" serve as a consensus-based cultural ideology. By exploring the traditional characteristics of Chinese cultural symbols and their new modes of dissemination, this study contributes to the expansion of cultural semiotics research in China, marking another innovative aspect of this paper.

Symbolic narrative, as a critical field in cultural studies, has been widely discussed in both domestic and international academia, despite differences in starting points and research methodologies. Internationally, research on symbolic narratives is often linked to structuralism, post-structuralism, and cultural studies, focusing on how symbols convey meaning within cultural contexts and construct social realities. From Ferdinand de Saussure to Roland Barthes, the rise of semiotic theory has provided a

systematic framework for symbolic narratives, particularly in the study of language, images, and mythology. Barthes' *Mythologies* emphasizes the cultural connotations behind everyday symbols and explores how symbols function as tools for ideological production. Under the influence of post-structuralism, symbolic narrative research has not only focused on the process of meaning-making but has also examined how symbols are continuously deconstructed and reconstructed across different cultural contexts. The scope of semiotic research has gradually expanded to include visual symbols, cinematic semiotics, and media symbols, revealing how symbols shape our cognitive and emotional worlds and influence the social construction of culture (Binder, 2017).

In contrast, research on symbolic narratives in China started relatively late. However, with the introduction of cultural studies and semiotic theory, a distinct academic framework has gradually emerged in recent years. Early Chinese research was heavily influenced by Western semiotic theories, particularly structuralism and post-structuralism. Domestic scholars have placed greater emphasis on the integration of symbols with traditional Chinese culture, viewing symbols as crucial carriers of cultural values and social structures within the frameworks of Confucianism, Daoism, and other philosophical traditions. Specifically (Lizardo, 2016), Chinese researchers have explored how symbols generate and transmit cultural meanings in historical heritage, folk art, religious iconography, and festival rituals, with a particular focus on the relationship between symbols and social ideology. In recent years, as globalization has progressed, Chinese symbolic narrative research has increasingly incorporated a cross-cultural perspective, examining the transformation, transmission, and reinterpretation of symbols across different cultures.

The symbolic narratives embedded in the images of Haihun Marquis State artifacts share certain similarities with international studies in terms of symbolic functionality and the multiplicity of interpretations. However, differences arise due to varying cultural backgrounds, symbolic expressions, and societal needs. This study emphasizes the symbolic nature of cultural inheritance and social structures. The images in Haihun Marquis artifacts, like those in historical Chinese iconography, primarily serves to express royal authority, religious rituals (Blakeley & Chang, 1984), and moral norms, carrying strong political and ceremonial significance. These symbols are directly linked to the hierarchical systems and power structures of their time. In contrast, Western semiotic studies, particularly in media semiotics, often focus more on the relationship between symbols and consumer culture, identity construction, and power dynamics in modern society.

Overall, both Chinese and international research on symbolic narratives has transcended traditional linguistic semiotics, increasingly emphasizing the diverse modes of symbolic expression and their complex functions. However, international research tends to prioritize theoretical construction and interdisciplinary integration, exploring the application of symbols in media, art, and politics. In contrast, this study focuses on the narrative symbolism within China's indigenous cultural traditions, particularly the Confucian ethical framework. By emphasizing the cultural contextual influences within semiotic research, this study enables the analysis of Haihun Marquis artifacts to go beyond the realms of archaeology and history, delving into the cultural and spiritual world. This provides richer interpretative pathways for the revival of traditional culture and the construction of contemporary cultural identity.

Additionally, it offers complementary perspectives on the globalization and localization of symbolic narrative studies.

Recommendations

1.Expanding the Research Perspective on the Images of Artifacts from the Haihun Marquis State

Research on the images of artifacts from the Haihun Marquis State has primarily focused on the material cultural heritage of these artifacts. However, studying these artifact images from the perspective of intangible cultural heritage—focusing on the cultural value of the spiritual world embedded within the artifacts—is a valuable area that deserves further exploration. This study provides a new research perspective for a deeper understanding. Art researchers should broaden their research approaches and horizons, especially by integrating intangible cultural heritage with Confucian ethical values, as well as considering cultural perspectives, image symbols, and interdisciplinary analysis. The viewpoint presented in this paper is not limited to the artifacts unearthed from the Haihun Marquis State; it can also be applied to all Han Dynasty artifacts, such as those unearthed from the Mawangdui tomb in Changsha and the Nanyue King Mausoleum in Guangzhou.

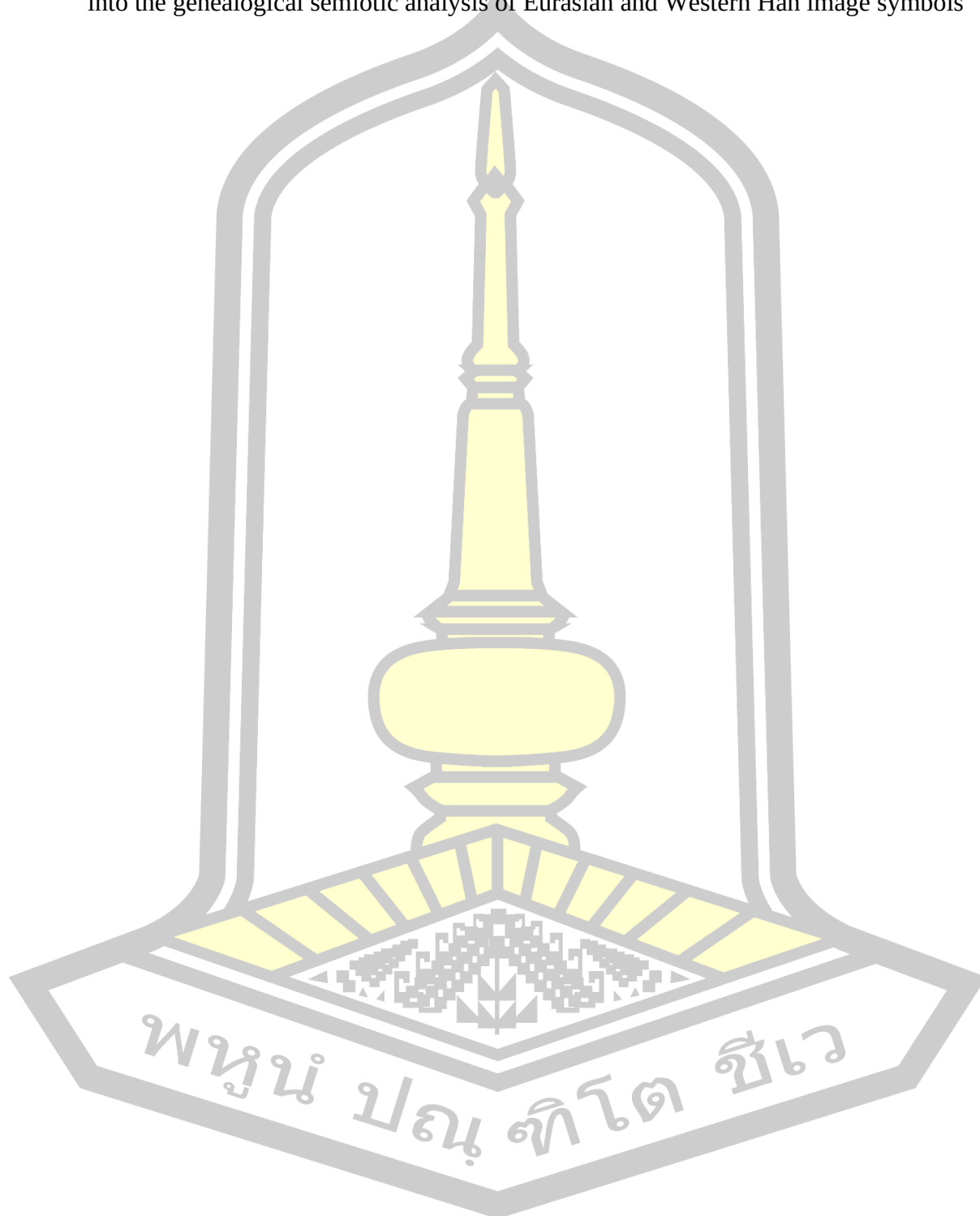
2.Interdisciplinary Integration of Cultural Semiotics

In the field of semiotics, further research can be conducted to advance the academic understanding of its integration with ethical and spiritual values. Currently, research on semiotics mainly focuses on aesthetic narratives and meaning interpretation at the cultural level, while the exploration of the cultural essence and connotations of symbols remains insufficient. It is recommended to further explore the framework of Confucian ethical image symbolism theory to deepen the understanding of the essence of symbols. Particular attention should be given to the cultural essence behind the intersection of symbols from a sociological perspective, exploring the theoretical role and cultural significance of these image symbols in the transmission of traditional Chinese culture, an area still open for further research.

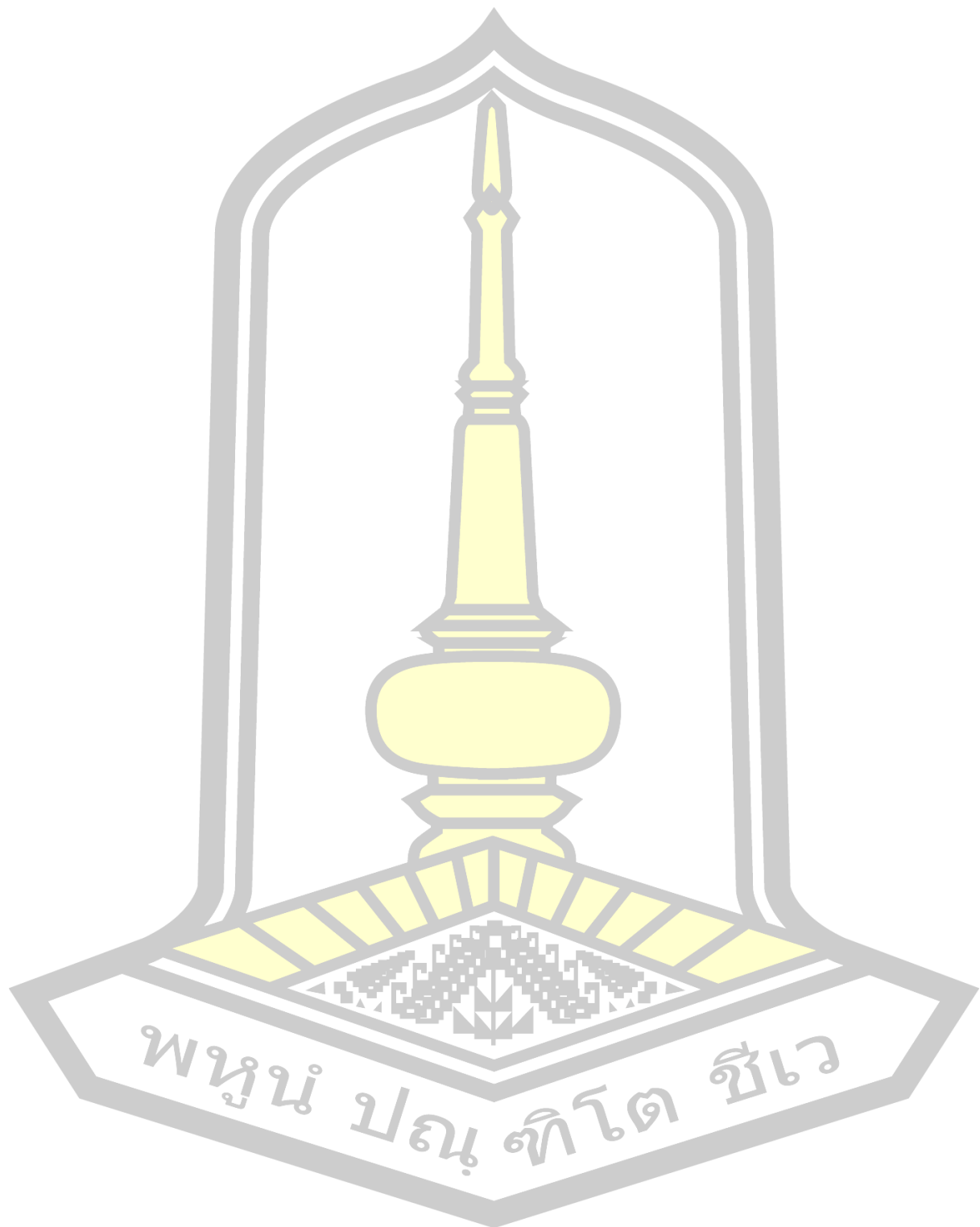
3.Cultural Differences and Integration in Cross-Cultural Research on Artifact images

As an important branch of cross-cultural studies, semiotics holds profound ethical significance in traditional Chinese culture. With the opening of the Silk Road, its influence has expanded to West Asia and even beyond to other regions outside Asia. Scholars should actively disseminate and deeply explore these cross-cultural phenomena, investigating how symbols generate cultural differences and integration in cross-cultural exchanges, and how they further influence expressions of Chinese commercial trade, artistic diplomacy, and other forms. Additionally, by integrating semiotic research from regions such as the West and South Asia, scholars can analyze how these symbols merge with images and cultural symbols to form cross-cultural communication vehicles and spiritual values. The study of the Confucian ethical cultural symbols found in the artifact images of the Haihun Marquis, as discussed in this paper, is rooted in the transmission of conceptual image cultural symbols from the Pre-Qin period. These symbols were further spread through ethical cultural symbols in ancient and contemporary Chinese society, contributing to the revival of traditional culture. As such, they represent a cross-temporal shift of symbols from diachronic to synchronic, transcending history, ethnicity, and geography to form cross-temporal

cultural symbols. This anthropological and spiritual cultural concept requires further exploration from the perspective of communication studies, to provide new insights into the genealogical semiotic analysis of Eurasian and Western Han image symbols



REFERENCES



- Achim Eschbach, & Jürgen Trabant. (1983). History of semiotics. J. Benjamins.
- An, J. (2023). The Emergence of Semiotics in Modern Chinese Art and Its Sensible Dialectics. *Journal of Renmin University of China*, 37(03), 150-157.
- Barthes, R. (1964). Elements of semiology. Hill And Wang .
- Barthes, R., & Rifat, S. (1998). Roland Barthes. Yapı Kredi Publications.
- Benston, A. N., & Jameson, F. (1983). The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act. *SubStance*, 12(4), 97.
- Binder, W. (2017). The semiotics of social life. *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*, 6(2), 401-416.
- Blakeley, B. B., & Chang, K. C. (1984). Art, Myth, and Ritual: The Path to Political Authority in Ancient China. *The American Historical Review*, 89(5), 1373.
- Cao, S., & Xie, (2023). Unity of Knowledge and Action: A Theory of Communicative Behavior in Ritual and Music Symbols. *Semiotics and Media*, (01), 63-78.
- Cassirer, E. (2023). The myth of the state (Vol. 25). Felix Meiner Verlag.
- Castillo, A. (2019). Symbolic Hermeneutic: The Symbolic Poetry of Juan Eduardo Cirlot. *Rilce-Revista De Filologia Hispanica*, 35(1), 223-245.
- Chen, Y. (2023). Heidegger's View of the Tao and Its Limitations from the Perspective of Semiotic Semantics. *Semiotics and Media*, (02), 110-123.
- Ding, E. (2007). Saussure, Peirce, and the Chinese Picto-phonetic Sign. *The American Journal of Semiotics*, 23(1), 67-79.
- Disilvestro, R. (2006). Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art: An Introduction. *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 46(1), 96-97.
- Dong, Y., & Li, Y. (2024). From "Patternization" to "Culture": A Semiotic Perspective on the Study of Ancient Comb and Comb Pattern Designs. *Hunan Packaging*, 39(05), 1-7.
- Duan, L. (2023). Constructing a Narrative Art History. *Semiotics and Media*, (02), 1-14.
- Fang, L., & Li, Y. (2024). A Study of the Traditional Core Values of the Chinese National Community Consciousness—From Shared Aesthetic Experience to Co-Creative Mental Order. *Ethnic Arts Research*, 37(01), 79-92.
- Feng, Y. (2023). The Connotations, Boundaries, and Generative Elements of Chinese Cultural Symbols. *Journal of Xinjiang Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*.
- Feng, Y. & Zhao, F. (1985). A Brief History of Chinese Philosophy (Vol. 16). Peking University Press.
- Foucault, M. (2012). The Archaeology of Knowledge. Vintage.
- Gu, Y. (2015). A Study on the Auspicious Image Patterns in Han Dynasty Portraits [PhD dissertation].
- Holenstein, E. (2008). Semiotics as a Cognitive Science. *Cognitive Semiotics*, 2008(3), 6-19.
- Hu, X. & Yuan, M. (2024). A Discussion on the Two Contradictory Images of Liu He, the Prince of Haihun, and Their Causes. *Journal of Langfang Normal University (Social Science Edition)*, 40(01), 43-49.
- Huang, W. (2023). A Study of the Dragon Patterns from the Tomb of the Haihun Marquis in the Han Dynasty from the Perspective of Design Semiotics [Master's Thesis].

Huppertz, D. J. (2011). Roland Barthes, Mythologies. *Design and Culture*, 3(1), 85-100.

Lebovitz, D. J. (2018). The I Ching (Book of Changes): A Critical Translation of the Ancient Text. *Journal of Chinese Religions*, 46(2), 215-219.

Li, S. (2023). A Semiotic Study of the Graphic Symbols on the Bronze Artifacts Excavated from the Tomb of the Haihun Marquis in Nanchang, Han Dynasty [Master's Thesis].

Liang, J. (2024). The Ancient Chinese Concept of "Ritual and Law in Harmony" and Its Modern Implications. *Cultural Innovation and Comparative Studies*, 8(20), 80-84.

Liu, L. (2023). The Levels, Characteristics, and Dissemination of Chinese Cultural Symbols. *Journal of Xinjiang Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)*, 44(3).

Lizardo, O. (2016). Cultural Symbols and Cultural Power. *Qualitative Sociology*, 39(2), 199-204.

Peter Pericles Trifonas. (2015). *International handbook of semiotics*. Springer.

Ruan, J. (2022). Chinese Cultural Symbols and the Spread of Chinese Culture. *Journal of South-Central University for Nationalities (Humanities and Social Sciences Edition)*, 8, 1-9.

Shen Zhengfu. (2024). Theoretical construction and practical aspects of Xi Jinping's cultural thoughts—from the perspective of cultural symbol communication. *Modern Publishing* (08), 20-29.

Titova, A. V. (2018). The Phoenix Myth: Shakespeare's Interpretation. In *XXVII Шекспировские чтения 2018 (27th Shakespeare Readings 2018)* (pp. 101-101).

Wang, G. (2023). Ritual Vessels and the "Han Way": An Institutional and Political Study of the "Jitian" Vessels from the Tomb of the Haihun Marquis. *Journal of Jiangxi Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, 56(02), 111-117.

Wang, Z. (2012). Art Philosophy from the Perspective of Cultural Holism—A New Exploration of Susan Langer's Aesthetic Thought. *Journal of Southeast University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, 14(06), 63-66+135.

Wang, Z. (2023). Reinterpretation of the "Lacquered Red Painted Shield" Excavated from the Tomb of the Haihun Marquis Liu He. *Cultural Relics*, No.800(01), 94-96.

Wu, X. (2017). *Material Culture, Power, and Identity in Ancient China*. Cambridge University Press.

Xue, C. (2015). The Evolution of Cognitive Science and its Relationship with Semiotics. *Semiotics and Media*, (02), 127-138.

Ye, S. (2010). The Narrative of Objects: A Fourfold Method of Evidence in Tracing the Origins of Chinese Civilization.

Zang, Z. (2016). A Historical Analysis of the Ascension and Deposition of Liu He. *Historical Monthly*, (09), 13-17.

Zehou, L., & Maija Bell Samei. (2010). *The Chinese aesthetic tradition*. Honolulu Univ. Of Hawaii Press Cop.

Zhang, J. (2018). Folklore in China: Past, Present, and Challenges. *Humanities*, 7(2), 35.

Zhang, M., & Liu, E. (2021). A Review of Domestic Research on the "Unity of Man and Nature" Thought Over the Last 40 Years. *Journal of Xi'an Aeronautical University*.

Zhao, Y. (2013). Redefining Signs and Semiotics. *International Journalism*, 35(06), 6-14.

Zhao, Y. (2023). *Outline of Aesthetic Semiotics*.

Zhuang, H. (2024). Cloudbound Wonderland: Tracing the Origins of the Hexagonal Turtle Back Pattern in Northern Dynasties through Han Dynasty Cloud Patterns. *Art Review*, (01), 9-18.

Zou, J., & Yang, X. (2024). A Review of Studies on Several Issues Related to the Haihun Marquis. *Social Sciences Dynamics*, (01), 72-79.



BIOGRAPHY

NAME	MS. Dai Yijun
DATE OF BIRTH	December 1, 1988
PLACE OF BIRTH	Hongjiang City, Hunan Province, China
ADDRESS	XinLi Community, NanchangCity, Jiangxi Province, China
POSITION	Teacher
PLACE OF WORK	Teacher
EDUCATION	2010 Graduated from JiangxiAgricultural University with Bachelor Degree, Major Art design 2015 Graduated from YunNan University with Master Degree, Major software engineering 2025 Doctor of Philosophy (Fine and Applied Arts Research),Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Mahasarakham University

