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The Hidden Leven in Space and Time: The Vertical Shaft in the Royal Tombs of the Zhongshan Kingdom in Late Eastern Zhou (475-221 BCE) China

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ABSTRACT
Among the best preserved royal tombs in early China, the tombs of the Zhongshan state (dated to the late fourth to early third centuries bce) in present-day Pingshan county each featured a concealed earthen shaft in the middle of the tomb. Constructed with rammed earth, this gigantic structure was located above the underground burial chamber, where the deceased’s casket and body were located, and below the freestanding offering hall that housed the deceased’s soul. Although this empty shaft would eventually be buried and become invisible, it was carefully embellished and sometimes even decorated with false architectural elements. What role did this seemingly superfluous “hidden level” play in the tomb and what meaning did it express? Previous scholarship failed to provide a satisfactory answer to these questions due to its blindness to the shaft’s function in the entire architectural space and ritual time. From the hitherto ignored spatial and temporal perspective, this article argues that this prominent ritual structure forms an intermediary space: (1) spatially it links the underground burial chamber (i.e. body) and the top freestanding offering hall (i.e. soul); (2) temporally it forms a passage that symbolically guides the soul to ascend from the underground realm upward to the high offering hall. In doing so, this article examines not only the shaft itself, but also its relationships to the structures below and above it to reveal its forgotten intermediary function. Four problems are discussed: (1) how the architectural elements in the upper shaft simulated real architecture; (2) how the shaft connected the burial chamber with the offering hall to assume its mediating role between the divorced body and soul; (3) how the shaft was built to facilitate the upward ascension of the deceased’s soul. (4) Finally, this article concludes that the appearance of these shafts indicates a concrete effort to resolve the contradictory notion of posthumous life—life and death at once, which is unexplained in surviving Eastern Zhou texts.

Keywords: Zhongshan, tomb, shaft, space, time, art

Between 1974 and 1978, two major royal cemeteries of the kingdom of Zhongshan, which flourished during the fourth century BCE and was annihilated by the State of Zhao in 296 BCE,[1] were discovered in present-day Pingshan, Hebei province (Map 1) in China.[2] Among so far the best preserved and excavated royal tombs of the late Eastern Zhou period in northern China, these Zhongshan tombs, especially the two fully published ones—King Cuo’s tomb (Tomb 1) and the anonymous Tomb 6—represented a new practice of constructing and using tombs that materializes an unreported contemporaneous notion of posthumous life in late Eastern Zhou China.

Of all these tombs, the largest and richest belonged to King Cuo, the next-to-last king of the Zhongshan kingdom (d. **c**.310), whose burial complex exemplifies the general structure of the largest tombs in the cemeteries (Figure 1).[3] Open to the above, Cuo's tomb registered a vertical configuration that characterizes all traditional Chinese vertical pit graves (shuxuemu), the standard burial style in China continuing and climaxing during the late Eastern Zhou.[4] Compared with the better examined plan of the cemetery, however, the vertical sections of these tombs received less consideration.

Approached by two ramps, the square central grave, 30 meters on a side (Figure 2, ABA′B′), contained the deceased king's physical remains. The vertical section of the central grave generally consists of three parts: (1) an underground burial chamber and three smaller and shallower side pits around it; the burial chamber holds the king's casket (guo), which encapsulates the coffins (guan) and grave goods,[5] and side pits, more grave goods; (2) a larger shaft built directly above the burial chamber and covered by an earth mound; (3) a freestanding offering hall atop the earth mound and the shaft (Figure 3).

Although the general structure of Cuo's tomb apparently followed the earlier burial tradition from the Shang (1600–1046) and the Western Zhou dynasty (1046–771), the distinctive shaft between the burial chamber and the freestanding ritual structure had never become so paradoxical until this period in the history of Chinese tombs: on the one hand, it was concealed under the mound, and on the other hand, it was meticulously embellished. Terraced into four steps, its interior walls were plastered twice, and then painted white. Similar embellishments were even more vivid in Tomb 6, attributed to another Zhongshan king prior to Cuo (Map 1). In this monumental tomb, archaeologists discovered simulated pilasters forming a pillar gallery in the shaft's interior walls (Figure 4). Such unprecedented embellishments in the shafts beg an intriguing question: if these painstakingly rammed steps and pilasters were ultimately to be covered by a mound during the construction of the tomb, why did the tomb builders make such seemingly superfluous efforts to decorate these shafts?

Such a paradoxical shaft, despite variations in different tombs, is an innovation of late Eastern Zhou funerary practice popular in a number of high-ranking tombs in China.[6] It might also have influenced later tombs, one of which was the First Emperor's (Qin Shihuangdi, r. 246–210) mausoleum at Lishan featuring a nine-stepped 30-meter-tall shaft buried under a 50-meter-tall tumulus (Shaanxi sheng kaogu yanjiuyuan 2007: 101). But to this day, notwithstanding the plentiful scholarship on the Zhongshan tombs and their contents,[7] apart from some basic description in the excavation reports little research has been devoted to this innovative structure.

In the light of new archaeological discoveries of the Eastern Zhou royal mausoleums during the past several decades in China, this article examines the intermediary role of such embellished shafts between the underground casket, containing the deceased king's body, and the world above, where his soul was thought to dwell.[8] It argues that this distinct shaft in the vertical structure of these Zhongshan tombs expresses the simultaneous separation and unity between the spiritless body and the disembodied soul after death. Methodologically, I will rely on hitherto ignored evidence from the tomb not only as a holistic artwork but also as a funerary ritual site. Meanwhile, I also refer sporadically to relevant texts mostly dating from the fourth and the third centuries to show the larger intellectual or religious context in which this new design was born. It must be noted, however, that my use of texts for contextual purposes is methodologically different from reliance on texts as the interpretative basis for what is found in archaeological remains. Whereas the latter uncritically assumes the authority of a selective text, which might not be directly related to the tombs in question, the former is only interested in

noting the fact that meanings of archaeological remains existed as integral part of the larger social and historical reality of this period.

In doing so, I will first contextualize the embellishments more closely in the architectural context—the shaft, which in turn was part of the multileveled structure of the Zhongshan tombs and the accompanying funerary ritual. By scrutinizing the form and content of the shaft, this article begins with a discussion of the shaft's architectural simulation. Then it proceeds to the shaft's spatial position in the distinctive multileveled structure of Cuo's tomb and Tomb 6 to unveil the shaft's religious significance. And finally it ends with a discussion of the shaft's role in the funerary ritual and time.

Simulating Architecture

As the middle section of the elevating construction, the shaft of Cuo's tomb was made into an architectural semblance, nearly 30 meters wide and 6 meters high (Figure 5). Viewed from the surrounding plains, the shaft was elevated above the plain like a fortress. In the excavation photo, the burial chamber and the three surrounding side pits appear to be bordered by a tall earth "wall," which is four-stepped on the side facing the tomb. The two ramps cut through this "wall" in the north and the south respectively (see Figure 2). Perhaps being aware of the fact that many contemporary buildings were multileveled terraced structures with similar thick rammed earthen walls,[9] the excavators propose that this shaft might have imitated the interior of a palace building (Hebei sheng wenwu yanjiusuo 1996a, Vol. 1: 502).

This still relatively abstract architectural imitation in Cuo's tomb was illuminated by the shaft in its sister tomb, Tomb 6. Almost identical in structure to Cuo's tomb, Tomb 6 was likewise constructed on a plateau and consisted of an aboveground shaft 4.6 meters high, an underground casket chamber in the burial chamber nearly 5 meters deep, and two side pits flanking the burial chamber (see Figure 4). The monumental shaft shares the reversed truncated pyramid shape with Cuo's shaft, measuring 27.5 meters square at the top and 25.5 meters square at the base, exhibiting another royal spectacle. Similarly plastered and whitened, the interior wall of the shaft was ornamented by a gallery of evenly spaced imitation pilasters. The excavators made the following observation:

> Using the iron adze to chop off the packed earth, the artisans created vertical grooves in the walls of the pit. They filled the grooves with baked mud bricks and flattened the surface with clay. After finishing this, they plastered the clay surface with a layer of greenish mud, distinguishing the color of these pilasters from the white walls. So the forms look like pillars. The dried mud bricks in the grooves were stacked up. The clay applied to their surface was one to two centimeters thick [see Figure 6]. There were six pilasters each on the eastern and western walls of the shaft, including the two corners, and four on both of the northern and southern walls. These pilasters shaped the shaft into a big hall, five bays wide and five bays long. (Hebei sheng wenwu yanjiusuo 2005: 123)

Though simulations, most of these pilasters extended between seven and nine centimeters below the floor, exactly as real pillars would have done. This seemingly superfluous replication suggests that the designer was concerned with making the structure "real," even though the structure itself was no more than a simulation. These simulated pillars transformed the shaft into a pillar gallery.

Such imitation pilasters were also found on the walls of the ramps that approach the tomb shaft from north and south (see Figure 4). The pilasters are evenly spaced on two levels of the ramp: on the upper level, two or three pairs of pilasters; on the lower, only one pair. Their placement was staggered on the two levels, suggesting two separate spaces. To the excavators' eyes, such a design represents a multistory building (Hebei sheng wenwu yanjiusuo 2005: 124). In architectural pictures on many Eastern Zhou pictorial bronze vessels, pillars staggered on different levels often meant multistory buildings (Figure 7) (Fu 1998: 96–9; Weber 1966: 271–311, Figs. 21, 22, 25, 26).

Another detail further bolsters this observation. Above each pilaster on the upper level of the ramps, a large rectangular hole and a small circular hole were created in the earth wall to hold rectangular and circular beams. Ash remains of these beams were identified during the excavation. A layer of clay covering these holes suggests that they were deliberately concealed before the tomb passage was filled. If they had no function, these concealed beams might have worked in symbolic tandem with the pilasters below them. But the excavators suggest that the beams may have been real (Hebei sheng wenwu yanjiusuo 1996a, Vol. 1: 124); if true, these genuine beams might have functioned to frame a door for entry to the shaft—the simulated building. All these architectural features refer to the builders' intention to turn the grave into a real building.[10]

The Elevated Shaft

The spacious shaft as seen in the Zhongshan tombs is related to a distinct type of ledge or platform that characterizes the vertical pit grave. In such a traditional grave, before the casket was filled and sealed, the interstices between the guo casket and the four walls of the tomb pit were filled up to the level of the top of the guo casket to form a small rectangular earth platform, which embraces the casket and coffins (Figure 8). Such a platform is conventionally called the "second-level platform" (ercengtai) by Chinese archaeologists (Zhongguo kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo 1956: 34). From the vertical perspective, this platform divided the tomb space into two levels, one on top of the other. In many Shang and Western Zhou graves, these two levels were equally used as burial spaces for grave goods (Li 1991: 40–7, 139–40). Concealed deep in the ground with burial objects, the space above the "second-level platform" and the burial chamber was an unmistakable, as is often identified in excavation reports, "burial chamber" (mushi).

Although Cuo's shaft was apparently a descendant of the traditional "second-level platform" or "burial chamber"—for both lay above the casket in the form of descending pits (from an elevated point of view)—it contained neither grave goods nor sacrificial remains: Cuo's shaft, like many other contemporaneous shafts, was found virtually empty.[11] This suggests that during the late Eastern Zhou such shafts had departed from earlier Shang-Zhou "second-level platforms" and assumed a new role.

Among all the late Eastern Zhou examples discovered so far, the Zhongshan shafts are special because they were constructed almost entirely above ground. For this reason, Chinese archaeologists labeled the shaft as the "aboveground burial chamber" (dishang mushi), or, more accurately, "aboveground section of the burial" (mushi de dishang bufen) in the excavation report (Hebei sheng wenwu yanjiusuo 1996a, Vol. 1: 27, 16, 28). Since traditionally a Chinese burial chamber was supposed to be concealed underground, the terminology sounds like a contradiction in terms. Overtly contradicting the contemporary Chinese conception of the underground burial, such aboveground shafts with walls constructed of rammed earth were new

to Chinese mortuary practice. Viewed in this way, the shaft in the Zhongshan tombs seems to be a traditional "second-level platform" that was virtually "elevated" above the ground and was deprived of its content.

"Elevating" the traditional underground grave to make it stand partly above ground was not unique to the Zhongshan tombs but also observed in a few other large graves in other kingdoms during the late Eastern Zhou period. For example, in the Qi and Chu kingdoms, which occupied portions of present-day Shandong and Hubei provinces respectively, although the major part of the grave pit was dug underground, the tomb builders nonetheless rammed a low stepped wall above the ground to surround the underground shaft, which is reminiscent of the aboveground shaft in the Zhongshan tombs (Henan sheng wenwu yanjiusuo 1984: 1–17; Hubei sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 2003: 12; Shandong sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 2007: 176). The intention of making such seemingly superfluous constructions is difficult to understand unless we recognize the hidden effort to raise the traditionally subterranean tomb shaft partly above the ground.

The Middle Level

Tracing the shaft's origin back to the rising "second-level platform," however, does not answer the question why these late Eastern Zhou shafts appeared with architectural simulations. In Zhongshan tombs, this question should be understood through the reshaped shaft's structural and symbolic connections with the structures below and above it. I will first examine how the entire tomb structure simulated a three-level building that rose from beneath the ground, and will then discuss the intermediary status of the shaft as the middle level of this "building."

Like the shaft, the entirely underground burial chamber as well as the side pits imitated building and symbolized a residential space while serving a unique practical purpose of concealing and protecting the corpse. Inside Cuo's casket excavators observed that a total of twelve bronze hinges (Figure 9, no. 7) had been attached to the northern corners of the outer coffin, implying that a door might have been installed there (Hebei sheng wenwu yanjiusuo 1996a, Vol. 1: 56). The hinges may have been used to fasten the door leaves onto the sideboards of the casket, allowing the door to be laterally pushed or pulled open.[12] Besides, the two side pits contained objects that perhaps referred to the public and private spaces in the king's residence (Wu 2004: 32).

As both the burial chamber and the shaft simulated a building, the latter symbolically constituted the upper "floor" of the former. This relationship was structurally consolidated, as mentioned earlier, by vertically adjacent ramps or steps that imitated passages or stairways connecting these two floors (see Figure 2) (Hebei sheng wenwu yanjiusuo 1996a, Vol. 1: 30). This simulation of a double-level building was not exceptional during the late Eastern Zhou. The contemporaneous Xuliangzhong Tomb 8 from the royal cemetery of the Yan kingdom near present-day Yixian in Hebei province features a familiar two-story structure below its tumulus (Figure 10) (Hebei sheng wenwu yanjiusuo 1996b, Vol. 1: 662–84).

The Zhongshan shaft merged not only downward with the burial chamber but also upward with the freestanding offering hall, whose form and purpose were very different from that of the burial chamber. The ruined freestanding structure above Cuo's grave has been reconstructed as a three-story building held up by evenly spaced pilasters and by eaves pillars on top of the six-stepped terrace (qiu) (see Figures 3 and 11). Identified by inscription as the "King's (offering) hall" (wangtang), this presumably lofty building was a descendant of the

earlier freestanding ritual structures erected above tomb pits (Hebei sheng wenwu yanjiusuo 1996a, Vol. 1: 56). A few high-ranking vertical pit graves began to have simple aboveground structures by the late Shang dynasty. The earliest known such examples date from the thirteenth century (Yang 1982: 38–42; Yang 2000: 70–6). During the late Eastern Zhou period, such freestanding structures revived in large numbers in royal cemeteries not only of the Zhongshan kingdom, but also of the Zhao, Wei, and Qin kingdoms (Luo 1982: 597–605, 564; Shaanxi sheng Yongcheng kaogudui 1983: 30–7; Shaanxi sheng Yongcheng kaogudui 1987: 55–65; Zhongguo kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo 1956: 70, 88, 97). Scholars usually identify such structures as offering halls (xiangtang) dedicated to the posthumous soul hovering above the burial (Wu 1999: 710–12; Yang 1982: 38–42; Yang 1985: 32–3, 103–6).

Since the simulated pilasters in the shaft of Zhongshan Tomb 6 supported no roof structures (see Figure 6; cf. Figure 7), this otherwise "opened-up" colonnade was covered beneath the freestanding hall as if the latter formed its upper story. This perhaps deliberate omission rendered the shaft and the offering hall into a double-level structure.[13]

The intention of turning the shaft into the lower floor of the offering hall in Zhongshan tombs was also implicit in the similar plan of the two vertically adjacent structures. Yang Hongxun's reconstruction of Cuo's tomb shows a freestanding square audience hall 26 meters on a side on top of a two-stepped terrace foundation (see Figure 3).[14] The floor plan and the size of this hall are markedly similar to those of the shaft, which measured 25 meters on a side (see Figure 11). Moreover, to make the whole building visually unified, the terraced foundation of the offering hall and the interior walls of the shaft were both plastered and painted white (Hebei sheng wenwu yanjiusuo 1996a, Vol. 1: 15).

Probable models for such multistory buildings with steps or stairs on both sides, reminiscent of the Zhongshan tombs with ramps, are vividly portrayed in architectural pictures on many Eastern Zhou pictorial bronze vessels. One basin excavated from Tomb 8101 in the Zhongshan cemetery itself shows a two-story building with a flight of stairs on its left side leading toward the second floor (Figure 12) (Hebei sheng wenwu yanjiusuo 2005: 279). The lower floor features a pillar gallery, which would remind us of the kind of pillar galleries simulated in the shaft of Tomb 6. One person holding a vessel is taking steps up toward the second floor, on which two persons facing each other are probably engaged in a ritual service, also with vessels in hands (Fong 1988–9). In light of this and other such images, the viewer can easily imagine an ongoing ritual ceremony in the offering hall of the Zhongshan tombs, and visualize the shaft as the lower floor (though later filled by earth) of the freestanding offering hall.

Despite the formal similarity and uniformity, the closely related shaft and offering hall were different in function. Although both imitated pillared structures, the shaft was a simulative ("fake") temporary building in contrast to the offering hall, a real ritual building that would last. The Rites of the Zhou (Zhouli) (compiled during the fourth and third centuries) related that a king's funeral must end with a sacrifice held at the cemetery, perhaps indicating one use for such offering halls (Ruan 1980, Vol. 1: 768). While the freestanding hall would remain permanently above ground to hold successive sacrifices to the deceased's soul, the shaft was eventually to be filled and buried during the funerary ceremony.

Situated in the middle of this three-level "building," being sunken and elevated at the same time, and empty of grave goods or sacrificial remains, the shaft possessed a paradoxical nature. In contrast, the levels below and above it—the burial chamber and the offering hall—held relatively unambiguous functions and meanings. As was put in Xunzi's comment on the

contemporaneous ritual practice, "to bury [in the casket] is to conceal the body with respect; to sacrifice [in the temple] is to serve the spirit with respect" (Wang 1954: 245; Watson 1963: 105). Whereas the burial and offering hall corresponded to corpse (body) and spirit (soul) respectively, the meaning of such shafts was seldom mentioned in any surviving texts on the late Eastern Zhou belief in posthumous life and thus can be interpreted only through the material remains.

Early Chinese people, like other ancient peoples in Egypt, Greece, and India, generally agreed that life was a union of somatic and spiritual elements conventionally called body and soul. According to this notion, to keep people alive, their souls must dwell firmly in their bodies. Like the two poles of a united magnetic field, these two life components, though contradictory, were never considered severable from each other (Ames 1993: 157–78; Fung 1997: 129–42). The same polarity found its material expression in the Zhongshan tombs: Along the vertical axis of the tomb coexisted an isolated burial chamber for the body and an open offering hall for the soul.[15]

Cuo's tomb, however, was no simple combination of burial and offering hall. Had that been the case, the construction of the aboveground shaft, let alone its embellishments, would have been vain. One may wonder whether this middle structure was necessary at all. Why didn't the offering hall stand straightly on top of the burial, if the goal was simply to reunite the deceased's soul with his body?

By form and position, the shaft assumed a paradoxical role of opening a gap and simultaneously bridging it between the underground body and the airborne soul of the deceased king. There had to be a distance between the body and the soul, because as soon as the king died the two had to depart from each other. This belief was articulated in many texts contemplating the final moment of human life.16 For example, the later compiled Book of Rites (Li ji, compiled during the first century) put this late Eastern Zhou idea nicely: "The ethereal soul (hunqi) returns to heaven; the physical body (xingpo) returns to the earth; and hence arose the idea of seeking (for the deceased) in sacrifice in the unseen darkness (yin) and in the bright region (yang) above" (Legge 2003, Vol. 1: 444, translation modified).[17] The shaft inserted between the place of the body and that of the soul confirmed and assured the reality of their detachment as the unavoidable aftermath of death. Meanwhile, it was also believed that life would go on after death, albeit in a different way. This posthumous life must require—as any life does—a new union of the disengaged body and soul. As a material solution to the antinomy of posthumous life, the shaft was built as a simulated gallery or passage along the vertical axis of the tomb to keep the divorced body and soul connected. In so doing, the paradoxical shaft embodied the antinomy of the posthumous life: the deceased king's body and soul were neither thoroughly parted (as the Li ji text stated) nor fully united (as on a living person), but both disconnected and connected.

Time, Ritual, and Ascension

Whereas the above discussion of the shaft focuses on its spatial dimension, or the architectural role of the shaft in the larger vertical structure of the tomb, in this section I will move on to the temporal dimension of the shaft: During the ritual process, the shaft was only temporarily used before it was concealed beneath earth forever. The Chinese funerary manual prohibits any attempt to reverse the ritual process once it starts; it has to be one-directional. The Book of Rites thus dictates: "There is a constant advance and no receding" (Legge 2003, Vol. 1: 142). As the irreversible funerary ritual in the tomb proceeded, the tomb construction went on,

and the tomb space extended upward step by step from the bottom of the burial chamber to the top offering hall. This means that the shaft formed one of the several successive stages during the ascension.

After a plateau or a height had been chosen, the tomb builders first removed any plants and cleaned its top. Next they dug a large shaft, the burial chamber, into the ground, at the bottom of which was the place for the casket, the final resting place for the nested coffins and the corpse in them. Smaller side pits for grave goods were dug around this central shaft. Meanwhile, two ramps leading to the shaft were constructed, one on the north side of the tomb and one on the south (Figure 13, Step 1).

Above the top surfaces of the burial chamber and the smaller surrounding pits, the workers then erected, outside the central shaft on each side, a stepped earth terrace whose inner surfaces bounded a shaft.

Either before or after the construction of shaft, the ritual of entombment should have taken place. After the coffins had settled in the casket,18 following the lower ramps, the ritual specialists began to fill the burial chamber with grave goods, which might be placed in the casket, or in the side pits, or both (Figure 13, Step 2). Yet even after the entombment was finished and the burial chamber and the side pits had been filled, the grave was far from completion. The ritual specialists covered the casket and the side pits with lids. They then plastered and painted the walls of the shaft and the two ramps, and sometimes shaped these three structures into pillared galleries with simulated architectural elements.

Meanwhile, the lower ramps were filled in, and on both north and south sides a new ramp was built almost a meter above the filled ramp (Figure 13, Step 3; see Figure 2). In this way they buried the old "used" ramps, through which they sent down the coffins and grave goods. In the south, for example, the new complex upper ramp, divided into three lanes, had two destinations, one above the other. The tripartite middle lane, consisting of a ramp at its southern end, seven steps in the middle, and a level path at its northern end, led down toward the burial chamber; the two side lanes led levelly toward the shaft. Similar double-level ramps led into the tomb from the north as well (see Figure 5).

After the embellishment of the shaft, the mourners who followed the southern passage into the tomb pit would eventually come to a fork in the ramp: the middle lane sloping downward and the other two side lanes advancing horizontally (see Figure 5). The sloping lane would lead them toward the casket chamber; the downward slope was a descent to the underworld. In Tomb 6 the pilasters along the ramps turned the latter into a two-story passage (see Figure 4). Walking these ramps might well have seemed like approaching a colossal edifice through a long, high gallery. Even though the burial chamber had ramps leading to it, mourners following these ramps would be stopped by a rough stone wall that shielded the dark world of casket and coffins and rendered it inaccessible to the living.

At this moment only the shaft was open to the mourners. With few material remains left in the shaft, we can only speculate that groups of mourners perhaps entered the cemetery from the south, ascended the terrace, and reached the shaft. At this highest level, they either gathered outside or walked into the simulated pillar gallery in the shaft to pay their respects to the deceased.

After these rituals, the tomb builders filled the shaft until it formed a solid foundation (Figure 13, Step 4), and then erected a three-level freestanding hall on top of the filled shaft (Figure 13, Step 5). Mourners could enter this new ritual space through a series of steps and resume their sacrifice to the deceased king's elevated soul.

As the reconstruction has demonstrated, the shaft was only temporarily open and accessible to the mourners during the tomb construction and the funerary ceremony. The shaft's stepped and embellished interior walls in Cuo's tomb and the simulated architectural elements in Tomb 6 only remained visible to the funerary participants during a short period, i.e. after the coffins were entombed and before the offering hall was erected. In other words, when the shaft was in actual use, the offering hall did not physically exist. So the deceased king, the recipient of the continuous ritual and cult, symbolically moved up from the casket to this intermediary and temporary shaft to meet with the mourners. This shaft, an elevated construction and descending pit, was the ideal transitional place where the underground and aboveground worlds made contact with each other. After this ritual had been completed, the ritual site continued to move up to the offering hall, which stayed totally and permanently in the living world.

During this process, the ritual site moved steadily upward, so did the mourners' and the deceased's positions. Earlier ritual practice of simulating ascension in vertical pit graves might be traced back to the Shang dynasty, though in a different manner. For example, in Fu Hao's—one of King Wuding's consorts—tomb after the inner coffin had been settled into the casket which rested on the bottom of the burial chamber 7.5 meters deep, jades, bronzes, and ivories were laid above the casket (Figure 14). Over them was placed a 1-meter layer of earth fill, and over that another group of jades—alternating layers of ritual objects and earth until the pit was filled. Altogether, ritual goods appear on eight different levels above the casket (Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo 1980: 9–11). This practice suggests that during the funerary ritual with the gradual elevation of the ritual sites the deceased consort or her soul might have been guided by these ritual goods to travel step by step upward through this richly furnished shaft, finally ascending to her offering hall at ground level.[19]

Notwithstanding the considerable temporal gap and other notable differences between the two examples, the shaft in the Zhongshan tombs was similar to the eightlevel ritual goods in Fu Hao's tomb in ritually enacting an upward movement. Unlike the Shang predecessor, however, the Zhongshan tomb designers did not deposit ritual goods (although such objects might have been used temporarily in this area during the ritual). Instead, they simulated a gallery (with the rituals possibly held in it) to guide and facilitate the departed soul's movement in his afterlife residence. And architecturally the final stop of the ascension was the summit of the vertical tomb or the offering hall where rituals to the deceased king's soul were held on regular basis.

Conclusion

The paradoxical shaft, first constructed above ground and finally buried beneath earth, united the bodily and spiritual parts of the tomb, i.e. the descending burial chamber and the elevating offering hall. This unity was fulfilled by two means: spatial and temporal. In space, the shaft represents the middle level of a simulated three-level building. With the upmost level housing the soul and the lowest level holding the corpse, the empty middle level separated the place of the body from that of the soul yet simultaneously held them connected. In time, the shaft functioned as a ritual passage, a liminal stage leading up toward the offering hall.

It must be noted, however, that the spatial and temporal dimensions of the shaft do not conflict with each other, but rather represent two kinds of experiences of the tomb as not only a work of art but also a ritual space. As a work, it has a holistic plan encompassing all parts simultaneously. As a ritual space, however, it begins and ends, and only points forward to what is about to happen.[20] The Zhongshan tombs were subject to both kinds of experiences, for

evidence suggests that these structures existed in two forms: in a preplanned (spatial) blueprint (Wang 2003), and in actual (temporal) rituals.

The intermediary shaft of the Zhongshan royal tombs reflects an unreported paradox of life and death. Life assumes perfect unity between body (xing) and soul (shen or hun) but death breaks it.[21] An afterlife either enshrined in temples or sustained in tombs must have meant life and death simultaneously, with body and soul both connected and separated (Poo 1995: 65). This profound paradox, which lay in the heart of the Eastern Zhou religious practice of ancestral worship, was overcome not in religious theory or philosophical discourse but by concrete ritual work in space and time. On the one hand, the wandering soul of the ancestor must be guided up to the ritual sites on the ground and be sustained by rituals performed in the living world; on the other hand, the released soul must reserve its access to the interred body while staying one level above the latter. Both notions were eloquently expressed in the monumental tombs that the royal houses invested so dearly to build.

Notes and References:

1 All dates in this article are Before Common Era unless otherwise noted.

2 We shall designate these two cemeteries A and B for convenience. A was inside the Eastern Zhou city called Lingshou, the capital of Zhongshan, and B was outside it. They included four large tombs numbered by the excavators 1, 2, 6, and 7; a few middle-sized tombs, numbered 3, 4, 5, and 8; and several smaller tombs (Hebei sheng wenwu guanlichu 1979: 1–26).

3 The exact date of King Cuo's death remains a matter of debate. The archaeological report gives 313 (Hebei sheng wenwu yanjiusuo 1996a, Vol. 1: 533); Li Xueqin and Li Ling hold to 309 (Li and Li 1979: 147–69).

4 For one of the earliest notes of the vertical configuration of early Chinese tombs before the Han, see Sekino 1916: 605–24; for the latest, see Wu 2009: 20–5. Huang Xiaofen names the vertical pit graves "guomu" (Casket tombs) (Huang 2002: 26–69).

5 "A guan was made before the funeral and even long before a person died; a guo was constructed inside the grave pit right before the entombment. A guan was a single rectangular container with a flat or curved lid; a guo often consisted of multiple compartments to store coffins and grave goods" (Wu 2009: 20–1).

6 For prominent examples, see Hebei sheng wenwu yanjiusuo 1996b, Vol. 1: 662–84; Henan sheng wenwu yanjiusuo 1984: 1–17; Hubei sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 2003: 12; Shandong sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 2007: 176–7; Zhongguo kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo 1956: 96.

7 A majority of previous scholarship is focused on grave goods, particularly bronzes, of which some were lavishly inscribed; for a recent survey and bibliography, see Wu 2004.

8 Early Chinese notions of soul as seen in texts are complex. Here I use the term "soul" to generally denote the incorporeal remains of the deceased as believed by the late Eastern Zhou Chinese; for the concept of soul as recorded by early Chinese transmitted texts, see Yü 1987.

9 Unlike later Chinese wooden structure buildings that reply on poles, beams as well as bracket and blocks (dougong) to hold the weight of the roof, early Chinese buildings adopted thick earthen walls to not only bound the inner living space but also support the roof structure; see Thorp 1984: 59–67.

10 As Xunzi (c.313–238) observed, "The grave and grave mound in form imitate a house" (Watson 1963: 105, translation modified).

11 It may be contested that the areas containing these objects were disrupted by tomb robbers. But extensive excavations in the same cemetery show grave goods exclusively laid in the casket rather than in the shaft or on the so-called second-level platform (ercengtai) (Hebei sheng wenwu yanjiusuo 2005: 206ff., 249ff., 327ff.). The second-level platform, though still extant in many late Eastern Zhou tombs, no longer served to house grave goods (Ye 1985: 163). Exceptions existed, though, particularly in Shandong, where some pottery surrogates of ritual vessels occasionally appeared in the shaft, or ercengtai (Jin 1994: 59–63).

12 Although this door remains assumptive, due to the total disintegration of the wooden casket, we have good reason to believe its existence, because attaching a functional door to the front of the coffin was not new at all. Its archetype was found in the Shang royal cemetery at Anyang, dating from the thirteenth century (Chang 1980: 114; Li 1977: 86). In western China, door-like openings occur in the walls partitioning the internal compartments of a Qin vassal's tomb at present-day Nanzhihui, Shaanxi Province, built in the sixth century (Falkenhausen 2004: 118–19). In southern China, the inner coffin of Marquis Yi of Zeng was painted with images of windows, and Marquis Yi's outer coffin bore little rectangular holes that probably signified doors (Hubei sheng bowuguan 1989: Vol. 1: 25, Vol. 2: Pl. 8). Cuo's contemporaries in the Chu region even installed functional doors or painted fake ones on the caskets in both large and modest-sized tombs (Thote 1999: 189–204). "In the Warring States-period Chu tombs," as Lothar von Falkenhausen has observed, "doors, windows, and other architectural elements (sometimes constructed, sometimes painted on) are also a common feature of burial chambers, illustrating the notion of the tomb as a subterranean house or palace" (Falkenhausen 2006: 308).

13 The parallel Xuliangzhong tomb had the freestanding hall replaced by a tumulus. A thin layer of white clay capped the top pillars buried in the upper pit; a tumulus was then erected on top of this layer of white clay. Beam holes, sometimes with wood ash in them, were uncovered next to these pilasters. Some of these beams lay directly beneath the white clay. It seems that the pillars below were meant to "support" the beams and the white clay that formed the base of the tumulus (Hebei sheng wenwu yanjiusuo 1996b, Vol. 1: 664). Similar phenomena were also identified in Guweicun Tomb 3 at Huixian (Zhongguo kexueyuan kaoguyanjiusuo 1956: 96). To Xunzi's eyes, such a tumulus might have symbolized the roof of the grave "building": "The grave and grave tumulus in form imitate a chamber and roof" (Watson 1963: 105, translation modified).

14 Yang 2000: 177. The author of the excavation report generally adopts Yang's theory (Hebei sheng wenwu yanjiusuo 1996a, Vol. 1: 22). Fu Xinian provides more than one plausible reconstruction. He calculates that the base of the top shrine could have measured as wide as 27

meters, reaching a conclusion similar to Yang's (Fu 1980: 70). For another not essentially different reconstruction based on a critical review of Fu and Yang's results, see Klose 1985.

15 Some literary scholars have also raised questions regarding the division of a hun-soul and a po-soul, based on Han resources (Brashier 1996: 125–58; Poo 1993: 213–17).

16 For the different roles and locations of burials and temples in early China, see Wu 1988: 78–115.

17 According to Poo Mou-chou, this passage might reflect late Eastern Zhou belief (Poo 1995: 64).

18 According to The Rites of Zhou, before entombing the king's coffin, some sort of ritual might have been performed around the casket to ward off evil spirits (Ruan 1980, Vol. 1: 851): "[After the Fangliang exorcist had] reached the cemetery, he entered the tomb pit and hit the four corners with age dagger to ward off the Fangliang ghosts." Translations mine.

19 Fu Hao's shaft was not an isolated case. In the ramps of Xibeigang Tomb 1001, perhaps belonging to a Shang king, archaeologists discovered a horrifying ritual practice of laying mutilated human sacrifices on multiple levels (Liang and Gao 1962: 37–48).

20 A similar view of the difference between "work" and "space" was articulated in Lefebvre 1991: 73, 104.

21 As described in Li ji, "When a parent dies, the Confucians lay out the corpse for a long time before dressing it for burial. They climb onto the roof, peer down the well, poke in the rat holes, and search in the washbasins, looking for (the soul) of the dead man." (Watson 1963: 125)

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