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Chapter Four

THE MANY MEANINGS OF JADE

Jade Suits and Local Identity in the Early Han

Liu Wu 劉戊, the third king of Chu 楚 (r. 174–154 BCE), reigned over a kingdom that historically had enjoyed one of the closest relationships with the imperial throne. His grandfather, Liu Jiao 劉交 (r. 201–179 BCE), was Emperor Gaozu's 高祖 (r. 202–195 BCE) younger brother by the same father.¹ Liu Jiao brought great honor to the family; he loved books and studied the *Book of Odes* (*Shijing* 詩經) with three disciples of Fuqiu Bo 浮丘伯, in turn a distinguished disciple of Xunzi 荀子 (d. 238 BCE).² Liu Jiao even wrote a commentary on the *Odes*.³ Liu Wu's father, Liu Yingke 劉郢客 (r. 178–172 BCE), also had an illustrious career. He studied the *Odes* with Shen Gong 申公, one of Fuqiu Bo's students and a founder of the Lu 魯 School of the *Odes*.⁴ He was also honored with the title director of the imperial clan (*zongzheng* 宗正) during Empress Dowager Lü's reign.⁵

In contrast to his father and grandfather, the *Hanshu* describes Liu Wu as “immoderate and ruthless” (*yin bao* 淫暴). He continued to employ the three erudite scholars his grandfather and father had employed—Mu Sheng 穆生, Shen Gong, and Bai Sheng 百生—but they soon recognized a difference between Liu Wu and his royal predecessors. Mu Sheng left Liu Wu's service at the first indication of disrespect: the king's not preparing the sweet wine that Liu Wu's father and grandfather had always prepared for him at official meetings.⁶ Shen Gong and Bai Sheng chose to remain in the king's service. However, when they criticized the king's decision to join the Seven Kingdoms Revolt, they were shackled, dressed in the reddish-brown garb of

convicts, and forced to engage in manual labor (grinding grain).⁷ Liu Wu's reign was cut short when the Seven Kingdoms Revolt was defeated in 154 BCE, forcing him to commit suicide.⁸

Archaeologists believe that, despite having spearheaded a revolt, Liu Wu was buried at Shizishan 獅子山 in the most extravagant jade suit excavated to date (figures 4.1 and 4.2).⁹ The suit—fashioned from pure

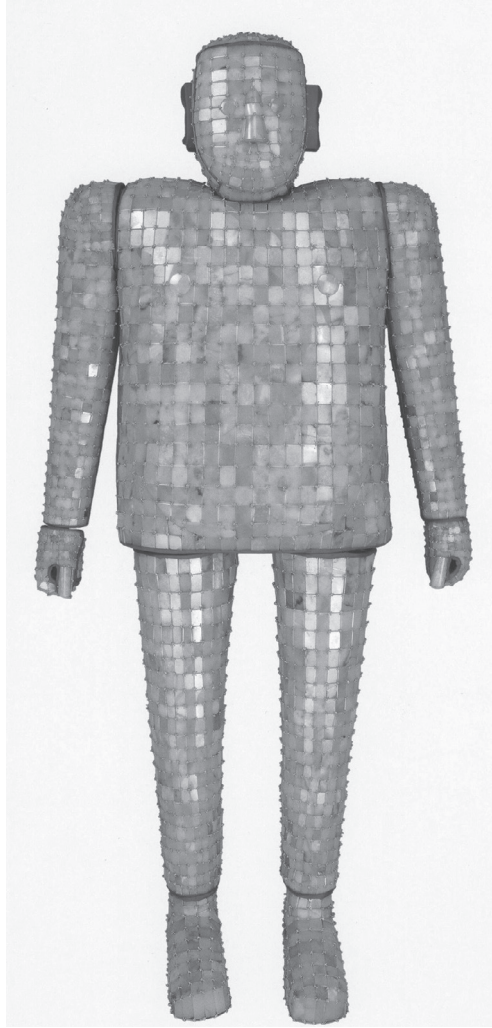


FIGURE 4.1 Gold-threaded jade suit from the Shizishan tomb, Xuzhou, Jiangsu province, Western Han, second century BCE. Length 175 cm (68.9 in), width 68 cm (26.8 in). Courtesy of the Xuzhou Museum.

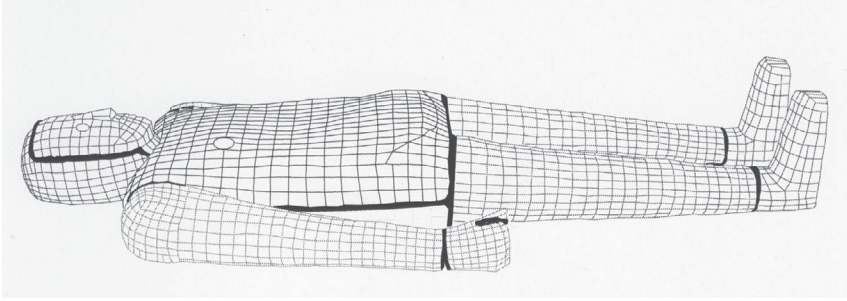


FIGURE 4.2 Line drawing of the Shizishan jade suit, Western Han, second century BCE. Courtesy of the Xuzhou Museum.

white jade from Xinjiang—was comprised of 4,248 finely worked jade plaques sewn together with gold thread. Each plaque was pierced four times and averaged only 1.2 to 2.5 millimeters in thickness, roughly that of a quarter.¹⁰ At the time of its discovery, the suit had been ripped apart by grave robbers for the approximately 1,576 grams (3.47 lbs) of gold thread.¹¹ Today, the suit has been carefully reconstructed by the Xuzhou 徐州 Museum, where it remains as part of the museum's permanent collection.

The suit found in the Shizishan tomb, however, is not the only full jade suit recovered to date; ten complete, or nearly complete, suits dating to the Western Han (202 BCE–9 CE) have been excavated (table 4.1). Of these, eight have been attributed to kings or queens of the Western Han, one belonged to a marquis, and one is unprovenanced. In addition, at least twenty-seven other Western Han burials have yielded jade plaques that are believed to have formed part of a full suit, a partial suit (figure 4.3), or a jade mask (figures 4.4 and 4.5).¹²

The jade suit represented one of the most important burial accoutrements of Han times. Unlike other burial goods, it was used consistently by Liu family members from its introduction all the way until the dynasty's fall. The suits then became such a notorious sign of imperial luxury that the Cao-Wei 曹魏 emperor Wen 文 (Cao Pi 曹丕, r. 220–226) had them banned in 222 CE.¹³

In this chapter, I will examine the meaning of the jade suit during the Han and show that although the use of jade in mortuary culture had a long history, the jade suit was not a genre that evolved expectedly from existing practices. The particular conditions of the early empire—certain material

TABLE 4.1
Complete (or restored to complete) Western Han jade suits

Site	Location	Occupant	Thread	Plaques	Plaque thickness	Length	Drilled?	Source
1 Shizishan 獅子山	Xuzhou 徐州, Jiangsu	Attributed to Liu Yingke 劉郢客, King Yi 夷 of Chu 楚 (r. 178–175 BCE), or Liu Wu 劉戊, king of Chu (r. 174–154 BCE)	Gold, 1,576 g (3.5 lbs)	4,000 excavated from the site; restored suit contained 4,248	Roughly .12–.25 cm	175 cm (5.7 ft)	Yes	Zhongguo guojia bowuguan and Xuzhou bowuguan, <i>Da Han Chuwang</i> , 308–309; Luo et al., “Xi Han zaoqi chutu jinlü he sili yuyi,” 66.
2 Huoshan 火山	Xuzhou 徐州, Jiangsu	Seal of Liu He 劉和 found in the tomb. Tomb dated to the reigns of Emperors Wen 文帝 and Jing 景帝 (180–141 BCE)	Silver, 1,000 g (2.2 lbs)	2,216	N/A	181 cm (5.9 ft)	Yes	Geng Jianjun and Sheng, “Xuzhou Huoshan Han mu,” 132–133.
3 King of Nanyue 南越 tomb	Guangzhou 廣州, Guangzhou	Zhao Mo 趙昧/Zhao Hu 趙 胡, king of Nanyue 南越 (r. 137–122 BCE)	Silk	2,291	0.29–0.39 cm	173 cm (5.7 ft)	Some drilled, some glued	Mai Yinghao, <i>Nanyue Wenwang mu</i> , 84–85. Luo et al., “Xi Han zaoqi chutu jinlü he sili yuyi,” 66.
4 Mancheng 滿城 tomb 1	Mancheng 滿城, Hebei	Liu Sheng 劉勝, King Jing 靖 of Zhongshan 中山 (r. 154–113)	Gold, 1,100 g (2.4 lbs)	2,498	0.2–0.35 cm	188 cm (6.2 ft)	Yes	Zhongguo shehui kexue yuan kaogu yanjiusuo et al, <i>Mancheng Han mu fajue baogao</i> , 37, 346.
5 Mancheng 滿城 tomb 2	Mancheng 滿城, Hebei	Queen of Zhongshan 中山, Dou Wan 竇綰	Gold, 700 g (1.5 lbs)	2,160	0.5 cm (chest)	172 cm (5.6 ft)	Some drilled, some glued	Zhongguo shehui kexue yuan kaogu yanjiusuo et al, <i>Mancheng Han mu fajue baogao</i> , 350.

6	Dayunshan 大雲山 tomb 1	Xuyi 肝 貽 county, Jiangsu	A king of Jiangdu 江都	Gold, 760 g (1.7 lbs)	1,738 excavated from the site; restored suit contained 2,381	Thinnest plaques were 0.15 cm	N/A	Yes	Wang Wei and Wang, “Dayunshan Han Mu jinlü yuyi,” 113, 117.
7	Dingxian 定縣 tomb 40	Ding 定 county, Hebei	Attributed to Liu Xiu 劉修, King Huai 懷 of Zhongshan 中山 (r. 69–54 BCE) or Liu Xing 劉興, King Xiao 孝 of Zhongshan (r. 23–8/7 BCE)	Gold, 2,580 g (5.7 lbs)	1,203	N/A	182 cm (6 ft)	Yes	Hebei sheng bowuguan et al., “Dingxian 40 hao Han mu,” 57.
8	Shenjushan 神居山 tomb 2	Gaoyou 高郵, Jiangsu	Queen of Guangling 廣陵, wife of Liu Xu 劉胥, King Li 歷 (r. 117–54 BCE)	Gold, 750 g (1.7 lbs)	2,480	N/A	188 cm (6.2 ft)	Yes	Information about the suit collected from plaques posted at the tomb site.
9	Xishan 僊山 tomb 1	Yongcheng 永城, Henan	A king of Liang 梁	Gold	1,000 excavated from the site; restored suit contained 2,008.	N/A	180 cm (5.9 ft)	Yes	Henan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiu suo, <i>Yongcheng Xi Han Liangguo wangling yu qinyuan</i> , 13.
10	Tianjin Museum 天津博物館 suit	N/A	Unknown; suit returned to China from abroad	Gold, 1,350 g (3 lbs)	3,124 plaques (more than 400 plaques added during restoration)	0.2 cm	165 cm (5.4 ft)	Yes	Bai Rongjin, “Yitao zhengui jinlü yuyi,” 59–61.

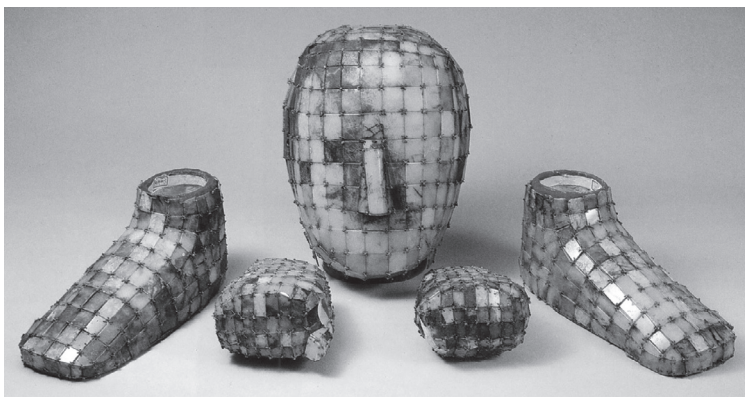


FIGURE 4.3 Gold-threaded partial jade suit from Hongjiadian, Linyi, Shandong province, Western Han dynasty. Head: height 27 cm (10.6 in), width 21.8 cm (8.6 in). Boots: height 12.3 cm (4.8 in), length 28 cm (11 in). Gloves: length 14.5 cm (5.7 in), width 12.2 cm (4.8 in). Reproduced by permission of Shanghai Far Eastern Press.

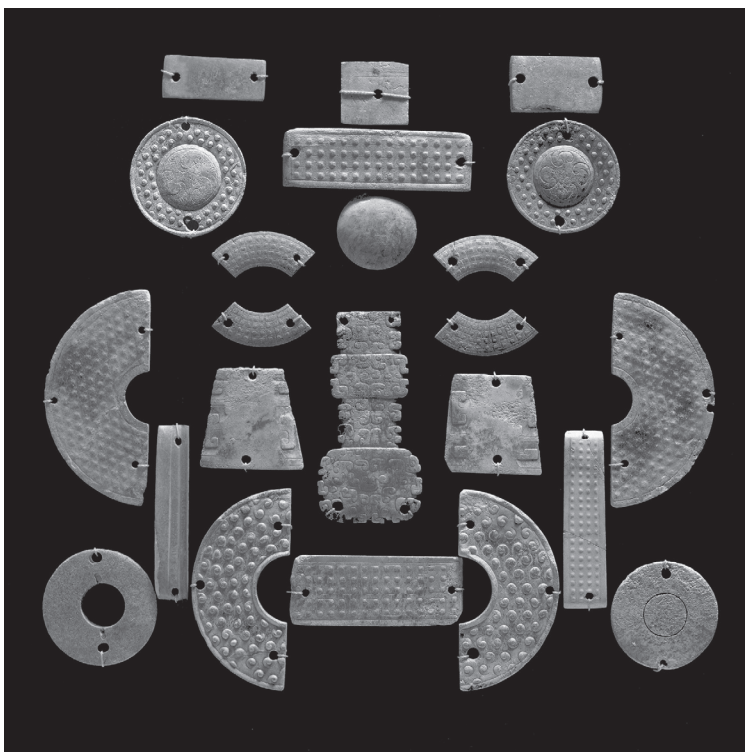


FIGURE 4.4 Jade face cover excavated from tomb 3 at Zifangshan, Xuzhou, Jiangsu province, Western Han, second century BCE. Length 35 cm (13.8 in), width 28 cm (11 in). Courtesy of the Xuzhou Museum.

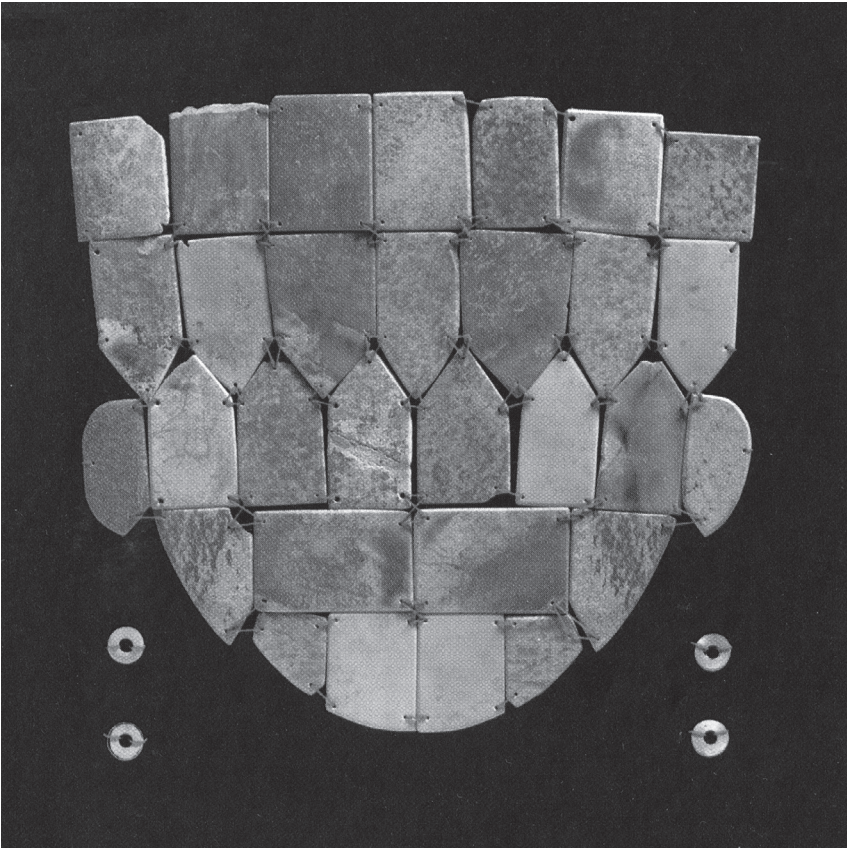


FIGURE 4.5 Stitched jade face cover excavated from tomb 1 at Houlioushan, Xuzhou, Jiangsu province, Western Han, second century BCE. Height 23 cm (9.1 in), width 24.5 cm (9.6 in). Thirty plaques in total. Courtesy of the Xuzhou Museum.

notions of virtue, a political situation that required clear expressions of status in burial, changing access to precious materials, new technologies, and the suit's ability to reflect the local status of kings—all made jade suits particularly successful in the early Han. Like the rock-cut style of tomb architecture, the jade suit enjoyed prolonged use during the Han because of the flexibility of the form itself. The suits were individualized creations that not only expressed a king's affiliation with the imperial house but communicated other meanings as well.

THE JADE SUIT AS A DISTINCTIVE STAGE IN JADE-FURNISHED BURIALS

Jade Suits and Earlier Jade-Furnished Burials

Before examining the meaning of the jade suit during the Han, I want to briefly discuss the origin of the genre and the jade suit's connection with earlier uses of jade in burial. Jades have been buried in Chinese tombs since the Neolithic. During that period, several cultures placed carved jades such as *bi* 璧 discs, *cong* 琮 tubes, beads, plaques, and pendants around the corpse. In tombs of the highest of elites, hundreds of jades were buried such as the 647 carved jade objects interred in tomb 12 of the Fanshan 反山 cemetery of the Liangzhu 良渚 culture.¹⁴ Following the Neolithic period, jades continued to be buried in tombs. A key development occurred around the Western Zhou period (1045–771 BCE), when elites began to use jade-embellished face covers or fabric veils embellished with numerous small carved jade pieces arranged in such a way as to abstractly suggest a face (figure 4.6).¹⁵ Some archaeologists believe the jade-embellished face covers may have been an extravagant version of the common fabric funerary veil. Such veils are still used in some areas of China today.¹⁶ These cloths allowed the corpse to be displayed during the funeral and entombment without exposing viewers to the face of the deceased, which would have undergone death stiffening (*rigor mortis*).¹⁷ At many sites where jade face covers have been discovered, jade ornaments, tablets, and *bi* discs were also found strewn about the body.¹⁸

Between the Western Zhou and the Han, elites continued to use jade in burials and new forms of jade veils were introduced. The mid-Warring States (480–221 BCE) Qinjiashan 秦家山 tomb in Jingzhou 荊州, Hubei, for example, yielded a dark black-brown mask fashioned from a single sheet of jade. Scholars believe it was originally attached to a fabric veil, similar to the jade-embellished masks discussed above.¹⁹

Other Eastern Zhou (770–256 BCE) sites yielded small assemblages of pierced jade plaques (two hundred or less) with holes indicating that they may also have been designed to be sewn together. The 187 rectangular plaques discovered in the Spring and Autumn period (770–481 BCE) tomb at Zhenshan 真山 in Suzhou 蘇州 city, for example, featured short ends pierced with six to eight holes, which indicated to archaeologists that the plaques were meant to be stitched together.²⁰ A similar proposal has been



FIGURE 4.6 Jade face cover of twenty-seven pieces excavated from Zhongzhou Road tomb 1316, Luoyang, Henan province, Warring States period (480–221 BCE). National Museum of China. Reproduced by permission of Cultural Relics Press.

advanced for 179 jade plaques pierced with four to twelve holes that were recently looted from a Warring States tomb in the Zhao 趙 royal mausoleum complex in Hebei.²¹ Additional assemblages of pierced plaques have been found in smaller quantities in other tombs.²²

To date, there is no evidence that these plaques formed something similar to a jade suit. All of the known assemblages of pierced plaques come from looted

tombs, which means that the original position of the plaques is unknown. The piercings on many of these plaques are quite irregular, and archaeologists still do not know how (or if) the plaques originally fit together.²³

In light of this evidence, the most direct precedent for the jade suits of the Han are the eighty-seven suits of stone armor and forty-three stone helmets excavated to date from an auxiliary pit in the First Emperor of Qin's mausoleum (figures 4.7 and 4.8).²⁴ Like the jade suit, the armor was comprised of



FIGURE 4.7 Limestone armor excavated from pit 9801 of the First Emperor's mausoleum, Lintong, Shaanxi province, Qin dynasty (221–207 BCE). Height 74 cm (29.1 in), width 31 cm (12.2 in). Shaanxi Provincial Archaeological Institute. Reproduced by permission of Cultural Relics Press.



FIGURE 4.8 Limestone helmet excavated from pit 9801 of the First Emperor's mausoleum, Lintong, Shaanxi province, Qin dynasty (221–207 BCE). Height 38 cm (15 in), width 21 cm (8.3 in). Shaanxi Provincial Archaeological Institute. Reproduced by permission of Cultural Relics Press.

stone plaques that were carefully cut into a variety of shapes and smoothed, polished, and punctured. The plaques of the armor were also stitched together with metallic wire, and they also featured a circular disc on the top of the helmet, which might be compared to the circular discs and round *bi* discs often used for the top of the head in jade suits. The stone plaques were cut to a thickness of 0.45–0.7 cm, which is broadly comparable to that of jade plaques from Han jade suits.²⁵

Despite their similarities, the Qin armor displays some critical manufacturing differences when compared to the Han jade suits. The Qin stone armor featured eight to twelve holes on each plaque, as opposed to the four

appearing in the majority of plaques from the Han jade suits.²⁶ The Qin armor required more holes because the plaques overlapped, whereas in the Han jade suits the plaques were generally sewn edge to edge not only to create a smoother look but also to conserve the material.²⁷ Sewing plaques edge to edge, however, would have required significantly more planning to ensure that the pieces fit together without gaps.

Past Developmental Narratives

Some previous scholars, considering China's long history of utilizing jade in burials, have proposed that jade suits developed organically from earlier practices. These scholars place jade suits at the end of a continuum of jade-furnished burials, which began in the Neolithic, "progressed" to jade-embellished face covers, then to stitched jade masks, partial suits, and finally to the full jade suit during the Western Han.²⁸ Such a narrative, however, implies a continuity of culture for roughly six thousand years—from the Xinglongwa 興隆窪 culture (ca. 6200–5400 BCE) to the Han dynasty. Moreover, it is constructed by cherry-picking from sites excavated all over continental East Asia and homogenizing the striking diversity of jade-using cultures across what would become China. It also disregards important differences in the function and manufacture of such jades. Although from one perspective, Neolithic and Zhou jade practices may appear similar since both cases present themselves in excavations as jades strewn around a corpse. However, jade-embellished face covers were unlike jades placed around the body in that they were placed over a fabric veil, which concealed the deceased's face. The jade embellishments on such veils thus not only communicated status but, as Kesner's research has highlighted, formed a mask that functioned as a new, constructed face for the deceased, viewed by those who attended the funeral.²⁹

Similarly, although jade-embellished face covers were an important precedent for the jade suit because they represented the face in jade, to say that the jade suit naturally developed from such a face cover is to ignore the magnitude of the manufacturing project involved in creating a jade suit. To create a jade suit, a team of artisans would first sketch a blueprint to determine the total number of suit pieces and the plaques required for each piece.³⁰ Typically, a suit was comprised of roughly twelve sections: a front and back head cover, a front and back chest section, two sleeves, two gloves, two legs, and a pair of booties. The plaques used for each section

were carefully calibrated: rectangular plaques were fabricated for the chest portion of the jade suit, but complex compositions such as the hands, head, and feet often required special, irregularly shaped plaques cut in triangular, trapezoidal, or rhomboid shapes (figures 4.9 and 4.10). After completing the design, artisans would choose the raw material for the jade plaques, with a careful eye to maintaining consistency of color across the plaques.³¹ They would then cut, polish, and drill the plaques, then lace them together with metallic thread.³² After the suit was laced, the edges of each suit section were bound with fine vermilion silk (sometimes with an iron bar inside for support), enabling the sections of the suit to be sewn together after they were placed over the body.³³

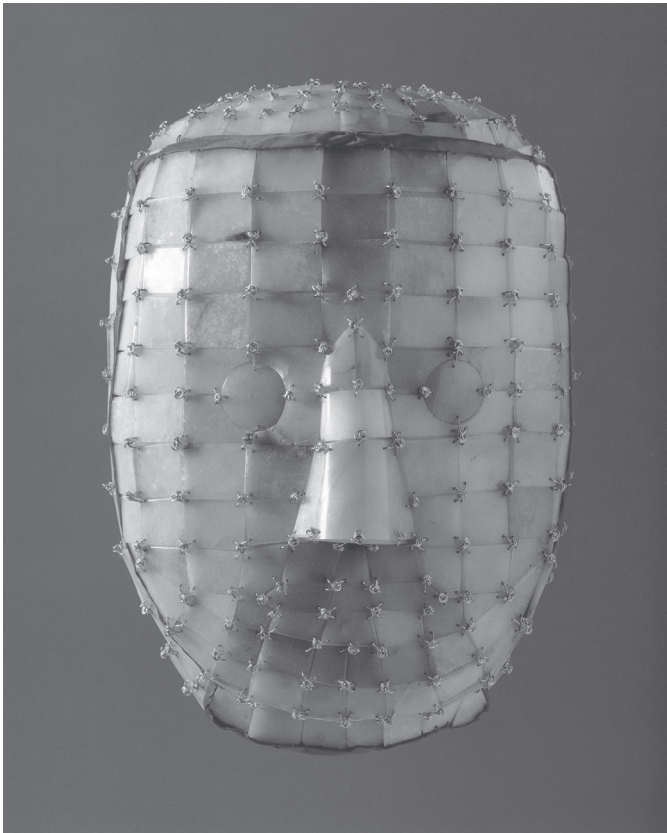


FIGURE 4.9 Face cover from the Shizishan jade suit, Xuzhou, Jiangsu province, Western Han, second century BCE. Courtesy of the Xuzhou Museum.

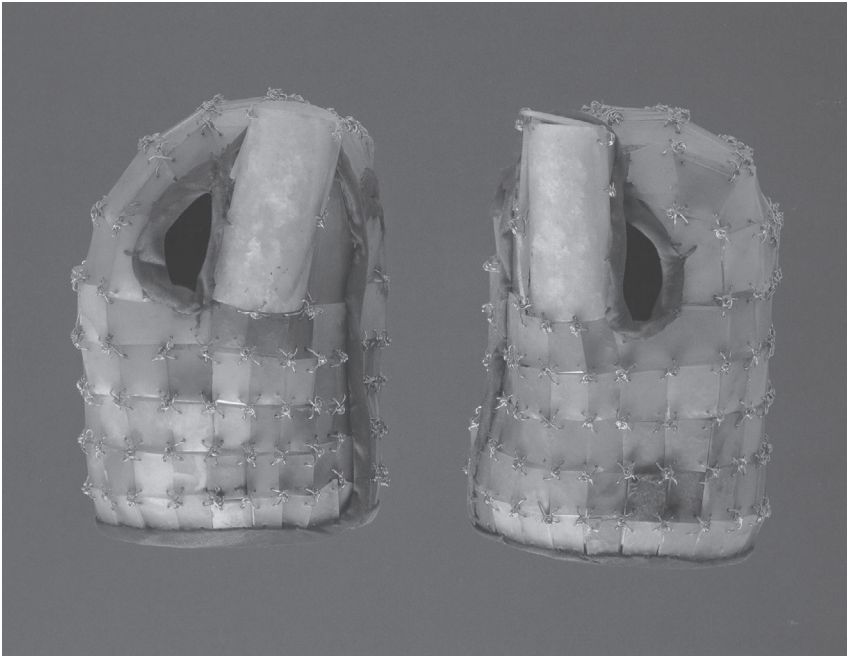


FIGURE 4.10 Gloves from the Shizishan jade suit, Xuzhou, Jiangsu province, Western Han, second century BCE. Courtesy of the Xuzhou Museum.

The meaning and impact of jade suits thus rested heavily on the highly skilled, labor-intensive way they were produced. The complex process involved in their creation prevented those who did not have access to large amounts of jade and control over the requisite amount of labor from commissioning one. The exclusivity of the jade suit was certainly a critical aspect of its success during the Han.

THE MEANINGS OF THE JADE SUIT DURING THE HAN

The discussion above has indicated that the jade suit in its first appearance represented a striking shift from the jade masks that had been manufactured previously. In this next section, I will examine why jade suits became popular in the Han, highlighting their relation to a multiplicity of factors: political, economic, cultural, and magical. In the past, one factor has often been emphasized above others—such as the suits' purported protective quality or their ability to reflect status based on the high cost and rarity of jade. This

discussion will furnish a fuller account of the circumstances that contributed to the popularity of the jade suit by examining material factors, new sumptuary requirements, the growth of material notions of virtue, and the suits' ability to communicate the trade connections of the kings and the skill of their local workshops.

Trade and Technology

The first factors to be considered in addressing the reasons why jade suits became popular among Han elites are related to materiality: specifically, the kings' increased access to high-quality jade and the development of new technology to work the material. Textual sources indicate that during the Warring States period, local rulers acquired independent trade relations that permitted them to acquire jade and other materials from western China. In the *Shiji*, for example, the strategist Su Li 蘇厲 warns King Huiwen 惠文 of Zhao (r. 298–266 BCE) that if Qin 秦 troops crossed the Gouzhu 句注 Mountains and captured the Mount Chang 常山 area, in modern-day Shanxi province, it would cut off the king's access to jades from Mount Kun 昆山.³⁴ Like the king of Zhao, the king of Qin—Ying Zheng 嬴政, who would later become the First Emperor—also placed a high priority on imported jade from Mount Kun. At one point, the king of Qin, fearful of “guest ministers” who might covertly work for foreign rulers, ordered that all aliens be expelled from the state. Li Si 李斯, himself a “guest minister,” argued that this would be akin to rejecting Mount Kun jade because it was not local: “Now your majesty imports Mount Kun jade . . . and you adore it, how [is this not the same]?” (今陛下致昆山之玉， 而陛下說之，何也).³⁵ Foreign ministers, like foreign jade, were valuable resources that could not be substituted with local stock.

In addition to increased access to material, a second factor that aided the development and popularity of jade suits was advancements in jade craft. Gu Fang, an expert in jade, has identified three main phases in the development of jade craft: the stone-tool, bronze-tool, and iron-tool stages.³⁶ Although the earliest iron implements appeared as early as the late Spring and Autumn period, jade working through the use of iron tools reached its full development during the Han.³⁷ Iron tools were harder, less brittle, and more resistant to wear, and they could be sharpened to thinner, sharper points than before. They enabled artisans to drill numerous tiny holes, resulting in fine lattice-work, which was far more difficult to accomplish in earlier periods.³⁸

The Sumptuary Crises During the Early Han

Access to material and new jade-working technologies provided the means by which artisans could more easily create jade suits. However, a variety of other reasons—political and cultural—help explain why the jade suit, as a particular product of jade craft, became so successful during the Han. Beginning with the political context, one of the key issues faced by the imperial house during the early Western Han was the problem of legitimacy. The Han founder, Liu Bang 劉邦, after all, was a mere commoner who ascended the throne after defeating his rival, Xiang Yu 項羽, in battle. The widespread belief that positions of authority should be based on merit rather than on birth placed the imperial house in a difficult position. How could the court prevent other powerful men and wealthy elites from seeking the throne for themselves? How could the imperial house convince the population that the Liu family deserved the throne in perpetuity?

During the reign of the fourth emperor, Emperor Wen 文帝 (r. 180–157 BCE), one of his key advisers—a statesman named Jia Yi 賈誼 (200–168 BCE)—warned the emperor that disrespect for the imperial administration had reached an alarming level and that the situation required immediate action. In the capital city, individuals had begun to “rob officials and take their gold” (剽吏而奪之金) in broad daylight.³⁹ Thieves also had begun to steal official courier carts and use them to swindle people in the provinces.⁴⁰ Jia Yi lamented, “Currently, people are all fighting to outdo one another in luxury, and the sovereign has no system. . . . People follow profit and that is all, showing no consideration for how they act” (今世以侈靡相競，而上無制……逐利乎不耳，慮念非顧行也).⁴¹

This obsession with luxury, in Jia Yi’s opinion, was connected to a dangerous presumption that anyone, with enough resources, could become emperor. Therefore, Jia Yi contended, it was important for the emperor to convince the population of his authority (and the sovereignty of the empire’s laws) by making imperial hierarchies more visible. He explained:

People’s emotions are no different; their faces and appearances are similar. The difference between noble and base is not something naturally rooted in appearance. That which we rely on to distinguish the noble and the base and to make clear the respected and petty are rank, position, clothing, and titles.

人之情不異，面目狀貌同類，貴賤之別非人天根着於形容也。所持以別貴賤明尊卑者，等級、勢力、衣服、號令也。⁴²

For Jia Yi, convincing people of one's authority required some constructive work: it was a matter of public image, which required a hardening of status divisions through material expression. The emperor and his administration had to be visually separated from the common people, including the empire's merchants. Only then would the hierarchy set in place by the administration become a natural fixture.

To visually separate people of various ranks, Jia recommended sumptuary laws. His proposal was extreme: every conceivable material and symbolic expression of rank was to be graded and regulated—flags and banners, tallies and seals,⁴³ ritual treatment by the emperor, hats and shoes, garments and sashes, jade rings and pendants, carriages and horses, wives and concubines, favors and gifts, palaces and chambers, beds and mats, vessels, foodstuffs and beverages, sacrifices, funerals, and burials.⁴⁴ He even maintained that people's access to luxury items could be more easily regulated if the government prevented the common people from using money. He proposed that the mining of copper, the minting of money, and even the use of money ought to be prohibited for the average person.⁴⁵ The result of a sumptuary system like this would be that “when the people of the empire see a person's clothing, they will know if that person is noble or base. When from afar they view a person's insignia, they will understand that person's position” (天下見其服而知貴賤，望其章而知其勢).⁴⁶ According to Jia, “The (system) should be widely transmitted so that the entire empire knows [whom] to honor” (傳遠而天下識祗).⁴⁷ Honor would thus be based on position, not wealth.

We do not know if, or to what extent, Jia Yi's system was adopted during the early Han. However, current archaeological evidence does indicate that jade suits were likely restricted to Liu family members and served as a marker of rank.⁴⁸ Full jade suits have only been found in the tombs of early Western Han kings and marquises of the Liu family. From the histories, we know that jade suits were also occasionally conferred on special favorites, such as Huo Guang 霍光 (d. 68 BCE) and Dong Xian 董賢 (d. 1 BCE).⁴⁹ Thus, jade suits appear to have been one way the imperial house materially distinguished members of the imperial family and other favorites from ultrawealthy individuals in the empire. The ideas of Jia Yi, therefore, have a contemporaneity with the period when expression of status through jade suits gained ascendancy.⁵⁰

Cultural Meanings of the Jade Suit

That jade suits were introduced in order to separate elites from commoners tells us something about their function, but it still does not explain why this

exact form was selected. For this, we need to understand more about the complex meanings associated with jade in the early empire. Jade's power in the early Han period, I will argue, lay in its association with multiple narratives, enabling it to appeal to a variety of people who thought in opposing ways about special materials like jade and the special powers attributed to it.

PRESERVING THE BODY

The most prominent narrative in scholarly literature concerning the invention of jade suits is that they were created, in Li Shuicheng's words, "to preserve the body eternally through jade's supernatural power."⁵¹ Li is echoing many others when he argues that this had been the principal function of jades used in burial since the Neolithic.⁵² In this view, fully covering the body in a stitched jade suit seemingly turned the deceased into a stone statue that would be preserved forever.

Other scholars have disputed the claim that the principal function of jade suits was to preserve the body. Miranda Brown, most notably, has argued that pre-Buddhist texts from the Han universally indicate that "literate members of the elite took for granted the decomposition of the corpse" and did not attempt to preserve the body using jade.⁵³ According to Brown's careful assessment, the earliest text to claim that jade had the power to preserve—the fourth century CE text *Baopuzi* 抱朴子—reflects the specific ideas of Daoists who lived in the mid-fourth century CE and after.⁵⁴ At that time, many Daoists, possibly influenced by Buddhism, sought to preserve the body using jade, self-cultivation, and other techniques for their possible resurrection.⁵⁵

Subsequent studies, such as Wu Hung's *The Art of Yellow Springs* (2010), have held that jade was indeed used in the Western Han period for the purpose of preserving the body. Wu contends that the way jades were layered over the corpse in Mancheng 滿城 tomb 1 presents direct evidence of the patron's intention. Underneath the jade suit discovered at that site, jade plugs were used to stop up the corpse's ears, nostrils, anus, and sex organ. Flat covers were also placed over the deceased's eyes and mouth. Meanwhile, eighteen *bi* discs were either tied together or sewn onto thick fabric to form a shroud that covered the deceased's upper body.⁵⁶ Wu argues that in the process of jades being applied to the body in this way, "the corpse gradually disappeared and was replaced. It became less and less a body of flesh vulnerable to physical decay, but more and more like a solid statue untouchable by time or the elements."⁵⁷ Wu is basically supplying

archaeological evidence that connects early practices with what Ge Hong wrote about slightly later.

Current debates thus presume a one-or-the-other stance. Some contend, based on archaeology, that jade was used to preserve the body, and others contend, based on textual sources, that it did not. If we look at the textual record, however, we discover that the situation was rather more complex. Jade had multiple associations in ancient China—and naturally, not everyone in Han times agreed on all of the attendant meanings. My point is that there were several narratives connected with the material of jade. These narratives did much to promote the idea of power in the jade suit.

As Brown noted in her study, many elites of the early empire opposed the notion that jade protected the corpse. Many texts of the Han period in particular convey a direct and strong objection. In the “Annals of Shang,” a section of the *Shiji*, for example, Sima Qian presents a story of the archetypical licentious ruler, the tyrant Zhou 紂, who was the last ruler of the Shang dynasty (1550–1045 BCE). Tyrant Zhou caused the fall of the Shang state, because he led an extravagant and debauched lifestyle while his people were overworked and starved. According to the *Shiji*, his palaces were stuffed with treasures financed by the people along with rare birds and beasts. He held parties—such as the one at Shaqiu 沙丘—where he filled a pool with wine, hung meats so that they resembled a forest, and ordered “naked men and women to chase one another and engage in drinking long into the night.”⁵⁸ When righteous King Wu 武 of the Zhou dynasty (r. 1045–1043 BCE) vanquished the tyrant Zhou of the Shang, the text records that the latter—certain of his impending fate—climbed on top of his famed Deer Terrace, “covered his clothing with his special jades and immolated himself.”⁵⁹ Allegedly, Zhou attached the jades to his clothing to prevent himself from being burned alive—to show his supernatural power to his people. But Sima Qian paints this last effort as another of the king’s misguided follies: the jades failed to protect him from the fire. When King Wu reached the capital, he gathered up Zhou’s corpse for public execution—shooting it with arrows, ceremonially striking it, and finally beheading him and hanging his head on a white banner to advertise the defeat of the Shang by the Zhou house.⁶⁰

This story highlights many of the key cultural associations connected with jade. First, some, like the tyrant Zhou, believed that jade could protect a body from fire or death. Sima Qian, a Han intellectual, revealed his skepticism toward this practice by relaying the horrible death suffered by

Zhou despite his attempt to use magic to save himself. Given that Sima's own emperor regularly engaged the services of such masters of techniques (known as *fangshi* 方士), the story may have been simply a veiled criticism of his own time.

Other intellectuals during the Han articulated a similarly doubtful attitude toward claims of jade's preservative power. The *Huainanzi* 淮南子 text, for example, argues that sending off the dead "wrapped in scales [of jade]" (*linshi* 鱗施) was an extravagant luxury that brought about poverty and "was of no aid to dry bones and rotting flesh" (無益於槁骨腐肉也).⁶¹ In the *Hanshu*, Yang Wangsun 楊王孫 (fl. 140–90 BCE) similarly states:

Bound up by presented silk, separated by the inner and outer coffins, the limbs and body bound by cords, the mouth holding jade stones, [the corpse] wishes to transform but does not get to; the rot becomes dried shriveled meat, and only after a thousand years, when the inner and outer coffin have decayed, does it get to revert to the soil.

裹以幣帛，鬲以棺槨，支體絡束，口含玉石，欲化不得，鬱為枯腊，千載之後，棺槨朽腐，乃得歸土。⁶²

Although Yang concedes that the practice of using thick coffins and jade in the mouth might delay the reversion of the body into the soil, he still argues that in the end, the body's only fate is decomposition.

Nonetheless, the presence in the Han of arguments like these—which assert that no matter the treatment, the corpse will decay—indicates there were people who believed that jade did protect the body. Otherwise, there would be no need for texts like these to make statements to the contrary. Thus, we can surmise that what might be referred to as a folk belief concerning jade's protective power most likely existed in popular culture. Those who subscribed to the notion, when they saw or heard about rulers clothed in jade, would have believed that their rulers possessed a special type of supernatural power that was drawn from the jade material.

THE MATERIAL OF VIRTUE

The jade-as-preservative narrative, however, was not the only one. Indeed, it may not have been the most important for many who selected the suits for burial. At this time, another aspect of jade may have been more important:

its physical connection as the material manifestation of virtue and—related to this—its ability to serve as a symbol of ruling authority.

In early China, since at least the Eastern Zhou period, jade had been linked with virtue and often served as a metaphor for the refined individual. For example, in the *Analects*, Confucius refers to himself as a fine piece of jade:

Zigong said, “If you possessed a piece of beautiful jade, would you hide it away in a locked box, or would you try to sell it at a good price?” The Master responded, “Oh, I would sell it! I would sell it! I am just waiting for the right offer.”⁶³

Confucius used jade as a metaphor for himself because in the words of the *Odes*, a cultivated person works on his nature so that it is “as if cut, as if polished; as if carved, as if ground” (如切如磋，如琢如磨).⁶⁴ A beautiful jade is a stone that has been cut and polished in such a way as to highlight its unique natural coloration, patterning, and translucence.

Although jade had been likened to virtue since the time of Confucius, a transition in cultural notions of jade occurred during the Warring States period. During that time, a seminal text titled Five Phases (*wuxing* 五行) argued that jade not only served as a metaphor for virtue but also that the virtuous person took on qualities of jade when he or she became humane (*ren* 仁), wise (*zhi* 智), and sagacious (*sheng* 聖), all virtues associated with high levels of self-cultivation. Consider the following passage about the development of wisdom:

Contemplating knowledge, one develops. When one develops, one obtains it. When one obtains it, one does not forget it. When one does not forget it, then one is clear-sighted. When one is clear-sighted, one sees a worthy man. When one sees a worthy man, one acquires the appearance of jade. When one acquires the appearance of jade, it (knowledge) takes form (in the body). When it takes form (in the body), then one is wise.

智之思也俚(長)，俚(長)則得，得則不亡(忘)，不亡(忘)則明，明則見馭(賢)人，見馭(賢)人則玉色，玉色則型(形)，型(形)則智。⁶⁵

Here, the adept begins his journey of self-cultivation with the contemplation of knowledge. At this phase, knowledge is external to the self. By the end, knowledge takes physical form in the body and the person acquires the

appearance of jade. In Mark Csikszentmihalyi's words, the development of this virtue "explicitly causes an actual physiological change in a person."⁶⁶ Notably, for our purposes, the physiological change is an unusual one: a person begins to physically resemble jade.

The *Wuxing* text just quoted contains similar passages regarding humane (*ren*) individuals and sages. A humane person begins by contemplating humaneness. When he or she acquires the appearance of jade (*yuse* 玉色), he or she becomes humane.⁶⁷ Similarly, those who achieve sagehood begin by contemplating sagacity and end by acquiring the "tone of jade" (*yuyin* 玉音).⁶⁸ In these three cases, the critical sign that a person has become humane, wise, or sagacious is that they look or sound like jade.

In Csikszentmihalyi's assessment, the *Wuxing*'s new claim that the successful adept looks and appears like jade developed in response to criticisms that had been leveled against Confucians—namely, that they made "false claims of acting out of virtue."⁶⁹ Claiming that virtuous men had a changed appearance was a way of furnishing physical evidence of internal transformation. However, the text itself also alludes to other, material reasons for this new philosophy of jade. Throughout the *Wuxing* text, the writer seems particularly interested in comparing jade to bronze and remarking on the superiority of the former. One passage, for example, states,

"Bronze sounding and jade resonating along with it," this is a person possessing virtue. The "sound of bronze" is goodness; The "tone of jade" is sagaciousness. Goodness is the Way of humans; Virtue is the [Way] of Heaven. Only one who possesses virtue is able to [make] "bronze sound and jade resonate with it."⁷⁰

金聖（聲），而玉晨（振）之，又（有）惠（德）者也。金聖（聲），善也；玉音，聖也。善，人道也；惠（德），而（天）【道也】。唯又（有）惠（德）者，狀（然）句（後）能金聖（聲）而玉晨（振）之。⁷¹

In these lines, the *Wuxing* presents a new take on a passage that also appears in the *Mencius*. The latter text describes instruments made from bronze and jade as playing complementary roles in a musical performance: "When bronze [bells?] sound, it is the beginning of the orderly sequence; when jade [chimestones?] resonate with them, it is the end of the orderly sequence" (金聲也者，始條理也；玉振之也者，終條理也).⁷² Although both texts are concerned with the materiality of music, the *Mencius* text places equal

emphasis on bronze and jade, whereas the *Wuxing* text clearly views jade as superior to bronze. The *Wuxing* imagines the trajectory toward sagehood as developmental: one starts by achieving goodness, or the sound of bronze, and ends in sagehood with the tone of jade. In other words, for the *Wuxing* text, bronze is good, but jade is better.

At the same time that the *Wuxing* text was written, other Warring States texts also began to lay out sumptuary systems based on jade, seemingly replacing former systems that had based expressions of rank on bronze. For example, the *Liji* 禮記 states, “A gentleman was never without his jades, excepting for some sufficient reason; he regarded the pieces of jade as emblematic of virtue” (君子無故玉不去身，君子於玉比德焉).⁷³ In the *Liji*, the jades worn by the gentleman served as a constant sign of his status and his commitment to virtue. For that reason, he makes sure to always wear them on his body. Following this statement, the text identifies specific pendants and cords that ought to be worn to distinguish rank: the Son of Heaven should wear white jade suspended on a black cord; a duke or marquis, “mountain black” jade on a vermilion cord; a Great Officer, an “aqua-blue” jade on a black cord.⁷⁴ The *Liji* is not the only text that does this; similar prescriptions can be found in the *Zhouli* 周禮 (*Rites of Zhou*), the *Yili* 儀禮 (*Ceremonies and Rites*), the *Liji* 禮記 (*Record of Ritual*), and the *Xunzi* 荀子 text.⁷⁵

Although the idea of using jade as a marker of rank based on its connection with benevolent virtue was introduced during the Warring States period, there is no evidence that the systems proposed by any of these texts were ever adopted. As Jessica Rawson has argued, Warring States texts “contain an idealized prescription of how jades should be used and not a description of how actual jades were used.”⁷⁶ This, however, would change during the Han.

Implementing Earlier Visions of Jade During the Han

In the Han, and in particular under Emperor Wen, a twenty-two-year-old prodigy—Jia Yi, who entered Emperor Wen’s court in 178 BCE—would outline a new empirewide role for jade. The emperor soon recognized Jia Yi’s talent and quickly raised him to the position of palace counselor (*taizhong dafu* 太中大夫). In his memorials to the emperor, Jia Yi built on the notion derived from *Wuxing* thought concerning jade’s materiality, but instead of arguing that the sage physically resembles and “sounds like”

jade, Jia contended that jade itself physically embodies the idea of benevolent virtue (*de* 德) and its six principles:

That which is able to give form to human virtue is only jade. A representation of benevolent virtue and an embodiment of its six principles can be fully seen in jade. Each has its form, and for this reason, jade is able to effect the six principles of virtue.

而能象人德者，獨玉也。寫德體六理，盡見於玉也，各有狀，是故以玉效德之六理。⁷⁷

In Jia's words, jade is said to "*xiang*" (象)—"to give or bring into shape"—benevolent virtue.⁷⁸ Only jade is able to embody human virtue's (*de*) six principles: among others features, it is glossy and reflective like the *dao*; thick, moist, and firm like human nature (*xing* 性); and full, bright, and shiny like perception (*ming* 明).⁷⁹ Because jade embodies virtue, people can learn about virtue from jade, simply by looking at it. According to Jia:

Although benevolent virtue is completely given to all things and all things have it, it is small and difficult to detect. Consider jade—a true depiction of *de*. Since the six principles are in jade and are obvious and easy to see, [people] raise up jade as a way to explain them. The way by which all things receive [benevolent virtue] is that they are of one body with jade.

德畢施物，物雖有之，微細難識。夫玉者，真德寫也。六理在玉，明而易見也。是以舉玉以諭，物之所受於德者，與玉一體也。⁸⁰

Because jade is of one body with virtue, Jia argued, to possess and observe jade was one way people could cultivate themselves. In other passages, Jia placed the viewing of jade on par with learning about virtue (*de*) from other sources, such as studying the classics—the *Documents*, the *Odes*, the *Changes*, the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, the *Rites*, and the *Music*.⁸¹

Jia's emphasis on viewing jade, as distinct from the much earlier *Wuxing* (and similar) texts, affected his recommendations for the imperial use of jade. In Jia Yi's system, the emperor's identity would be communicated through the jades he wore on his body, which were ultimately viewed by others:

In antiquity, a sage ruler at rest had laws and standards. When he moved, he was refined and resplendent. Positioned between his guards and his ministers, he sounded

his jades as he walked. The jades that sounded were pendant jades. On top, he wore paired *heng*, on the bottom paired *huang*, with *chongya* and pearls in between, and jades of other shapes mixed in.

古者聖王居有法則，動有文章，位執戒輔，鳴玉以行。鳴玉者，佩玉也。上有雙珩，下有雙璜，衝牙纓珠以納其間，琚瑀以雜之。⁸²

Some earlier Warring States texts, such as the *Zhouli* and the *Xunzi*, had recommended that the emperor and his subordinates hold jade tablets and other objects during ritual ceremonies in order to formally signify their status hierarchies.⁸³ Jia's advice was different. Along with the *Liji*, he emphasized the importance of the emperor's displaying his jades directly on his body. That way, when he walked, the jades would sound, and when he was at rest, he would appear refined.

To Jia, jade was a rare material that negated its own status as a luxury because of its association with refined virtue. When worn by the emperor, he believed, it would communicate to the population the ruler's distinctive status, highlighting the notion that his rule was based on virtue rather than on pedigree. This can be contrasted with the bronze vessels of prior eras, which were objects designed to announce one's lineage.

At this point, we do not have sufficient evidence to determine whether Emperor Wen adopted Jia Yi's ideas concerning jade. However, his ideas were certainly contemporaneous with the special emphasis on jade craft in the early Han. Other studies have shown that Jia Yi's recommendations in areas such as the general abatement of punishments and the restructuring of the territories of invested kings had a strong influence on imperial policy during Emperor Wen's reign.⁸⁴ Given that Jia Yi had attained a powerful role in policies of all kinds, even if his ideas about jade were not implemented in full, they could have contributed to the court's increasing use of jade as an ornament and its use of jade suits as markers of rank in burial.

THE JADE SUIT AND THE HAN KINGS

We have discussed several factors that likely contributed to the development of the jade suit during the Han, including an increase in trade networks, refinements in iron tools, emerging political circumstances, and the variety of cultural meanings related to the jade suit. A final factor was the suit's ability

not only to connect local elites with the imperial house but also to project the power and artisanal strength of workshops located in the kings' own areas.

Past scholars have read jade suits principally as projections of imperial authority, based on the idea that they were all manufactured in the capital region and given to the kings as gifts. As evidence, these scholars typically cite two examples from recent archaeology. First, on the back of some of the plaques that comprised the suit made for the Eastern Han (25–220 CE) king of Zhongshan 中山, Liu Yan 劉焉 (d. 90 CE), *Zhongshan* was written in black script. It has been assumed that the suit was inscribed in this way to distinguish it from other suits that were presumably being manufactured at the same time in capital workshops.⁸⁵ Second, two rectangular pieces of sewn-together jade plaques were found padding the torso of the jade suit from Dingxian 定縣 tomb 40 (figure 4.11).⁸⁶ These two pieces, archaeologists believe, may have been severed from the suit when it was shortened to fit the body of the deceased. The inference is that suits were manufactured in the capital and then shipped to localities upon the death of a king.⁸⁷

Without question, the histories make clear that *some* jade suits were produced in imperial workshops.⁸⁸ However, I will present evidence that, at least in the Western Han period, some jade suits were also produced locally by kings, as reflections of their own power and identity. First, I look at general textual and archaeological evidence for the presence of jade workshops



FIGURE 4.11 Gold-threaded jade suit from tomb 40, Bajiaolang village, Dingxian county, Hebei province, Western Han, first century BCE. National Museum of China. Photograph by the author.

in the kingdoms. Then, I examine differences between the suits—including differences in material; the size, number, thickness, and shape of the jade plaques; the quantity of metallic thread; the drilling method; and the representation of the body—that provide further evidence for local manufacture. After reviewing the evidence for local manufacture, I will then propose that in the genre of jade suits, a trend can be observed that we have also noted in other areas of material culture such as tomb figurines: namely, innovations in jade suits coming from the kings lead to counter-innovations on the part of the imperial court.

General Evidence for Local Manufacture

In recent years, archaeologists have paid increasing attention to evidence for the existence of local workshops. First, they have made careful note in archaeological sites of scrap jade and works that seem to be half-finished. Several examples have been found in Xuzhou. At Baiyunshan 白雲山 Cement Plant tomb 1 (dated to the Western Han), for example, archaeologists have uncovered a half-worked *bi* disc that was in the process of being cut into two jade *huang* 璜, as well as a round piece of jade that appears to have been cut out of the center of a *bi* disc.⁸⁹ Moving ahead in time, the Eastern Han (25–220 CE) Qiaojiahu 喬家湖 tomb in Xuzhou also yielded scraps of jade that appear to have been discarded in the process of carving jade *bi* discs.⁹⁰

Among Chu-area jades, scholars have also observed a strong local style, another factor that points to local production. For example, from the Shizishan site, archaeologists have excavated a jade *huang* piece with more than twenty dragons in relief, as well as a jade axe with intricately carved dragons. These are unlike any other excavated jade pieces dating to the Western Han.⁹¹ Two jade pendants in the shape of archer's rings from the Beidongshan 北洞山 site, one with a dragon and phoenix and the other with six hornless dragons, are likewise without parallel.⁹²

At the very least, by the time of the Eastern Han, the kingdom of Chu had its own workshops. The *Hou Hanshu* states that at that time the Chu king, Liu Ying 劉英 (r. 41–71 CE), instructed his workshops to create a jade crane and a golden turtle and to label them as auspicious omens, based on the advice of a “master of techniques.”⁹³

In Guangzhou, much farther south, archaeologists have also uncovered evidence of local workshops. They have discovered incompletely carved *bi* discs as well as pieces of pseudo-jade in the western side chamber of the

king of Nanyue 南越's tomb. They were composed of the same material used for some plaques found in the bodice and pants of the king's jade suit (figure. 4.12). In the Nanyue suit, only the head cover, gloves, and shoes were manufactured from plaques that were sewn together. The bodice and pants of the suit, in contrast, were composed of plaques that were not punctured, but tied with ribbons and attached to a fabric backing. The pieces of pseudo-jade found in the tomb matched this latter type of plaque.⁹⁴

Finally, a later, Song-era 宋 (960–1279 CE) source indicates that the Han-era kingdom of Guangling 廣陵 also had its own workshop. We are told that the Guangling king offered money to the most famous jade artisan of the day, Yan Gui 顏規 of Wu 吳 commandery (modern-day Suzhou), to come to his kingdom to carve jade.⁹⁵ Many fine jades have been excavated from royal tombs in the kingdom of Guangling, testifying to the veracity of this account.⁹⁶

Differences in the Manufacture of the Suits

In addition to broad textual and archaeological evidence, the jade suits themselves present evidence of local manufacture. I will address each category of evidence individually.

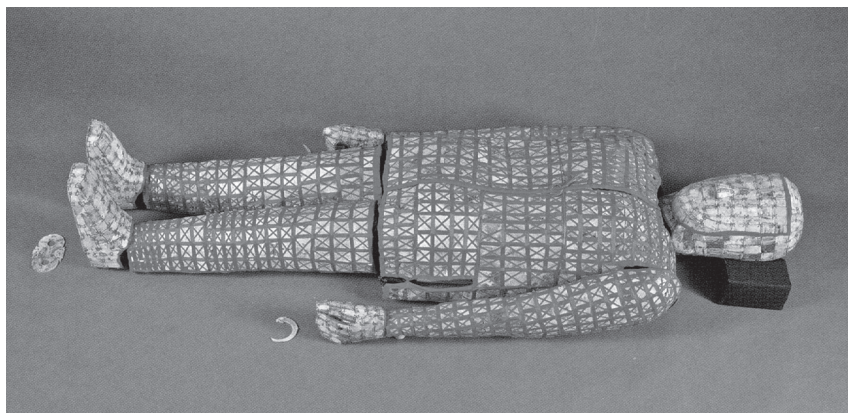


FIGURE 4.12 Silk-threaded jade suit from the tomb of the king of Nanyue, Guangzhou, Guangdong province, Western Han, second century BCE. Length 1.73 m (5.7 ft). Reproduced by permission of Cultural Relics Press.

MATERIAL

One of the most critical differences among the suits is the quality of jade used in their manufacture. To date, scientific studies have been conducted on samples from four Western Han jade suits: Shizishan, Nanyue, Shenjushan 神居山, and Mancheng. These studies, which I discuss below, have found considerable differences in jade quality and color among these suits. Such differences would be expected if the suits were produced by different workshops.

In 2010, Gu et al. tested plaques from the Shizishan jade suit and jade coffin against jade samples from nine other sources in China and Taiwan. They determined that the Shizishan jades were most similar to nephrite jade mined in Khotan (Hetian 和田), Xinjiang, and were unlike seven other jade sources, including one local source only four hundred kilometers from the Shizishan tomb.⁹⁷ The researchers compared the jades based on several factors including chemical composition, infrared spectra, Raman spectra, and rare-earth elements.

In 2012, Luo Han et al. compared twenty-five plaques from the Nanyue suit with forty-three plaques from the Shizishan suit and coffin.⁹⁸ Their results again supported the conclusion that the Shizishan jades likely derived from Khotan.⁹⁹ The study also concluded that the Nanyue suit was composed of five types of jade. The first type was Khotan jade; however, the color—white-green to dark green—was of a lower quality than the white to milky-white jade plaques from Shizishan. The second and third types may also have been from Khotan, but they were course jades of a very low quality. The fourth type exhibited qualities similar to Xiuyan 岫岩 jades from Liaoning. Fifth, they also found that the suit contained pseudo-jades (*jiayu* 假玉) or stones from Guangdong's Guangning 廣寧 county (often referred to as Guanglü 廣綠 jades).¹⁰⁰ The pseudo-jades found in the king of Nanyue's suit were positioned in the chest portion, where the plaques were not pierced but tied together with ribbons. This section was hastily composed, possibly because of the king's death. Pseudo-jades may have been used because the king died prematurely and/or because the king's workshops simply ran out of the better-quality jades.

A third study, conducted in 1994, determined that pseudo-jades were not only used to create a suit for a foreign king in the empire's hinterland, but also for kings in the heartland of the Han empire. This study examined six plaques

from the Shenjushan 神居山 jade suit found in a royal tomb in Gaoyou 高郵, Jiangsu province. Half of the plaques were nephrite (jade); the other half were acidic lava pseudo-jades.¹⁰¹

Finally, in 1980, Zhang Peishan, a fellow of the Institute of Geology of the Chinese Academy of Geological Sciences, studied one plaque from Liu Sheng 劉勝's (r. 154–113) jade suit from the Mancheng site, as well as three other jade objects from that tomb and the tomb of Liu Sheng's wife, Dou Wan 竇綰, and conducted rock-mineral identification, chemical analysis, and X-ray diffraction. He determined that the plaque from Liu Sheng's suit was consistent in its mineralogical composition and physical properties with Khotan jade from Xinjiang.¹⁰² However, Gu Fang, a leading recognized expert in ancient jade, has maintained that the Mancheng suits, based on external observation, resemble Xiuyan jade sourced from modern-day Liaoning province.¹⁰³

These studies indicate that considerable differences in jade quality and color can be observed across the jade suits of the early Western Han. The Shizishan suit, with its milky-white color, was comprised of jade that far eclipses the other suits in quality. Even though the Shizishan and Nanyue suits are both believed to have been fabricated with Khotan jade from Xinjiang, the quality of the jade differed dramatically between the two suits.

Second, the pseudo-jades identified in the Nanyue and Shenjushan suits present strong evidence for local manufacture. Scientists have not identified the source of the stone used for the pseudo-jades in the Shenjushan suit. In the case of Nanyue, the king's suit should not contain local pseudo-jades if it was manufactured at the imperial capital. Indeed, local manufacture makes sense in the case of the Nanyue suit because Zhao Mo 趙昧, the king for whom the suit was made, was not a Liu family member, but rather a foreign king who had usurped the title of emperor, as had his grandfather who reigned before him, Zhao Tuo 趙佗 (r. 203–137 BCE).¹⁰⁴ As additional suits are tested and as the database of jade samples is expanded, it will be increasingly possible to understand more about the mining and flow of jade across the Western Han empire.¹⁰⁵

SIZE, NUMBER, THICKNESS, AND SHAPE OF THE PLAQUES

As can be observed in table 4.1, one of the most distinctive differences between the suits is the exceptional variety in the number, size, thickness,

and shape of the plaques that comprised each suit. The suit with the highest quality of jade was also the suit with the highest number of plaques—the Shizishan suit, with 4,248 plaques of white, Hetian jade.¹⁰⁶ This is more than 3.5 times the number of plaques used in the suit from Dingxian 定縣 tomb 40 (hereafter, the Dingxian suit), which contained a mere 1,203 plaques.¹⁰⁷ Differences in the height of the tomb occupant cannot explain the discrepancy: the length of the King of Chu's suit (the Shizishan suit) at 175 centimeters suggests that he was shorter than the king of Zhongshan (the Dingxian suit), whose suit was 182 centimeters long.¹⁰⁸

The plaques from the king of Chu's suit were not only smaller but also thinner than those of other suits. The thinnest plaques comprising the suit of the king of Jiangdu 江都 from Dayunshan 大雲山, at 0.15 cm (figure 4.13), were closest to those of the king of Chu's suit, which measured 0.12–0.25 cm in thickness.¹⁰⁹ The jade pieces from the chest section of Dou Wan's suit from Mancheng (figure 4.14) were four times thicker, measuring 0.5 cm in thickness.¹¹⁰

Most of the suits contained a similar range of shapes. However, at two sites—the king of Chu's tomb at Beidongshan and a brick tomb of a high-ranking aristocrat at Zhangjiapu 張家堡 in Xi'an—several “fish-scale” plaques have been excavated (figure 4.15).¹¹¹ In the Qin First Emperor's tomb, armor fashioned from fish-scale plaques was used to distinguish

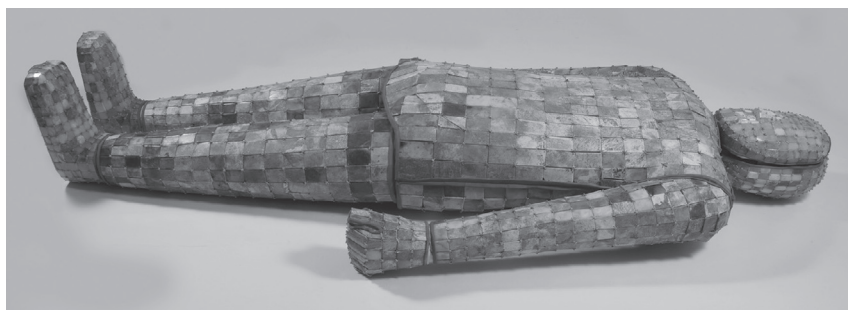


FIGURE 4.13 Gold-threaded jade suit from Dayunshan tomb 2, Xuyi, Jiangsu province, Western Han, second century BCE. Height 28 cm (11 in), length 175 cm (5.7 ft), width 76 cm (29.9 in). Courtesy of the Nanjing Museum.

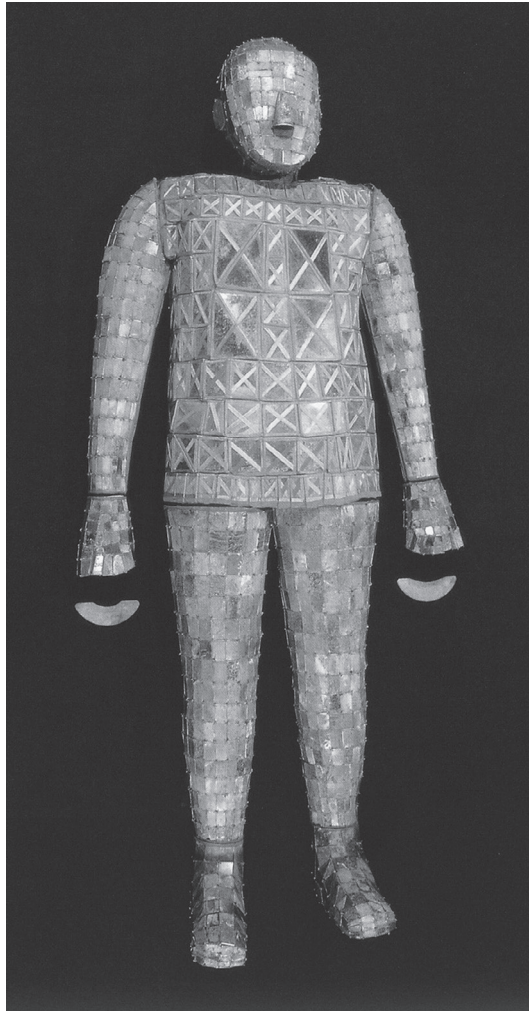


FIGURE 4.14 Gold-threaded jade suit from Mancheng tomb 2, the tomb of Dou Wan, Mancheng, Hebei province, Western Han dynasty. Length 1.72 m (5.6 ft). Hebei Museum. Reproduced by permission of Cultural Relics Press.

generals of high rank.¹¹² Because fish-scale plaques required overlap, if they were used to create a jade suit, they would have necessitated more material than typical rectangular plaques. However, since only a few plaques have been found at both sites, it remains unclear whether such plaques originally belonged to a full jade suit. At Beidongshan in particular, fish-scale plaques were found together with rectangular, trapezoidal, and other plaques of

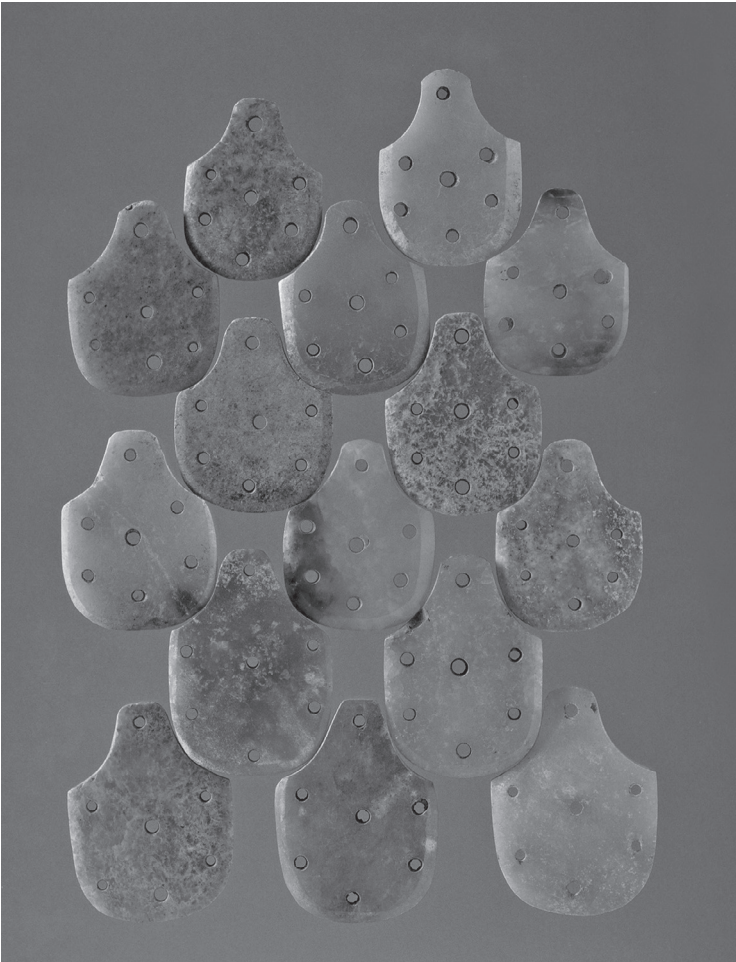


FIGURE 4.15 “Fish-scale” jade plaques pierced with seven holes excavated from the Beidongshan tomb, Xuzhou, Jiangsu province, Western Han, second century BCE. Courtesy of the Xuzhou Museum.

irregular shape, raising the question of how such plaques might originally have fit together.¹¹³

THREADING AND DRILLING METHODS

We also observe critical differences in the amount of gold thread used to sew the suits. One would expect that making suits with a higher quantity

of jade pieces would also entail expending more gold thread to stitch the pieces together. However, this was not always the case. For example, 2,580 grams of gold was used for the thread on the Dingxian suit.¹¹⁴ This is roughly 3.4 times more gold than was used for the Dayunshan suit, even though the Dayunshan suit, after restoration, contained considerably more plaques.¹¹⁵

Not only did the amount of thread differ, but there were considerable differences in the way the holes in the jade plaques were drilled. Luo Han's comparative research on the Nanyue and Shizishan suits has revealed that the Shizishan plaques were drilled using a single-face method: each hole was drilled from the back side of the plaque, ensuring that the hole would appear small and clean-cut on the front. The thread holes on the plaques from the Nan Yue suit, by comparison, were drilled from both sides because the plaques were thicker.¹¹⁶ They also used different drill bits: the Shizishan drill bits were tapered, whereas those used for Nanyue and Mancheng were tubular.¹¹⁷ If all the suits were made by the imperial house, we would generally expect that they would all be drilled the same way (and with similar bits). Because not all of the suits are contemporaneous, however, some differences may represent temporal developments or production in different imperial factories.

REPRESENTATION OF THE BODY

The final piece of evidence that at least some suits were locally manufactured is the variation observed in the way each suit represented the body. Although noses have been found on all full suits discovered to date, several full suits—namely, the examples from Huoshan 火山, Nanyue, Shenjushan, Dayunshan, and Xishan 僖山 tomb 1—did not explicitly represent the eyes.¹¹⁸ Those that did represent the eyes did so in different ways. Two suits—the Tianjin 天津 suit (figure 4.16) and the Mancheng suit of Dou Wan, Liu Sheng's wife—featured rectangular plaques broken in half to create eye slits. The Shizishan suit featured round jade plaques for eyes and a distinctive oval-shaped mouth formed from three plaques. In Liu Sheng's suit, artisans implied eyes by carving out a small half-round hole on the upper edge of two plaques on the face.

At times, suits produced in the same region show different features. For example, whereas the Shizishan suit featured round eyes and an oval mouth, the Huoshan suit, which was also produced in Chu during roughly



FIGURE 4.16 Jade face cover from the jade suit held in the Tianjin museum, Han dynasty. Courtesy of the Tianjin museum.

the same time period, featured no eyes or mouth. Since Huoshan was a silver-threaded suit that belonged to an aristocrat of the marquis rank, less articulation in the face may have been correlated with the relatively lower rank of the tomb occupant.

The jade suits also varied as to whether components such as ears, genitals, and nipples were included. The Shizishan suit had round plaque nipples, but no other bodily features. The Zhongshan suits—Liu Sheng's from Mancheng and the Dingxian suit—were the only suits with expressed genitals. Dou Wan's suit from Mancheng did not include genitals, but it did include ears, which were not found on her husband's suit. The only other suit with ears is the Tianjin Museum suit, which was recovered by the museum from abroad and lacks provenance.¹¹⁹

Some differences in the suits might be attributed to different artistic solutions to the problem of how to connect the various suit elements. The Dingxian suit, for example, features two large triangles on each shoulder. This represents the artisans' inelegant attempt to smooth out the connection

between the bodice and the arms.¹²⁰ The artisans similarly experimented with a different approach to the suit's head cover, making it rounded, resembling a ball.

Understanding Differences in Manufacture and Form

How do we understand the different manufacturing techniques that we observe in the suits? How do we explain the fact that some suits appear in partial form, whereas others appear in full? Wu Hung has previously proposed that jade suits were manufactured differently to suit patrons who desired to represent the transformation of the corpse into a “jade body” in different ways. In Wu's view, partial suits—where the deceased wore only a jade mask, jade gloves, and jade booties—were utilized when patrons desired to represent a jade body as being covered with fabric clothing. In these cases, their head, hands, and feet were covered with jade to enact—a “metonymic representation of a jade figure, in which the parts stand for the whole.”¹²¹

A second type of jade suit utilized by some patrons, he proposes, utilized jade to represent both clothing and the body. In these cases, the techniques used to link the plaques together differed between the pieces representing the body and those representing clothing. In the Nanyue suit, for example, only the head cover, the gloves, and the shoes were manufactured from plaques that were sewn together. The bodice and the pants of the suit, in contrast, were created with plaques that were tied together with thick ribbons and attached to a fabric backing.¹²² Wu interprets the different manufacturing technique applied to the clothing sections of the suit—the bodice and the pants—as evidence that the artisans wanted to distinguish the jade “clothing” from the jade feet, hands, and face.

Finally, a third type of suit, he argues, represented a jade body without clothing. All plaques were sewn together, and the suit featured elements like nipples and genitals that indicated that the entire suit represented a naked body. Liu Sheng's suit from Mancheng tomb 1 is an example of this type of suit.¹²³

Wu Hung is of course right that Han elites utilized different types of jade coverings. Nonetheless, the idea that some suits represented clothing while others did not, based on the method used to link the plaques together, remains difficult to understand. Instead, I suggest that the observed differences were due to contingencies faced by artisans after the death of a royal

family member, regional systems of rank, differing degrees of wealth, and varying modes of local expression.

As to different methods of linking the plaques together, Wu has proposed that jade plaques were tied together and glued to a fabric backing (rather than punctured and sewn) for the purpose of distinguishing “jade clothing” from the “jade body.” While this proposition is plausible in the case of the Nanyue suit, Dou Wan’s suit from Mancheng problematizes this theory, because the ribboned plaques in this suit were found only in the bodice area.¹²⁴ If Wu’s theory is correct, this would mean that Dou Wan was buried with a “naked” lower half.

A more probable explanation for plaques being ribboned together and attached to a fabric backing is that artisans resorted to this method when they ran out of time after the sudden death of their patron. Since the hands, feet, and head were the most elaborate compositions, requiring the cutting of specially shaped plaques, these portions of the suits may have been created first. When time ran out, it would have been easiest for artisans to ribbon together and glue roughly cut rectangular plaques to form the chest and back sections. This suggestion is supported by the fact that the ribboned plaques are universally irregular in size, thicker, and more coarsely finished than the sewn-together jade plaques.¹²⁵

As for the partial suits, although it is plausible that they were meant to imply a jade body under clothing, it is unlikely that someone would choose a partial suit over a full suit if they had the choice. To the contrary, evidence from Xuzhou indicates that in the Chu region, the form of the suit reflected the rank of the individual. According to research by Tian Zhimei, individuals buried with only a face cover—whether a Zhou-style jade-embellished face cover (such as those found at Zifangshan 子房山, Yaojiansuo 藥檢所, and Kuishan 奎山 tomb 9) or a stitched mask (such as those found at Tianqi 天齊 tomb 1, Sushantou 蘇山頭 tomb 2, and Houloushan 後樓山 tomb 1)—all generally had ranks below that of marquises.¹²⁶ Full suits and partial suits were reserved for kings and marquises of the Liu family. Gold-threaded suits were reserved for kings and queens, while silver-threaded suits were used by marquises.¹²⁷ However, such a rank-based scheme can only be proposed for the kingdom of Chu, a wealthy kingdom with an advanced jade workshop. In other Western Han kingdoms, even a king could be buried with just a jade mask. For example, in the Jibei 濟北 kingdom, a king buried at the Shuangrushan 雙乳山 site was interred with only a jade mask.¹²⁸

Given this array of evidence, I deduce that jade suits, like rock-cut tombs, were individual expressions uniquely designed for the mortuary needs of elites in the Han. Although they signaled status, and likely membership in the Liu house, they also allowed for the showcasing of local craft. As with other genres of craft, innovations by royal workshops may have sparked counterinnovation by imperial workshops. For example, several partial suits and jade suit fragments have been discovered that were carved or painted. A partial suit consisting of a jade head cover and jade shoes from Tuolongshan 拖龍山 tomb 1, for example, was discovered with cloud designs executed in red.¹²⁹ Roughly three hundred of the six hundred plaques excavated from Hanshan 韓山 tomb 1, which were also believed to have comprised a partial suit, were also painted in polychrome.¹³⁰ Carved plaques with cloud and floral motifs inlaid in gold have also been discovered at the Xingtai 邢台 tomb in Hebei.¹³¹ Similar motifs have been found on glass plaques excavated from the Ganquanshan 甘泉山 tomb in Yangzhou 揚州 and in museums and private collections.¹³² According to the later source *Diverse Notes on the Western Capital* (*Xijing zaji* 西京雜記), Emperor Wu (reigned 141–87 BCE) was buried in a “flood dragon jade suit” (*jiaolong yuxia* 蛟龍玉匣) engraved with patterns of dragons, phoenix, turtle, and deer.¹³³ If this account is accurate, the emperor may have commissioned a suit with this new design to distinguish his burial from earlier burials of kings and marquises around the empire. Later on, other elites followed suit and experimented with even more ornamental designs.

CONCLUSION

Past studies of jade suits have characterized them as a development in a continuous tradition of utilizing jade in burials, from the Neolithic to the Han, for the purpose of achieving immortality. This chapter, utilizing a materials-based approach, has taken an alternate position, demonstrating that jade suits were not a natural development in the Chinese burial tradition, but rather a form that became popular in a specific historical context due to the circumstances of the early empire. Jade suits mattered to elites in the Han for a variety of reasons. Certainly, as others have pointed out, jade suits’ purported ability to protect the body against decay seemed to grant those encased in such suits a superhuman type of power, though many in the Han were skeptical of this claim. Jade suits also capitalized on the fact that the moral meanings associated with jade effectively diverted attention

away from the material's identity as a luxury material. Jade also embodied the ideals of the age—the virtuous ruler whose legitimacy was based on his talents rather than on his pedigree. Finally, the rarity and the technical difficulty involved in producing jade suits made them attractive to the imperial house, which at that time was struggling to create a sumptuary system that might make the empire's hierarchies seem more natural and that would not be easily abridged by the empire's wealthy elites. The jade suit worked well in this context because only the highest of elites had control over the labor and materials required to fabricate a suit.

In addition to exploring the meanings of the jade suit, this chapter has also highlighted the ways jade suits, in their design and craftsmanship, underscored the strength of local workshops. The suit produced by the king of Chu for his tomb at Shizishan, for example, is the finest-quality jade suit known to date, featuring fine white jade cut into very thin, finely polished plaques. It is likely that not all of the suits found in the kingdoms were made by the kings; some may have been imperial bequests fashioned in the capital. But, as we have seen in other genres, those suits that were made in the kingdoms seemed to inspire counterinnovation on the part of the imperial court. Such competition among kings and between the kings and the imperial house led to the manufacture of a range of suits with individualized forms and varying qualities of jade, again confirming that the presence of the kings enhanced rather than hindered artistic creativity across the Han empire as a whole.