A Brief Discussion on Joint Burial in Mogou Cemetery of Qijia Culture

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I. Burial Practice and the Clumping Together of Human Skeletons

Among the burial practices evident at the site are primary interments, secondary interments and disturbed skeletons. We often think that the method of burial is clearly connected to certain religious beliefs or ideological factors. At the site of Mogou we see that the human remains in many of the burials have undergone different degrees of reorganization, but we can recognize secondary interments and those which have been disturbed in the process of clumping the bones together.

There are examples of burials that would typically be referred to as secondary interments among the Qijia Culture graves at Mogou. For example, grave M206 contains eight individuals in the left side chamber which include two adults and six juveniles. Other than the outermost skeleton – a juvenile primary burial placed closest to the grave shaft – the rest are all secondary burials. The bones of these skeletons are all arranged in a neat and orderly manner. This is particularly true of the two adult secondary burials which clearly first had their skulls placed in the chamber, followed by their upper limb and trunk bones, with the lower limb bones placed in last. These were placed in the chamber in more-or-less correct anatomical position, with the head oriented to the northwest, and a great degree of regularity. A similar situation is observed in a small number of other burials such as M84 (Figure 1), and we can be sure that these represent a rather fixed set of burial practices.

Those skeletons that have been disturbed can be separated into ones that were moved in an orderly fashion and those that were moved randomly. The former variety includes those cases in which the bones were moved relatively slightly from their original positions. Often this involves only the separation of the head from the rest of the body. One example is burial M240 in the left side chamber of which the remains of three individuals were found but only a single skull (Figure 2). In this tomb one skull was discovered in the grave shaft, and a second was found in a niche at the head end, and it seems likely that these two bones may be those missing from the left side chamber. In the head niche, underneath the skull that it contained, the excavators found a 4–5cm level of sediment that may relate to the moment when this bone was moved from its original position. Those examples where the bones were moved randomly include a much greater degree of disturbance resulting in a distribution of human remains that is generally disor-
moved involved skeletons that had been interred first whose bones had been moved to the extent that they formed a cluster. One example of complete clumping is the case of skeleton III in the inner part of the side chamber of Tomb M344. In this case the bones of the young skeleton VI were found above the femur of skeleton IV and were the result of the displacement of an entire skeleton, the purpose of which seems to have been to bury together the juvenile skeletons V and VII found in the outer part of the side chamber. Those cases that only involved the partial clumping of a skeleton's bones were cases where only parts of the skeletons of those first interred were disturbed later. The disturbance was done in order to create sufficient room for multiple

![Figure 1. Primary and Secondary Adult Burials in Tomb M84](image1)

![Figure 2. Disturbed Burial in Tomb M240](image2)

Burials with clumped human remains are the result of attempts to clear space for the interment of later skeletons, with the degree of clumping relating to the size of the chamber and the number of individuals interred. These situations can be preliminarily divided into two types: those where the entire skeleton was pushed together and those in which only a part was disturbed. Those cases where the entire skeleton was moved involved skeletons that had been interred first whose bones had been moved to the extent that they formed a cluster. One example of complete clumping is the case of skeleton III in the inner part of the side chamber of Tomb M344. In this case the bones of the young skeleton VI were found above the femur of skeleton IV and were the result of the displacement of an entire skeleton, the purpose of which seems to have been to bury together the juvenile skeletons V and VII found in the outer part of the side chamber. Those cases that only involved the partial clumping of a skeleton's bones were cases where only parts of the skeletons of those first interred were disturbed later. The disturbance was done in order to create sufficient room for multiple
burials. One example is Tomb M230 in which two adult skeletons both were partially pushed into clumps. In this case the lower limbs of the adult individual from the outer part of the chamber were pushed on top of the leg bones of the innermost individual, but the toe bones seemingly remained in their original positions. The toe bones that were thick and long, which were found isolated at the leg portion of the side chamber, were seemingly unrelated to the two younger individuals buried in the outer portion of the side chamber (Figure 4). Instead, these were the remains of an adult individual whose bones had been clustered together on the inside. These were all the results of efforts to bury later skeletons.

II. The Characteristics of the Process of Secondary Burial

The stratigraphic relationship among some of the burials at the Mogou Cemetery make it possible to clearly observe the reasons and procedures for creating multiple burials and to explain the characteristics of long-term multiple collective burials at the site.

1. Examples where the side chamber has collapsed and then the grave shaft was filled, such as M164, M303 and M344.

In the process of cleaning out the side chamber of grave M164 excavators discovered the remnants of collapse and fill about 80cm below the mouth of the grave. This material can be divided into four strata. The Stratum 1 was 18–36cm of yellow sediment with a certain number of chunks or laminated strata that vary in coloration. The Stratum 2, 7–20cm thick, was mixed yellow-grey sediment deposited on an incline with the higher side towards the grave shaft. This stratum was linked with the fill of the shaft and very similar in both color and texture to this fill. Stratum 3 was similar to the first and 10–46cm thick. Stratum 4 was 2cm thick of greenish-gray silt at the base of the side chamber (Figure 5). The chunks of earth in Stratum 3 lay on top of the silt in the fourth stratum and should be the result of repeated intermittent collapses of the roof of the side chamber. The similarity between Stratum 2 and the fill of the grave shaft indicates that this stratum was formed by the process of filling in the grave. Stratum 1 is the result of continued collapse of the roof of the side chamber af-
After the grave had already been filled in. In particular the relationship between Strata 2 and 3 indicates that it was only when the grave could no longer be used due to the collapse of the roof of the side chamber that it was finally filled in. The bones of the two individuals on the interior part of the side chamber in this grave were found in displaced positions and bunched together while no bones were found in the outermost 50cm of the chamber. This situation suggests that grave M164 was not filled in according to an original plan but instead that an open area had been left in the side chamber that was never able to be used because of the collapse of the roof.

It seems that the upper and lower side chambers in M303 were, for a time, used together. The sediment on the outer lower part of the upper side chamber was a deep grey in color whereas the sediment inside on the base of the chamber was yellow. The human remains were on top of this yellow layer. The dark grey earth on the outside of the upper chamber was likely formed after the collapse of this chamber once the human bones had been pushed together. Apparently this was caused after a crack formed in the bottom of the chamber and the bones were pushed away from the area of the crack. In the process of pushing the bones they were clumped together because the flesh had already deteriorated. Furthermore this demonstrates that when the upper chamber was being used the shaft still had not been filled in and it is possible that the crack in the floor of the upper chamber was created during the use of the lower chamber. Some of the pottery grave goods placed on the foot end of the upper chamber had also slid downward and this probably happened when the floor slumped toward the grave shaft. The lower side chamber is covered by the mixed soil that was on top of the dark grey sediment that caved in. This is to say that this grave was probably filled after the collapse of the lower part of the upper chamber when both the upper and lower side chambers could both no longer be used. Furthermore, the objects discovered within the dark grey earth in the lower chamber were probably originally placed in the upper side chamber.

2. Examples where the grave shaft was reopened, such as Tomb M260.

In M260, two different grave shafts were dug that were different from each other in terms of length and orientation. The shapes of the shafts were both rectangular with rounded corners. Reopening of the grave shaft was necessary because it became filled in. The latter of the two grave shafts was oriented somewhat more to the northeast, and the northwest side of the earlier shaft was withdrawn 24–40cm. The earlier shaft was longer but otherwise more or less in the same location as the later shaft. The fill in the grave was primarily grayish-yellow mixed sediment whereas the fill in the earlier shaft was yellowish-grey mixed soil that was somewhat harder. A deep-belly jar and a double handled jar were each found at the head end of the grave on the right side, with the latter being on the bottom. The base of the shaft was near the two layers of remnants of the side chamber sealing. The outermost of these remains of chamber sealing was relatively short. The head end was slanted into the channel for the chamber sealing, which was built into the fill within the earlier grave shaft and rather far from the mouth of the side chamber. On the foot end there is no visible trace of a notch for the chamber sealing. It is likely that it would have crossed over into the same groove as the inner chamber sealing. The inner chamber sealing is located in the earlier grave shaft attached to the entrance to the side chamber. In differ-
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ent places at the base of the grave shafts two groups of pottery grave goods were discovered. One group contained two objects and was located between the two remnants of sealing for the side chamber covered by the fill within the earlier grave shaft. The grave shaft involved two different areas which caused the creation of inner and outer sets of chamber sealing remains, but these relate to the same side chamber. The grave goods should have been deposited on two separate occasions. The pottery jars found in the upper portion of the outer grave shaft, in the niche on the head end of the grave, and at the base of the grave shaft between the inner and outer chamber sealing were objects placed during the earlier burial. Those objects found in the inner portions of the upper grave shaft fill and those at the bottom of the grave shaft in the middle were likely deposited during the second burial. Only those objects that were found within the side chamber are unable to be definitively assigned to the instance of burial when they were interred. The skeleton II was moved around whereas skeleton I was not. It is possible that skeleton II belonged to the person buried in the first instance of interment whereas skeleton I belonged to the person buried in the second instance. The time between the two burials was at least as long as it takes for flesh to decompose off the bones.

3. Grave shafts filled in stages, such as M206.

Grave M206 is relatively long (2.5m), 0.6–0.7m wide, and 1.94m deep. A shallow pit was dug at the base of the left wall of the grave shaft within which one adult female skeleton was placed in a flexed position with the head oriented to the southeast. Long stone slabs were placed at both ends of the base of the grave shaft, and the space was filled with yellow earth forming a second-tier.

The upper part of the grave shaft contained mixed grey and yellow sediment which is the most common fill in the grave shaft. This fill can more or less be separated into two levels with the top of the stones at both ends marking the division line. Below this is silt soil that is filled up to high levels on both ends and is low in the middle. This level is between 5–25cm thick, and at the foot end the stratum can be further divided into seven sub-strata (Figure 6).

The bases of the grave shaft and the side chamber on the right are level which indicates that the side chamber was constructed at the same time as the grave. The cranium and grave goods found within the shallow pit in the base of the grave are beneath the stone slab at the foot end of the grave. This demonstrates that the shallow pit was dug before the stone was placed in the base of the grave shaft. Based on analysis of the sediment and silt found at the base of the grave shaft, it seems that the grave was filled in within a distinct period of time, and the second-tier constructed using stones may have been used to support wood.

The use of the right side chamber went through at least three stages. The scattered bones and grave goods at the bottom should represent the earliest remains and include both adult and infant bones. Perhaps because the silt sediment was unsuitable for continued use, the bones were collected together, mixed with grayish-brown fill and reburied. Skeleton I found on top of this stratum is likely the remains of an individual originally buried on the floor of the side chamber. The arc of the ceiling of the side chamber has a clear inflection about 30cm from the floor of the chamber. This should reflect a reconstruction of the roof of the side chamber and the creation of a yellowish-grey level of tamped

Figure 6. Cutaway View of the Grave Shaft and Left Side Chamber of Tomb M206
earth immediately above the grayish-brown mixed sediment. The tops of the stone slabs placed on either end of the grave shaft were more or less level with the top of the tamped down yellowish-grey earth, above which human bones, cattle horns, deer antlers and grave goods were scattered.

The floor of the left side chamber is more or less level with the top of the stones placed on either end of the grave shaft which demonstrates that at the time it was constructed the grave had been filled up to this point. The times of construction of the left and right side chambers might not be the same; however they were probably not created too long before or after one another. In addition, the eight individuals placed in the left side chamber were mostly secondary burials, when considered together with the scattered human remains in the right side chamber, and the bones in the left chamber may have been from individuals originally placed in the right chamber.

III. Conclusions

The above discussion has made clear that it is possible to divide the burial process of these multiple burials into at least three types of circumstances. The first process involves graves in which the shaft is not filled before the completion of the multiple burial procedure and only when the side chamber caves in and the grave can no longer be used is it filled in. The second process is that the grave shaft is filled at once when the first burial is done and reopened whenever new burials are needed to be done. The third process is that the grave shaft is filled by stages, just like M206, the grave shaft of which was first separated by logs into two or more floors, the top of which are filled and the space below the floor is kept hollow, then the upper part is reopened and the space below the floor(s) is filled, and at last the portion of the grave shaft above the floor is filled. The evidences mentioned above clearly showed that the joint burials of Mogou Qijia Culture Cemetery are the results of multiple burials on multiple occasions just because of which the different burial positions occurred in the same grave.

The overall picture of the Mogou Qijia Culture Cemetery suggests that most multiple burials include adult males and females with children, and these may represent family tombs. Among the graves, those that involve multiple burials on multiple occasions often contained bones that had been clumped together in order to make room for the interment of later individuals. This suggests that the people who used these graves were not overly concerned about preserving the integrity of the earlier interments and further supports the hypothesis that these were family tombs. If true, this would further suggest that the people of that time ascribed particular importance to the family and bloodline and perhaps the place of the family in the social life of the community was particularly prominent. This reflects the development of a more complex society in the Qijia Culture represented by the Mogou Site.

Postscript: The original essay by Qian Yaopeng 钱耀鹏, Zhu Yunyun 朱芸芸, Mao Ruilin 毛瑞林, and Xie Yan 谢焱 was published in Wenwu 文物 (Cultural Relics) 2009.10: 62–9 with six illustrations. This abridged version is made by Zhu Yunyun and translated into English by Rowan Flad 傅罗文.