

The Successful Application of Liangzhu for World Heritage Status Reconstructs The Criteria for Determining Civilization and Its Limits

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Abstract

The inclusion of the Liangzhu Ancient City Site in the World Heritage List in 2019 poses a challenge to the traditional criteria for determining the "three elements" of civilization. This paper analyzes the academic significance of Liangzhu's successful application for World Heritage status, distills the core connotation of the "Liangzhu standard", and examines its demonstration effect on the reevaluation of sites such as Shangmao and Sanxingdui. The study found that Liangzhu's application for World Heritage status marks a shift in the determination of civilization from technical indicators to the ability of social organizations, but the new standard also faces the risk of insufficient conceptual generalization and universality. The conclusion suggests that the value of the "Liangzhu standard" does not lie in providing alternative criteria, but in initiating a multi-dimensional dialogue on the definition of civilization.

Keywords

World Heritage Application; Origins of Civilization; Early states; Liangzhu Ancient City; Project for Tracing the Origins of Chinese Civilization.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background and Question Presentation

The Liangzhu Ancient City Site was inscribed on the World Heritage List at the 43rd session of the World Heritage Committee in July 2019. The review comments of the World Heritage Committee noted: "The Liangzhu Ancient City Site shows the form of an early regional state that existed in the late Neolithic period in China, which was economically supported by rice farming and had social differentiation and a unified belief system, confirming the outstanding contribution of the Yangtze River Basin to the origin of Chinese civilization." [1]. The deep impact of this statement lies in the fact that Liangzhu had no metalware, no systematic writing system, and its international recognition was based on the grand ancient city and water conservancy system, systematic social stratification and ritual system construction.

This event raises a core question: Where is the rationality of the "three elements" criteria for determining civilization centered on writing, metallurgy, and cities? Is it universal? In what sense has Liangzhu's successful application for World Heritage status restructured the criteria for determining civilization? What does this reconfiguration mean for other East Asian sites that have long been under the framework of the "three elements"?

1.2. Literature Review

The academic community has gone through a long period of theoretical exploration regarding the criteria for determining the origin of civilization. Since the 20th century, represented by V. Gordon Childe's "urban revolution" theory, the Western academic community has formed a

"three-element" standard centered on writing, metallurgy, and cities. This standard, modeled after the civilizations of the Tigris-Euphrates River Basin and ancient Egypt, has long dominated the framework of the international academic community's understanding of civilizations. However, as archaeological discoveries continue to enrich, the universality of the "three elements" standard is increasingly being questioned. In "The Origin of Chinese Civilization", Xia Nai, a Chinese scholar, first systematically uses archaeological materials to explore the origin [2] of Chinese civilization. Su Bingqi's "starry sky" theory and "ancient culture, ancient city, ancient country" theory offer a new perspective[3] for understanding the diverse origins of Chinese civilization. Entering the 21st century, the Project for Tracing the Origins of Chinese Civilization has systematically carried out multi-disciplinary comprehensive research, explicitly stating that "based on Chinese materials and taking into account other ancient civilizations, a new criterion for judging the entry into a civilized society has been proposed." [1] Regarding the research on Liangzhu Culture, Liu Bin and Wang Ningyuan systematically reviewed the archaeological discoveries of the Liangzhu Ancient City, revealing its grand ancient city layout and peripheral water conservancy system[4,5]. Scholars such as Wu Ruzuo and Duan Yu have expounded on the spiritual belief system of the Liangzhu culture from the perspective of the formation of the ritual system [6,7]and the function of the jade cong. These studies have laid a solid foundation for understanding the cultural attributes of Liangzhu.

Recent archaeological discoveries at sites such as Shangmao and Sanxingdui have greatly enriched our understanding of the early civilizations in East Asia. Systematic excavations of the Shimaowan city site by scholars such as Sun Zhouyong have revealed its cultural attributes[8-10] as an early regional center in the north. Xu Danyang, CAI Yunzhang and other scholars' research on the Sanxingdui culture reveals its unique system [12,13]of sun god worship. However, these sites have long been excluded from the discussion of civilizations within the framework of the traditional "three elements", and their cultural attributes have not been fully recognized.

1.3. Research Methods and Framework

This paper employs a research approach that combines the analysis of archaeological materials with theoretical reflection. Starting from the archaeological basis of Liangzhu's successful application for World Heritage status, analyze the archaeological evidence on which it has gained international recognition. Then extract the theoretical content of the "Liangzhu standard", reveal the shift in the criteria for determining civilization, examine the demonstration effect of the "Liangzhu Standard" by taking Shangmao and Sanxingdui as cases, and finally reflect on the theoretical limits of the "Liangzhu Standard".

The text is divided into six parts. The first part is the introduction, the second part analyzes the archaeological basis of Liangzhu's successful application for World Heritage status, the third part refines the theoretical content of the Liangzhu standard, the fourth part examines the demonstration effect of the Liangzhu standard on Shangmao and Sanxingdui, the fifth part discusses the theoretical limits of the Liangzhu standard, and the sixth part is the conclusions and prospects.

2. The Archaeological Foundation for the Successful Application of Liangzhu for World Heritage Status

2.1. Archaeological discoveries of the ancient city and its water conservancy system

Liangzhu's successful application for World Heritage status was primarily due to the full revelation of its own archaeological materials. Since the discovery of Liangzhu in 2006, the Zhejiang Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology and other units have carried

out continuous and systematic archaeological work both inside and outside the ancient city, gradually clarifying the complete layout [4] of this early capital. Liangzhu Ancient City is located in Pingyao Town, Yuhang District, Hangzhou City, at the junction of the Tianmu Mountain range and the Hangzhou-Jiaxing-Huzhou Plain. The ancient city is a slightly rounded rectangle, about 1,910 meters long from north to south and 1,770 meters wide from east to west, with a total area of about 3 million square meters. The base of the city wall is generally paved with stones, and the upper part is built with layers of yellow clay. The wall is 20 to 145 meters wide, and some sections of the best-preserved northern city wall are still about 4 meters [4] high. In the center of the city is the site of the Mojiao Mountain Palace, which covers an area of about 300,000 square meters. On top of it are three small mounds: the Greater Mojiao Mountain, the Lesser Mojiao Mountain and the Turtle Mountain, forming a complex of buildings of the nature of a palace city. Both inside and outside the city, there are high-level cemeteries such as Fanshan and Yaoshan, which are of the rank of royal tombs. What is particularly notable is the water conservancy system on the outskirts of Liangzhu Ancient City. Since 2009, archaeologists have discovered a huge water conservancy project in the northwest of the ancient city, consisting of two groups of DAMS, the high dam and the low dam. The high dam system is located at the mouth of the northwest valley and includes DAMS such as Ganggongling, Laohulling, Zhoujiafan, Qiuwu, Shiwu, and Beimingong, with the top of the DAMS at an altitude of 30 to 40 meters; The low dam system is connected to the mountain through the Tangshan, Shizishan, Liyushan, Guanshan, Wutongnong and other dam bodies, with the top of the dam at an altitude of 10 to 20 meters. The entire dam system is about 5 kilometers long, and the reservoir area is equivalent to that of two West Lakes. Carbon-14 dating, the Ganggongling dam and other dam bodies are about 4,900 years old, belonging to the early [5] Liangzhu culture. Such a huge project would require labor from a vast area to work together. The estimated volume of earthwork for the construction of the city and the dam alone would amount to 36 million labor days. If 10,000 people were to work continuously for 10 years [1].

2.2. Multiple pieces of evidence of social complexity

The high complexity of the Liangzhu society is reflected not only in the super-large projects but also in the systematic social stratification and ritual system construction. Among the 11 tombs excavated from the Fanshan Cemetery, jade wares accounted for more than 90 percent of all burial objects. Among them, the "Cong King" unearthed from M12 weighed 6.5 kilograms, with the body densely covered with the face patterns of gods, humans and beasts, and four or five fine lines engraved within a one-millimeter width. The craftsmanship was as exquisite as micro-sculpture [14]. This set of jade ritual vessels, with the cong, bi and yue as the main body, marked the maturity of the ritual system. Wu Ruzuo pointed out that the jade wares in the Fanshan and Yaoshan cemeteries were all genuine jade, while in the Fuquanshan cemetery, "there were more genuine jade mixed with fake jade", and in the Heyedi cemetery, "there was about a mixture of genuine and fake jade". This difference in the grade of jade used directly corresponded to the stratification of social status. The six large red-burnt earth deposits discovered at the Mojiaoshan site, with diameters of about 20 meters and pot-shaped bottoms, are presumed to have been campfire sites for large-scale sacrificial activities, reflecting the close combination of theologian and royal power. It is these archaeological materials - 3 million square meters of ancient city, 13 million cubic meters of water conservancy system, and the face patterns of gods, humans and beasts reflecting the unified belief - that together form the technical support for Liangzhu's application for World Heritage status. The World Heritage Committee's recognition of Liangzhu as an "early regional state form" is based on these empirical materials.

3. The Theoretical Implications of The "Liangzhu Standard"

3.1. The shift from technical indicators to capability content

The success of Liangzhu's application for World Heritage status is not just a case victory for one site, but also a theoretical breakthrough in the underlying logic of civilization determination. Wang Wei and Zhao Hui, when summarizing the achievements of the "Project for Tracing the Origins of Chinese Civilization", clearly pointed out that the project "based on Chinese materials and taking into account other ancient civilizations, proposed a new criterion for judging the entry into a civilized society" [1]. The introduction of this new standard reflects a major shift in the criteria for determining civilization. The traditional "three elements" take metallurgy, writing, and cities as hard indicators for determining civilization, with the core assumption that the essence of civilization lies in the invention of certain technologies. The Liangzhu case, however, shows that what is more essential than technological invention is the ability of social organization. Whether it was the ramming of the ancient city wall, the piling up of the Mojiao Mountain high platform, or the 5-kilometer-long water conservancy system, all relied on the mobilization of a large number of laborers and the integration of resources across regions. The ability to organize itself is a core feature of the state form. One of the signs of entering a civilized society, as Project Origin summarizes, is "the emergence of significant population concentration and the formation of early cities" and "the formation of a pyramid-shaped social structure with Kings at the top of the pyramid, who hold military command, social management, and religious sacrificial powers." [1] These signs emphasize the form of social organization rather than a single technical indicator.

3.2. Conceptual Definition and Technical Framework

Based on archaeological materials from Liangzhu, some scholars have proposed an analytical framework that could be called the "Liangzhu Standard". The core of this framework lies in replacing a single technical indicator with the combined complexity of social organization and spiritual beliefs. Specifically, the framework includes the following core elements: first, the capacity of social organizations, that is, the ability to mobilize a large workforce and achieve cross-regional resource integration. The second is the spiritual belief system, that is, whether there is a unified belief system that transcends geographical boundaries. The third social stratification structure, that is, whether a pyramid-like social hierarchy is formed. The fourth ritual system and power, that is, whether there is a ritual system that indicates status and a centralized monarchy. On this basis, the Project further summarizes the key features for identifying entry into a civilized society: Prehistoric agriculture developed significantly, handicraft technology advanced significantly and was controlled by the privileged class, there was significant population concentration and early cities, there was a serious division of the rich and the poor in society, a pyramid social structure and monarchy were formed, blood ties and geographical ties were combined, violence and war became common phenomena, and regional political systems were formed under the rule of the monarchy [1]. This framework is no longer based on metallurgy and writing as necessary conditions, but on the complexity of social organization as the core indicator.

4. Test of the Demonstration Effect of the Liangzhu Standard

4.1. Repositioning of the Shimao Site

The Shimao site is located in Gaojiabu Town, Shenmu City, Shaanxi Province, on the north bank of the Tuwei River in the northern part of the Loess Plateau. Systematic archaeological work since 2011 has revealed that it is a grand stone-built city site consisting of three structures: the "Imperial City platform", the inner city and the outer city, covering an area of more than 4

million square meters. It is the largest known city site [8] from the Longshan period to the Xia Dynasty in China. But within the old framework, Shangmao has long been in an awkward state of "identity anxiety": it has no written system, no bronze wares in its early stages, and its stone-built walls are quite different from the traditional rammed earth of the Central Plains, and thus is often regarded as a "regional center" rather than a "civilization" on the northern frontier.

The proposal of the "Liangzhu Standard" provides a new analytical framework for the revaluation of Shangmao. The giant city site itself is direct evidence of the ability of social organization. The Imperial City Terrace of the Shimaowan Ruins is a high tableland with four bays of stone and retaining walls, with a top area of about 80,000 square meters and a bottom area of about 240,000 square meters. The gate site of the Imperial City Terrace is structurally complex, featuring a square, an outer barbican, north and south piers, a stone-paved ramp, an inner barbican, and a main gateway. It is highly defensive and private [9]. The east gate of the outer city is equipped with double barbicans, watchtowers, "gate schools", corner towers and other facilities, among which the discovery of "horse face" has brought forward the appearance of such defense facilities by two thousand [8] years compared to previous understanding. Such a huge project, which requires the mobilization of a large number of laborers and the integration of resources across regions, reflects a strong ability of social organization. Secondly, the more than 70 stone carvings unearthed from the southern retaining wall of Taida Taiji in the imperial city reveal a complex system of spiritual beliefs. The stone carvings employ a variety of techniques such as reduced relief, intaglio, and round carving, and the images include figures, animals, "divine beasts", symbols, etc. Among them, the No. 24 stone sculpture, with a central human face as the center, is symmetrically carved with a top-down animal pattern and a side-looking human head on the left and right, with a regular and rigorous [10] composition. The No. 47 is a flat-round column with relief of human faces on both sides of the top and body, presenting a continuous rotating pattern [10] of "Y" shapes and concentric circles. The patterns and expressions of these stone carvings are closely related to the tradition of stone carving since the Hongshan Culture, and may even have influenced the artistic conception [11] of the jade wares of the post-Shijiahe Culture, the turquoise "dragons" and "tigers" of the Erlitou Culture, and the bronze ritual vessels of the Shang and Zhou dynasties. The discovery of artifacts such as stone carvings, pottery eagles, divination bones and mouth gongs suggests that the imperial City platform was not only a political center but also a religious one. The hierarchical structure of the Shimaowan ruins itself embodies a "pyramid-like social structure". The Imperial city platform was the core, and the inner and outer cities surrounded it layer by layer. Outside the city, there were also ancillary facilities [8] such as the "sentry post" of Fanzhuangzi. This layout is similar to the structure of the Liangzhu Ancient City, which is centered on the Mojiao Mountain and surrounded by layers of inner and outer cities, both reflecting the spatial planning concept of the early state. The more than 40,000 artifacts unearthed from the abandoned pile on the upper part of the northern section of the eastern retaining wall of the imperial City Platform, including tens of thousands of high-quality items such as bone needles, bone molds, bronze wares, jade wares, and sea shells, indicate that the Imperial City platform was not only the residence of the nobility but also controlled the core handicraft production [11]. This is in perfect alignment with the origin project's conclusion that "high-end handicrafts were controlled by the privileged class" of civilization. Based on the above evidence, Shangmao was no longer "a type of Longshan culture" or "a central settlement on the northern frontier", but an early state in northern China around 2000 BC. The imperial city platform had the nature of an early "palace city" and should have been "the residence of the king" [11]. The discovery at Shimaou proves that beyond the middle reaches of the Yellow River, there is another path of civilization characterized by stone cities and with military defense and religious sacrifice as its dual core.

4.2. A Re-discussion on the cultural attributes of the Sanxingdui Ruins

The Sanxingdui Ruins are located in Guanghan City, Sichuan Province, and are the most representative site of the Bronze Age on the Chengdu Plain. Since the discovery of Pit 1 and Pit 2 in 1986, Sanxingdui has shocked the academic community with a large number of strangely shaped bronze wares: wide-eyed masks, bronze sacred trees, large standing figures, golden staffs, etc., all different from the bronze civilization of the Central Plains. However, within the framework of the "three elements", Sanxingdui has long been an "exception" that cannot be classified. It has highly developed bronze casting technology, but no mature writing system has been discovered. It has a vast city site and a complex sacrificial system, but cannot be framed by the standard template of "writing - metallurgy - city". As a result, Sanxingdui was either labeled as "mysterious" or interpreted as the product of "foreign culture", and its cultural attributes remained unclear. The proposal of the "Liangzhu standard" provides a new perspective for the repositioning of Sanxingdui. The essence of civilization is not the presence or absence of certain technologies, but the complexity of social organization and the systematicness of spiritual beliefs. Sanxingdui precisely provides clear evidence in these two aspects. The size and structure of the ancient city of Sanxingdui reflect a strong ability of social organization. The ancient city of Sanxingdui is composed of the big city, the small city of Moon Bay, the small city of Southwest, and the small city of Cangbao, with a total area of about 3.5 square kilometers [12]. The city walls were built on slopes, in line with the techniques of the Baodun Culture city walls, and some sections are well-preserved. The city is divided into different functional areas such as the palace area, the sacrificial area, the workshop area and the residential area. The planning and construction of such a large city would require strong political authority and mobilization capabilities. The group of artifacts unearthed from the Sanxingdui sacrificial pits reveals a highly systematic system of spiritual beliefs. Thousands of bronze, gold, jade and ivory wares were unearthed from Pits 1 and 2, among which the most representative was the belief system centered on "sun - divine bird - divine tree - divine man". The bronze divine tree, which is 3.9 meters tall, has three layers of branches, with three branches in each layer and a bird on each branch. It is believed to be a symbol of "Fusang" and "Wakamura" in mythological tales, reflecting the cosmology of the "Ten Days" myth. The large bronze standing figure, which is 2.62 meters tall, wears an arched crown on its head and holds its hands in a ring grip. It is believed to be the idol [13] of the sun god "Di Jun" or the ancestors of ancient Shu. The human head, bird, fish and feathered arrow pattern on the golden staff shows the waxing and waning of Yin and Yang as the sun rises and Yin fades, which is in line with the image of the hexagram "Ming rises above the earth" in the I Ching. This belief system centered on the worship of the sun, like the Liangzhu culture's belief system centered on the jade cong emblem and the Hongshan culture's belief system centered on the temple of the goddess, was a spiritual bond for the integration of civilizations in a specific region. The absorption and transformation of foreign cultures at Sanxingdui reflect the openness and creativity of civilization. The Sanxingdui culture is a complex [12] culture formed on the basis of the local Baodun culture by extensively absorbing elements of the surrounding cultures such as the Erlitou culture in the Central Plains and the Shijiahe culture in the middle reaches of the Yangtze River. Bronze vessels such as the zun, lei, and plate were clearly influenced by the shang culture of the central plains, but they were tall and slender, with elaborate patterns, forming a unique local style; Ritual vessels such as jade zhang, jade GUI and jade cong have both Central Plains forms and local variations; The golden scepter, the golden mask, the bronze sacred tree, and the wide-eyed mask are all native creations. This "fusion-transformation-innovation" model, which is in line with the logic of the Liangzhu culture of "integrating society by ritual system", proves that the formation of civilization is not a simple cultural dissemination but a creative transformation based on local traditions. In general, Sanxingdui is no longer an "incomprehensible outlier", but a model of "another logic of civilization". It demonstrates that

civilization can reach a highly complex political and spiritual organization without relying on writing, that theocracy and kingship can coexist and even that theocracy can take the leading position, and that the southwest region holds an irreplaceable position in the pattern of the pluralistic unity of Chinese civilization.

5. The Theoretical Limits of the Liangzhu Standard

5.1. The risk of conceptual generalization

The core contribution of the Liangzhu Standard lies in shifting the focus of civilization determination from technical indicators to social organizations and spiritual beliefs. But this shift itself poses a new question: Can all cultures that conform to this feature be recognized as civilizations? The eight new standards [1] proposed by the Project for Tracing Origins are undoubtedly closer to the reality of East Asian archaeological materials, but there is no more evidence to prove whether they are universal. Would applying this set of criteria to the Tigris-Euphrates river Basin or ancient Egypt lead to conclusions similar to the traditional three elements? Did these standards unintentionally set up barriers within a closed framework that prevented Chinese or East Asian civilizations from being compared with other civilizations?

Another related question is how to avoid overgeneralization of standards, which would cause the concept of "civilization" to lose its analytical power. If the definition of "civilization" is too broad, then any Neolithic settlement of a certain size can be labeled as "civilization". The Origin Project pushes the age limit of ancient states to 5,800 years ago and includes Liangzhu, Hongshan, Lingjiatan and others in the category [1] of "ancient state civilizations". While this expansion highlights the long history of Chinese civilization, it also brings the risk of conceptual generalization. If the line between "civilization" and "complex society" becomes blurred, how much analytical value does the concept of "civilization" itself have?

5.2. The issue of universality

The demonstration effect of the Liangzhu Standard enabled Shangmao and Sanxingdui to enter the realm of civilization. But when we integrate these sites into the narrative framework of "early East Asian civilizations", we cannot ignore the huge differences among them. The differences between Shangmao and Sanxingdui may be far greater than their commonalities. Take Shimaowan for example. Its civilization has a strong military character: the east gate of the outer city has double barbicans inside and outside, watchtowers, "horse faces", corner towers and other defense facilities, and many jade articles have been found in the crevices of the city wall, which is believed to be an attempt to use the "divine power" of jade articles to stop foreign invaders [8]. The square, the outer barbican and the inner barbican of the imperial city gate were fortified layer upon layer, and the access roads were highly [9] private. Outside the city, on the southeast side, there is a "sentry post" at Fan [8] zhuangzi. This layout of the city site, which was centered on military defense, was quite different from the Liangzhu civilization, which was centered on water conservancy projects and ritual architecture. The "civilization" of Shangmao was one that was deeply embedded in war and violence. The Sanxingdui civilization is characterized by a group of artifacts such as bronze sacred trees, large standing figures, wide-eyed masks, and golden staffs, demonstrating a belief system centered on the worship of the sun. The theocratic color of this belief system was so strong that it might even have surpassed the monarchy. Although the ancient city of Sanxingdui had a city wall, its defense facilities were far less developed than those of Shangmao. Although a large number of ritual vessels were unearthed, the combination of ritual vessels was quite different from that of the Central Plains. The "civilization" of Sanxingdui was dominated by theocracy and centered on the worship of the sun. The difference between the two forms of civilization is not a matter of the degree of development, but of the different paths of development. Measured by the "Liangzhu standard",

both remains conform to core indicators such as "complex social organization" and "systematic spiritual beliefs", but one cannot focus only on these commonalities and ignore the differences between them, otherwise it may fall into another kind of reductionism. The universality of the "Liangzhu standard" needs to be tested in the face of such diversity. A truly explanatory theory should be able to accommodate diversity at the same time, rather than forcing diversity into a single framework.

5.3. The differences between World Heritage Discourse and Academic Chinese

In the process of constructing the "Liangzhu standard", Liangzhu's successful application for World Heritage status was given special significance. However, the recognition of World Heritage and the academic determination of civilization belong to different discourse systems. The review logic of the World Heritage Committee is based on "outstanding universal value" as the core criterion. The criterion itself is deeply contradictory: Who exactly defines the so-called "universal value", and in the case of Liangzhu, the review opinion emphasizes that it "confirms the outstanding contribution of the Yangtze River Basin to the origin of Chinese civilization" [1]. This statement is both an academic judgment and has a distinct cultural and political tint. World Heritage recognition is an international political practice that involves multiple factors such as national image, cultural soft power, and international discourse power. Equating a successful application for World Heritage status with an academic conclusion is a dangerous tendency. The success of Liangzhu's application for World Heritage status does not mean that all disputes over the attributes of the Liangzhu civilization have been settled. Taking the "Liangzhu standard" as the standard does not mean that the study of the origin of the civilization can come to an end. What is more alarming is that a successful application for World Heritage status could in turn affect the independence of academic research. When a site is inscribed on the World Heritage List, it is no longer just an object of academic research, but an important part of a country's cultural strategy. This transformation poses two risks: one is that academic research may be directed towards serving the needs of heritage protection and application promotion, rather than purely academic exploration. The second is that critical study of the site could be suppressed, as any questioning could be interpreted as a denial of the national treasure. There is a candid self-reflection in the summary of the origin project: "Due to the fact that the research results of the project have not been systematically reported to the academic community and have not been widely and deeply publicized to the entire society, the main research result of the project - the recognition that 'more than five thousand years of Chinese civilization is historical truth' - has not been widely recognized by the historical community. To this day, a considerable number of historians insist that the society where the Liangzhu, Taosi and Shangmao sites were located was in the "tribal alliance" stage and that Chinese civilization began with the establishment [1] of the Xia Dynasty. This statement reflects the reality that academic consensus has not yet been formed, and reminds us that academic disputes are the norm and consensus needs to be tested by time.

6. Conclusions and Prospects

6.1. Main Conclusions

This paper, through a systematic analysis of the successful application of Liangzhu for World Heritage status, reveals its academic significance for the reconstruction of the criteria for determining civilization. The study found that Liangzhu's application for World Heritage status reflects the international academic community's re-examination of the criteria for determining civilization, forming an analytical framework that can be called the "Liangzhu standard". The core of this framework lies in replacing a single technical indicator with the combined complexity of social organization and spiritual beliefs. A study of the Shimaowan and Sanxingdui sites shows that the Liangzhu standard has a significant demonstration effect. The

Shimaowan site, with its 4 million square meters of stone-built city sites, complex defense facilities and exquisite stone carvings, showcases a civilization centered on military defense; The Sanxingdui Ruins show a theocratic civilization centered on sun worship with bronze sacred trees, large standing figures, golden scepters and other artifacts. The revaluation of the two confirms the analytical power of the "Liangzhu standard". However, the Liangzhu Standard also faces theoretical limits. The risk of conceptual generalization, the issue of universality, and the differences between the World Heritage discourse and the academic discourse all remind us to be critical. This paper argues that the greatest contribution of the "Liangzhu Standard" is not to provide a new set of criteria, but to initiate an ongoing dialogue on "what constitutes civilization".

6.2. Limitations of Research

The research of this paper has the following limitations. First, the analysis of the Liangzhu, Shangmao and Sanxingdui sites mainly relies on published archaeological reports, lacking direct examination of first-hand archaeological materials. Second, the theoretical refinement of the "Liangzhu standard" is still in the initial stage, and its conceptual connotation and analytical framework need to be further deepened. Ultimately, the discussion of the differences between the World Heritage discourse and the academic discourse is rather preliminary and fails to fully carry out the critical analysis.

6.3. Future Research directions

Future research could go further in the following directions: First, in-depth comparative studies of sites such as Liangzhu, Shangmao, and Sanxingdui to reveal the diversity of early civilizations in East Asia and their interrelationships. Second, promote dialogue between the Liangzhu Standard and other global frameworks for determining civilizations, and explore the cross-cultural universality of the determination of civilizations. Third, strengthen the critical study of the discourse on world heritage and define the complex relationship between academic judgment and heritage recognition. Fourth, keep an eye on the latest achievements of the Project to Trace the Origins of Chinese Civilization and keep updating our understanding of the origin of civilization.

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