

MASTER'S THESIS

Production of Circular Jades in Prehistoric Hong Kong

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Abstract

Profound and rapid socio-political changes in the late Neolithic and Bronze Ages in South China resulted in the early formation of complex societies. Several factors responsible for cultural evolution during this period merit further research. Geographic preconditions may have been a critical trigger for the rise of early social dynamics. However, technological choices and transformations and their interregional interactions across East and Southeast Asia matter when researching local developments in South China. Understudied prehistoric sites in Hong Kong and South China can serve as case studies for developing early complex societies and communication among the emergent powers in Bronze Age China.

Technology is commonly viewed as an essential aspect directly associated with production organizations, and its complexity is frequently used to determine the degree of production organization and societal sophistication. Based on the microwear preserved on the finished and semi-finished products and production tools of circular jades, this thesis introduces the tools and products related to the production of circular jades based on the excavated materials of Hong Kong, and speculates on or recovers jade production in prehistoric Hong Kong. According to preliminary research, in addition to handheld tools for scraping and drilling, producers in prehistoric Hong Kong areas may have used early drilling machinery, specifically tube drilling technology, which first appeared in the Neolithic period and may have been used in the production process of Hong Kong circular jades.

This thesis introduces circular jades excavated from prehistoric Hong Kong. Moreover, it discusses the distribution, raw material acquisition, and production techniques. It provides a historical overview of the origin and evolution of slit rings. Thereafter, this thesis conducts an in-depth research on the production of circular jades by combining data on circular jades and manufacturing tools excavated in Hong Kong, including two archaeological experiments, I participated in, concerning circular jade made using different manufacturing techniques and tools, as well as comparative studies of counterparts in East Asia. The thesis considers the investment of time and labor by the producers of jades with varying Mohs hardness.