

Hezhang Kele from the Perspective of Landscape Archaeology



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Abstract: As a rising archaeological research perspective, landscape archaeology emphasizes examining remains within a natural-social context, examining the political patterns, economic networks, and cultural concepts of specific groups through settlement forms, tomb layouts, resource utilization, and ritual spaces. It is human-centered, focusing on the interdependence and mutual legacy between people and the environment, and between people and objects, exploring how humans build settlements, plan cemeteries, and extract resources in specific spaces, thereby endowing landscapes with power, beliefs, and symbols of identity in cultural terms. This paper focuses on the Hezhang Kele site in Guizhou, applying the perspective and analytical model of landscape archaeology, starting from the site and adopting a path combining a "central perspective" and "internal-external interaction": on one hand, it analyzes the long-term interaction between the Kele site and natural environments such as mountain valleys, revealing its site selection logic, livelihood patterns, and social organizational structure, and uncovering the local connotations and traditions of Kele culture; On the other hand, the site is placed within the process of Central Plains dynasties expanding into the southwestern frontier since the Qin and Han dynasties, examining the collision, borrowing, and integration of Han culture and southwestern minority cultures during the "integration" process, as well as the political, economic, and cultural exchanges between the frontier and the Central Plains, and further exploring the historical mechanisms by which the southwestern frontier gradually integrated into the multi-cultural unity pattern of Chinese culture.

Keywords: Hezhang Kele; Landscape Archaeology; Archaeological Sites

DOI: [10.57237/j.ssr.2026.05.002](https://doi.org/10.57237/j.ssr.2026.05.002)

1. Introduction

The Hezhang Kele site cluster centers around the Hezhang Kele site and includes the Zujia Laobao, Shunshan, Zhongzhai, Yuantian, Guanshan, Shuiying, Guoluobao cemetery groups, as well as surrounding sites such as the Grain Management Office [1], Liaojiaping [2], Sanjiazhai Kiln [3] Site, Fuchu Tomb Group [4], Dashan Ancient Copper Smelting [5] Site, and Liujiagou [6] Site. Previous research has mostly focused on the cultural appearance, distribution, and development of the Kele region, as well as the periodization and classification of specific tombs and sites and chronological studies, or the analysis of the ages

of individual tombs and excavated artifacts. This article starts from the Hezhang Kele itself and uses the perspective of landscape archaeology to explore the Hezhang Kele. A landscape is "the whole geographical environment where a person interacts with their central environment and with the people they live in." It [7] is a domain of settlement resources, not just between humans and nature, but also a reflection of social resources and cultural systems. The Kele site is a representative site where Han culture entered the southwest and border ethnic groups integrated into the core

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region of the Central Plains. Analyzing the site from a landscape archaeology perspective and observing the interaction between natural and cultural landscapes allows us to

explore its spatial layout, social functions, ecological adaptation, and cultural symbolism.

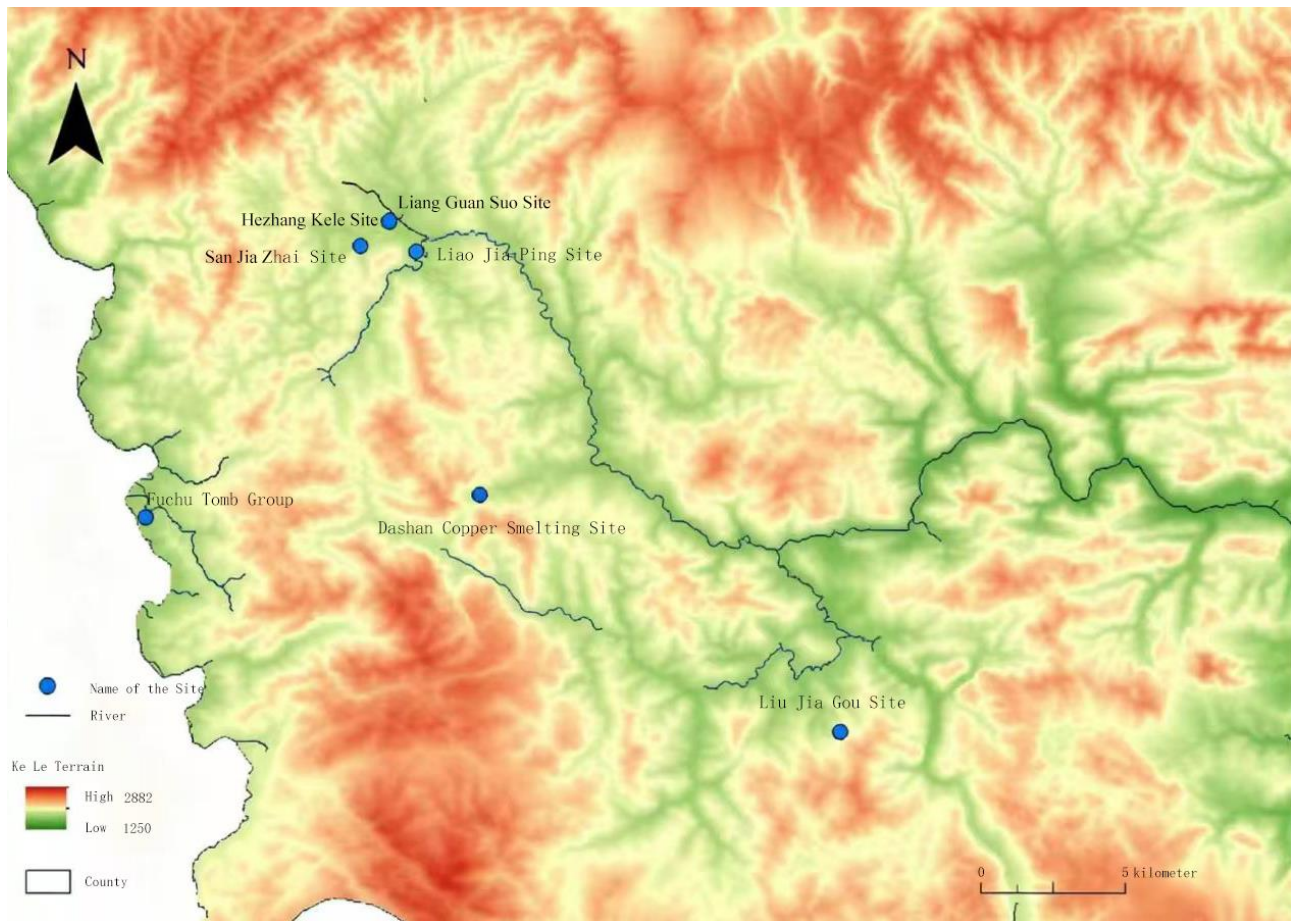


Figure 1 Topographic map of the Hezhang Kele site group

2. Natural Landscapes and Settlement Site Selection

The Hele County Kele Site is administratively under Kele Yi and Miao Ethnic Township, Hezhang County, Bijie City, Guizhou Province, located in the western part of Hezhang County. Geographically, the Kele site is located in a mountain bazai on the eastern foothills of Wumeng Mountain in northwestern Guizhou. It is a mountain terrace transitioning from the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau to the central Qianzhou mountains. The Kele River flowing from the southwest and the Mashui River flowing from the northwest converge in the western part of the dam, ultimately flowing into the main river Liuchong River within

Hezhang County [8]. The confluence of rivers provides fertile soil, convenient water sources, and communication channels, supporting agricultural irrigation, the development of the smelting and casting industry, and daily life needs. The river has become an important channel for communication with the outside world. Its geographical environment with mountains and water gives the site natural defensive capabilities, making it a natural choice for ancient border residents in the complex environment.

In terms of climate, the Hezhang Kele site dates mainly to the mid to late Western Han dynasty. According to previous scholars, the eastern Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau had a warmer climate than today, and the Dianchi area was home to parrots, peacocks, and other tropical and subtropical animals[9]. "It was rich in parrots, peacocks, salt ponds, fields, fishing, and gold, silver, and livestock." "[10] Hezhang Kele is located in the central-southwestern part of Guizhou,

near the eastern Yunnan region, and its average temperature is not much different from that of eastern Yunnan. At the same time, analysis of plant pollen test results shows that the climate features no severe cold in winter, no extreme heat in summer, [11] warm and humid climate, proximity to the Indian Ocean, abundant moisture, abundant precipitation, and ample rainfall, all of which are beneficial for agricultural development.

The Hezhang area is rich in resources, especially metals such as copper, iron, lead, and zinc. The ancient Dashan copper smelting site discovered at the southern end of the Kele site is located in Dashan Village, Kele Township. Copper slag from the smelting remains inside the kiln, with copper rust on top. This copper mine dates from the Warring States to the Qin-Han periods and is within the Kele site group. At the same time, copper smelting kiln sites were also found in the Fuchu tomb group. The large number of bronzes found at the Kele site are intrinsically connected to Dashan copper smelting, indicating that as early as the Warring States period, the ancestors of Kele had already mastered copper mining and smelting methods.

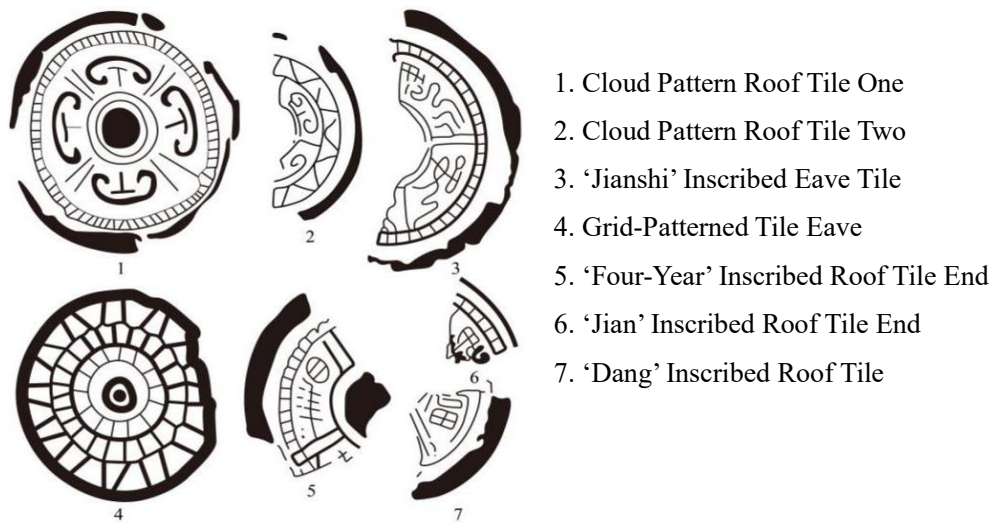
The Kele area's flat terrain, warm and humid climate, convenient water and transportation resources, and abundant copper and iron resources have created the natural conditions for the formation of large settlements, creating favorable conditions for population concentration and agricultural development. After Emperor Wu of Han opened up the southwestern barbarians, a large Han population gathered here. Hezhang Kele became an important city controlled by the Han dynasty in the southwest, serving as a key route for material and cultural exchange between Han and the southwest.

3. Cultural Landscapes and Social Structure

After archaeological discoveries, the Hezhang Kele site centers on a group of burials (Kele Tomb Group and Fuchu Tomb Group), surrounded by residential sites (Grain Management Office, Liaojiaping, Liujiagou Site) and kiln sites (Dashan Copper Smelting Site), forming a complete social settlement structure including residential areas, burial areas, and handicraft workshop areas. The Grain Management

Office site and the Liaojiaping site are both near the Kele Riverbank and adjacent to the Kele site. Based on research on the remains and artifacts at the Liaojiaping site, it is determined to be a residential site, dating back to the Han dynasty. These two sites are closely linked to the ownership and origin of the burial site in Cole.

Residential sites are one of the fundamental units for studying settlement models. The indigenous peoples of the Kele region and the Han Chinese are clearly divided in their exchange and integration. The area near the Kele site is likely a Han Chinese settlement, with clear spatial divisions between Class A and Class B tombs: Class A Han tombs are mainly concentrated on the north bank of the Kele River, while Class B tombs are mainly concentrated on the south bank. At the Hezhang Kele Grain Management Office site, inscribed tile ends, cloud pattern, and grid pattern tile ends were found. The inscribed tile ends are: 'Jianshi' inscribed tile ends, 'Jian' inscribed tile ends, 'Fourth Year' inscribed tile ends, and 'Dang' inscribed tile ends. Pottery, bronze, ironware, and architectural bricks and tiles were also found [12]. The discovery of roof tiles and building bricks indicates that the Hezhang Kele Grain Management Office site contains large-scale architectural remains, and the inscription on roof tiles indicates that the building is of a high grade. According to previous research [13], the inscription tiles at the Grain Management Office site roughly date from Emperor Cheng of the Western Han to the beginning of Wang Mang's Xin dynasty. The site of the grain management office is believed to have been the seat of Hanyang County during the Western Han dynasty, where Han Chinese who entered Guizhou along the Zangke River gathered. From the map, the Liujiagou site is quite different from the Kele site. Moreover, the tomb's form and artifacts differ greatly from the Class A tombs of Kele, while the similarity is to the Type B tombs, suggesting it is the local ethnic settlement area of Kele. However, the site is smaller in scale and contains few artifacts, suggesting that Han Chinese continued to move south and west, gradually encroaching into local ethnic areas and occupying the original ethnic settlements. From this perspective, during the process of "from barbarians to Han and then back to barbarians" in the southwest, the Han dynasty entered the southwestern barbarian region, and Han culture held a strong position.



Volumes 1~7 are taken from 'Western Han Dynasty Date Inscription Wadang Unearthed from Hezhang Kele, Guizhou'

Figure 2 Rubbing of tile tiles from the Hezhang Kele Grain Management Office site

Tombs provide excellent archaeological data for understanding ancient social interaction patterns. During the introduction of Han culture into the southwest, indigenous cultures themselves also underwent mutations. Social class divisions gradually became clearer, and class differentiation became apparent. This can be seen from the differences in the types and quantities of burial goods in tombs. "Jacket burial," as a unique burial custom among the local ethnic groups of the Kele region, is not common for everyone. According to materials published twice, a total of 276 Class B tombs were excavated, of which only 25 used 'cover burials [14].' The burial goods in the head burial are quite abundant, including bronze-handled iron swords, jade ornaments, large quantities of bronze ware, lacquered woodwork, and gold and silver ornaments. Moreover, head burials are often buried at higher elevations, symbolizing the tomb owner's "high position" and noble status. For example, in M274, there are over 93 burial items. The covered bronze cauldron is exquisitely cast with meticulous craftsmanship, and the shoulders of the cauldron are adorned with a pair of majestic standing tigers, indicating the tomb owner's prominent status within the tribe. The warrior class within the tribe generally buried sets of halberds, swords, and bronze ornaments, with a small total number of burials; In most tribes, burial goods are rare, or very few items are buried, such as a piece of pottery or personal belongings.

Tombs not only reflect social hierarchy; behind different

burial customs lie the types of rituals in different regions and how different rituals are used to absorb patterns used to construct identity. Just as "head burial" itself is an external manifestation of the special burial customs of tribal groups in terms of material culture, it indicates a cultural distinction from the Han and other ethnic groups. "Ritual refers to a performance activity with a fixed venue, specific time, and equipment. These performances can strengthen community cohesion through standardized behaviors and procedural sequences of cultural responses, while also involving the expression of faith and religious divinity." [15] The construction of ritual spaces requires a series of external material activities and material relics to emerge. Besides the cap burial, other unique burial customs were found in Class B cemeteries, including placing a copper basin under the deceased's head, a copper basin covering the face, and a bronze dagger-axe slanted at the bottom of the tomb beside the head; The unique style of burial goods also reflects the characteristics of the local ethnic groups in Kele. For example, the bronze ge with intricate human patterns shifted from realistic to exaggerated, with the rear end of the ge yuan gradually hollowing out, and the copper ge gradually losing its practical use, turning into a tool for religious ceremonies and ceremonies. Regular religious activities were present in daily life, reflecting the tribe's strong primitive religious rituals. A large number of carefully polished jade artifacts reflect the tribe's widespread pursuit of beauty in daily life.

During its Sinicization process, Hezhang Kele never ceased to communicate with the outside world, and the Kele site is a tangible evidence of the fusion of civilizations in the southwest. In terms of tomb form, the Hezhang Kele Class A tomb is very similar to the Han tombs found in southern Western Han regions, especially in the southwest, where Han-style pit tombs and brick chamber tombs generally have no passages or are relatively short, such as the Han tombs in Changsha [16] and the local Qingzhen Pingba tombs in Guizhou [17]. The rectangular pit vertical pit tombs found in the Qingzhen and Pingba areas are generally 2.5-4.5 meters long and 2-3 meters wide. The Hezhang Kele tombs of similar type are basically identical in form to those excavated in Qingzhen and Pingba areas of Guizhou in the 1950s, and the unearthed artifacts are also largely similar, all exhibiting many Han-style burial styles. Pottery jars, pots, steamers, basins, and bowls among pottery are common in Han tombs, and bronze swords and knives clearly show cultural influences from other regions of the same period. For example, the open-work plaque-shaped stem-head bronze sword has a distinct Bashu-style sword style. The Kele region, as a strategic site for "Emperor Wu's expansion of the southwestern tribes," was the meeting point of Yelang and the Han Empire, serving as a hub for material exchanges and a frontier for cultural interaction.

4. Economic Forms and Ecological Interaction

Landscape archaeology emphasizes the dynamic relationship between human livelihoods and ecosystems, that is, the population of settlements relative to. Based on artifacts unearthed at the Kele site, a considerable number of practical pottery and model tools indicate that the people of Kele had a rich daily life and advanced agricultural standards at that time.

A large number of pottery, copper and ironware, lacquerware, and gold and silver artifacts were unearthed at Hezhang Cole. The burial goods in Class A tombs mainly consist of pottery, bronze ware, and iron items. Over three hundred pottery pieces were excavated in two rounds, divided into practical and model types. Practical utensils mainly include daily necessities, including pottery jars, pots, pots, steamers, basins, bowls, and bowls; Ceramic model vessels mainly serve agricultural models, including pottery wells, pottery ponds and paddy fields, pottery

houses, and pottery chickens. Over 300 bronze artifacts were discovered in two rounds, divided into practical and model types. Practical bronze vessels include bronze tripods, pots, fang, cauldrons, iron pots, he, zeng, incense burner lids, bowls, and more; Weapons include bronze spears, arrowheads, caltrops, carves, uptrops, scabbard tails, and sword guards; Model bronze artifacts mainly consist of chariot and horse accessories, including axles, axles, carriage ornaments, money trees, and copper coins. There were more than 130 pieces of iron ware, divided into three categories: production tools, weapons, and daily utensils. Production tools include shovels, shovels, axes, axes, axes, chisels, etc.; Weapons include knives, swords, spears, arrowheads, cauldrons, and stirrups; Household utensils also include tripods, kettles, and jin. Some lacquerware and gold and silver artifacts were also found in the top-class tombs. In addition to the above items, Class B tombs also include a small number of jade artifacts.

The 1978 report [18] shows that the M15 reservoir paddy fields in the Kele area already had mature rice farming at that time. The model consists of half of the ponds and half of the paddy fields, with three snails in the pond, divided into four sections, each with one snail, highlighting the Kele region's unique agricultural water conservancy environment and developed agricultural production; M24 and M26 each feature two ceramic house models, divided into upper and lower levels, with four round columns at the base. A horizontal beam is erected between the two columns to support the upper houses. The upper houses have flat-bottomed hard gable roofs, with front corridors and rear houses, forming a rod-railed house [19] model, reflecting the indigenous people's adaptation to the unique natural living style. The abundance of wooden bone tools indicates the coexistence of agriculture and hunting and animal husbandry in the Kele population, reflecting their diversified use of mountain and water environments. From the unearthed artifacts, numerous practical and model pottery pieces indicate that the Kele region during the Han dynasty had rich daily life and agricultural activities.

Copper and iron ware not only reflect the local copper mines and considerable smelting technology, but also the level of productivity development and the specialization of handicrafts in the Kele region during the Han dynasty. Bronze and iron artifacts from the Kele Cemetery show clear traces of the lost-wax and mold-building methods. Testing and analysis revealed that a large proportion of Class B tombs consisted of cast iron and decarbonized steel,

along with decarbonized cast iron and ductile cast iron, indicating that the tribe had mastered relatively mature smelting and manufacturing techniques for copper and ironware. The abundance of bone horns, jade tools, and lacquered wood artifacts also indicates that the area has specialized handicraft processing facilities and mature processing techniques. The discovery of large kiln sites at the Dashan copper smelting site and the kiln sites in the auxiliary cemetery further confirm the origin of copper and iron burials at the Kele cemetery, supporting the established tribal settlements in the Kele area with a mature handicraft system.

Kele is located at a key junction on the 'Southern Barbarians Road,' connecting Bashu, Dianchi, and Lingnan. Agate ornaments, malachite strings, and shell ornaments have been found in tombs, and foreign items such as sea shells and amber have been unearthed, further confirming its status as a regional trade hub. Natural pathways and artificial roads together form a transportation network, shaping Kele's economic and geographic landscape.

5. Cultural Memory and Landscape Symbolism

Landscape archaeology is not only about material spatial analysis but also serves as a carrier of cultural symbolism. Among the 39 Class A tombs published in the 1978 report, twenty-two tombs face $10^{\circ}\sim 85^{\circ}$, six are $135^{\circ}\sim 175^{\circ}$, eleven are $280^{\circ}\sim 357^{\circ}$, mostly northeast-southwest and northwest-southeast. Among 168 Class B tombs, 141 are at $0^{\circ}\sim 115^{\circ}$, and twenty-seven are $270^{\circ}\sim 360^{\circ}$. From this perspective, most Kele tombs face north or east, and the overhead burials are also mostly north-facing. The copper cauldron used for the overhead may symbolize "reaching the heavens," and the orientation may have communicated with the gods and the imagery of communication between heaven and earth. At the same time, the concentrated distribution of tombs serves as spatial anchors for ethnic identity and resting places for tribal ancestors, filled with ancestor worship and primitive religious meaning.

After Emperor Wu opened up the southwestern barbarians and opened the southwest route, the Han dynasty often established commanderies and counties in the southwest. The Kele area was likely the seat of Hanyang County in Han Jianwei Commandery, as well as the seat of the southern Jianwei commandant. It was an important political, economic, and cultural center for the Han dynasty's deep penetration into the southwest, as well as a key military unit

to control and intimidate surrounding ethnic minorities. With the establishment of commanderies and counties, a large number of Han Chinese from the Central Plains migrated here. Han-style architecture, customs, and burial customs (Han tombs) flourished throughout the southwest, marking the transformation of cultural landscapes by political power. Original border minority groups were gradually "assimilated" by Han ethnic groups.

5. Conclusion

Traditionally, the Hezhang Kele Cemetery is not a political, economic, or cultural center. In the interaction between the Central Plains and the frontier regions, it has always been seen from a 'marginal' perspective. In fact, it serves as a central point connecting the Central Plains and linking Bashu. This community is rich in resources, features unique terrain and landforms, and excellent water conservancy conditions. It holds a unique political 'center' status, economic development model, and cultural interaction process. Landscapes create people, and at the same time, are created by people; humans are always progressing through constant entanglement with 'things.' From the perspective of landscape archaeology, Hezhang Kele is no longer just an isolated tomb or artifact combination, but a dynamic system where natural and cultural elements intertwine. Its spatial layout, resource utilization, and cultural expression profoundly reflect the adaptation strategies, hierarchical order, and interaction between the southwestern ethnic minority societies in complex mountainous environments and Han culture.

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