

# Ancient Tombs

## TO THE TEACHER

**OBJECTIVES OF THE UNIT:** To introduce students to archaeological finds as an historical source. To encourage students to think about the connections between burial practices, forms of social organization, and beliefs about the afterlife. To present students with visual evidence of the great changes in China between 2000 and 100 BCE.

**TEACHING STRATEGIES:** It might be best to start with an individual tomb and ask the students to look at the objects in it. What do they reveal about the aesthetics and technology of the period? To encourage students to speculate about possible functions of the objects or the meaning of decoration added to them, the teacher can tell them that even specialists frequently propose very different theories. To encourage students to think about change over time, they can be asked to compare the five tombs.

To make this material more challenging, the teacher could introduce issues relating to twentieth century archaeology, ranging from Chinese concerns to show that China developed independently of the rest of Eurasia, to the political favor archaeology has enjoyed because it fits well with Marxist materialist theories of history. Students could discuss whether archaeologists should devote their time to the most splendid tombs, showing the finest art and technology, to more representative tombs, or to sites of cities, kilns, and other evidence of economic life.

**WHEN TO TEACH:** This unit is designed for a chronologically-organized course. For courses that devote a week or more to the ancient period, using all five tombs offers a good way to reinforce recognition of the enormous changes that occurred in China during those centuries. When less time is available, it might make more sense to select one tomb to use in class. The tomb of Fu Hao, for instance, could be used to supplement discussion of the Shang dynasty without using the other tombs.



ca. 2300 BC

Neolithic tomb at Dawenkou



ca. 1200 BC

Shang tomb of Fu Hao



ca. 1000 BC

Western Zhou tomb of the Count of Yu

In China, as elsewhere, the earlier the period the more important archaeological evidence is to our understanding of what life was like. For periods before writing, surviving artifacts offer a crucial corrective to legend and myth. Moreover, even after writing was invented, for many centuries the types of texts that survive are very limited, so that there is still a great deal to learn from artifacts. Scientifically excavated objects can be placed more accurately in time and place than early texts, which often went through a process of accretion over time, with many passages added later.

Thousands of early archaeological sites have been excavated in China, most of them graves. Learning from this archaeological evidence is at least as difficult as learning from texts. The objects are silent--we must ask questions of them before they can tell us anything.

This unit contains summaries of five archaeological sites, ranging in date from about 2300 BC to 100 BC. The tombs selected for examination were all advanced for their time. Their occupants were members of the ruling class of the period, able to afford the highest standard of material comfort, technical excellence, and artistic embellishment then available.

Think about the following issues as you examine each tomb:

- What can you learn about the occupant of the grave from the goods buried with him or her?
- Why do you think certain types of objects were selected to be put in graves? How does this change or stay the same from tomb to tomb?
- What can you infer from these graves about attitudes toward death and the afterlife? How do these attitudes change over time?
- How do the objects in these five tombs reveal changes in stylistic preference? How about media and technique?
- Do you see evidence of technological advances in either the construction or the contents of the tombs?

- **What are some of the advantages and some of the limitations of what you can learn from the archaeological evidence presented in these five sites?**

**[Click to see a map showing the locations of these five tombs \(given below in Teacher's Guide\)](#)**

**Suggested Reading**



**433 BC**

**[Eastern Zhou tomb of the Marquis Yi](#)**



**113 BC**

**[Han tomb of Liu Sheng](#)**



Sites of the five tombs



# Neolithic Tomb at Dawenkou

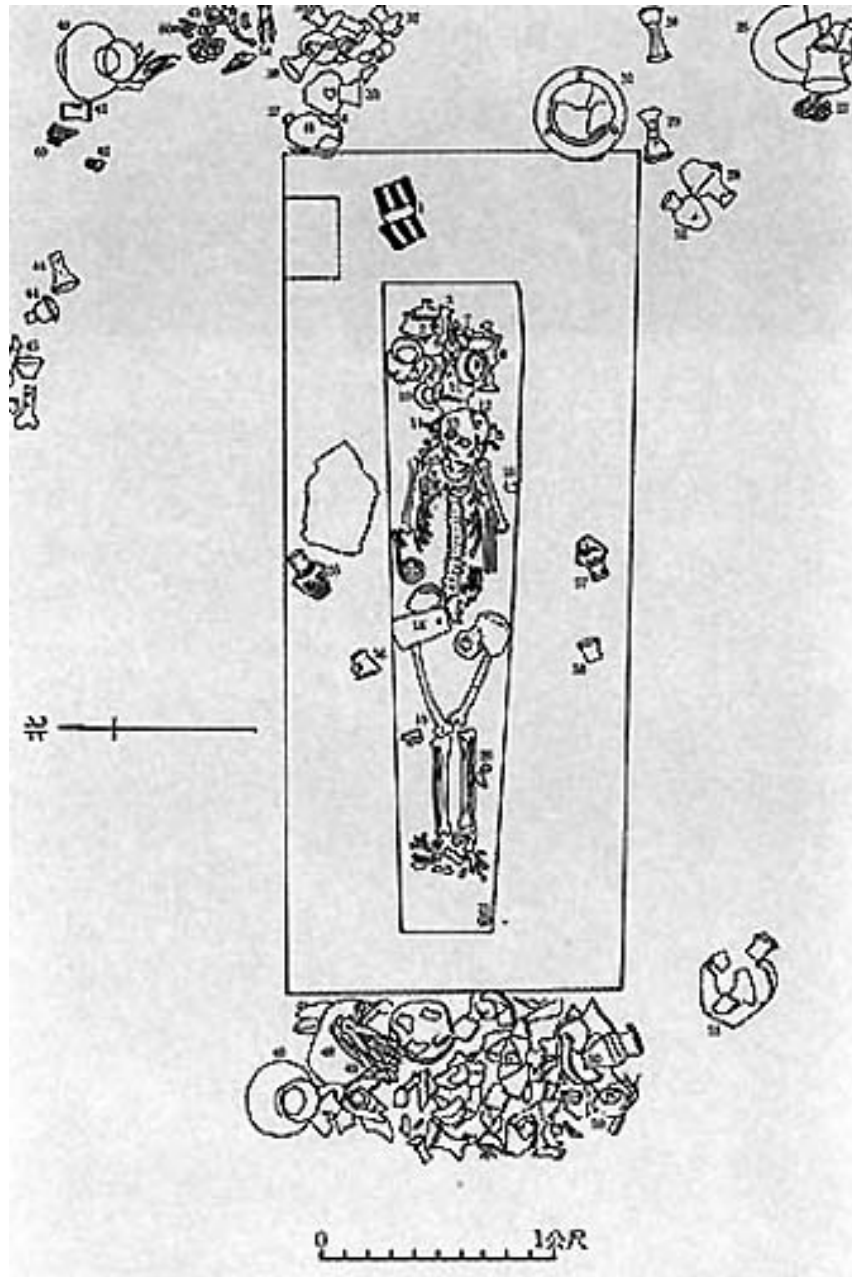


Diagram of Tomb 10 at Dawenkou

SOURCE: *Zhonguo zhongda kaogu faxian* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1990), p. 53.

The first tomb we examine dates to the Neolithic period, which began in China about 10,000 BC. As in other parts of the world, the Neolithic period was marked by the development of agriculture, including both the cultivation of plants and the domestication of livestock, as well as the development of pottery and textiles. Permanent settlements became possible, paving the way for more complex societies.

Traditionally it was believed that Chinese civilization arose in the Yellow River valley and spread out from this center. Recent archaeological discoveries, however, reveal a far more complex picture of Neolithic China, with a number of distinct and independent cultures in various regions interacting with and influencing each other. The best known of these is the Yangshao culture (5000-3000 BC) of the middle Yellow River valley, known for its painted pottery, and the later Longshan culture (2500-2000 BC) of the east, distinguished for its black pottery. Other major Neolithic cultures were the Hongshan culture in northeastern China, the Liangzhu culture in the lower Yangzi River delta, and the Shijiahe culture in the middle Yangzi River basin, among many others.

The Dawenkou culture (4300-2500 BC) based in present-day Shandong province ([review map](#)) overlapped in time with Yangshao culture, and can be considered one of the precursors of the Longshan. Over 100 tombs have been excavated at Dawenkou. The tombs have many features in common; all are rectangular pit-graves, most are oriented with the dead persons' heads toward the east, and most of the bodies had deer teeth in their hands. Some tombs had one or two items in them, but most tombs had ten or twenty items.

Tomb 10 was for a woman about 50 to 55 years old and 1.6 m tall. The tomb pit was 4.2 m in length, 3.2 m in width, and 0.36 m in depth. Inside the pit was a wooden chamber which contained the coffin. The woman wore a stone necklace, a jade ring, and a stone jewel on her chest. An ivory comb was by her head, a jade ax by her right thigh, a bone tube by her right knee, and a stone hammer near her left shoulder. Most of the burial items were placed on a second-level ledge outside the burial chamber.

Altogether tomb 10 contained:

- 94 pottery containers and lids
- 3 jade objects
- 7 stone objects
- 6 ivory objects
- 1 bone tube
- 2 deer teeth
- 2 pig heads
- 15 pig bones
- 84 alligator bones

Look at the diagram of the tomb above and consider the list of items.

*How would you describe the status of the woman in Tomb 10?*

**MORE:** When compared with earlier sites, late Dawenkou culture shows more differentiation. Although most tombs had between ten and twenty objects, some had only one or two, and the richest burials had fifty, sixty, or even more than 180 pieces. In the larger tombs the coffins were placed inside wooden chambers lining the grave pit for additional protection. The larger graves with more burial items were also separated from those with fewer items. Because the gradation between tombs seems gradual, it is thought that differences may reflect differences in age or achievement, rather than hereditary rank.



Jade ax

Length: 18cm

Jade was already widely used in the Neolithic period (note the two other jade objects in Tomb 10). To the left is a jade ax from Tomb 10.

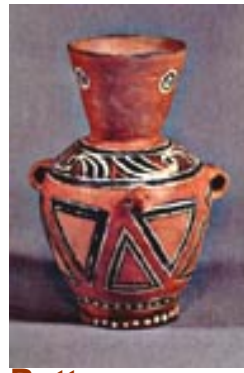
*How difficult do you think it was to make this?*

*What might be the function of the hole?*

**SOURCE:** *Zhongguo gudai cankao tulu v. 1* (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 1989), 5<sup>th</sup> page of illustrations.

**ANSWER:** The hole, probably bored by pecking or tubular-boring, was for tying a handle onto the ax. Because jade was so costly, it is unlikely this was a utilitarian tool. Its use was probably more symbolic or ritual. The thin, sharp blade shows no sign of wear. The presence of such jade objects indicate a high level of skill in fine crafts. Due to its hardness, jade cannot be carved with metal blades but must be ground with abrasive sand in a slow, labor-intensive process. A high level of skill is also evident in the finely carved ivory and bone fishhooks, combs, and hairpins found at Dawenkou.

**Go on to view some of the objects from this tomb:**

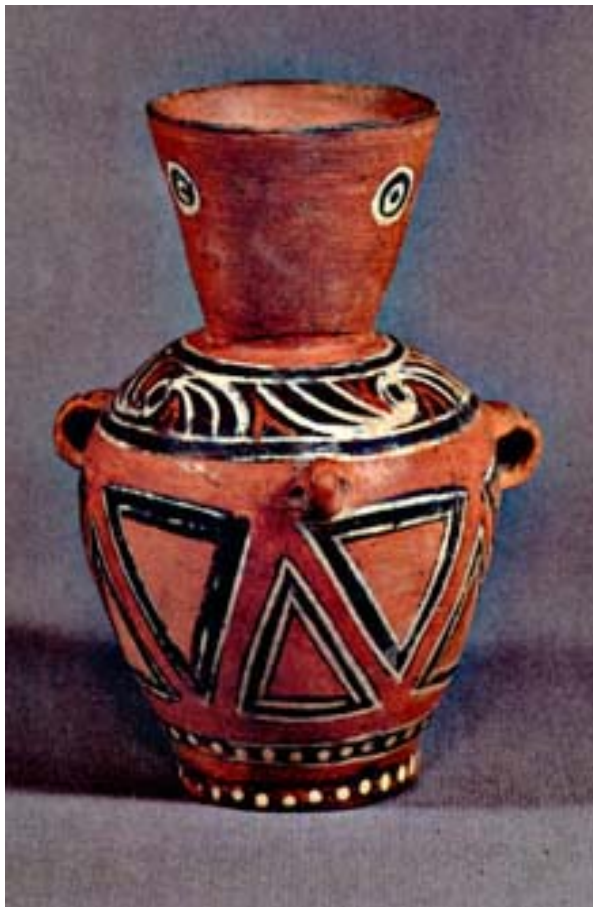


Pottery



# Pottery

Below are four of the 94 pieces of pottery from this tomb. Pottery found in Dawenkou tombs varied greatly in shape and size. Keep the shapes of these pottery pieces in mind when you look at later bronzes.



Height: 17.2cm

**SOURCE:** *Zhonguo zhongda kaogu faxian* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1990), p. 55.

Much of Neolithic pottery is decorated with geometric designs. Although these designs appear purely abstract, some of them may be derived from forms in nature.

*Can you imagine what kinds of organic forms might have inspired the decoration on this vessel? How does the decoration and color scheme complement the shape of the pottery?*

**SOME THOUGHTS:** Some have speculated that the triangles might have evolved from the shape of fish fins and fish tails. The circular forms may be inspired by eyes.

*How do you think this pottery was made?*

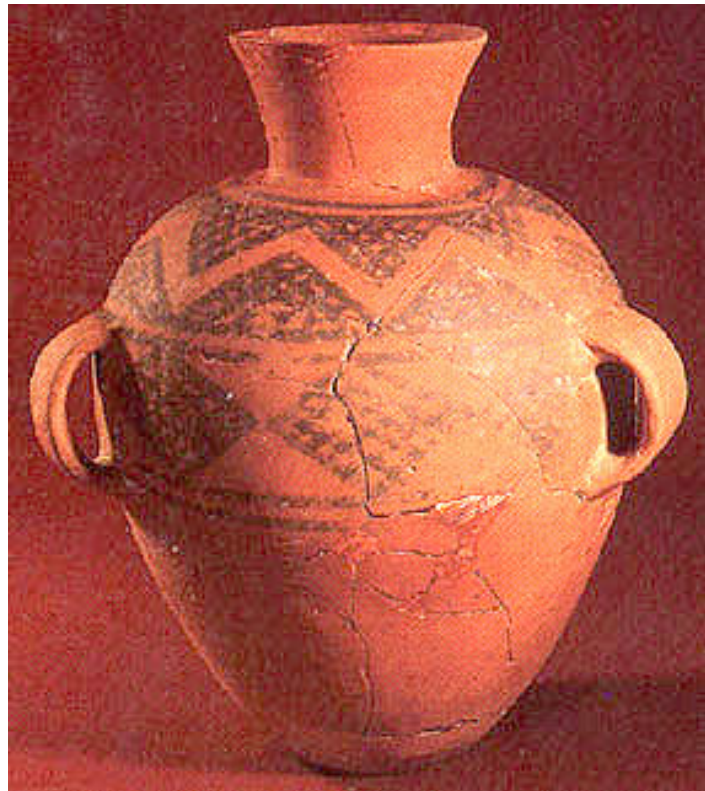
**ANSWER:** This piece was probably made on a wheel, in contrast to earlier handmade pottery. Invention of the pottery wheel, first used shortly after 3000 B.C. by the Dawenkou and Longshan cultures, meant that potters could make thin-walled, evenly formed vessels with greater speed.

Below are two more pots from this tomb:



Height: 13.4cm

SOURCE: *Zhonguo zhongda kaogu faxian* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1990), p. 56.



Height: 28.3cm

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji* v. 1 (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), p. 14.

**What animal is the piece below meant to represent? What was the significance of this animal?**

**HINT: Think about some of the animal parts that are found in Tomb 10.**



Ceramic vessel      Height: 22cm   Length: 25cm

**SOURCE:** *Zhongguo meishu quanji* v. 1 (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), p. 14.



Detail

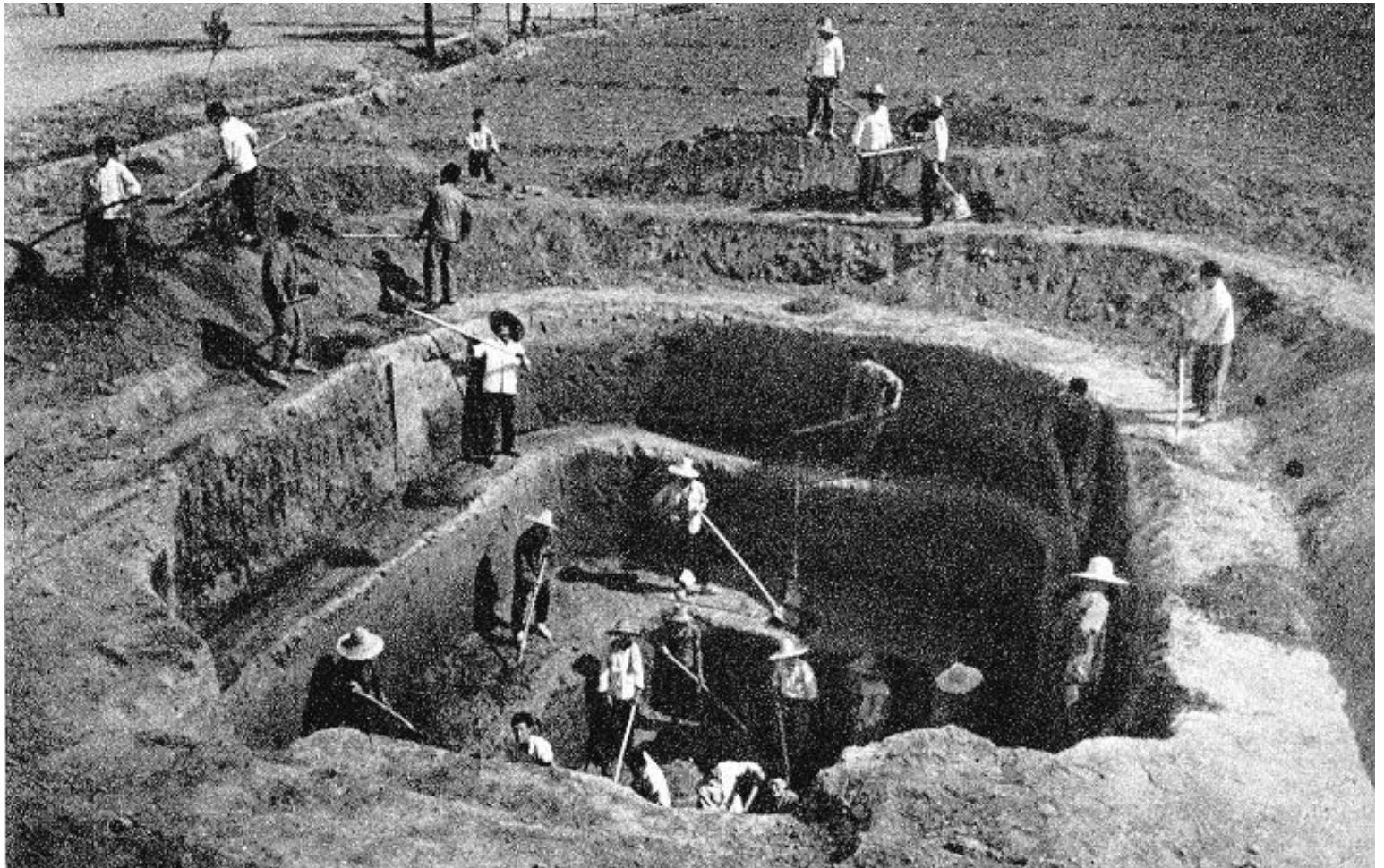
**SOURCE:** *Zhongguo meishu quanji* v. 1 (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), p. 14.

**ANSWER:** Probably a pig, a staple of the Neolithic economy. The Dawenkou people cultivated millet and domesticated pigs and other livestock. Heads and jaws of pigs were frequently buried with the dead as symbols of wealth.

Move on to [Shang Tomb of Fu Hao](#)



# Shang Tomb of Fu Hao



Excavating Fu Hao's tomb

SOURCE: *Yinxu Fuhao mu* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1980), p. 10.

China's Bronze Age began soon after 2000 B.C. The Shang dynasty (ca. 1600-1050 B.C.) had not only bronze technology, but also writing, walled cities, and a complex state structure. Shang tombs, thousands of which have been excavated, provide rich evidence of Shang material culture and ritual practices.

Among the most important finds from Shang tombs are "oracle bones," recording the questions Shang kings posed to their ancestors. From them we learn of the divinities they recognized, from the high god Di to nature gods and ancestors, as well as the issues that concerned them, such as harvests, childbirth, and military campaigns. The king did not address Di directly, but called on his ancestors to act as an intermediary for him. Sacrifices to Di or the ancestors could include human sacrifices of war captives and others.

Shang royal burial practices confirm the abiding interest of the Shang rulers with their ancestors. At Anyang (in present-day Henan province, [review map](#)), the last capital of the Shang, many huge royal tombs have been found. The one we examine here, the tomb of the consort Fu Hao, is the only royal Shang tomb of a member of the Shang royal family to have been found unlooted. Dated around 1250 BC, it is a tomb of modest size located outside the main royal cemetery. The tomb is a single large pit, 5.6 m by 4 m at the mouth. The floor level housed the royal corpse and most of the utensils and implements buried with her. Below the corpse was a small pit holding the remains of six dogs, and along the perimeters lay the skeletons of 16 humans. Inside the pit was a wooden chamber 5 m long, 3.5 m wide and 1.3 m high. Within the chamber was a lacquered coffin which has since rotted away. There also seems to have once been a structure built over the tomb for holding memorial ceremonies.

Fu Hao was mentioned in oracle bone inscriptions as the consort of King Wu Ding and a general who participated in several military campaigns. She also presided over important sacrificial ceremonies and controlled her own estate.

Altogether Fu Hao's tomb contained:

- 468 bronze objects including 130 weapons, 23 bells, 27 knives, 4 mirrors, and 4 tigers or tiger heads
- 755 jade objects
- 63 stone objects
- 5 ivory objects
- 564 bone objects including nearly 500 bone hairpins and over 20 bone arrowheads
- 11 pottery objects
- 6,900 pieces of cowry shell

*Consider the size and construction of the tomb in the photo above. Were more resources devoted to constructing the tomb or manufacturing the objects placed in it?*

*What would have been the significance of such large numbers of objects? Why put in more weapons than any one person would need? What meaning would numbers alone have carried?*





The vessel to the left is made of ivory with intricate turquoise inlay.

*Which animal part do you recognize in the shape of the handle?*

*Where might the ivory for burial goods have come from?*

**HINT:** Think about the climate in China 3000 years ago.

Ivory cup

Height: 30.5cm, Diameter: 10.5~11.3cm

**SOURCE:** *Zhongguo zhongda kaogu faxian* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1990), p. 100.

**ANSWER:** Ivory was a local luxury (the climate of China was warmer 3000 years ago, and elephants lived much further to the north than they do now). An elephant skeleton was found at Anyang, and even more exotic forms -- whale and rhinoceros, for example -- indicate the presence of a royal park or zoo. The handle of the beaker is in the shape of a bird's beak.

**Go on to view some of the objects from this tomb:**



Bronze objects



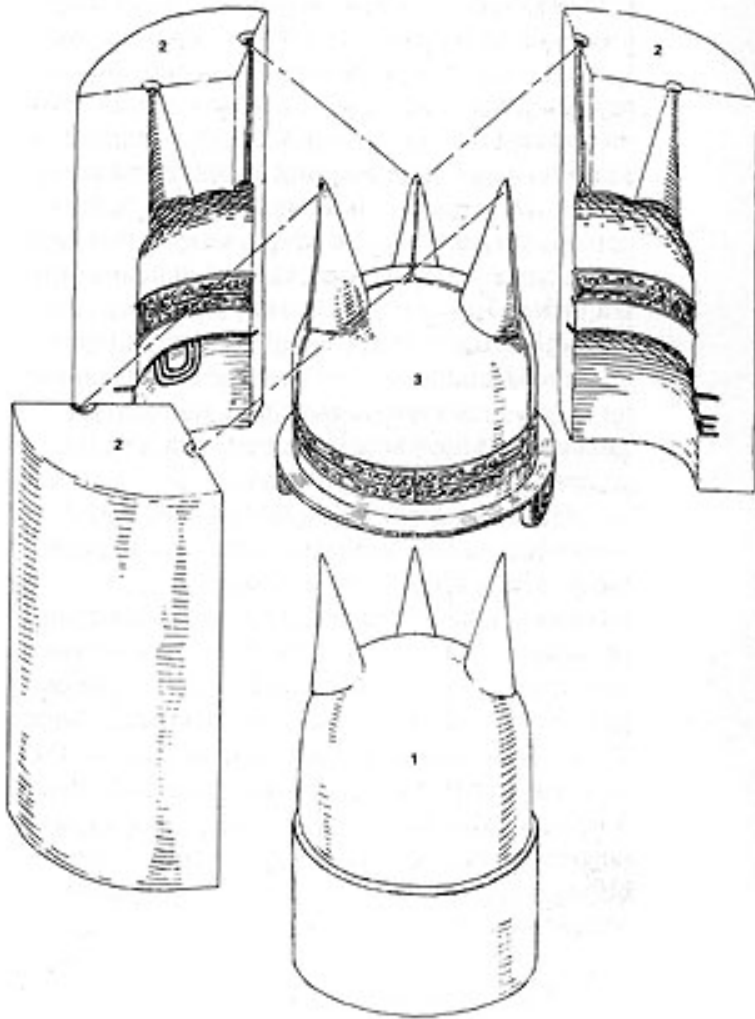
Jade objects

# Bronzes from Fu Hao's Tomb

The development of metal-working technology represents a significant transition in Chinese history. The first known bronze vessels were found at Erlitou near the middle reaches of the Yellow River in northern central China. Most archaeologists now identify this site with the Xia dynasty (c. 2100-1600 BC) mentioned in ancient texts as the first of the three ancient dynasties (Xia, Shang, and Zhou). It was during the Shang (1600-1050 BC), however, that bronze-casting was perfected. Bronze was used for weapons, chariots, horse trappings, and above all for the ritual vessels with which the ruler would perform sacrifices to the ancestors. The high level of workmanship seen in the bronzes in Shang tombs suggests a stratified and highly organized society, with powerful rulers who were able to mobilize the human and material resources to mine, transport, and refine the ores, to manufacture and tool the clay models, cores, and molds used in the casting process, and to run the foundries.

Altogether the bronzes found in Fu Hao's tomb weighed 1.6 metric tons, a sign of the enormous wealth of the royal family. These vessels were not only valuable by virtue of their material, a strong alloy of copper, tin, and lead, but also because of the difficult process of creating them. The piece-mold technique, used exclusively in China, required a great deal of time and skill. (In this Teacher's Guide, the hyperlink for the piece-mold technique is given below.)

To make a bronze vessel, a clay model of the bronze vessel-to-be had to be fashioned. When it hardened, soft clay was pressed against it, taking on the negative impression of both its shape and decoration. These clay pieces were removed in sections to form the piece-molds. The model was then shaved down to become the core ( the walls of the bronze vessel would exactly equal in thickness this layer that had been shaved off). The piece-molds were then reassembled around the core. Molten bronze would then be poured into the space between the mold and the core. After cooling, the mold pieces were removed. Pre-cast appendages were often inserted into the core-mold assemblage before casting; when the vessel was produced, they became locked into place as the metal was poured in.



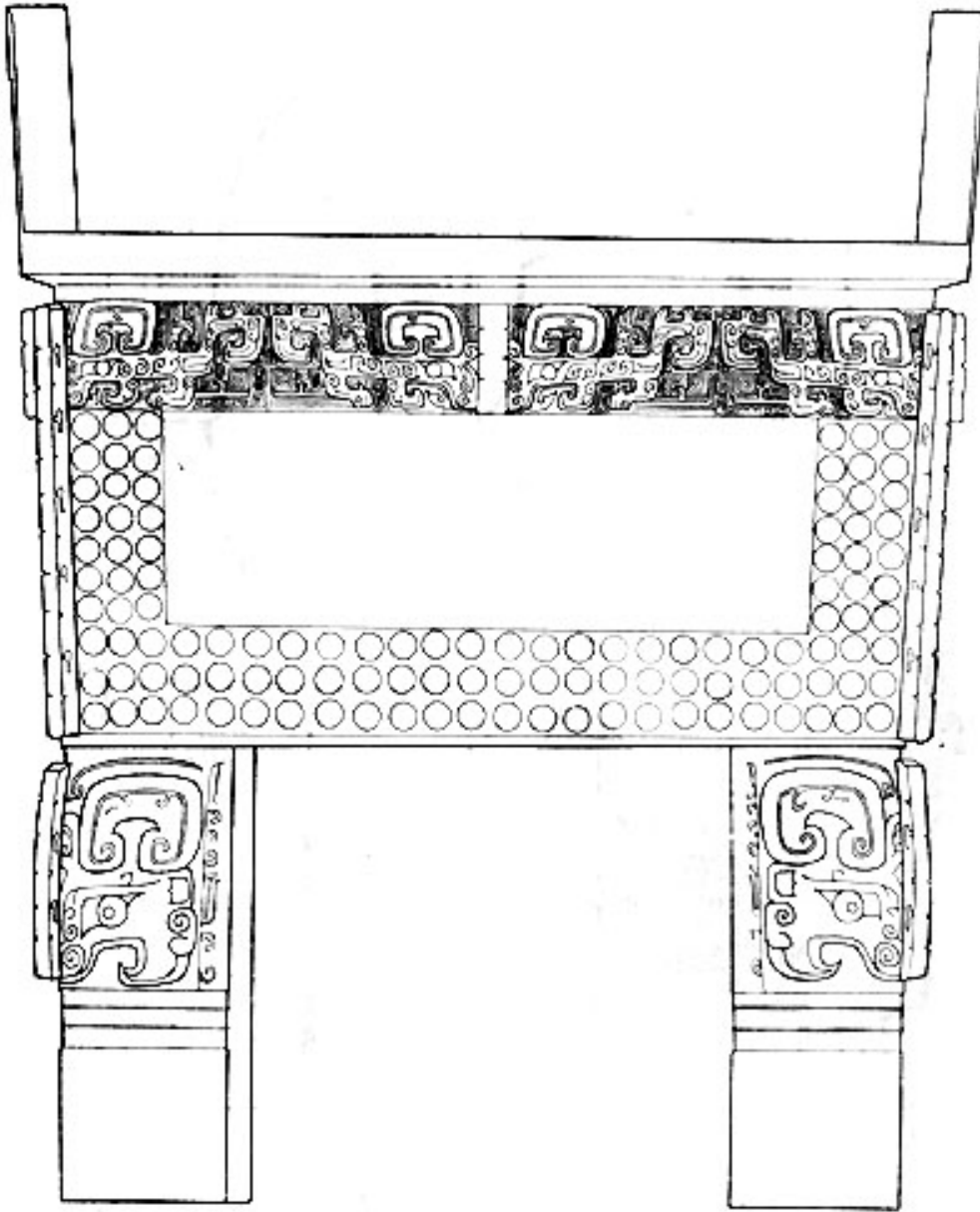
**What does this sophisticated method of casting bronze imply about the level of ceramic technology during the same period?**

Diagram showing how early Chinese bronzes were formed: the model or core (1), the sections of the mold (2), and the completed vessel (3—the cauldron no. 4)

**SOURCE:** *Treasures from the Bronze Age of China: An Exhibition from the People's Republic of China* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1980), p. 19. Copyright by The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The vessel below is a *ding*, used for food.

Think about the piece-mold process. *How do you think the technique affected the shapes and decoration on vessels such as this ding?* (The hyperlink for decoration is given below in this Teachers' Guide.)



To the left is a drawing showing the decoration of the *ding*. In the center of the frieze or band running around the top rim is a design of a *taotie* mask. This part-human, part-animal face with bulging eyes is a recurring image on Shang bronzes. It may have carried some symbolic significance, but we can no longer be certain of its meaning. Some hypotheses include a monster, a dragon, a ritual mask, or simply a popular formal design.

**SOURCE:** *Bronze Vessels from Yin Xu* (Beijing: Cultural Relics Publishing House, 1985), Diagram 4.

Many of the vessels were inscribed with Fu Hao's posthumous title, "Si Mu





Bronze *ding* vessel

Height: 80.1cm, Weight: 128kg

SOURCE: Zhongguo gudai cankao tulu v. 2 (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 1989), 2<sup>nd</sup> page of illustrations.

Xin." The rubbing of her title from the *ding* at left can be seen below.



SOURCE: Zhongguo gudai cankao tulu v. 2 (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 1989), p. 57.

**SOME THOUGHTS:** In the piece-mold technique, surface decoration could be made by carving into the mold (for raised relief) or into the model (for recessed designs). The use of a ceramic mold made of tightly fitting sections made intricate shapes very difficult. As a result greater attention was placed on surface decoration, which was easier to create.





To the left is one of a pair of *zun* vessels used for wine. The creature stands on two legs; a down-turned tail forms the third leg. The back of the head is a removable lid with a miniature bird and dragon as knobs.

Click to see a drawing of its decoration. (In the Teachers's Guide, this is shown below.)

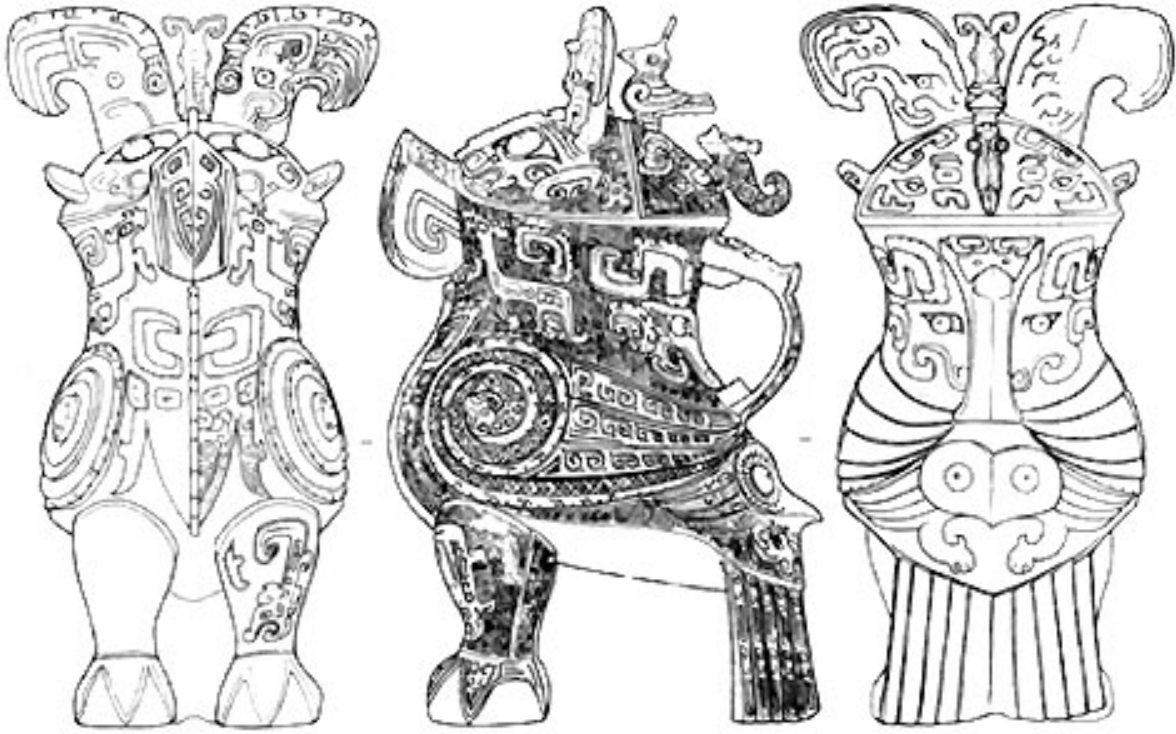
*What creature is this zun supposed to represent?*

**ANSWER:** An owl or a parrot. A similar owl in white marble was found in Tomb 1001 at Anyang, thought to be the tomb of King Wu Ding.

**Wine vessel**

**Height: 46.3cm, Weight: 16kg**

**SOURCE:** *Zhonguo zhongda kaogu faxian* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1990), p. 97.



**SOURCE:** *Bronze Vessels from Yin Xu* (Beijing: Cultural Relics Publishing House, 1985), Diagram 14.



**Can you make out what the decoration on this ax shows?**

**Think about the contents of Fu Hao's tomb.**

**What do you think this ax might have been used for?**



**Bronze ax**

**SOURCE:** *Zhonguo zhongda kaogu faxian* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1990), p. 94.

**ANSWER:** The center of the ax shows a human head with a tiger on either side. Axes of this type and size were probably used for ritual sacrifices (recall the animals and humans found in Fu Hao's tomb). During Shang times, human sacrifices to the ancestors accompanied cult ceremonies, the construction of buildings, and the burials of the elite members of society. Many of these people were probably prisoners of war from the Shang's frequent battles against its neighbors. In addition, subordinates would also voluntarily "accompany" a superior in death.



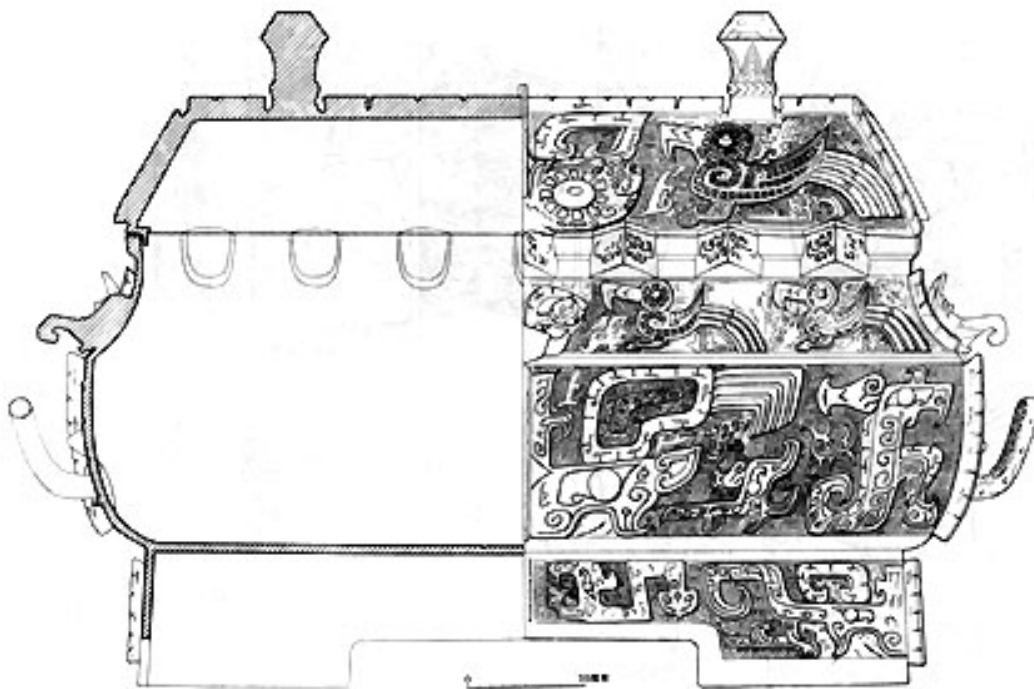


Click to see a drawing of the decoration on the bronze at left. (In this Teachers' Guide, shown below.)

*Why do you think zoomorphic images play such a large role in Shang art?*

Covered container      Height: 60cm, Length: 88cm, Weight: 71kg

SOURCE: *Zhongguo zhongda kaogu faxian* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1990), p. 96.



*Do you see any similarity to the decoration on the ding seen earlier?*

图一 妇好铜方彝 (M5:791)

SOURCE: *Bronze Vessels from Yin Xu* (Beijing: Cultural Relics Publishing House, 1985), Diagram 11.

**MORE:** The zoomorphic images on Shang bronzes range from clearly mimetic low- or high-relief images of birds, snakes, crocodiles, and deer, to imaginary animals like dragons, and to highly stylized mask motifs that allude to animals but don't directly represent them. Since bronze vessels were used in sacrificial rituals, most observers assume the decoration symbolized something important in Shang political and religious cosmology. Unfortunately, texts that discuss the meaning of images exist only from much later periods.



**Can you think of technical reasons for the projecting flanges on the body of the vessel to the left?**

**ANSWER:** In the piece-mold technique, molten metal would sometimes seep in between the pieces of the mold, leaving traces of vertical joins. Some bronze artists, instead of working to eliminate these casting seams, transformed them into major structural elements in the vessel's decoration.

**Drinking vessel**

**SOURCE:** *Zhonguo zhongda kaogu faxian* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1990), p. 93.

**Move on to [Jade from Fu Hao's tomb](#)**

## Jade from Fu Hao's Tomb

Jade has had symbolic value in Chinese culture since very early times, and has been found in many eastern Neolithic tombs, including Dawenkou. The process of shaping jade is both time and labor-intensive, leading Confucius (c. 500 B.C.) to compare the process to the cultivation of an educated person. In addition to being a symbol of luxury and wealth, jade is associated with the qualities of purity and refinement and is often believed to possess magical powers.



The figure to the left is one of more than ten round or relief sculptures of human figures found in Fu Hao's tomb. The person wears a long robe with a wide sash at the waist and has a short braid at the back of the neck.

*What do you think of the pose of the figure?  
What are some possibilities for the tail-like projection?*

**SOME THOUGHTS:** The figure is in the formal seated pose current in China before the introduction of the chair. Some have speculated that the figure is a performer in the midst of singing or chanting. The tail-like projection may be an elaboration of the sash, or it may have something to do with the way the object was worn or used.

Jade sculpture of a seated human figure

Height: 7cm

**SOURCE:** *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian, 1* (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), p. 26.



Many small jade ornaments in the shapes of animals were found in Fu Hao's tomb. Below are several examples. These combine an interest in three-dimensional form with an exploration of surface decoration. It is not clear if these were ornaments or served some other function.

The pendant below is ingeniously carved so that the weight of the sweeping tail allows the creature to be vertically suspended with the head up.



This jade was probably several hundred years old when Lady Hao acquired it. Members of the Shang elite often collected precious objects that had been transmitted from ancient times.

A jade pendant in the shape of a phoenix

Length: 13.6cm, Thickness: 0.7cm

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian, 1* (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), p. 53.



Here and below are several small jade images of animals.

*How does the surface decoration compare with the decoration of bronze vessels from Fu Hao's tomb?*



Jade tiger

Height: 3.5cm, Length: 14.1cm

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian*, v. 1 (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), p. 51.



Jade elephant

Length: 6 cm

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian*, v. 1 (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), p. 51.

*Can you tell from which part of its body the elephant might have been suspended?*

ANSWER: The final curl of its trunk is formed by a perforation from which it might have been suspended.

*How do the two creatures below combine the real with the imaginary?*



Height: 5.5cm

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian, v. 1* (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), p. 54.



Height: 5.6cm, Length: 8.1cm

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian, v. 1* (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), p. 52.

The jade pendant below is of a spread-winged hawk. One side shows the breast and abdomen, the other the spine.



Jade hawk

Height: 6cm, Thickness: 0.2cm

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian, 1* (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), p. 54.



Compare the style of this stone ox to the jade animals above.

*How does the medium affect the style? In what ways is it similar to or different from the jade animals?*

Stone ox

Height: 1.4cm, Length: 25cm

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian, 1* (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), p. 50.

Move on to the [Zhou tomb of the Count of Yu](#)

# Zhou Tomb of Count of Yu

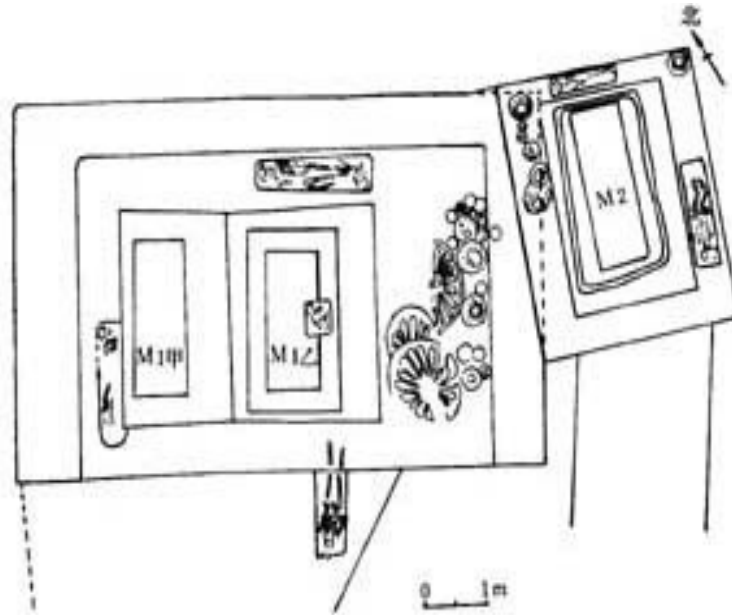


Diagram of the three burials associated with the Count of Yu

SOURCE: Xu Ziran, *Zhongguo huangtu diqu lidai muzang* (Beijing: Dizhi chubanshe, 1988), p. 31.

In about 1050 BC the Shang dynasty was defeated in battle by armies from Zhou, a rival state to the west, which seems both to have inherited cultural traditions from the Neolithic cultures of the northwest and to have absorbed most of the material culture of the Shang.



The conquerors retained their homeland in the Wei River valley in present-day Shaanxi province and portioned out the rest of their territory among their relatives and local chiefs, creating a number of local courts or principalities.

The culture of the early Zhou is known to us not solely through archaeological evidence, but also through transmitted texts, such as the *Book of Documents (Shujing)*, which describes the Zhou conquest of the Shang as the victory of just and noble warriors over a decadent and dissolute king. In these texts and bronze inscriptions alike, the rule of the Zhou kings was linked to heaven, conceived of as the sacred moral power of the cosmos. A king and a dynasty could rule only so long as they retained heaven's favor. If a king neglected his sacred duties and acted tyrannically, heaven would display its displeasure by sending down ominous portents and natural disasters.

Zhou rulers, like their Shang predecessors, devoted considerable resources to tombs. The tomb we examine here dates from the earliest years of the Zhou dynasty. It is Rujiashuang Tomb 1, dated around 950-900 BC and located in present-day Shaanxi province (review [map](#)). Based on inscriptions found on bronze vessels, scholars believe that Tomb 1 belonged to a Count of Yu and his wife, Jing Ji. They also surmise that the occupant of Tomb 2, partly overlapping Tomb 1, was Count Yu's concubine, but this is less certain. The pit of Tomb 1 is 12.2 meters deep and measures 8.4 meters by 5.2 meters at the bottom. Within it are two wooden chambers, both with coffins. One human sacrifice was placed at the entry of the tomb, and six others between the tomb wall and the chambers. Burial goods were placed both inside and outside the chambers. Outside were three chariot wheels and some pottery containers. Inside were bronze vessels, weapons, and tools. Textile imprints were found within the chambers as well. Most of the jade objects were placed on the dead.

*What do you notice about the number of human sacrifices compared to Fu Hao's tomb? What do you think might account for this difference?*

**MORE:** Human sacrifices decrease considerably in early Zhou graves, and many of the victims found in graves can be identified as the personal attendants and servants. The victims were also not beheaded or otherwise mutilated, as they had been in Shang tombs. Some had simple coffins and were buried with a few of their personal possessions.

**Altogether the tomb of the count contained:**

- Over 2,700 bronze objects, including 33 vessels and 13 weapons
- 4 musical instruments
- over 100 chariot parts
- 11 pieces of pottery
- over 280 jade and stone objects

**The tomb of his wife Jing Ji contained:**

- 10 bronze vessels
- over 280 jade and stone objects

*Why would chariot parts and weapons be included in tombs?*

**SOME THOUGHTS:** Horse-drawn two-wheeled chariots first came into use in the late Shang, and represented the most up-to-date military technology. Chariots and weapons more generally were important symbols of the military might of the ruling elite.

Go on to view some of the objects from this tomb:



Bronze Objects



Jade Objects

## Bronzes from Count Yu's Tomb

Early Zhou art shows considerable continuities from Shang tradition. For the first two centuries of Zhou, all major vessel classes and all the main types of ornament used by the Shang continued to be used. Ancestors remained central to the religious imagination in Western Zhou times. Bronzes were often inscribed with reports to ancestors detailing the achievements of their descendants. Bronzes also continued to function as symbols of secular power, and were often given as gifts by the Zhou kings to their followers.

*How do the shapes and decorative motifs on the bronzes from the count's tomb shown below compare to those in Fu Hao's tomb?*

Some of the bronzes in the tomb present entirely new shapes.

Compare this *zun* with the one from Fu Hao's tomb.

*How is the treatment of the animal forms different?*



Bronze elephant

Height: 22cm, Length: 38cm

SOURCE: Lu Liancheng and Hu Zhisheng, *Baoji yuguo mudu-xiace* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988), p. 18.

**Why do you think the bird below has three legs?**



**Bird vessel** Height: 15.5cm, 21.4cm

**SOURCE:** Lu Liancheng and Hu Zhisheng, *Baoji yuguo mudi-xiace* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988), p. 19.



**Bronze ding** Height: 121.4cm

**SOURCE:** Lu Liancheng and Hu Zhisheng, *Baoji yuguo mudi-xiace* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988), p. 17.

**SOME THOUGHTS:** Some have suggested that this bird is related to the legend about three-legged crows in the sun, but the form is closer to a turtle-dove. The third leg might also be to provide stability.





***Does this vessel remind you of shapes in another medium?***

**ANSWER:** The shape of the lobed ewer is probably derived from pottery.

**Bronze *ding***

**SOURCE:** Lu Liancheng and Hu Zhisheng, *Baoji yuguo mudu-xiace* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988), p. 20.

***What do you think of the surface decoration on the vessel below and above compared to that on Shang bronzes?***



**Covered bronze vessel**

**SOURCE:** Lu Liancheng and Hu Zhisheng, *Baoji yuguo mudi-xiace* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988), p. 17.

***What purpose do you think this bronze figure may have served?***



Bronze human figure

Height: 11.6cm

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian, 1* (Beijing: renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), p. 68.

***What function do you think the piece below would have served on a chariot?***





Front and back of bronze object



Height: 13cm

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian, 1* (Beijing: renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), p. 67.

Move on to [Jades in Count Yu's tomb](#)



# Jades from Count Yu's tomb

***How does the style of these jade stags compare with the jade animals found in Fu Hao's tomb? How is movement suggested?***



**Jade deer pendants**

**SOURCE:** *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian, 1* (Beijing: renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), p. 80.

**Move on to the Warring States Tomb of Marquis Yi**

# Warring States Tomb of Marquis Yi



**Marquis Yi's four-chambered tomb**

**SOURCE:** *Suixian Zenghouyi mu* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1980), pl. 2.

**The Warring States Period (475-221 BC) was a time of turmoil and violence, with constant warfare between the regional states, but it was also a time of great intellectual and artistic activity, when the intellectual traditions of Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism originated.**

**As military conflict became more frequent and more deadly, one by one the smaller states were conquered and absorbed by the half dozen largest ones. One of the more successful such states was Chu, based in the middle reaches of the Yangzi River. It defeated and absorbed fifty or more small states, eventually controlling a territory as extensive as the Shang or Western Zhou dynasties at their heights.**

**Evidence of the distinctive style of Chu court workshops can be seen in the objects found in the tomb of Marquis Yi. Dated around 430 BC, this tomb is located in present-day Hubei Province (review [map](#)). Inscriptions [included below for the Teacher's Guide] on the bronzes found at the site identify the tomb as that of a marquis of the state of Zeng, a small state then under the domination of Chu. The tomb is 21m long, 16.5m wide, and 13m deep, making it 220 square meters in area. It has four chambers. The eastern chamber contained the marquis's lacquered double coffin, the coffins of eight young women, and a dog in its own coffin. The chamber also contained weapons, a chariot, and many personal items, including furniture, a zither, silk, and vessels -- but no bronze vessels. The central chamber seems to have been a ceremonial hall, with a large set of bronze bells and other instruments, as well as bronze ritual vessels. The northern chamber served as an armory and storeroom, the western chamber, where thirteen more young women were buried, as servants' quarters.**

**MORE: The young women were all between the ages of 13 and 25. The eight in the eastern chamber were probably musicians who had entertained the marquis at court while the other 13 might have been concubines. The practice of human sacrifice or "accompanying in death" was already unusual by this time.**

## INSCRIPTIONS



This bell is 36 1/2" high and weighs 236 pounds. The 31-character inscription states that it was commissioned by a king of Chu in 433 BC for Marquis Yi.

*What do you think is the significance of a gift like this?*

**SOURCE:** *Suixian Zenghouyi mu* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1980), pl. 22.

***What do you notice about the layout of this tomb compared to earlier ones? What changes in beliefs about the afterlife might this reflect?***



**SOME THOUGHTS:** Shang royal tombs such as Fu Hao's had been single pits, often of great depth. The layout of the tomb of the Marquis Yi, however, attempts to approximate his living quarters as they had been during his lifetime. It has several chambers, and objects are arranged in them as they would be in real life. A tomb is now thought of as an eternal dwelling for the soul. There will be more multi-chambered tombs in the Han dynasty, but the tomb of the Marquis Yi is one of the earliest known attempts to re-create a palace.

**Altogether Marquis Yi's tomb contained:**

- 124 musical instruments, including bells, chimes, drums, zithers, pipes, and flutes
- 134 bronze vessels and other bronze household items
- 4,777 weapons, mostly made of bronze
- 1,127 bronze chariot parts
- 25 pieces of leather armor
- 5,012 pieces of lacquer ware
- 26 bamboo articles
- 5 gold objects and 4 gold belt hooks
- 528 jade and stone objects
- 6,696 Chinese characters written in ink on slips of bamboo

***What do you notice about the variety and amount of burial goods compared with earlier tombs?***

**SOME THOUGHTS:** Because of peculiar underground conditions in central Hubei, many objects that have perished in tombs elsewhere have been preserved in tombs in this region. Objects made of bamboo, leather, and wood have rarely survived from earlier tombs. The large quantities of bronze objects and the inclusion of so many musical instruments, however, would seem to reflect changing views of what to put in tombs, or perhaps a more sumptuous life style at this small court.

This jade chain is formed of moveable parts joined by links. Four of the links are partly of gold and can be detached; eight are created from openwork carving and can't be undone. In addition to the openwork carving, the chain is also decorated with relief carvings of birds and dragons or snakes. The chain can be separated into five pieces or joined into one, folded or opened.

*How difficult do you think it is to carve openwork in jade?*

*How do you think this was worn?*

**SOME THOUGHTS:** It's not known how this jade object was worn or used, though it must have been very precious to its owner. Some have suggested that it was worn on the brim of some kind of headgear.



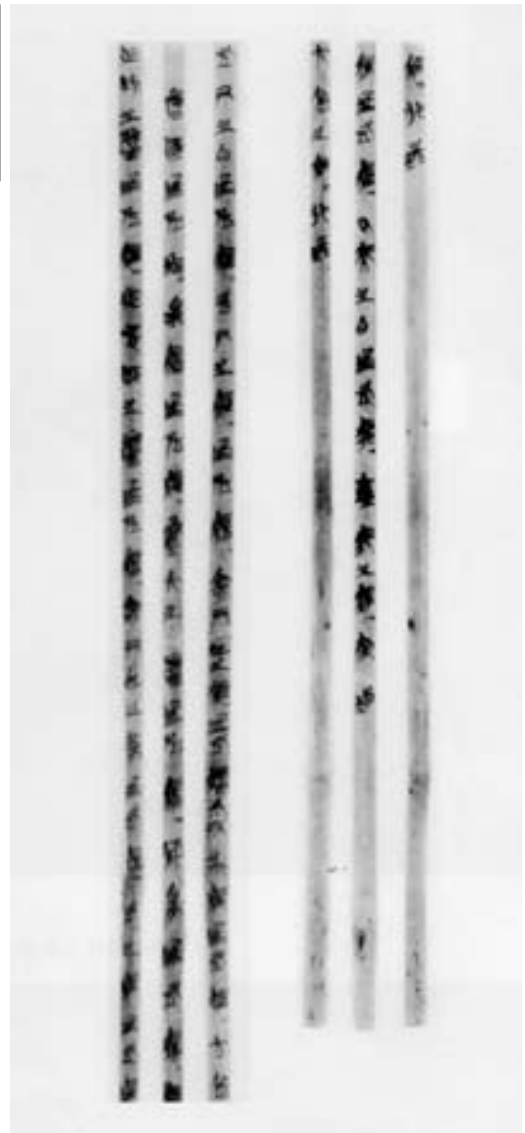
Jade chain Length: 48cm

**SOURCE:** *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian, 1* (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), p. 148.

Some of the bamboo slips found in the tomb list the mourners at the funeral and the objects placed in the grave.

*Why is the discovery of writing on bamboo slips important?*

**ANSWER:** The Shang inscribed bones, used for divination, have garnered a great deal of well-deserved attention, but in fact the bulk of ancient Chinese writing was most likely done on bamboo or silk. The discovery of the bamboo slips in Marquis Yi's tomb provides us with some of the earliest known example of writing on bamboo.



Inscribed bamboo slips

**SOURCE:** *Suixian Zenghouyi mu* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1980), pl. 108.

Go on to view some of the objects from this tomb:



Musical instruments



Bronze vessels



Lacquer ware



Gold objects



# Musical Instruments

Archaeologists have unearthed quite a few sets of instruments used in court performances in Zhou times. Key instruments were stone chimes, bronze drums, stringed lute-like instruments, bamboo flutes, and sets of bells. The instruments found in Marquis Yi's tomb represent the largest single group of musical instruments preserved from any culture in the ancient world.

Music played a central role in court life in ancient China. Visitors to the courts of kings and lords could expect to be entertained by troops of dancers and accompanying musicians. Many of the poems in the classic *Book of Songs* were odes or hymns meant to be performed on ritual occasions. Music was believed by early thinkers to have great moral powers. Confucius distinguished between music that would bring people into harmony and music that would lead to wanton thoughts. The more quantifiable aspects of music attracted the attention of cosmological theorists who speculated on the significance of pitch measurement and its relationship to other numerical relationships. Sound as a natural phenomenon was perceived to be paradigmatic of many natural processes.

*How do the instruments shown below compare with western instruments?*

The woodwind instrument below is a mouth organ. The body is eight inches long. There are eighteen bamboo pipes with a vibrating reed inside each pipe.

The picture below shows one of two panpipes found in the tomb. It is about nine inches long and is made of thirteen bamboo pipes.



**Bamboo mouth organ**

**SOURCE:** Zuo Boyang, *Recent Discoveries in Chinese Archeology* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1984), illustration on p. 8.



**Bamboo panpipe**      Length: 29cm

**SOURCE:** *Suixian Zenghouyi mu* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1980), pl. 34.



***What do you think these chimes are made of?***

***How can you tell this instrument was intended for visual display as well as musical enjoyment?***

## Chimes on rack with bronze supports

**SOURCE:** *Zhonguo zhongda kaogu faxian* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1990), p. 125.

**ANSWER:** The 32 chimes are made of stone and are divided into four groups. Most of the chime stones now suspended from the rack are reconstructions, since few of the original pieces have survived intact, but remnants of the inscriptions on each explain the pitch. The bronze frame is the original.

The set of 64 bells found in Marquis Yi's tomb must be considered one of the most astonishing archaeological discoveries in recent times. The picture below shows a part of the set. The bells were arranged in eight rows according to size and pitch, and hang in three rows on the L-shaped frame.

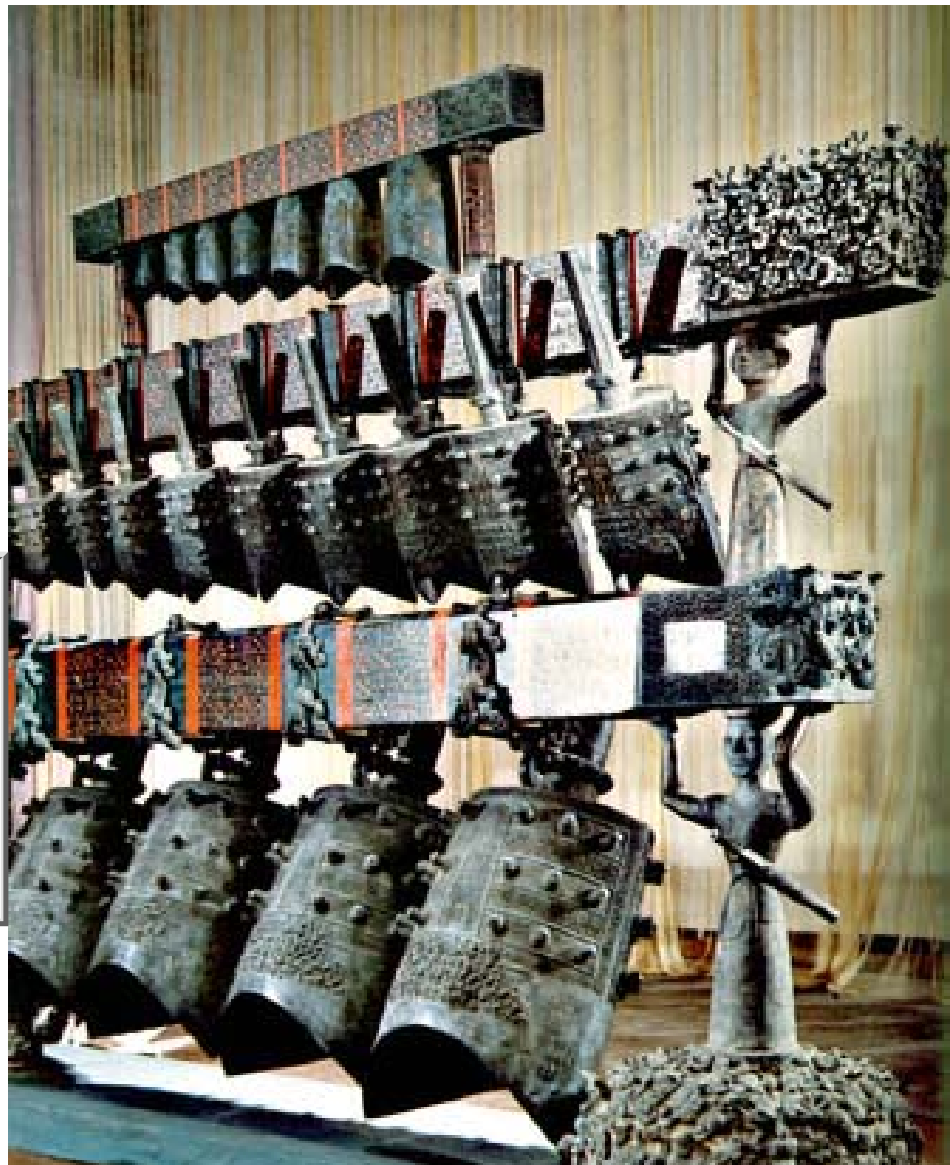
*Can you tell what is supporting the wooden beams?*

To see archaeologists working on these bells, [click here](#) [given below in this Teacher's Guide].

The bells bear inscriptions that indicate their pitches and reveal they were gifts from the king of Chu. The precision with which these bells were cast indicates that the art of bell-making had reached a very advanced state.

The bells vary in weight from 6.75 to 79.5 kg.

**MORE:** As early as the Shang dynasty both north and south China had produced massive clapperless bells (*nao*), the predecessor to the kind of bells from Marquis Yi's tomb. Constructed with the mouth of the bell upward, the *nao* is arranged in groups of three for playing simple tunes. In later times the number of bells required for a performance increased, and though they remained similar to the *nao* in shape, they were suspended mouth-downward from a frame.







**Bells on lacquered stand with bronze support**

**Length of stand 5.8 m**

**SOURCE:** *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian, 1* (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), p. 107.

***Can you imagine how these bells were played?***

**ANSWER:** These bells have no clappers and are sounded by striking. Because of their shape, each bell could sound two different notes, one if struck at the side, the other at the center. The notes produced by the set range over five octaves.

### **Restoration of the Bells**



**The bells were found in their original positions and in remarkably good condition, due to the fact that the charcoal-packed tomb had become waterlogged over time. The shaft of the tomb had also been filled with clay, stone slabs, and earth. These durable materials provided a natural method of preservation.**

**Notice the size of the set of bells in relation to the people.**



**SOURCE:** *Suixian Zenghouyi mu* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1980), illustration #8.

Move on to [Bronzes from Marquis Yi's tomb](#)

# Bronzes from Marquis Yi's Tomb

The late Zhou saw important changes in the function and style of bronzes. During the Shang and the Western Zhou bronze vessels had been used primarily for sacrifices to the ancestors, both in life and after death. During the Warring States period, however, bronze vessels began to be seen as luxury items in their own right and were increasingly disassociated from the realm of religious ritual. Sacrificial vessels were still necessary, but those tended to be plainer in appearance than the vessels for display and feasting. Bronzes became larger in size and more ornate in appearance, as shown in the extensive use of gold and silver inlay. In keeping with their new role as commodities, most bronze vessels of the Warring States period lack significant inscriptions. The inscriptions on Marquis Yi's bronzes refer to the owner, but not to ancestors.

*How might changes in the function and appearance of bronzes be related to the political circumstances during the Warring States period?*

**SOME THOUGHTS:** During the Warring States period there was constant conflict and competition between the various states. Lavish and public displays of wealth was one way for a ruler to assert his prestige before his allies and rivals. The wealth of the state of Zeng can only be imagined, but the tonnage of the bronzes in Marquis Yi's tomb far exceeds that of any ancient tomb anywhere in the world -- the total weight is estimated at over ten metric tons.

*As you look at the bronzes below, think about how they compare to those from the Shang and Zhou tombs of Fu Hao and the Count of Yu.*



To the left is a wine vessel in a matching tray. This elaborate set was made by a complex process of multiple casting. The vessels themselves were cast by the traditional piece-mold technique, but the intricate decoration was done by a new casting process and then soldered to the vessels.

*Can you imagine how the decoration was cast?*

Bronze *zun* (wine vessel) and bronze pan (plate)

**SOURCE:** *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian, 1* (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), p. 164.

**ANSWER:** The decoration was probably cast using the new lost-wax technique. First, a model of the object is made in wax. Clay is then molded around it and the whole thing heated. The melted wax then runs out, leaving the clay mold ready for the liquid bronze to be poured in. The advantage of this method over the piece-mold technique is that small objects of irregular shape can be made since wax is relatively easy to shape.



Here are those same two vessels separated. The decoration is characteristic of the flamboyant style of Chu-influenced bronzes.

*How does the decoration on these vessels compare with that on earlier ones you've seen?*



Height of the *zun*: 33.1cm, diameter of mouth: 47.3 cm, weight: 19.2kg

SOURCE: *Suixian Zenghouyi mu* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1980), illustration #55.



To the left are a pair of wine vessels (*hu*), each about 39 inches tall. They fit into circular openings in the matching stand. A cast inscription inside the neck of each *hu* reads: "Marquis Yi of Zeng commissioned [this vessel]; may he possess and use it for eternity."

*Can you tell what kind of creatures form the handles?*



**Pair of bronze wine vessels**

**Height: 111cm, weight: 240kg**

**SOURCE:** Zuo Boyang, *Recent Discoveries in Chinese Archeology* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1984), 4<sup>th</sup> page of illustration.

Below is a set of bronze vessels for cooling or warming wine. The square outer vessel (*jian*) has a smaller inner vessel (*fou*) hooked onto its bottom. A removable grate with a square opening holds the neck of the inner vessel. Wine was cooled by filling the space between the two vessels with ice. The set was found with a large serving ladle.

The set here and the two above were found together in the central chamber of the tomb.

*What are some similarities in function and decoration between the three sets?*



**Bronze vessel for cooling or warming wine**

**Height: 61.5cm, Weight: 168.8kg**

**SOURCE: *Suixian Zenghouyi mu* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1980), pl. 50.**

**ANSWER: All three were used for wine, and all three feature serpent or dragon motifs.**

One of the innovations of late Zhou bronzes is the development of inlay designs. While inlays were created in Near Eastern workshops by applying designs to the cold surface of an undecorated bronze, the Chinese craftsman obtained similar results by casting depressions into the bronze to receive the inlay.



The vessel to the left features inlay tracery that looks like gold and silver.

*What kind of effect could be achieved with the use of inlay?*

**HINT: Remember the original color of bronze.**

**Bronze pan and scoop**

**Height of scoop: 24cm, weight: 2.6kg Height of pan: 11cm, weight: 8.8kg**

**SOURCE: *Suixian Zenghouyi mu* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1980), pl. 60.**

The creature to the left is of bronze. The rims of the wings were once inlaid with turquoise, and the stand was originally inlaid with semiprecious stones. It is about 1.5 m high, and was found next to the double coffins of the marquis.

*What kind of creature is this? What might its function have been?*

**SOME THOUGHTS:** The animal is usually identified as an antlered crane, and was apparently made as a stand to hold a tambourine. Carved wooden figures with antlers have been found at a number of sites in the Chu state. Note that the dragons on the pair of *hu* also have antlers. It has been suggested that antlers were believed to have magical powers.



**Bronze creature**

**Height: 143cm, weight: 38.4kg**

**SOURCE:** *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian, 1* (Beijing: renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), p. 148.



**What do you think the chains on either side of this charcoal stove was for?**

**ANSWER:** The chain handles allowed the stove to be lifted when the charcoal was lit.



Bronze brazier

Height: 21.3cm, Diameter: 39.4cm, Weight: 8.4cm

**SOURCE:** *Suixian Zenghouyi mu* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1980), pl. 63.

Move on to [Lacquer Objects from Marquis Yi's Tomb](#)



# Lacquer Objects

Lacquer, which is highly toxic in the raw, is extracted from the sap of the lac tree indigenous to China. The process of lacquering wood and other materials was invented in China and used to waterproof bamboo and wooden objects as early as Neolithic times, though few pieces survive before the Warring States period. Lacquerware was considered a wonderful luxury because of the hazardous and laborious process involved in making such objects. Highly skilled craftsmen had to apply many thin layers of lacquer to achieve the final effect of a glossy coating. Although we cannot be sure of the cost of the lacquer items in Marquis Yi's tomb, a later text from the first century BC reports that the price of lacquer was ten times that of bronze.

Look at the objects below. *How do the designs take advantage of the glossy finish of lacquer and make the most out of a limited range of colors?*



The outer coffin of the Marquis Yi is to the left, the inner coffin below.

*How are the designs on the coffin related to designs on bronzes?*

Lacquered outer coffin Length: 3.2m, Width: 2.1m, Height: 2.19cm

SOURCE: *Zhonguo zhongda kaogu faxian* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1990), p. 120.

**Why have an inner and an outer coffin? What changing attitudes toward the afterlife might this practice reflect?**

**Think about the construction and layout of Marquis Yi's tomb.**



**Lacquered inner coffin**

**Length: 2.49m, Width: 1.27m, Height: 1.32m**

**SOURCE: *Suixian Zenghouyi mu* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1980), pl. 4.**

**Below is a detail of the decoration on the inner coffin. In the Chu culture a large number of spiritual powers both benign and malevolent were venerated and feared. These beings were not understood as ancestors, though they do have the power to interfere in human affairs. In representations they frequently take animal and semi-human form.**

***Scholars are not sure of the role of these creatures on the inner coffin. What do you think?***

**HINT: Consider the weapons in their hands.**



**Detail of the design on the inner coffin**

**SOURCE:** *Zhonguo zhongda kaogu faxian* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1990), p. 121.

**Below is the cover of a lacquer trunk decorated with 28 lunar mansions (divisions of the sky). A dragon is represented on one end of the lid, a tiger on the other. This is the earliest known celestial map in China.**





Lacquer box-cover

Length: 82.7, Height: 44.8cm

SOURCE: *Suixian Zenghouyi mu* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1980), pl. 89.

The stag to the left was found in the marquis' burial chamber. The movable head is fixed with real deer antlers. The body is decorated with small almond-shaped designs and tiny dots to resemble the coat of a deer.

*Where else have you seen deer or deer parts? How does this compare?*





Lacquer stag

Height: 86.8cm, length: 50cm

**SOURCE:** *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian, 1* (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), p. 142.

Below is a lacquer box in the unusual shape of a duck. The duck has a removable lid on its back and the head can be turned from side to side. It was found in the western chamber, which contained the remains of 13 young women. There were fewer objects in this chamber than the others, but this box stands out for its high level of craftsmanship. The surface is lacquered in black and decorated with red and yellow painting.

***What does the painting on the side of the duck show?***

**HINT:** Think of some of the musical instruments found in Marquis Yi's tomb.



Lacquer box in the shape of a mandarin duck

Height: 16.3cm, length: 20.4cm

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian, 1* (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), p. 152.

Move on to [Gold and Silver Objects from Marquis Yi's Tomb](#)

## Gold and Silver

Opulent vessels in gold testify to the wealth of Marquis Yi. Solid gold vessels from pre-imperial China are extremely rare, probably because of the cost of the material. The bowl below, at six inches diameter and almost five pounds, is the largest gold object of its kind from the pre-Qin period. It was found in the eastern chamber beneath the marquis' coffin along with the gold goblet to the right. In addition, four gold belt hooks were inside the inner coffin.

*What does the location of these gold objects imply about their significance for the owner?*



Gold cup

Height: 11.1cm

SOURCE: *Suixian Zenghouyi mu* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1980), pl. 96.

**SOME THOUGHTS:** The location suggests that these gold objects were personal treasures of the marquis, and not intended for public ceremonial use.

The bowl below was found with a matching ladle inside. It stands on S-shaped zoomorphic feet and is decorated with a pattern of interlaced dragons on the body.

*Considering the open-work ladle, what do you think this set might have been used for?*



**Covered gold bowl with ladle**

**Height: 10.7cm, weight: 2.15kg Weight of ladle: 50 grams**

**SOURCE: *Zhonguo zhongda kaogu faxian* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1990), p. 124.**

**Move on to the [Han Tomb of Liu Sheng](#)**



## FURTHER READING FOR ANCIENT TOMBS

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# Han Tomb of Liu Sheng



To see archaeologists working on the tomb [click here](#) [in this teachers' guide shown below].

Entrance to Liu Sheng's tomb

**SOURCE:** *Xin Zhongguo chutu wenwu* (Beijing: Waiwen chubanshe, 1972), pl. 94.

## ARCHAEOLOGISTS WORKING ON LIU SHENG'S TOMB



This photo was taken in 1968.

*Is the sophistication of this dig more or less than you would expect?*

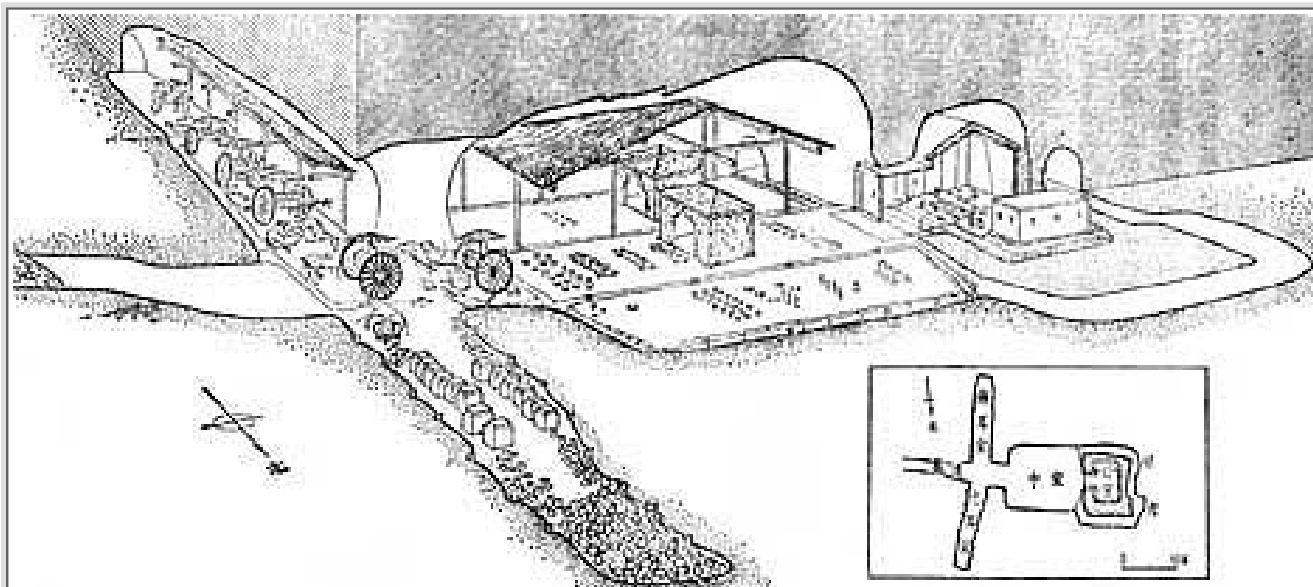
**SOURCE:** *Zhonghuarenmingongheguo chutu wenwu zhanlan* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1973), p. 68.

**MORE:** Modern archaeology has a relatively short history in China; it was not until the 20th century that systematic excavations of archaeological sites were undertaken. The first excavations, in the 1920s and 1930s, were led by foreign archaeologists and yielded rich discoveries that encouraged Chinese scientists to enter the new field themselves. In addition, the People's Republic of China, with its ideological commitment to a materialist view of history, has favored archaeological research.

The Chinese imperial period began with the unification of China in 221 by the state of Qin and the consolidation of a huge empire under the succeeding Han dynasty (206 BC - AD 220). Consolidating the empire involved not merely geographical expansion, but also bringing together and reconciling the ideas and practices that had developed in the different states. The new state incorporated elements of Legalism, Daoism, and Confucianism in its ideology but the officials who administered the state came to be identified more and more with Confucian learning. Reflecting the development of religious practices during the Warring States period, Han art and literature are rich in references to spirits, portents, myths, the strange, and the powerful.

In 1968 two tombs were found in present-day Mancheng County in Hebei province (review [map](#)). The first undisturbed royal Western Han tombs ever discovered, they belong to the prince Liu Sheng (d. 113 BC), who was a son of Emperor Jing Di, and Liu Sheng's consort

**Dou Wan.** The structure and layout of the tombs departs from earlier traditions in significant ways. To see a drawing of Liu Sheng's tomb and learn about its layout, [click here](#). (In the Teachers' Guide, this is below.)



**Drawing of Liu Sheng's tomb**

**SOURCE:** Wang Zhongshu, *Handai kaoguxue gaishuo* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), p. 87.

Liu Sheng and Dou Wan were buried in two separate caves hollowed out of a mountainside. Each tomb has an entrance passage, two side-chambers for storage, a large central area, and a rear chamber in which the coffin was placed. The central chambers in both tombs originally had wooden structures with tile roofs, which have since collapsed.

**Liu Sheng's tomb:**

- Entrance passage: 65 feet long.
- South side-chamber: Chariots and remains of horses.
- North side-chamber: Vessels and jars for wine, grain, fish, and meat; Cooking utensils and tableware.
- Central chamber: 50 feet long by 40 feet wide. Large canopies, bronze vessels, lacquerware, pottery, and clay figures of attendants.
- Rear chamber: Lined with stone slabs. Coffin placed on north side; a room on the south side of the chamber contained small stone figures of servants, wine flasks, lamps, and an incense burner.

***What are some differences in terms of tomb construction between this tomb and the***



***earlier ones examined?***

***How do the contents of the tomb and the division of burial goods reflect changing beliefs about the afterlife?***

***What is the likely significance of the stone and clay figures?***

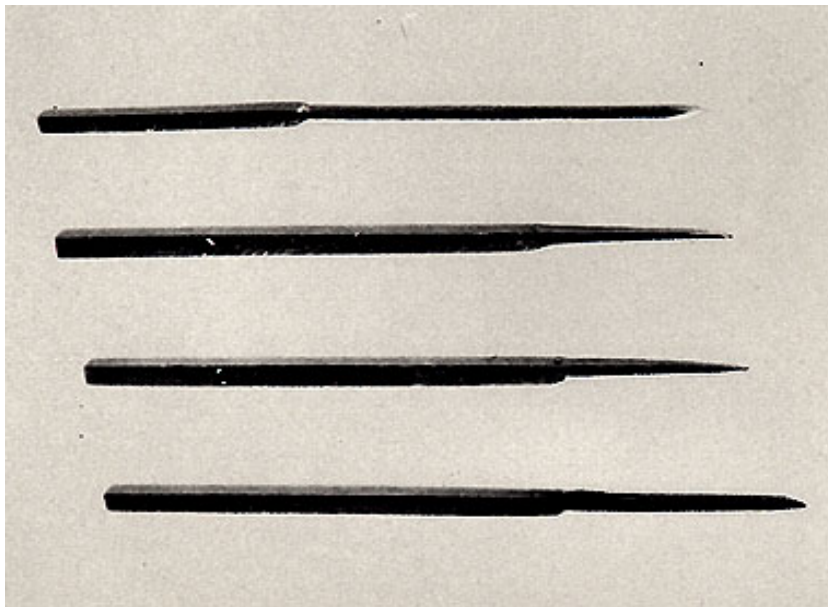
**SOME THOUGHTS:** Liu Sheng's tomb shows the shift from burial pits to horizontal rock-cut chambers. The stone-lined rear chambers are part of a trend toward greater use of stone in mortuary structures.

**In the central chamber everything is laid out for a sumptuous banquet involving the tomb occupant as the host, seated in a tent-like canopy. Row of tables were set up for the imaginary guests.**

**Liu Sheng's tomb contained over 2,700 burial objects. Among them, bronze and iron items predominate. Altogether there were:**

- 419 bronze objects
- 499 iron objects
- 21 gold items
- 77 silver items
- 78 jade objects
- 70 lacquer objects
- 6 chariots (in south side-chamber)
- 571 pieces of pottery (mainly in north side-chamber)
- silk fabric

***What do you notice about the number of bronze objects relative to the number of iron ones?***



To the left are gold and silver acupuncture needles from Liu Sheng's tomb.

*How do these compare with acupuncture needles today?*

*Why include acupuncture needles in a tomb?*

Acupuncture needles Length: 6-7cm

**SOURCE:** *Wenhuadageming qijian chutu wenwu* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1972), p. 16.



To the left is a dagger made of iron.

*Why were weapons increasingly made of iron instead of bronze?*

Iron dagger

Length: 36.4cm, Width: 6.4cm

**SOURCE:** *Wenhuadageming qijian chutu wenwu* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1972), p. 17.

**ANSWER:** Iron is tougher than bronze and the cutting edge is harder. Iron also occurs much more widely than either copper or tin (the two main components needed to make bronze), making it much cheaper. Of the weapons in Liu Sheng's tomb, more were made of iron than bronze.

Move on to view some of the objects from this tomb:



Bronze objects



Jade objects

# Bronze Objects

By the Western Han period, iron had become the material of choice for agricultural tools and weapons, and the number of bronze objects in tombs decreases dramatically. Those objects that were made of bronze were primarily coins and mirrors rather than vessels.

The bronze vessel as an art form also declined with the rise of representational art in the Han period. For the first time images of daily life began to appear in tombs in the form of wall reliefs and earthenware models. Before this time, representations of scenes from life had been rare, a minor artistic concern when compared to the interest in shapes and surface decoration. In the tombs at Mancheng, however, the bronzes are mostly unadorned vessels meant for everyday use. The six objects below are exceptions.



To the left are three bronze leopards inlaid with gold and silver plum-blossom designs.

*How are these animals given an air of animation?*

**HINT:** Look at their eyes.

Bronze weights

Height: 3.5cm, Length: 5.8cm

**SOURCE:** *Wenhua dageming qijian chutu wenwu* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1972), p. 21.



The two ears of the bronze *ding* to the right are fitted with movable animal-shaped pegs to keep the cover tight.

*How does this ding compare with others you've seen?*

*The three feet are in the shape of what animal?*



Bronze *ding* vessel

SOURCE: *Zhonguo zhongda kaogu faxian* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1990), p. 144.

ANSWER: A bear. Bears are unusual in early Chinese art, and appeared mostly during the Western Han period.



The bird-like creature in the center of this double cup holds a jade ring in its mouth and its feet are planted on another animal. It has been cast as a single piece.

Gilded bronze double cups with turquoise inlay

Height 4 1/2"

SOURCE: *Wenhua dageming qijian chutu wenwu* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1972), p. 22.

To the right is an incense burner inlaid with gold. Three dragons emerge from the openwork foot to support the bowl of the burner. The bowl is decorated with a pattern of swirling gold inlay suggestive of waves. The lid of the burner is formed of flame-shaped peaks, among which are trees, animals, and immortals. There are many tiny holes in the peaks.

*What religious significance might this incense burner have? Is there any connection between the beliefs evident in its and the rest of the tomb?*

*Can you imagine the effect when incense is lit?*



Inlaid bronze incense burner

Height: 26cm

SOURCE: *Zhonguo zhongda kaogu faxian* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1990), p. 142.

**ANSWER:** The burner probably symbolizes the mythical Daoist mountain of Boshan, on the Isle of Immortals in the Eastern Sea. The incense smoke rising from the holes would have suggested clouds or mist among the mountain grottoes. Mountains had special significance in the Han imagination; tall mountains were believed to be access routes to the world of the immortals.





Oil-burning lamps were a common means of night-time illumination in this and later periods. The lamp to the left has an ingenious movable door to regulate the supply of oxygen and thus the strength of the fire. Smoke from the fire would go up the sleeve, keeping the room from getting too smoky.

**Bronze lamp**

**Height: 48cm**

**SOURCE:** *Zhonguo zhongda kaogu faxian* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1990), p. 143.



***How do you think this lamp would look when oil was burning in it?***



**Bronze lamp**

**SOURCE:** *Zhonguo zhongda kaogu faxian* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1990), p. 145.

Move on to [Jade objects](#)

## Jade Objects



Jade suit for corpse (male)

Length: 1.88m

SOURCE: *Xin Zhongguo chutu wenwu* (Beijing: Waiwen chubanshe, 1972), pl. 96.

Although their coffins had collapsed, Liu Sheng and Dou Wan were each found in a well-preserved jade suit. Liu Sheng's was made of 2498 pieces of jade, sewn together with two and a half pounds of gold wire (Dou Wan's was smaller). Each suit consists of 12 sections: face, head, front, and back parts of tunic, arms, gloves, leggings, and feet. It has been estimated that a suit such as Liu Sheng's would have taken ten years to fashion. Along with the jade suits, Liu Sheng and Dou Wan each had a gilt bronze headrest inlaid with jade and held jade crescents in their hands.

Archaeologists had known of the existence of jade burial suits from texts, but the two suits found at Mancheng are the earliest and most complete examples ever discovered. During the Han, jade funerary suits were used exclusively for the highest ranking nobles and were sewn with gold, silver, or bronze wire according to rank. The practice was discontinued after the Han.

***What beliefs about the soul and the afterlife are reflected in the practice of wearing jade burial suits?***

**SOME THOUGHTS:** Jade was believed to possess magical properties that would protect the body from decay and ward off evil spirits. Attempts to preserve the body reflect the belief that the earthly aspect of the soul continues to dwell in the body after death.



Here are some jade objects from Liu Sheng's tomb.

*How do these objects compare with the ones you saw from Fu Hao's tomb?*

**Jade ornaments**

**SOURCE:** *Zhongguo zhongda kaogu faxian* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1990), p. 145.