

**Spring 2024 Arts of Asia Lecture Series
Echoes of the Past, Visions of the Future
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Phoenix Kingdoms: the Last Splendors of China's Bronze Age

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Study Guide

The special exhibition currently on view at the Asian Art Museum, *Phoenix Kingdoms: The Last Splendor of China's Bronze Age*, focuses on the southern borderland of China's Zhou dynasty kingdom (ca. 1050–256 BCE), a region along the middle Yangzi River. The rich history and splendid artistic legacy of that region are best represented by material remains from two powerful states of the time—Zeng (ca. 1040–after 400 BCE) and Chu (ca. 1030–223 BCE), both vassals to the Zhou royal house. However, Zeng's existence was somehow forgotten for more than two thousand years, with its long and remarkable history being rediscovered only in recent years through field archaeology. Chu was very well known in written history, however. It vied with the fellow vassal state of Qin for dominance but was eventually vanquished by Qin in the latter's campaign to replace the Zhou royal house by conquering fellow vassal states and ultimately unifying China into a unified empire in 221 BCE. With extraordinary examples of the material cultures of Zeng and Chu represented in this landmark exhibition, we can learn about the art and cultures of those two states, present rare archaeological finds to supplement the narrative of early Chinese history, and explore the relationship between archaeology and art history.

For further study of the art and material culture of Zeng and Chu in the middle Yangzi River region, the eponymous exhibition catalogue listed below will serve as a good starting beginning. The catalogue contains a rich bibliography, which can aid further explorations.

Selected Reading:

Fan & Xu 2022 Fan J. Zhang and Jay Xu, ed., *Phoenix Kingdoms: the Last Splendor of China's Bronze Age*. San Francisco & Oakland: Asian Art Museum and University of California Press, 2022.