

*Arts of Asia Lecture Series Fall 2012*  
*The Culture and Arts of China: From the Neolithic Age Through the Tang Dynasty*  
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**From Ritual Vessels and Bells to Luxury Status Symbols: The Spring and Autumn and Warring States Periods (770–221 BCE)**

The Eastern Zhou era (770-221 BCE) was one of the most important watersheds in Chinese history. Encompassing two periods—the Spring and Autumn (722-481 BCE) and Warring States (450-221 BCE)—this era saw the rise of regional powers, one of which, Qin, eventually unified China for the first time in 221 BCE. Although plagued by incessant warfare, this was also an era of intellectual ferment that saw the appearance of many competing philosophies, among which Confucianism (founded by Confucius 551-479 BCE) and Daoism associated with Laozi (possibly 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE) were to endure until the end of dynastic China. Literacy spread rapidly among the elite and many texts composed during this period survive. The era also saw profound changes in material culture and significant technological innovations. The system of ritual bronzes inherited from Western Zhou was first transformed by regional influences and later eclipsed by a new range of articles with differing functions and decorative styles

**The Western Zhou Legacy and its Transformation, ca. 770-ca. 430 BCE**

- 1) 770. The Western Zhou flee their capitals near Xi'an to their eastern capital at Luoyang. They are now rulers in name alone and few bronzes can be associated with the Eastern Zhou ruling house. Instead numerous states appear for the first time in the written record and many of these are attested by inscribed ritual bronzes.
- 2) Ca. 770-ca. 600 BCE: The late Western Zhou repertoire of bronze vessels continues to flourish, augmented with new vessel types. Interlaced ornament on the surface of vessel, which originated in Western Zhou, becomes more intricate and increasingly miniaturized. Important finds of bronzes illustrating this process include those from the states of Guo, Huang and Zheng.
- 3) Ca. 600-400 BCE: The rise of regional styles. The most clear cut distinctions in both repertoire and decorative style exist between the northern state of Jin and the southern state of Chu, although other states such as Qi, Wu, and Yue also produced distinctive bronzes.
- 4) Ca. 580-450 BCE: The Houma foundry and bronzes from the tomb of the Minister Zhao exemplify the bronze styles of the Jin state. The interlaced ornament is invigorated, and new, often realistic animal motifs, possibly derived from nomadic cultures to the north appear. Pictorial scenes and inlay become popular, the latter foreshadowing its dominance in the fourth century.
- 5) Broadly concurrent with the Jin style, the Chu bronze style emphasized fields of curls rather than interlacery, and elaborate openwork appendages attached to the vessels. The tombs of a member of the Chu ruling family at Xiasi (mid 6<sup>th</sup> century) in Henan Province and the tomb of a Chu vassal, the Marquis Yi of Zeng (d. 433 BCE), at Suizhou in Hubei are representative of this style.

**Immortality and Luxury during the Warring States period (ca. 430—221 BCE)**

A new emphasis on the individual and on a life after death conceived as a continuation of earthly existence leads to a decline in ritual vessels and bells. Instead, tombs are filled luxury items that are the new symbols of social and political status. The new range of objects include exquisite bronze weapons, lamps, incense burners and belt hooks, often ingeniously inlaid with precious metal and jade; a wide variety of lacquer articles, and stunning silk textiles and intricate jade carvings. Major sites in Chu include fourth century tombs at Wangshan tomb 1, Mashan tomb 1 and Baoshan tomb 2 (316 BCE) at the Chu capital near Jiangling in Hubei province and the mausoleum of the kings of Zhongshan (late 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE) at Pingshan in Hebei.

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