

The Art of Xuzhou

A Regional Approach

Wu Hung

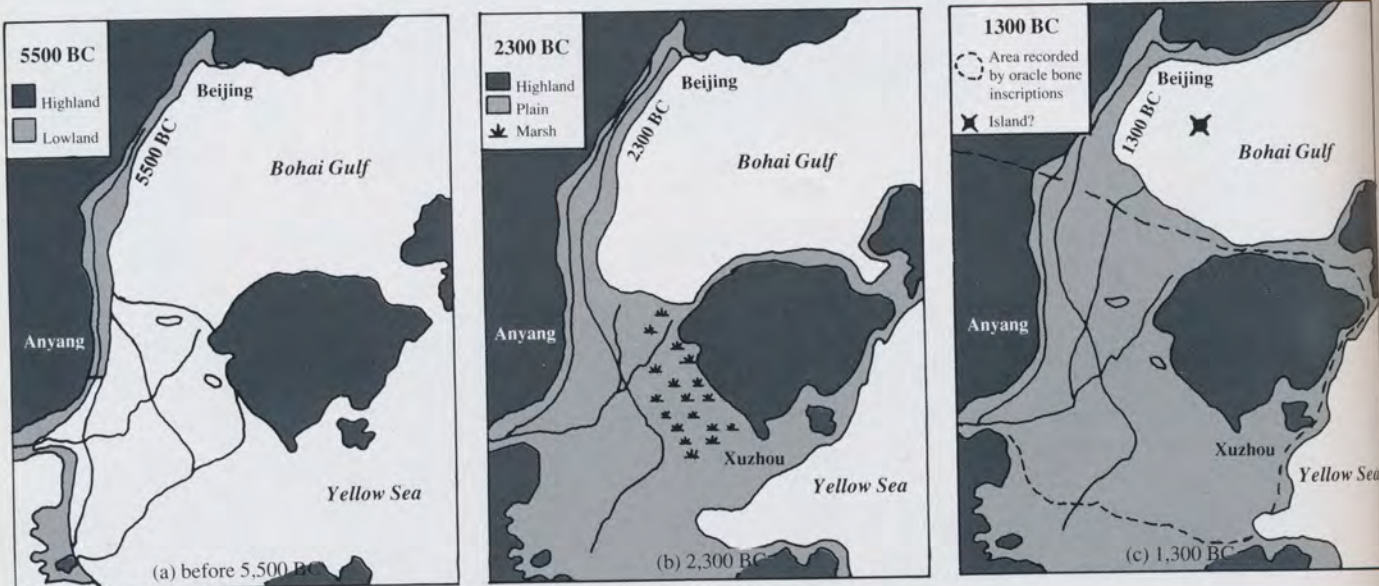
Two basic forms of historical writing appeared in China almost simultaneously around the late Zhou dynasty and have persisted to date. The first, represented by *Chun Qiu* (*The Spring and Autumn Annals*), arranges facts into a unilinear temporal chronicle; the second, exemplified by *Zhan Guo Ce* (*Intrigues of the Warring States*, Eastern Zhou documents compiled by Liu Xiang, 1st century BC), focuses primarily on various geographic regions. In both traditions the most frequently accepted guidelines have been political: a great many works, including those on the history of art, follow imperial dynastic succession, while others define their scope according to divisions of states and provinces. While these two schemes have provided many writers with a convenient means to perceive and reconstruct past history, modern historians, especially those working on non-political genres, have increasingly challenged such traditional modes. They ask, for example: does the dynastic periodization necessarily reflect the development of literature and art, or must an administrative unit coincide with the distribution of a culture or an art style? Moreover, these scholars argue that all frameworks used in historical writing – not only dynastic chronology and political geography but also those based on ideology and religion – are inevitably cultural constructions by people of different times and places for divergent purposes. None are prior objective structures free from historical inquiry. It is therefore necessary for historians to re-examine old frameworks, and indeed such a re-examination often motivates their research. As a result, various new formulations of the history of literature, painting, music and drama

have emerged, while ancient cultural maps have been constantly redrawn.

The present paper, which focuses on Xuzhou in eastern China, represents one such effort. A major difference between this study and some previous ones is its contextual analytical method: instead of approaching the area in isolation, an attempt is made to explore its changing role and significance in Chinese cultural and art history. It is thus hoped that this case study will lead to the discovery of general patterns of cultural and artistic transmission that define Xuzhou's position in a given period. In particular, the following proposals will be made: (1) during prehistoric times, Xuzhou played a pivotal role in the east-west communication that contributed a great deal to the formation of Chinese civilization; (2) during the Three Dynasties (Xia, Shang and Zhou), the area linked the north and south and became a stepping stone for the expansion of metropolitan culture into the Huai and Yangzi river regions; (3) during the Han, the area was a centre of state religion, from which a specific iconography spread to other regions.

Located at the conjunction of present-day Shandong, Jiangsu and Anhui provinces, Xuzhou is generally defined as enclosed by low-lying hills (Shizishan, Luotuoshan, Yangguishan and Xiuqiushan) to the north and east, and the Si river (a former tributary of the Yellow river) to the south and west (Wang Kai and Xu Yixian, p. 84). It would be a grave mistake, however, to hold onto this 'modern' geographical notion when examining Xuzhou's prehistory, since the area's old topography was entirely different. In a pioneering study published some thirty-five years ago, Ding Su tried to reconstruct the changing topography of the lower Yellow river valley from 5,500 BC onward (Figs 1a-c). He specified that, beginning with the onset of the Holocene, a huge amount of loessic alluvium

(Fig. 1) Formation of the Central Plain according to Ding Su (After Ding Su, 1965, pp. 60-62)



brought by the Yellow river to its lower course created an increasing delta or alluvial plain, and in the process large and small islands originally scattered in the East China Sea were gradually connected with the continent and became what is now the massive Shandong peninsula (Ding Su, 1965). Ding's reconstruction, though containing errors due to his limited data, is crucial to our understanding of various coastal cultures in terms of their distribution, shared attributes, shifting centres, and internal and external communication (Wu Hung, 1987). Xuzhou's prehistoric phase, located within the coastal region, must be observed in this context.

An interesting passage – in fact the first literary description of Xuzhou – is found in the oldest Chinese geographical treatise, *Yu Gong* (*The Tribute of Yu*, date unknown):

Between the sea, the Dai mountain [Taishan] and the Huai river was Xuzhou. The Huai and Yi rivers were regulated, the Meng and Yu hills were cultivated. The Great Wild Marsh was drained into a lake, and the Eastern Plain was levelled.

(Translation based on B. Karlgren, *The Book of Documents*, Stockholm, 1950, p. 14)

Traditionally, these topographic changes were attributed to Yu the Great (Da Yu), the founder of the Xia dynasty, and a hero who regulated watercourses all over China. But from a modern scientific perspective, these changes must have taken place over several thousand years. Before Xuzhou finally appeared 'between the sea, the Dai mountain, and the Huai river', the low hills in the area were actually islands – either part of the Shandong islands or small islets scattered in the sea. However, even at that time, during the late Paleolithic period, human beings had already been active in the region, as demonstrated by some two hundred stone tools found in Donghai county not far from present-day Xuzhou. Interestingly, the excavators noted 'amazing resemblances' between some of these tools and those unearthed in Shanxi province in the mid-Yellow river

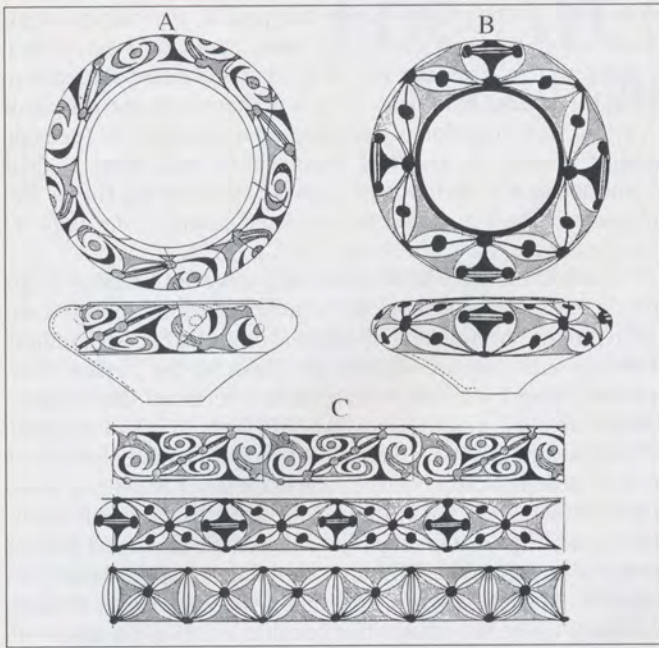
valley (*Wenwu Kaogu Gongzuo 30 Nian*, 1979, p. 198). Considering the topography during that period, any cultural communication between these two areas could only have been carried out by crossing the strait that separated the eastern islands from the continent. This is perhaps why the people of Xuzhou were traditionally considered a branch of an 'oceanic people' called the Yi. They were said to 'take boats as their home and oars as their horses', and the author of the *Yuejue Shu* (*History of the Yue*, 2nd century) stated plainly: 'The name Yi means the sea' (see Wu Hung, 1987, p. 172).

Towards the third millennium BC, however, Shandong was no longer isolated islands but a large peninsula loosely connected to the continent. The original strait had been gradually filled in with alluvial soil brought down by the Yellow river, creating broad marshes which further 'drained into a lake', identifiable as present-day Lake Weishan, north of Xuzhou. This new topography explains the distribution of neolithic sites in this area: numerous villages and cemeteries belonging to the Dawenkou culture have been found along the east side of the lake zone (Fig. 2). Direct passage across the lakes and jungles must have still been difficult; one of the main channels for cultural contact between east and west China was through Xuzhou, where the islands had become low hills covered with fertile soil (as described in *Yu Gong*: 'The Meng and Yu hills were cultivated...and the East Plain was levelled'). Some important archaeological sites belonging to this period, astonishingly rich in cultural deposits, have been discovered on such earthen hills; among them are the neolithic villages and burials at Dadunzi and Liulin.

Excavated in 1963, the Dadunzi site occupied an area of almost fifty square kilometres (*Kaogu Xuebao*, 1964:2, pp. 9-56; *Xin Zhongguo de Kaogu Faxian he Yanjiu*, Beijing, 1984, pp. 87-88). More than six thousand artefacts, including tools, vessels, sculptures and ornaments, were unearthed, attesting to an agricultural society of remarkable productive skill and aesthetic awareness. While the site has been classified as a Dawenkou or Qingliangang-type settlement, this classification tends to neglect its complex content. Most importantly, a con-

(Fig. 2) Distribution of Dawenkou culture sites (After Wu Hung, 1989, p. 170)





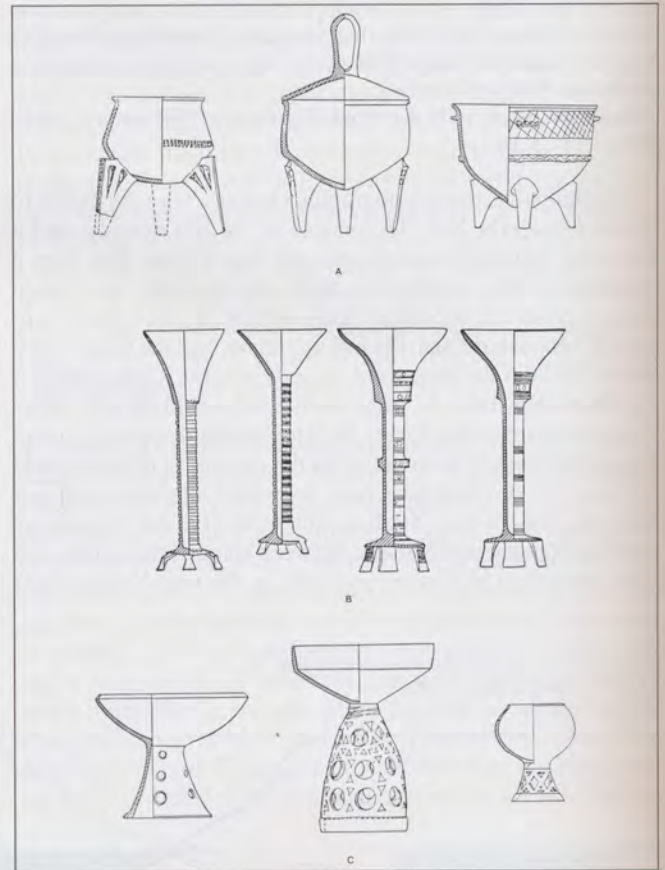
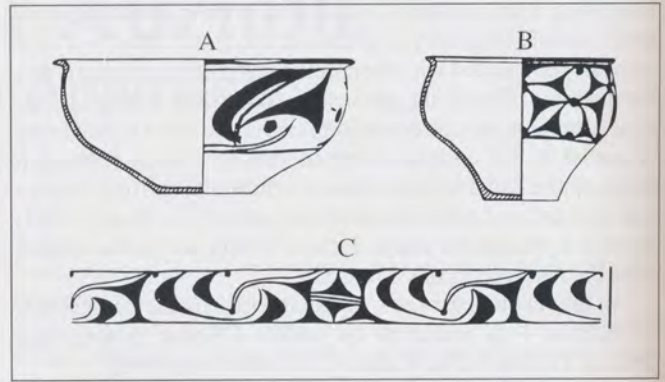
(Figs 3a, b and c) Painted pottery from Dadunzi
(After *Kaogu Xuebao*, 1964:2, pp. 34-35)

(Figs 4a, b and c) Painted pottery from Miaodigou, Henan
(After *Journal of the Institute of Archaeology*, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 1984, p. 45)

(Figs 5a, b and c) Plain pottery from Dadunzi: (a) *ding* tripods, (b) cups, (c) *dou* vessels
(After *Kaogu Xuebao*, 1964:2, pp. 37, 41, 43)

siderable proportion of the painted pottery from Dadunzi is not typical of the eastern coastal culture, but is closely related to the Yangshao culture in the Central Plain. Some vessels are virtually identical in shape and decoration with those from Miaodigou in Henan (compare Figs 3a and c, and Figs 4a and b). In fact, their common 'floral' pattern has led some scholars to propose that the Dadunzi objects may have been 'imported' from the Yangshao region (*ibid.*, p. 49). Another extremely elegant basin from the same site (Fig. 3b) must have resulted from the same cultural exchange: its surface patterns – not only the 'floral' design but also a circle containing a diamond shape – are again found on Miaodigou vessels (Fig. 4c).

At Dadunzi these Yangshao-type painted vessels were found together with a larger quantity of unpainted pottery indigenous to the east coast. The relationship between these two types of pottery has long been debated by scholars; some researchers have asserted that they belong to two consecutive stages in a continuous development (see Chen Yongqing's article in this issue, pp. 50-53), while others have argued that their marked differences must indicate distinctive origins. This author's interpretation, based on a stylistic analysis, confirms the second approach: these two kinds of pottery reflect conflicting aesthetic concerns and are very unlikely products of a single tradition. Generally speaking, the most fundamental element of pottery art is shape. There are many pottery vessels without decoration, but none without shape. The word 'shape', however, can be understood in two different ways – either as the three-dimensional form of a vessel, that is, its volume, or as a two-dimensional form, that is, its silhouette. In fact, when a potter is designing a vessel, he often focuses on one or other



aspect; he is preoccupied with modelling the object either as a round 'sculpture' which can be enjoyed from various angles, or with a single profile of the vessel in mind.

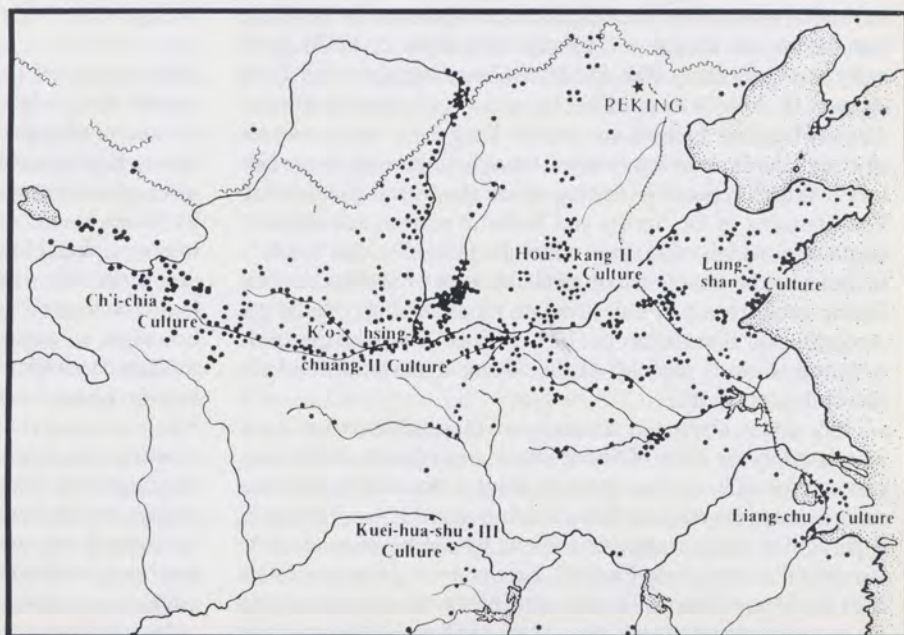
These two different views underlie the two kinds of pottery found at Dadunzi. The Yangshao-type examples are flat basins, bowls and bulky jars, with full, round bodies which contract at the bottom and swell at the shoulder. No matter from which angle they are viewed, their outlines are smooth and coherent, with no additional details disturbing the sense of completeness. The unpainted pottery from the same site, however, includes various tripods and cups supported by tall legs and bases (Fig. 5a). For example, the cup in Figure 5b is slender and angular; its foot or base is extremely elongated and the cup itself relatively insignificant, being disproportionately small, with a much attenuated and flaring mouth. These features eliminate the impression of volume, but exaggerate the complexity of the silhouette.

The contrast between the decoration of these two types of vessel is even more striking. It would be too simplistic to reduce their divergences to the polar categories of 'painted' and 'unpainted' pottery. More importantly, their decor is intimately related to the different conceptions of shape. Surface patterns on the Yangshao-type vessels increase the sense of volume; the roundness of a vessel is reinforced by repeated curvilinear designs. These ever-moving patterns lead the eye from one point to another in a circular motion, and at the same time the three-dimensionality of the object is emphasized. This transference of viewpoint caused by decoration is completely absent in the unpainted pottery, which is either entirely undecorated, or decorated with stamped, incised, grooved and openwork designs. In some cases decoration functions to create a uniform surface texture; in others it emphasizes the angularity of shape by dividing the surface into distinct sections. Openwork patterns best illustrate the nature of such 'decoration' (Fig. 5c); instead of guiding the viewer to comprehend a vessel as a round and solid object, these patterns lead him to 'see through' the surface, and thus most effectively reduce the sense of volume and increase the complexity of the silhouette.

The coexistence of these two types of pottery is visible not only at Dadunzi but also at other neolithic sites nearby, including Liulin. This recurrent phenomenon suggests that the Xuzhou area must have been a crucial link in the cultural exchange between eastern and central China at that time. Through this channel, Yangshao art as well as ideas and technology originating in the mid-Yellow river valley were introduced to the coastal region, whereas the inventions of the eastern Yi were known to the Hua-Xia people to the west. Once a 'foreign' form

(Fig. 6) Covered *bo*
Excavated in 1963 at Dadunzi, Pei county, Jiangsu province
Qingliangang culture (c. 3,500 BC)
Cover: red earthenware overpainted with black pigment
Jar: black earthenware
Height 12.4 cm

(Fig. 7) Distribution of archaeological sites of Longshan and related cultures
(After *Wenwu*, 1981:6, p. 42)

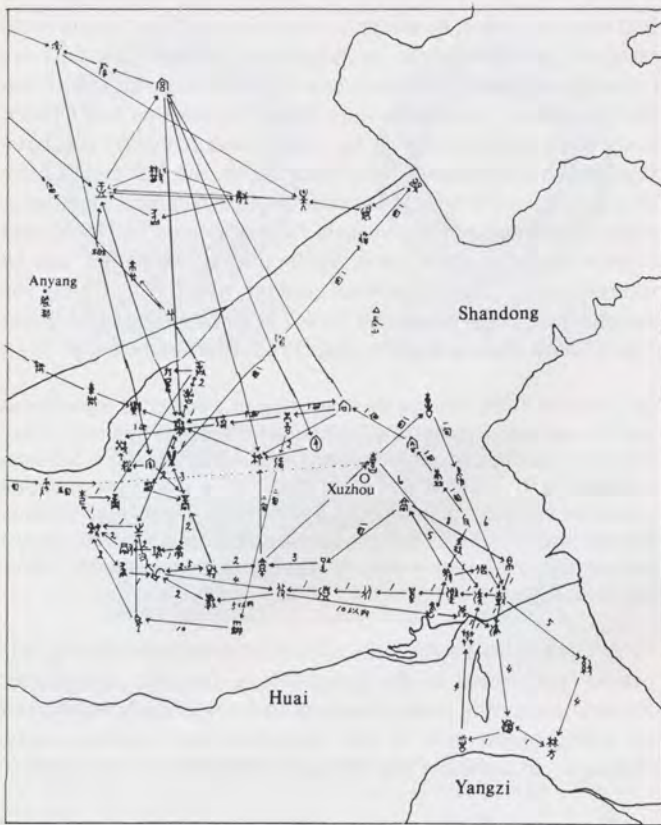


had been imported, however, it would be modified to suit local taste and integrated into an indigenous culture. It is thus not coincidental that at Dadunzi vessels combining attributes from the two pottery traditions were found: a small jar has a black body but a painted lid (Fig. 6), while a number of tripods have been given Yangshao-type surface decor. Similar pieces have also been found in typical Dawenkou sites in central Shandong, while unpainted pottery vessels have appeared in Henan and even in regions further west. Such cultural 'exchange' can be interpreted in a broad historical context, which K.C. Chang has summarized in his important book *The Archaeology of Ancient China* (New Haven and London, 1986, fourth edition, p. 234):

By about 4000 BC, we see the beginning of a powerful process that was to continue for the next millennium or more – namely, these [regional] cultures became closely linked, and they share common archaeological elements that bring them into a vast network within which the cultural similarities are qualitatively greater than without. But this time we see why these cultures are described together: not just because they are located within the borders of the present-day China, but because they were the initial China.

According to Chang, all cultural interferences during this period contributed to the formation of Chinese civilization; Xuzhou, a meeting point of eastern and western art, thus played an indispensable role in the emergence of a homogeneous 'Chinese' art tradition which was to continue into later ages.

The result of the east-west cultural exchange was not a half-and-half mixture; archaeological evidence has revealed that towards the third millennium BC there appeared a powerful expansion of the eastern tradition. As a consequence, various regional Longshan cultures emerged in the old Yangshao territory in the Central Plain (Fig. 7), where the Three Dynasties subsequently founded their capitals during the second and first millennia BC. The Three Dynasties introduced a new pattern of cultural transmission: following the establishment of powerful metropolitan centres in the Central Plain, the mid-Yellow river region became the heart and brain of the



(Fig. 8) Routes of the Shang expedition according to Shima Kunio (After Shima Kunio, *Inkyo bokuji kenkyu* [A Study of Divinatory Inscriptions from the Ruin of Yin], Tokyo, 1958, pp. 382-83)

whole of China. Expeditionary troops and envoys were dispatched from there to various 'local' areas to bring the latter into a large political/cultural framework. In this context, Xuzhou became a place to be 'conquered' as well as a stepping stone for the dynastic expansion towards the south and south-east.

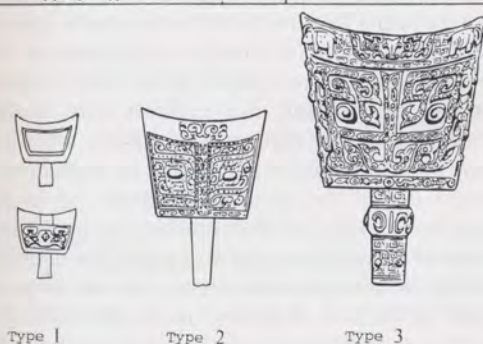
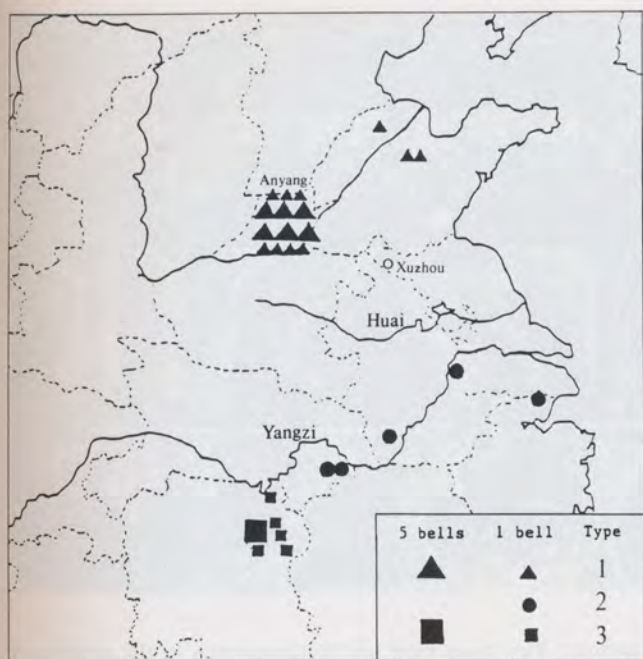
Both textual and archaeological data indicate that during the Xia and Shang Xuzhou was the capital of a local kingdom called Peng or 'Da Peng' ('Great Peng'). The scholar Gu Zuyu (1624-90) stated that 'the Xuzhou area recorded in *Yu Gong* was the ancient kingdom Da Peng' (Gu Zuyu, p. 1293). Two early texts, the early Han *Shi Ben* (*Genealogy*) and the Tang dynasty (618-907) *Kuodi Zhi* (*Record of Geography*), further identify the ruler of this kingdom as 'Peng Zu' – the 'Ancestor of Peng'. Additional information regarding the kingdom's history is found in *Guo Yu* (*Dialogues on the States*, attributed to Zuo Qiuming of the Spring and Autumn period) and its commentaries, which state that although Peng Zu was made a marquis by the Shang, the unjust behaviour of his descendants finally caused their own destruction by the Shang royal army. According to Sima Qian (c. 145-c. 85 BC), this last episode occurred towards the end of the Shang dynasty, around the eleventh century BC.

Any doubt about the accuracy of these records has been dismissed by the finds of Shang oracle inscriptions in Anyang, Henan province, the last dynastic capital. Among the inscriptions dated to the reign of King Wuding (r. c. 1324-c. 1266 BC), a particular inquiry asks whether it would be auspicious to conquer the Peng (Luo Zhenyu, *Yinxu Shuqi Qianbian*, 1913, 5.34.1). Strong Shang influences in Xuzhou have been revealed by an excavation that took place from 1959 to 1965 in a village

called Qiuwan, where houses and storage pits uncovered in a residential area yielded oracle bones, stone implements, pottery, a bronze knife and a bronze chisel, all in typical Shang styles (*Kaogu* 1960:3, pp. 25-29; 1973: 2, pp. 71-79).

A major surprise, however, was the find of a sacrificial site south of the dwelling compound: in the centre of this area of about seventy-five square metres stood four large rocks, surrounded by the skeletons of twenty human beings and twelve dogs. All of the humans were buried face down with their arms tied behind their backs. According to the excavators, these were sacrifices to the God of Earth, She, who was symbolized by the standing rocks. While this identification is supported by convincing textual information (see *Wenwu*, 1973:12, pp. 55-58), it is important to note that the worship of She was not unique to this eastern kingdom, but was part of the Shang metropolitan religion, as frequently recorded in royal divinatory archives (ibid., p. 56). In these records the character *she* 土 is written as a large 'stone' standing on the ground. Even in the Han, it was still clear that this symbolic form was a Shang invention, since we read in the *Huainanzi* (compiled by Liu An, a prince of the Huainan kingdom, 2nd century BC) that: 'In Xia ritual the She is represented by pine trees; in Shang ritual it is represented by stones, and in Zhou ritual it is represented by a kitchen range' (*juan* 11, 'Qishu Xuan', *Sibu Congkan*, no. 96, p. 77).

Sima Qian's statement that: 'The Shang destroyed the lineage of the Peng towards the end of the dynasty' (*Shi Ji* [The Book of History], *juan* 40, 'Chu Shijia', Beijing, 1959, p. 1690) may be related to a series of oracle bone inscriptions that records King Xin's military expedition to the Huai river region. A number of scholars, including Chen Mengjia, Li Xueqin and Shima Kunio, have tried to map the places mentioned in these inscriptions and to reconstruct the expedition's route. As shown by Shima Kunio's map (Fig. 8), the place equivalent to Xuzhou in geographical location was 兗, through which Shang troops proceeded eastwards into Shandong and southwards into the Huai and lower Yangzi river valleys. It would be too simplistic, however, to perceive this and other expeditions merely as military activities mobilized by ambitious Shang kings; in human history, military conquests have always served as a means to export cultural influences. Taking a familiar Western example, the conquest of northern India and Afghanistan by Alexander the Great not only further expanded his already vast empire, but also produced the Gandharan art style which greatly influenced the development of Buddhist art all over Asia. Similarly, we find that the Shang military expansion reinforced cultural transmission: its strong south-eastern orientation coincides with the diffusive pattern of Shang metropolitan art.



(Fig. 9) Distribution and diffusion of Shang bronze bells

(Fig. 10) Bronze *nao* bell
Late Shang dynasty (16th-11th century BC)
Collection of the late King Gustaf VI Adolf of Sweden
(After B. Gyllensvard and J. Pope, *Chinese Art from the Collection of H.M. King Gustaf VI Adolf of Sweden*, New York, 1966, no. 14)

This author has attempted to trace this pattern by studying a particular type of bronze – the *nao* (a clapperless bell with its mouth facing upward), examples of which have been found in Anyang as well as various local regions. Some of the conclusions from this study can be summarized as follows (see Fig. 9):

(1) During the late Shang, small *nao* less than twenty centimetres long (Type 1) were popular in the metropolitan area of the lower Yellow river valley. The body of such a bell is decorated with either simple geometric patterns or additional animal masks, but the handle is always plain. Often three bells of decreasing size comprise a set, perhaps fixed onto a wooden stand for musical performances.

(2) So far, the closest relatives of such metropolitan bells (Type 2) have been found in the lower Yangzi river valley. The handle of this type of bell is again undecorated, but the *taotie* mask, here with a distinctive 'hooked crest', has become increasingly elaborate and abstract. These bells are larger than their prototypes, averaging thirty to forty centimetres in height, and there is no evidence that they were grouped in sets.



(3) The distribution of the Type 2 bells along the lower reaches of the Yangzi implies that the bronze bell was introduced into the mid-Yangzi region by way of this great river. In north-eastern Hunan, higher upstream, a third type of *nao* (Type 3) has emerged, characterized by a further increase in size (some are seventy centimetres high), bold and abstract *taotie* motifs, and additional decoration on the handles. While all these features exaggerate the tendencies introduced by the Type 2 *nao*, the two groups of southern bells share the feature that they were played individually, not in a set.

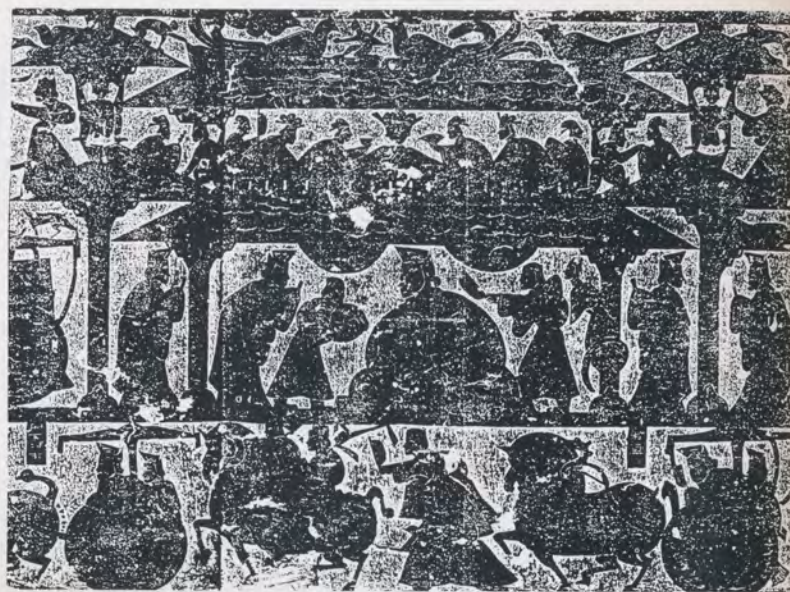
The route of the diffusion of bronze bells thus overlaps, at least partially, that of the Shang military expeditions, both indicating a strong south-eastern movement of Shang metropolitan culture. Also of note with regard to the present study are oracle bone inscriptions recording that the Shang conquerors passed through Xuzhou, and an extant bell (Fig. 10) that may have been produced in this region. Owned by the late King Gustaf VI Adolf of Sweden, this bell is almost identical to Type 1 examples except that its *taotie* motif has a hooked crest and it is thirty-one centimetres in height. As mentioned earlier, these are characteristics of Type 2 bells. This bell, therefore, represents a transitional stage from Type 1 to Type 2, bridging the Shang metropolitan prototype and its lower Yangzi variation.

Xuzhou's role as a hub in the north-south relationship continued into later Chinese history but, following the decline of the Zhou, the area came under the influence of the powerful southern state of Chu. In 261 BC, Xuzhou, then under the jurisdiction of the state of Lu in Shandong, was occupied by Chu which led to Chu's conquest of Lu five years later. Xiang Yu, a native of Chu who competed for dynastic power after the fall of the Qin, seems to have followed a similar path: he established his capital in Xuzhou which, from this southerner's point of view, must have been an ideal strategic position from which to conquer northern China. Documentary accounts of the Chu occupancy of Xuzhou have been confirmed by archaeological finds. Gold coins that circulated within Chu territory have been unearthed (*Wenwu*, 1959:4, p. 11), but a more

(Fig. 11) Painted banner
Jinqueshan, Linyi, Shandong
province, Western Han period
(206 BC-AD 23)
(After *Wenwu*, 1977:11, inside
cover)



(Fig. 12) 'Homage scene' on the
Front Wu shrine
Jiaxiang, Shandong province,
2nd century
(After E. Chavannes, *Mission
archéologique dans la Chine
septentrionale*, Paris, 1913,
vol. 2, pl. 51, no. 107)



important discovery for the study of art history is a painted banner (Fig. 11) from Jinqueshan in Linyi, identified by Gu Zuyu as part of ancient Xuzhou (Gu Zuyu, *juan* 33, p. 1466). The banner is commonly believed to have been used in a funerary rite to summon a dead person's soul – the 'soul recalling' ritual – which is recognized as an important feature of Chu culture. Prayers sung by shamans during the ceremony are preserved in the 'Zhao Hun' and 'Da Zhao' chapters of *Chu Ci* (*Songs of the South*, attributed to Qu Yuan, c. 342-289 BC). Four other excavated Chu 'soul-recalling' banners (all found in Changsha and dated to the Eastern Zhou and early Han) can be viewed as prototypes of the Jinqueshan example. The Jinqueshan banner, in turn, links Chu art and Han pictorial art, which will be examined in the following section.

The discussion so far has focused on Xuzhou's role as an important intermediary in the general cultural and artistic transmission between east and west or north and south China. However, there were also instances in which Xuzhou appeared as the 'kernel' or primary source of certain art styles and iconography. One such situation occurred in the Han; Liu Bang, founder of the dynasty, originated from this area, giving Xuzhou a status superior to that of any other region during this period.

The close association of Xuzhou with the Han imperial family is revealed by several events. For example, when Liu Bang divided the newly established empire into principalities and districts, he assigned his younger brother, rather than any meritorious minister or general, to be the lord of Xuzhou (then, under the name of Pengcheng, the capital of the Chu prin-

cipality). Ten huge Han tombs discovered in the suburbs of Xuzhou have been identified by the burial goods, including jade suits, gold seals, inscribed bronzes and a group of more than four thousand figurines, as tombs of generations of Chu princes. This intimate relationship also explains why Xuzhou often appeared as a 'mirror' of metropolitan culture: when a new idea or art form was promoted in the capital, an immediate reaction was always felt in this local principality. For example, an important development of Han funerary architecture was the appearance of a type of cave tomb designed for members of the royal family, and it is no coincidence that the largest one has been found in Xuzhou. Dug deep inside a hill cliff, it consists of a fifty-five metre long passageway, nineteen halls and seven niches (see Li Yinde's article in this issue, pp. 57-61). Compared to this 'underground palace' even the better-known Mancheng tomb in Hebei (belonging to Liu Sheng, a brother of Han Wu Di and king of the state of Zhongshan) seems humble.

Another example concerns the introduction of Buddhism and Buddhist art. It is said that during the Yongping reign (58-75) Emperor Ming dreamt about a statue of the Buddha and subsequently sent an envoy to seek out Buddhism. Apart from Liu Ying, the Chu prince (r. 61-71) who 'studied the Buddha's doctrines and practised fasting and made offerings during his late years' (*Hou Han Shu* [*History of the Later Han*], *juan* 42, 'Chuwang Ying zhuan', Beijing, 1965, p. 1428), other members of the royal family do not appear to have shared the emperor's interest in the foreign religion. The Han official history records frequent meetings between Prince Ying and Emperor Ming in the years AD 56, 59, 63 and 68. Moreover, when someone reported Ying's 'unorthodox' religious tendency to Emperor Ming, the emperor issued a special edict justifying Buddhism as a 'worthy religion' and safeguarding the prince's right to practise it.

Xuzhou's role during the Han, however, went far beyond being a 'mirror' of metropolitan fashion. That the founder of the dynasty arose from here (more precisely, from a small town called Pei in the Xuzhou district) eventually made it one of the 'holy sites' of the Han state religion and a source of Han religious art. For many years scholars have been debating the iconography and symbolism of what is perhaps the most important scene in Han pictorial art (see Fig. 12). Often called the

'homage scene', it usually appears in the centre of the back wall in a temple or shrine – the most prominent position in any religious structure. Its iconography is fixed: a grand personage sits on the lower level of an elaborate pavilion, his massive figure almost reaching the ceiling. Facing and leaning to the left, he is granting an audience to officials who are holding ceremonial tablets called *hu* 笏 and bowing towards him. Behind him are servants, and above, on the second storey of the pavilion, women flank a central lady, presumably the grand personage's wife. This scene seems to have derived its basic composition from early Han funerary banners: both Mawangdui and Jinqieshan paintings (see Fig. 11) are centred on a 'homage scene' in which subordinates are paying their respects to a superior. The scene engraved or painted in later Han shrines, however, is far grander and probably represents a court audience.

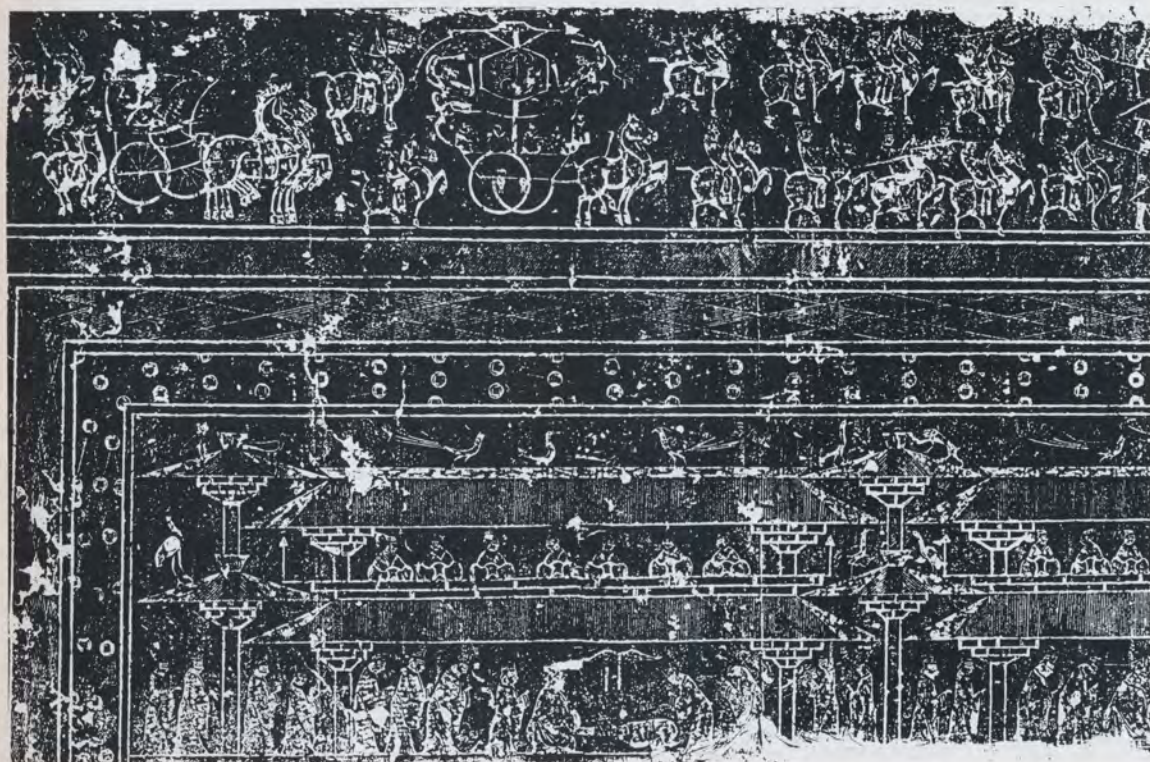
There has been much speculation about the identification and interpretation of this image (see Wu Hung, 1989, pp. 195-98). The nineteenth-century scholar Feng Yunpeng con-

sidered it a representation of Qin Shi Huangdi and the pavilion the famous Afang Palace. Stephen Bushell hypothesized that the scene depicts King Mu's legendary visit to the Queen Mother of the West. A third opinion was advanced by Rong Geng and Wilma Fairbank, who argued that since the image regularly appears in funerary shrines it could only be a portrait of the deceased. None of these propositions, however, is entirely convincing: it is quite impossible that people of the Han would honour the Qin emperor, who was sharply criticized at the time, while the image of the Queen Mother of the West and a portrait of the deceased sometimes appear alongside the 'homage scene' in the same shrine (see Wu Hung, 1989, pp. 108, 198).

This author's identification of the 'homage scene' has taken a somewhat different route: in addition to studying the composition itself an attempt has been made to locate its origin. Research has shown that typical examples have been found in Xuzhou, Weishan, Dongping, Feicheng, Jining, Tengxian and Jiaxiang, all located in south-west Shandong and north-west Jiangsu provinces along the narrow Weishan lake. Outside this area the 'homage scene' is rare or represented only in the form of distant variations. The question of why this scene was most extensively depicted in this area naturally arises and leads to the discovery of an important episode in Han history and art history.

From the beginning of the Han, the emperors tried hard to forge a state religion which would sustain the newly unified empire. One means of realizing this goal was to promote the worship of deceased emperors; such worship was held in imperial temples which were established in all principalities, prefectures and counties. A major step forward in creating this religious system took place in 195 BC when, on the death of Liu Bang, his successor Han Hui Di (r. 194-187 BC) com-

(Fig. 13) Pictorial carvings
Xiaotanshan shrine, Shandong province, mid-1st century
(a) homage scene and chariot procession, (b) battle scene, (c) tribute scene
(After E. Chavannes, *ibid.*, vol. 1, pl. 24, no. 45; pl. 27, no. 48; pl. 28, no. 50)



(a)

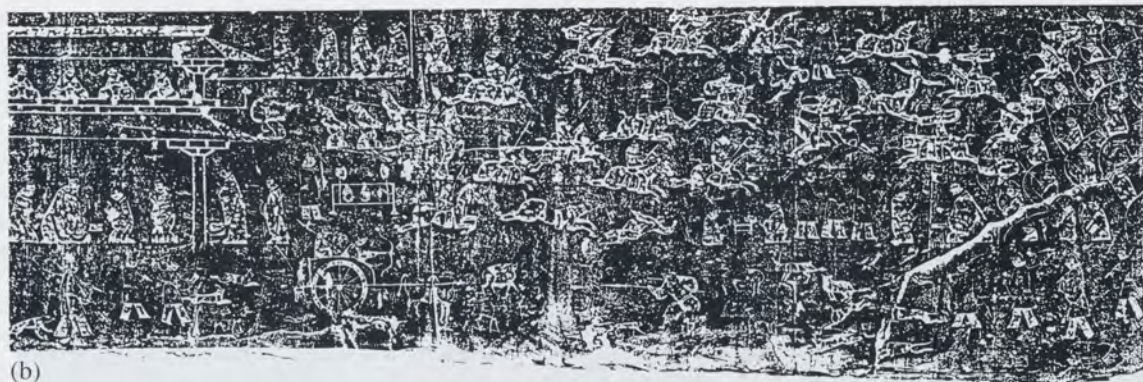
mandated that shrines to the dynastic founder be set up all over the country (*Shi Ji*, *juan* 8, 'Gaozu Benji', p. 392). This practice became state policy and was confirmed by each successive Han emperor. According to the biography of the imperial counsellor Wei Xuancheng, towards the end of the Western Han there were 167 such 'duplicated' imperial shrines in the capitals of principalities (*Han Shu*, a history of the Western Han period compiled by Ban Gu, AD 32-92, *juan* 73, 'Wei Xian zhuan', Beijing, 1962, p. 3115), and it is probable that there were even more in the prefectures and counties. The temples dedicated by local princes seem to have occupied a position of equal importance, and the princes and local officials were required to present offerings in them once a year. The only exception, however, was the Yuan Miao ('Temple of Origin') built in the birthplace of the dynastic founder at Pei, which became a focus of national attention.

The importance of this temple in the Han state religion is shown, first of all, by its frequent mention in *Shi Ji*, *Han Shu* and *Hou Han Shu* (see Wu Hung, 1989, pp. 211-12). Its size must have been considerable: 120 boys were permanently in residence to perform the songs that the deceased emperor had most enjoyed. Although the temple was partially destroyed by fire at the beginning of the first century, after Liu Xiu founded the Eastern Han he immediately ordered it to be rebuilt. Liu Xiu also enlarged the body of temple officials, and in AD 29, he travelled to Pei and sacrificed to his great ancestor. His example was followed by later Eastern Han rulers; one of the objects of their devotions was a memorial tablet dedicated to the temple in 167 by Han Huan Di.

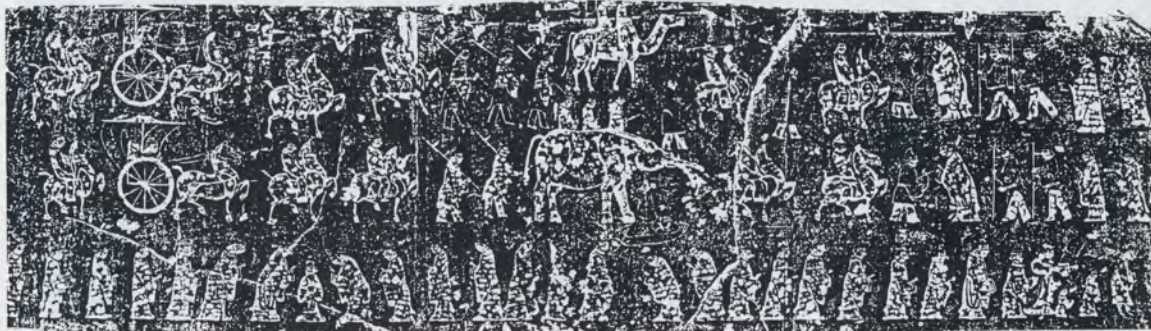
Although there is no detailed record of the temple's structure and decoration, one can reasonably argue that there must have been an icon of the deceased emperor as the object of monthly and yearly sacrifices. This hypothesis is supported by the

surviving homage scenes and their pictorial contexts. One of the earliest existing homage scenes dating from the mid-first century is found in a shrine at Xiaotangshan in present-day western Shandong province. As always, the scene is depicted in the focal position on the back wall of the shrine (Fig. 13a). To the right of the picture is a large battle scene (Fig. 13b); cavalry and foot soldiers of the Han imperial army contend with nomads wearing pointed caps, some of whom have been captured and decapitated. Other prisoners have their hands tied behind their backs, among them a figure identified by a cartouche as 'the king of the northern barbarians' (*hu wang*) who is being presented to the master in the pavilion as a demonstration of the Han army's victory.

Above the 'homage scene' on the rear wall of the shrine appears a grand procession of four chariots and thirty horsemen (Fig. 13a). The most elaborate chariot is pulled by four horses whose heads are decorated with bird-shaped ornaments. During the Han, this type of chariot was used exclusively by emperors, an identification confirmed by a cartouche close to the chariot which reads 'the chariot of the great king'. To the left of the 'homage scene' on the east wall, a composition represents foreigners presenting tribute to the Han court (Fig. 13c). The foreigners, again wearing horn-shaped caps, are shown riding a large elephant and a camel. Similar events are recorded in Han official history. For example, during Han Wu Di's reign, a small country to the south-west paid tribute to the Han by sending an elephant, and the emperor himself wrote a poem to record this occasion. While the image of the elephant in the Xiaotangshan shrine symbolizes the submission of the south, the camel represents the tribute from the north. This 'tribute procession' is being greeted by another procession led by two officials, one of whom is identified by an inscription as the 'prime minister' of the Han.



(b)



(c)



(Fig. 14) *Emperor Taizong in a Sedan Chair Greeting Tibetan Envoys*
By Yan Liben (c. 600-73)
Palace Museum, Beijing
(After *Zhongguo Lidai Huihua: Gugong Bowuyuan Canghua*, vol. 1, pl. 36-37)

It thus becomes apparent that all these individual scenes index the most important national events – war, peace and the leadership of the ‘great king’. They comprise a coherent pictorial programme, in which the focal ‘homage scene’ can only represent homage paid to the Han emperor. While the great concentration of this composition around the Weishan lake suggests its origin in Pei in the Xuzhou district, in time the scene gradually lost its original implication and was widely used as a model for portraiture. If we review some masterpieces of Chinese scroll painting, such as Gu Kaizhi’s (c. 344-c. 406) *Nymph of the Luo River* in the Freer Gallery of Art and Yan Liben’s (c. 600-74) *Emperor Taizong in a Sedan Chair Greeting Tibetan Envoys* (Fig. 14), we find a standard formula which can be traced to the Han ‘homage scene’ and then to the Jinqushan and Mawangdui banners.

After the fall of the Han, Xuzhou resumed its role as a pivot in the north-south axis and its art continued to mirror the changing political dominance of the region. A major group of post-Han art works excavated at Xuzhou consists of some one hundred painted figurines dated to the Northern Dynasties (see Wang Kai and Xu Yixian, 1989). These sculptures have been praised by Wang Ziyun as representing the highest level of artistic creation at that time, but in my opinion they again attest to the theory proposed in this paper that a ‘regional’ art style is always intimately related to a broader cultural movement. After the Jin moved to the south, keeping control of Xuzhou became a key factor in the dynasty’s survival, while the Northern Wei was only too eager to seize the area in order to further advance to the Yangzi. After the Wei finally realized this goal, a special military headquarters, called the ‘Chief Command of South-east Traffic’, was established there and the sculptures excavated in Xuzhou demonstrate the importation of the northern art tradition. Summarizing this and other historical events recorded in texts, Gu Zuyu wrote some three hundred years ago:

Xuzhou is encircled by mountains and hills, and the Bian and Si rivers flow through it. Moving north one reaches the Qi and Lu and moving west one arrives at the Liang and Song; since ancient times it has been a place of vital importance (Gu Zuyu, p. 1194).

This ‘vital importance’ of Xuzhou is confirmed by the present study which derives its primary evidence from archaeological finds and focuses on the development of art.

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Suggested further reading

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- Gu Zuyu, *Tushi Fangyu Jiyao (Notes on Reading Historical Geography)*, Beijing, 1955.
- Wang Kai and Xu Yixian, ‘Northern Dynasties Pottery Figurines from Xuzhou’, *Orientalism*, vol. 20, no. 9 (September 1989), pp. 84-89.
- Wu Hung, ‘Cong Dixing Bianhua he Dili Fenbu Guancha Shandong Gudai Wenhua de Fazhan’ (‘A Study of Ancient Cultures of the Shandong Region, in the Light of Geographical Distribution and Topographical Changes’), Su Bingqi ed., *Kaoguxue Wenhua Lunji (Papers on Archaeological Cultures)*, Beijing, 1987, pp. 165-81.
- Wu Hung, *The Wu Liang Shrine: The Ideology of Early Chinese Pictorial Art*, Stanford, 1989.