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LOWER YANGTZE CULTURES

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LOWER YANGTZE CULTURES

■ Archaeologists now believe that the Yangtze River region was just as much of a birthplace of Chinese culture and civilization as the Yellow River basin. Various cultures flourished in the regions surrounding the mouth of the Yangtze River, where later the states of Wu and Yue would thrive. These culture progressed through a number of stages. The latest phase, called the Liangzhu culture, and is dated to 3500-2000. [Source: Robert Eno, Indiana University indiana.edu]



Hemudu totem

(<http://www.indiana.edu/~p374/Resources.html>) /+]

■ Along the Yangtze archeologists have discovered thousands of items of pottery, porcelain, polished stone tools and axes, elaborately carved jade rings, bracelets and necklaces that date back to at least 6000 B.C. Neolithic residents of the Lower Yangtze are said to have differed physically from inhabitants of the Yellow River sites to the north. Scholars view the Hemudu Culture as a source of the proto-Austronesian cultures. [Source: Wikipedia +]

■ The main Lower Kuahuqiao sites (minimum number of sites, distribution area, approximate date BP and B.C.): 1) Shangshan (10, Upper Qiantang valley 11,000–8500 B.P. 9050–6550 B.C.) 2) Kuahuqiao (5, Upper to lower Qiantang valley, More than 8000–7000 BP, 6050–5050 B.C.) 3) Hemudu and Majiabang (70 Hemudu sites concentrated in the Ningshao Plain; Majiabang sites distributed around Lake Tai. 7000–5800 BP, 5050–3850 B.C.) 4) Songze (30, Mostly on the Hangjiahu Plain, 5700–5300 BP, 3750–3350 B.C.) Liangzhu (300, mostly on the Hangjiahu Plain, 5200–4300 BP, 3250–2350 B.C.). [Source: "The Kuahuqiao Site and Culture" by Leping Jiang, A Companion to Chinese Archaeology, Edited by Anne P. Underhill, Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2013 thirdworld.nl (<http://thirdworld.nl/the-kuahuqiao-site-and-culture>) ~[-]

■ Human activity has been verified in the Three Gorges area of the Yangtze River as far back as 27,000 years ago, and by the 5th millennium B.C., the lower Yangtze was a major population center occupied by the Hemudu and Majiabang cultures, both among the earliest cultivators of rice. By the 3rd millennium B.C., the successor Liangzhu culture showed evidence of influence from the Longshan peoples of the North China Plain. A study of Liangzhu remains found a high prevalence of haplogroup O1, linking it to Austronesian and Daic populations. [Source: Wikipedia]

■ The climate in the Lower Yangtze 5000 to 4000 years ago was warm and humid, typical of a mid subtropical zone climate, with the temperature was two to three degrees higher than today. The land was covered by lush growth of evergreen chinquapin and big leave trees. Along with the expanding of the Yangtze River delta towards the sea, the area became farther from the seaside with many lakes and ponds. There many water plants and fruits on the trees all year around. Many big and medium mammals including tigers, elephants, alligators and rhinoceros, in the forests and swamps. Small animals, birds and fishes provided plentiful sources of food.

Good Websites and Sources: Yangshao Culture [Wikipedia \(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yangshao_culture\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yangshao_culture) ; Banpo site [China Museums \(http://www.chinamuseums.com/ban_po.htm\)](http://www.chinamuseums.com/ban_po.htm) ; Liukeng Village [China Vista \(http://www.chinavista.com/experience/liukeng/liukeng.html\)](http://www.chinavista.com/experience/liukeng/liukeng.html) ; Ancient Tombs [University of Washington \(http://depts.washington.edu/chinaciv/archae/2tommain.htm\)](http://depts.washington.edu/chinaciv/archae/2tommain.htm) ; Ancient Rice [National Geographic.com \(http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2007/09/070926-china-rice.html\)](http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2007/09/070926-china-rice.html); Website on Rice Cultivation in China: Ancient Chinese Rice Archeological Project, Carleton University [carleton.ca/~bgordon/Rice \(http://http-server.carleton.ca/~bgordon/Rice/\)](http://http-server.carleton.ca/~bgordon/Rice/)]

Good Websites and Sources on Early Chinese History: 1) Ancient China Life [ancientchinalife.com \(http://www.ancientchinalife.com/\)](http://www.ancientchinalife.com/) ; 2) Ancient China for School Kids [elibrary.sd71.bc.ca/subject_resources \(http://elibrary.sd71.bc.ca/subject_resources/socials/CHINA.htm#clothing\)](http://elibrary.sd71.bc.ca/subject_resources) ; 3) Oriental Style [ourorient.com \(http://www.ourorient.com/\)](http://www.ourorient.com/) ; 4) Chinese Text Project [ctext.org \(http://ctext.org/\)](http://ctext.org/); **Books:** *Cambridge History of Ancient China* edited by Michael Loewe and Edward Shaughnessy (1999, Cambridge University Press); *The Culture and Civilization of China*, a massive, multi-volume series, (Yale University Press); *Mysteries of Ancient China: New Discoveries from the Early Dynasties* by Jessica Rawson (British Museum, 1996)

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HEMUDU CULTURE (5500-3300 B.C.)



mimic of Hemudu site

■ The Hemudu culture (5500 to 3300 B.C.) was a Neolithic culture that flourished just south of the Hangzhou Bay in Jiangnan in modern Yuyao, Zhejiang, China, 150 kilometers south of Shanghai. Hemudu sites have also been discovered on the islands of Zhoushan. Hemudu residents are said to have differed physically from inhabitants of the Yellow River sites to the north. Scholars view the Hemudu Culture as a source of the proto-Austronesian cultures. The Hemudu culture has been divided into an early and late phases, before and after 4000 B.C. respectively. Some scholars assert that the Hemudu culture co-existed with the Majiabang culture as two separate and distinct cultures, with cultural transmissions

between the two. Other scholars group Hemudu in with Majiabang subtraditions. [Source: Wikipedia +]

■ The Hemudu Archaeological Site in Hemudu Town, Yuyao county — 22 kilometers northwest of Ningbo — has items dating back to more than 7,500 years ago. They were found in June 1973 by local villagers during construction work. The discovery is one of the most important archeological events in China in the 20th century. The findings there called into question the conventional view that the Yellow River region, to the north was more advanced than the rest of China and showed that Chinese civilization originated in both the Yellow and Yangtze river areas. The evidence included rice seeds and wooden oars from a flourishing Neolithic culture on the river delta, as well as those archaeologists have dug out at various sites around Cihu Lake, Fujia, Tianluo, Zishan, Xiangjia and Xiangshan mountains and the Mingshanhou village. They date from 5,000 to 3,000 B.C.. The Hemudu Site in Ningbo holds one of the earliest records of China's Neolithic Age in the southeastern area. [Source: chinadaily.com, January 19, 2015]

■ Over 7,000 items have been unearthed at Hemudu sites, including production tools, tools for daily life and construction components. Among the most significant finds are some of the earliest human-grown rice, the earliest wood-structured well and some of the earliest for examples of weaving and oar-powered boats. The site offers strong evidence that both the Yangtze River valley and Yellow River valley are the cradles of the Chinese civilization. The fact was written in the high school textbook of history in 1979. [Source: China.org]

■ The Hemudu Site covers forty thousand square meters and has a cultural layer that is a total of 3.7 meters in depth. Four separate cultural layers can be distinguished that, after calibrated carbon fourteen testing, date to between 7,000 and 3,500 years ago. In 1982, this site was declared a National Key Cultural Protected Unit. [Source: Chinamuseums.com]

■ Fossilized amoeboids and pollen suggests Hemudu culture emerged and developed in the middle of the Holocene Climatic Optimum. A study of a sea-level highstand in the Ningshao Plain from 7000 – 5000 BP shows that there may have been stabilized lower sea levels at this time followed by, from 5000 to 3900 BP, frequent flooding. The climate was said to be tropical to subtropical with high temperatures and much precipitation throughout the year. Two major floods caused the nearby Yaojiang River to change its course and inundated the soil with salt, forcing the people of Hemudu to abandon its settlements. +

See Separate Article KUAHUQIAO AND SHANGSHAN: THE OLDEST LOWER YANGTZE CULTURES

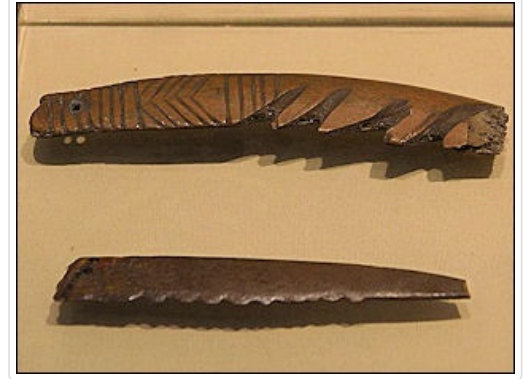
Hemudu Finds

■ The Hemudu Site Museum was opened in May of 1993 and is divided into two parts: the actual site of excavation and an exhibition of objects. It covers a total of 26,000 square meters and the building area covers a space of 3,163 square meters. The building area is composed of six separate buildings that are joined to one another by corridors. The general layout of the buildings conforms to the unique Hemudu style of architecture, which in Chinese is called ganlan-style, or trunk and railing. This includes a long ridgepole, short eaves, and a high foundation. The building rests on 456 pillars on which lie groups of cross beams, symbolizing the tenon and mortise technology already used some 7000 years ago. The foyer is in the shape of a legendary 'roc' spreading its wings, expressing the worship of birds that was practiced by the early Hemudu people. [Source: Chinamuseums.com ||||]

■ The museum exhibits around 3,000 objects that were retrieved in two main excavation periods at the site.

Among the objects are remains of rice kernels planted by man, ceramic fragments that have traces of carbonized rice grains, rice-husk-patterned pottery fragments, bone items, wooden joint pieces, ivory bird-shaped artefacts, ivory carved plate-shaped containers with sun motifs, jade items, and so on. These are all worthy of being described as gems of neolithic culture. ||||

■ The second hall of the museum covers 300 square meters, and reflects the hunting and gathering life as well as the rice-agriculture of the time. It exhibits actual items such as man-cultivated grain, agricultural implements made of bone, a husker made of wood, and stone grinders, ceramic axes, etc., as well as containers for holding food, appropriate for an exhibition of rice-producing culture. The third hall covers 400 square meters and includes two parts, one on the life of the settlement and one on its spiritual or intellectual culture. Exhibited here are pillars, beams, boards and other wooden architectural elements, wooden tools, stone ax, stone awl, bone awl, a reconstructed trunk and railing style building (portion), and a model of a well. Parts of a primitive loom are also displayed, including many things that no longer have contemporary names. ||||



bone sickles

Hemudu Society and Life



pottery stove

■ The Hemudu people lived in long, stilt houses, which make sense in a region with a lot of water. Communal longhouses — much like the ones found in modern-day Borneo and found among some Southeast Asian ethnic groups — were also common in Hemudu sites. The Hemudu culture was one of the earliest cultures to cultivate rice. Recent excavations at the Hemudu period site of Tianluoshan has demonstrated rice was undergoing evolutionary changes recognized as domestication. Most of the artifacts discovered at Hemudu consist of animal bones, exemplified by hoes made of shoulder bones used for cultivating rice. [Source: Wikipedia +]

■ The culture also produced lacquer wood. The remains of various plants, including water caltrop,

Nelumbo nucifera, acorns, melon, wild kiwifruit, blackberries, peach, the foxnut or *Gorgon euryale* and bottle gourd, were found at Hemudu and Tianluoshan.^{9]} The Hemudu people likely domesticated pigs, and dogs but practiced extensive hunting of deer and some wild water buffalo. Fishing was also carried out on a large scale, with a particular focus on crucian carp. The practices of fishing and hunting are evidenced by the remains of bone harpoons and bows and arrowheads. Music instruments, such as bone whistles and wooden drums, were also found at Hemudu. Artifact design by Hemudu inhabitants bears many resemblances to those of Insular Southeast Asia. +

■ The culture produced a thick, porous pottery. The distinct pottery was typically black and made with charcoal powder. Plant and geometric designs were commonly painted onto the pottery; the pottery was sometimes also cord-marked. The culture also produced carved jade ornaments, carved ivory artifacts and small, clay figurines. +

■ In the early Hemudu period is the maternal clan phase. Descent is said to be matrilineal and the social status of children and women is comparatively high. In the later periods, they gradually transitioned into patrilineal clans. During this period, the social status of men rose and descent is passed through the male line. +

- Hemudu's inhabitants worshiped a sun spirit as well as a fertility spirit. They also enacted shamanistic rituals to the sun and believed in bird totems. A belief in an afterlife and ghosts is believed to have taken place as well. People were buried with their heads facing east or northeast and most had no burial objects. Infants were buried in urn-casket style burials, while children and adults received earth level burials. They did not have a definite communal burial ground, for the most part, but a clan communal burial ground has been found in the later period. Two groups in separate parts of this burial ground are thought to be two intermarrying clans. There were noticeably more burial goods in this communal burial ground. +

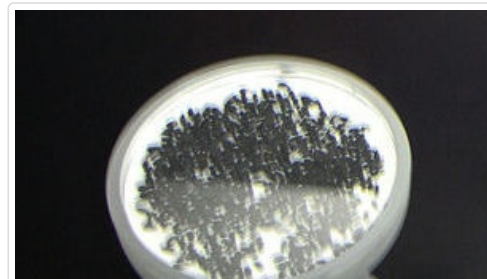
Majiabang Culture (5000-3300 B.C.)

- The Majiabang culture was a Chinese Neolithic culture that existed at the mouth of the Yangtze River, primarily around Lake Tai near Shanghai and north of Hangzhou Bay. The culture spread throughout southern Jiangsu and northern Zhejiang from around 5000 B.C. to 3300 B.C.. The later part of the period is known as the Songze culture. The Majiabang Culture is named after Majiabang in Jiaxing, Zhejiang where the earliest remains of the culture were discovered in 1959. [Source: Wikipedia +, Shanghai Qinqu Museum =]

- Initially, archaeologists had considered the Majiabang sites and sites in northern Jiangsu to be part of the same culture, naming it the Qingliangang culture. Archaeologists later realized that the northern Jiangsu sites were of the Dawenkou culture and renamed the southern Jiangsu sites Majiabang culture. Some scholars state that the Hemudu culture co-existed with the Majiabang culture as two separate and distinct cultures, with cultural transmissions between the two. Other scholars group Hemudu in with Majiabang subtraditions. +

Majiabang Life

- Majiabang people subsisted mainly on farming, gathering, fishing and hunting. Cultivated paddies both of the long and short grained rice — dated to 6000 years ago — have been excavated from the lower ash pits and stratum of the Songze site. From the lower stratum of the Songze site also excavated domestic pig gum bone, which shows that the living environment of that time was quite stable and pig-raising was great importance in the economic life of the local people. The tools made of various animal bones from the lower stratum of the Songze site at Qingpu also show the importance of fishing and hunting at that time. And the fish bones and nuts evidence the food resources of the time. [Source: Shanghai Qinqu Museum =]



Hemudu rice

- At Caoxieshan and Chuodun, sites of the Majiabang culture, archaeologists excavated paddy fields, indicating the centrality of rice to the economy. However, the remains of sika and roe deer have been found, showing that people were not totally reliant on agricultural production. In the lower stratum of the Songze excavation site in Shanghai's modern day Qingpu District, archaeologists found the prone skeleton of one of the area's earliest inhabitants—a 25-30-year-old male with an almost complete skull dated to the Majiabang era. [Source: Wikipedia]

- Some of the earliest Chinese wells have been found at Majiabang sites. Two well 6000-year-old wells were excavated from the lower stratum of the Songze site at Qingpu. Both are made of clay in a tube shape with a smooth wall and rounded bottom. One is about 2 meters deep containing some pottery shards, net weights and animal bones. =

Majiabang Pottery, Cloth and Tools

- Majiabang tools were mainly stone axes and adzes. They were polished and perforated by pointed awls from both sides, sometimes with help of chisels. There is little evidence of more advanced tube'drilling perforation. Archaeological sites also bear evidence that Majiabang people produced jade ornaments. [Source: Shanghai Qinqu Museum =]

- From the lower stratum of the Songze site, some hand-made pottery vessels were excavated, including pottery Fu (cauldron), Dou (stem bowl) ox-nose shaped vessel's ear and grate. Most of them are simple and coarse brownish red sandy pottery and a few reddish clay pottery with no decoration, made by coiling up the hand-molded clay strips. The Majiabang people used the local clay for their pottery vessels. The vessel Fu (cauldron) with a raised waist is its typical vessel. The Ding (tripod) appeared in its late period. There were also some pottery Pen (basin) and jar but very small in number. The use of grate enables the firepot to have sufficient oxygen to burn the firewood, saving the fuel and speeding the cooking as well. This kind of independently formed grate from the Songze site at Qingpu is the earliest ever found in the whole country.

=

- Three pieces of cloth remnants of 6000 years old (of the early Majiabang Culture) were excavated from the Caoxieshan site at Wuxian, Jiangsu province. The material was authenticated as wild kudzu vine. As the earliest textile ever found in China, they were made of rib stitch in stead of plain weaving, showing the Majiabang weaving was quite advanced 6000 years ago. =

LIANGZHU CULTURE



- In June 2006, archaeological excavations near Hangzhou, in Zhejiang province, led to the identification of the largest and earliest walled city in ancient China. Located south of the Yangzi River, the enormous settlement has been named Liangzhu after the modern site where evidence of the culture was first discovered in the early twentieth century. Following study of the many remarkable remains associated with these Neolithic (or New Stone Age) peoples, including palace foundations, royal tombs, craft workshops, and sophisticated jades, archaeologists date the influential Liangzhu culture from 3300 to 2250 B.C. [Source: Smithsonian]

- The Liangzhu culture (3400–2250 B.C.) was the last Neolithic jade culture in the Yangtze River Delta of China. Centered about 20 kilometers northwest of Hangzhou, which is about 175 kilometers southwest of Shanghai, the culture was highly stratified, as jade, silk, ivory and lacquer artifacts were found exclusively in elite burials, while pottery was more commonly found in the burial plots of poorer individuals. This division of class indicates that the Liangzhu Period was an early state, symbolized by the clear distinction drawn between social classes in funeral structures. A

pan-regional urban center had emerged at the Liangzhu city-site and elite groups from this site presided over the local centers. The type site at Liangzhu was discovered in Yuhang County, Zhejiang and initially excavated by Shi Xingeng in 1936. [Source: Wikipedia]

- In 2013, Liangzhu Archaeological Site was named a UNESCO world Heritage Site. On why it was selected, UNESCO said: "The Site shows a political, economic, cultural and religious center of the prehistoric Liangzhu Culture (3300B.C." 2300B.C.) of China. The Site, with its magnificent scale, the idea of selecting the site that is embraced by mountain and river, construction of the city with stone, the water system linking both inner and outer parts of the city, the spatial hierarchy between different settlements, and the facilities of a city shown by the foundations of large structures, presents the supreme achievements made by the late Neolithic settlement civilization in the Yellow River and Yangtze River basins."Source: UNESCO ~]

- The Liangzhu Culture entered its prime about 4000 ~ 5000 years ago, but suddenly disappeared from the Taihu Lake area about 4200 years ago when it reached the peak. There are almost no traces of the splendid culture created by the Liangzhu people in the following years ever found in this area. Recent research has shown that the development of human settlements was interrupted several times by rising waters. This led researchers to conclude the demise of the Liangzhu culture was brought about by extreme environmental changes such as floods, as the cultural layers are usually interrupted by muddy or marshy and sandy-gravelly layers with buried palaeotrees. Some evidence implicates that the Taihu lake was formed as an impact crater only 4500 years ago, which could help explaining the disappearance of the Liangzhu culture.

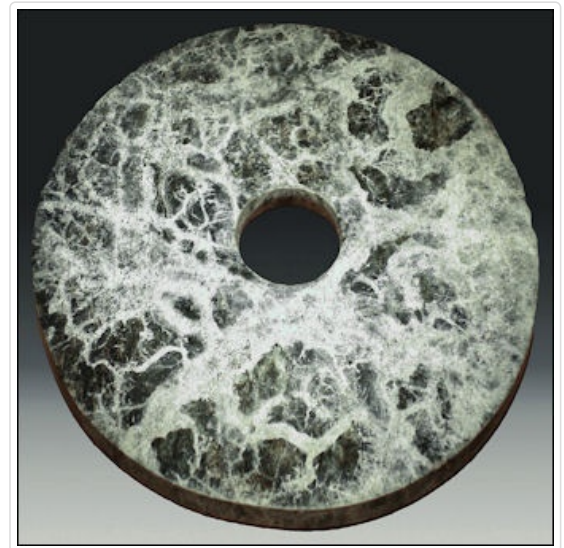
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Importance of the Liangzhu Culture

- The Liangzhu culture was extremely influential and its sphere of influence reached as far north as Shanxi and as far south as Guangdong. A 2007 analysis of the DNA recovered from human remains shows high frequencies of Haplogroup O1 in Liangzhu culture linking this culture to modern Austronesian and Tai-Kadai populations. It is believed that the Liangzhu culture or other associated subtraditions are the ancestral homeland of Austronesian speakers. [Source: Wikipedia]
- According to UNESCO: "The types, functions, patterns and rules of using jade wares excavated from Fanshan and Yaoshan Altar-Tomb Sites reveal the origin of the fundamental feature of a country in the early period of Chinese civilization, namely "ritual and military affairs are the base of a nation", and the significance in the consequent "ritual" culture throughout the 5,000 years' civilization of China; the unearthed jade wares are of incomparable significance all around the world in terms of cultural meaning and technique; in particular, the "King of Cong (a jade piece in square shape with a hole in the middle)" with the most typical "deity and animal mask pattern" of Liangzhu jade ware exhibits the religious features of the agricultural civilization in the Yellow River and Yangtze River basins. [Source: UNESCO ~]
- "The Site explains the supreme achievements of the rice agriculture in the initial stage of Chinese civilization, exhibits the Liangzhu Culture with far-reaching significance in the 5,000-year development of Chinese civilization, and is the evidence for the "diverse and integral" development of Chinese civilization. It is an outstanding representative of large settlement sites in East Asia along the history of human civilization and is well preserved with authenticity and integrity." ~

Liangzhu Archaeological Site

- According to UNESCO: "Liangzhu Archaeological Site is a comprehensive archaeological site representing the Chinese civilization of prehistoric rice agriculture between 3300 B.C. and 2300 B.C. Located in a plain of river network at the east foot of Tianmu Mountain north of the coastal hilly region in southeast China, it covers an area of 908.89 hectares in Yuhang District, Hangzhou of Zhejiang Province and consists of the archaeological site, unearthed cultural relics and an environment of wetland; meanwhile, the buffer zone covering 10,256.45 hectares around the nominated Liangzhu Site includes five heritage sites, namely Yaoshan, Tangshan, Xunshan, Huiguanshan and Yaojiadun which have potential supporting value to the property. It is one of the most important sites of the Neolithic Age in the lower reaches of the Yangtze River. [Source: UNESCO ~]



jade disk

- "The Liangzhu Ancient City sits in a wetland environment in the plain of river network between Daxiong Mountain and Dazhe Mountain of the Tianmu Mountain Range. The Ancient City has a roughly rectangular plan with round corners, and is 1,500-1,700 meters wide from east to west and 1,800-1,900 meters long from north to south. Covering an area of 290 hectares, it was built nestling against Fengshan Hill and Zhishan Hill. Six city gates have been found so far, two in the north city wall, two in the east and two in the south. All are waterway entrances linking to the water network both inside and outside the city. Inside the city there are Mojiao Hill and other high artificial earth mounds, and Fanshan Site where jade wares of the supreme level of Liangzhu Culture were excavated from tombs of the nobilities. ~
- "Outside of the city historic remains are found densely in an area about 700 hectares, and around the city there are accumulations of traces of life in the late period of Liangzhu Culture; important sites can be found on most of the terraces such as Wenjiashan, Bianjiashan and Meirendi which are 1-2 meters above the paddy fields. Also excavated inside and outside the city are a large number of utensils for production, living, military and ritual purposes represented by numerous delicate Liangzhu jade wares of cultural

profoundness; the remains including city walls, foundations of large architectures, tombs, alters, residences, docks and workshops imply existence of the largest ancient city of late Neolithic Age in the Yangtze River basin." ~

Liangzhu Life and Society

■ Dr. Robert Eno of Indiana University wrote: "Liangzhu culture, although on the fringes of what we generally think of as the cradle of Chinese civilization, was very advanced, and seems to have influenced the more central regions of China in many ways. It was an agricultural society, cultivating rice – a very challenging crop to domesticate. The Liangzhu people also depended on fishing, and hunted for boar, deer, foxes, and the occasional elephant. They domesticated pigs, dogs, sheep, and water buffalo (which became the principal draught animal of South China). Liangzhu architecture was distinctive, consisting of timbered construction with well developed joinery. Houses were long, up to 60 feet, with platform entrances on the broad side of the house, and plank floors. Dwellings were built on piles over wetlands. [Source: "Neolithic China: Before the Shang Dynasty" by Robert Eno, Indiana University]

Jade from the Liangzhu Culture



ritual tube

■ According to Smithsonian's Freer-Sackler Museum of Asian Art: "The Liangzhu must have placed great value on jade, judging by the high number and outstanding quality of jades found in their tombs. Since they did not have a system of writing, no records remain describing their historic events, religious beliefs, or leaders. Consequently, the meaning of objects, their specific origins, and the significance of their shapes and surface decorations are still unknown. How the Liangzhu regarded these bi and cong in ritual burials is difficult to surmise, yet they obviously held jade in high esteem, considering the untold hours required to craft these disks, tubes, and blades from an unyielding material. Liangzhu patterns of jade use spread to other Neolithic cultures, including the Qijia and Sanxingdui, via China's vast river systems. The influence of the prehistoric Liangzhu culture continued for centuries and

can be found in early Bronze Age centers, such as Anyang, the capital of the late Shang dynasty. [Source: Smithsonian]

■ According to the National Palace Museum, Taipei: "Six to seven thousand years ago, jade carvings began appearing in the lower valley of the Yangtze River, and by four to five thousand years ago, its development reached a peak. At this time, society was stratified, and powerful shamans held jade "yüeh" axes symbolic of their power at the altar. As later generations have mentioned, they used circular "pi" and square "ts'ung" to worship the heavens and the earth. Some "pi" and "ts'ung" have shallow carvings of mystical emblems, which are renditions of birds on altars. Masks with small and large eyes were carved on "ts'ung". There were also jade knives with crowns in the shape of the character for "chieh" carved at the top. These were all revered as ritual objects. [Source: National Palace Museum, Taipei [npm.gov.tw](http://www.npm.gov.tw) (<http://www.npm.gov.tw/exhibition/jad9910/english/introduction.htm>) \=/]

■ "Pi discs of great beauty and significance. All were probably used in important ancient rituals to assist in communication with the gods. Withstanding the test of time, they retain all of their former mystique and vitality. One of the jade pi discs from the Liang-chu Culture (ca. 3200-2000 B.C.) is etched with the marking of a bird perched on an altar. This suggests to us that the "Sun Bird" was the totem of Neolithic tribes inhabiting the lower Yangtze River valley. Up until the Han dynasty, pi discs were not only frequently hung at the imperial palace, but "treasured jade pi discs" were also objects of veneration. The pi disc in this exhibit carved with the characters for "perpetual happiness (ch'ang-lo)" also includes a dragon and tiger design on the inner rim and a dragon, tiger, phoenix, and turtle-and-snake pair (the "four spirit animals") arranged clockwise along the outer rim. These are both perhaps expressions of the ancient belief that the universe revolved around the earth." \=/

Links Between Liangzhu Culture and Xia and Shang Dynasties

■ Dr. Eno wrote: “In many respects, Liangzhu culture seems far removed from later metropolitan Chinese culture. But three features of Liangzhu grave practices resonate closely with the Shang. First, many graves show evidence of bone piles that may suggest the practice of dismembering the living to accompany the dead, a practice which reaches its peak in the massive tombs of the Shang kings. Second, among the grave goods in Liangzhu burials we find a very great quantity of finely carved jades. Jade, which is found in Shang tombs, is a very hard stone to work, and it appears that the Liangzhu culture was the first to master the art and to devote to it the large investment of artisan time that it required. One species of jade ornament found in great numbers in Liangzhu graves is 10 a smoothly hollowed tube of jade, square on the outside and round within. These objects are found nowhere but in graves, and appear to have had no utility other than a symbolic one (which we do not yet fully understand). [Source: “Neolithic China: Before the Shang Dynasty” by Robert Eno, Indiana University /+]



jade burial

■ “These jade tubes resemble Shang bronzes in that each represents a remarkable concentration of cultural resources in ritual pursuits associated with the dead. The jade tubes recall the Shang in another, even more direct way. Their outer patterns bear significant resemblance to the *taotie* and related animal motifs that are the essential characteristics of Shang bronze art. In the version at left, the bulging eyes that may have evolved into the masklike *taotie* are worked into a motif that is distinctively Liangzhu, apparently showing a combination of human and bird forms surrounding the central facial image. If, indeed, that face is the root of the *taotie*, we may well ask how Liangzhu could have influenced the Shang? The two cultures were far separated geographically, and clearly, the rice and fishing culture of the Yangzi delta left no mark on metropolitan Chinese culture. /+]

■ “One possibility has been suggested by a different form of archaeological data. The record of settlement and of soil sediments for the Liangzhu culture indicates that towards the close of its existence, the region of the lower Yangzi Valley encountered a prolonged period of floods. This flooding seems to have driven the people of Liangzhu culture inland; the archeological record of their civilization in the region comes to an end. The layer of settlements found in soil directly above those of Liangzhu cultural stratum come from a less developed culture, which appears to have moved into the area after the floods receded. (It is a rare sinologist who does not wonder whether these new reports of a prehistoric flood during the time period generally associated with the Xia Dynasty might not have some connection with the legend of the Emperor Yu, who became king and founded the Xia on the basis of his superhuman feats of flood control.) /+]

■ “If this reconstruction is accurate, then it may be that the Liangzhu culture emigrated to the regions where the Longshan and Yangshao cultures were undergoing their lengthy fusion and contributed to the cultural enrichment of those regions. Perhaps it was the Liangzhu immigrants who inspired the Shang to so value the turtle shell as a divinatory object, or who led the Shang to make cowry shells – unavailable in the inland Shang regions – the principal form of “cash” in trade. (One scholar has even proposed that the Liangzhu people were the Xia, establishing a dynastic tradition in the Yellow River valley through emigration and conquest.) /+]

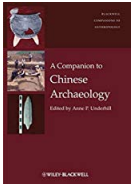
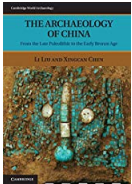
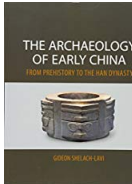
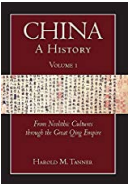
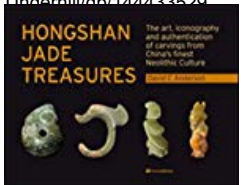
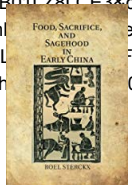


■ “The picture that emerges towards the close of the Neolithic, then, is of a China in which, through processes of cultural aggression and natural forces, different advanced cultures were being brought together. While all may have, in millennia past, belonged to a single group of early inhabitants of China, by the end of the Neolithic, each culture had introduced an independent cultural dynamic into a shared cultural

substratum. This provided, perhaps, enough common ground for cultural exchange – in spite of forms of violence that may have accompanied it – and enough variety to create the enormously complex societies of the Shang and Zhou that were to follow. “ /+/
 Image Sources: Wikimedia Commons

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