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LONGEVITY LIKE METAL AND STONE: THE ROLE OF THE MIRROR IN HAN BURIALS

BY

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When debating the significance of jade objects unearthed in early Chinese burials, most scholars look beyond the object's shape to also probe the ritual meaning of its medium – the jade itself. The classics have invested jade with many virtues such as 'smoothness like benevolence' and 'durability like intelligence',¹ and when archaeology yields jade suits, jade disks or jade tubes, scholars rightly take this physical material into account.

Yet while there exist many theories as to the presence of mirrors in Han burials, to my knowledge none regards the significance of the mirror's metallic medium. Like jade, metal was a benchmark of longevity, the trait most desired in considerations of the after-life.

At least as early as the Ming Dynasty, scholars have regarded the number of mirrors recovered from early tombs as noteworthy. The scholar Xie Zhaozhe 謝肇淛 (fl. 1592–1607) in his *Wu zazu* 五雜俎 considered their great number unusual:

今山東，河南，關中掘地得古塚，常獲鏡無數，它器物不及也。

In the regions east of the mountains, south of the Yellow River and within the passes, whenever the earth is excavated and an ancient grave is found, one obtains innumerable mirrors, more than other vessels and goods.²

Modern archaeology confirms that numerous early burials, especially from the Han Dynasty, include bronze mirrors. According to Noel Barnard and Satō Tamotsu's 1975 metallurgical study of al-

¹ For example, see "Pingyi" 聘義 in the *Li ji*, Sun Xidan 孫希旦, *Li ji jijie* 禮記集解, Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe, 1973, p. 1337 (*Shisan jing zhushu* 十三經注疏 63.9a–11a). The author wishes to thank Professor Michael Loewe for helping him to revise an earlier version of his text.

² See "Wubu si" 物部四 in Xie Zhaozhe, *Wu zazu*, Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1959, p. 347.

most 440 excavations, only 130 pre-Han mirrors had been discovered by then, compared to 1,165 Han mirrors. These were found at 79 Western Han sites and 93 Eastern Han sites.³ This increase is more conspicuous because other bronze objects such as ritual vessels had declined in number.

The following article will first review four explanations of the mirror's role in the grave, each of which assigns the mirror with a functional use. It will then explore the hypothesis that the mirror, or more specifically the mirror's metal, served as the benchmark of perpetuation that was desired in the grave. In conclusion, it will attempt to place the bronze mirror in the context of mortuary ritual.

I. *Previous scholarship*

The mirror's role in the burial has been interpreted in at least four different ways: 1.) to illuminate the tomb, 2.) to ward off inauspicious influences, 3.) to accompany the dead as it did in life, and 4.) to convey the soul into the land of immortals.

The first of these interpretations was already put forward in the Sung Dynasty. Zhou Mi 周密 (1232–1308) in his *Guixin zayi xuji* 癸辛雜識續集 wrote:

今世有大殮而用鏡懸之棺蓋，以照尸者，往往調取光明破暗之意。按漢書霍光傳，光之喪，賜東園溫明。服虔曰：東園處此器，以鏡置其中，以懸尸上。然則其來尚矣。

When the current generation carries out the greater dressing, they suspend a mirror from the coffin lid in order to illuminate the corpse. It is frequently said that this is meant to take radiant brightness and smash the darkness.

According to Huo Guang's biography in the *Han shu*, among Guang's funerary gifts from the emperor there was a *wenming* from the Dongyuan Office. Fu Qian says, "The Dongyuan Office positions this vessel, taking a mirror and putting it inside [the vessel] in order to suspend it over the corpse." If this be the case, then this practice is long-standing.⁴

³ Noel Barnard and Satō Tamotsu, *Metallurgical Remains of Ancient China*, Tokyo: Nichiōsha, 1975, p. 128.

⁴ Zhou Mi, *Guixin zazhi* 癸辛雜識, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988, p. 202. An alternative reading adds the word 'coffin' 祕器 after *wenming* in the *Han shu* text. See the commentary to "Qi Jingling Wenxuan wang xingzhuang" 齊竟陵文宣王行狀 by Ren Fang 任昉 (c. 460–508), *Wen xuan* 文選 60, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986, p. 2570. The term 'greater dressing' will be discussed below. The Dongyuan

The full text of Fu Qian (c. 125–195), an Eastern Han grand administrator of Jiujiang, is as follows:

東園處此器，形如方漆桶，開一面，漆畫之，以鏡置其中，以懸屍上，大斂並蓋之。

The Dongyuan Office positions this vessel; its shape is like a square lacquer box that is open on one side. They paint the box with lacquer, take a mirror and place it inside in order to suspend it over the corpse. At the greater dressing, [this object] is also sealed inside.⁵

Neither the *Han shu*, which simply lists the *wenming* among the funeral furnishings, nor the commentary of Fu Qian, actually refer to any motive of bringing light into the grave as Zhou Mi suggested.⁶

While Han texts and stelae repeatedly refer to the perpetual darkness of the tomb, to my knowledge they never discuss attempts to bring in light. In fact, some sources such as the divination guide *Yilin* 易林 refer to a Han tradition of removing all possibility of vision:

舉被覆目，不見日月，衣裳簠簋，就長夜室

A raised cloth to cover the eyes,
He cannot see the sun and moon.
Clothing and sacrificial vessels
Are taken to the Hall of Long Night.⁷

Office was the imperial funeral workshop which, according to Yan Shigu, was subordinate to the Lesser Treasury. They were responsible for funerary items such as coffins, lacquer ware and ritual vessels. See Hans Bielenstein, *The Bureaucracy of Han Times*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980, p. 62.

⁵ *Han shu* 68.2948–2949 (*Han shu buzhu* 68.12a). Huo Guang's funeral became a standard against which later funerals were compared. For example, see *Hou Han shu* 16.615 & 18.684 (*Hou Han shu jijie* 16.13b & 18.7b).

⁶ Han mirror inscriptions often “liken [the mirror] to the sun and the moon” 象日月, a comparison found in inscriptions on other metal objects. Mirrors also regularly use the term *zhao* (昭 or 照), which can be translated either ‘to illuminate’ or ‘to reflect’. However, the inscriptions do not record whether the mirror possessed the ability to illuminate by itself. For examples, see Bernhard Karlgren, “Early Chinese Mirror Inscriptions,” *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities*, Vol. 6, 1934, pp. 9–79.

⁷ Jiao Yanshou 焦延壽 (1st cent. B.C.), *Yilin*, Shanghai: Shanghai Zhonghua qianyi, 1930, 1.4b. The Hall of Long Night is a euphemism for the tomb (e.g. 3.8a, 8.10b and 9.6b from the same source).

The *Yi li* 儀禮 and its commentaries describe in detail the cloths used to 'screen the eyes' 幘目, a tradition also borne out at Ma-wangdui.⁸

Fu Qian referred to a suspended mirror which later scholars interpreted as an illuminator, but more recently, others have taken similar Han references to suspended mirrors and interpreted their usage quite differently. In 1977, a fragmentary set of Han bamboo strips was excavated near Fuyang in Anhui Province, one document of which is now entitled the "Myriad of things" 萬物. These strips make reference to a "highly suspended large mirror" 高懸大鏡. The committee organized to annotate the strips did not adopt the explanation of illumination but instead quoted the Ming scholar Li Shizhen 李時珍 (1518–1593), who wrote that "In general, people should suspend large mirrors; this can drive away evil demons."⁹ The committee cited the fragmentary bamboo strip as possible evidence of influence from the arts of immortality.¹⁰

This second interpretation of the mirror's role does have support from post-Han accounts that ascribed the mirror with magical qualities. Ge Hong 葛洪 (284–364) in his *Baopuzi* 抱朴子 wrote that when creatures became old, they acquired the deceptive ability to take on human form, but the mirror would always reveal their true shape. Thus, Daoist masters travelling in the mountains wore mirrors on their backs to keep the evil spirits at a distance. However, Ge Hong also wrote that this was a practice of ancient times, not of his own.¹¹

Therefore, Fu Qian's account and the Fuyang bamboo strips are two cases of Han suspended mirrors that later commentators have interpreted differently. Still, theories as to their role in the Han burials are not confined to these. More than forty years ago, Ardelia Ripley Hall countered these first two interpretations, arguing that the mirror was neither a burial illuminator nor an

⁸ For a discussion of the *Yi li* passages and archaeological discoveries of face covers, see Krishna Riboud, "Some Remarks on the Face-covers (fu-mien) Discovered in the Tombs of Astana," *Oriental Art* 23.4, Winter 1977, pp. 438–454. See also Xu Weiyou 許維通, *Lü shi chunqiu jishi* 呂氏春秋集釋, Beijing: Zhongguo shudian, 1985, 23.9a.

⁹ Li Shizhen, *Bencao gangmu* 本草綱目, Beijing: Renmin weisheng chubanshe, 1975, p. 482.

¹⁰ *Wenwu* 1978, Vol. 8, p. 12; 1988, Vol. 4, pp. 39, 46, 49.

¹¹ Wang Ming 王明, *Baopuzi neipian jiaoshi* 抱朴子內篇校釋, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985, p. 300 (登涉卷十七).

apotropaic device to ward off demons. As to the latter, Hall wrote:

Only after the Han dynasty was the mirror itself invested with magical power and freighted with weird uses. They hinge on the belief that the mirror has in itself an occult power. ... In a consideration of the early significance of Chinese mirrors, these superstitions may be ignored.¹²

Hall introduced a third interpretation, strongly professing that the mirror still maintained its practical function as an item of toiletry in the grave, that it was a personal possession buried alongside food and drink that would be taken by the deceased into the afterlife. She wrote:

There need be no question that the Chinese mirror was always used as a toilet mirror, and as a talisman it was worn even in hope that it might be so used in the hereafter. The utility of the early mirror is not to be denied. Upon its function its original significance depends.¹³

In support of this, Mawangdui (Tomb No. 1) is a clear example in which the mirror is associated with other items of toiletry. Grey in colour because of its high tin content, the mirror was found wrapped in an embroidered scarf and placed in one of many cosmetic boxes, a box which also included five smaller toiletry containers.¹⁴

Some mirrors in Han burials clearly retained their everyday usage, but it is equally clear that others did not. First, the Eastern Han commentator Fu Qian described the special *wenming* lacquer box that housed a suspended mirror inside the coffin. Here the mirror has moved away from its everyday usage. Second, mirrors have been depicted in Han tomb stone reliefs among much cosmic imagery. Specifically, a Shandong relief excavated near Jining in the 1970s¹⁵ displays five mirrors¹⁶ circling the toad of the moon

¹² Ardelia Ripley Hall, "The Early Significance of Chinese Mirrors," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 55, 1935, p. 187.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

¹⁴ Hunan sheng bowuguan, Zhongguo kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo 湖南省博物館 中國科學院考古研究所, *Changsha Mawangdui yihao Han mu* 長沙馬王堆一號漢墓, Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1973, vol. 1, p. 128; vol. 2, p. 167; pl. 178.

¹⁵ Actually they were 're-excavated,' for some reproductions of the reliefs already appear in a collection by Fu Xihua 傅惜華 entitled *Handai huaxiang quanji* 漢代畫像全集 published in 1950 in Beijing. Neither Fu's reproductions nor those in *Wenwu* 1983, no. 5, pp. 21–27, match the quality of *Shandong Han huaxiang shi xuanji* 山東漢畫像石選集, the 1982 work from which my illustration is taken.

¹⁶ Because the top left corner of the stone is missing, only four remain.



Figure 1. Jining County stone relief with four (formerly five) mirrors of the joined-arc design circling the moon's toad. This stone's counterpart is topped with the sun's crow. The moon is surrounded by fish and the sun by birds, which are the creatures of yin and yang respectively. See Liu Wendian 劉文典, *Huainan honglie jijie* 淮南鴻烈集解, Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe, 1992, p. 81 (天文). Note that the bottom of the three figures strides upon waves, a common trait of immortals.

From Shandong sheng bowuguan 山東省博物館 & Shandong sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 山東省文物考古研究所, *Shandong Han huaxiang shi xuanji* 山東漢畫像石選集, Qi Lu shushe, 1982, 圖 143.



Figure 2. The joined-arc mirror, *lianhu jing* 連弧鏡, a style common in the Han Dynasty and depicted on the Jining County stone relief.

From Kong Xiangxing 孔祥星, *Zhongguo tongjing tudian* 中國銅鏡圖典, Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1992, p. 371.

with three wave-walking humans striding toward them (Figs. 1–2). Finally, modern excavations demonstrate that the mirror was often separated from the other burial goods, or *mingqi*, and given a unique position in the tomb (Figs. 3–5). This position may have resulted from the mirror being placed inside the coffin, as Fu Qian stated. The other burial goods were most likely placed in the tomb during the formal funeral, which was often many months later.¹⁷

¹⁷ For additional examples of burials with mirrors placed in valued positions, see Kaogu 1963, p. 77; Kaogu 1964, p. 404; Kaogu 1964, p. 479; Kaogu 1964, p. 555; Kaogu 1966, p. 248; Kaogu 1973, p. 18; Kaogu 1991, p. 714; Wenwu 1960, no. 5, p. 61; and Wenwu 1983, no. 4, p. 16. In all of these examples where a corpse is present, the mirror is located within the coffin space, usually next to the head.

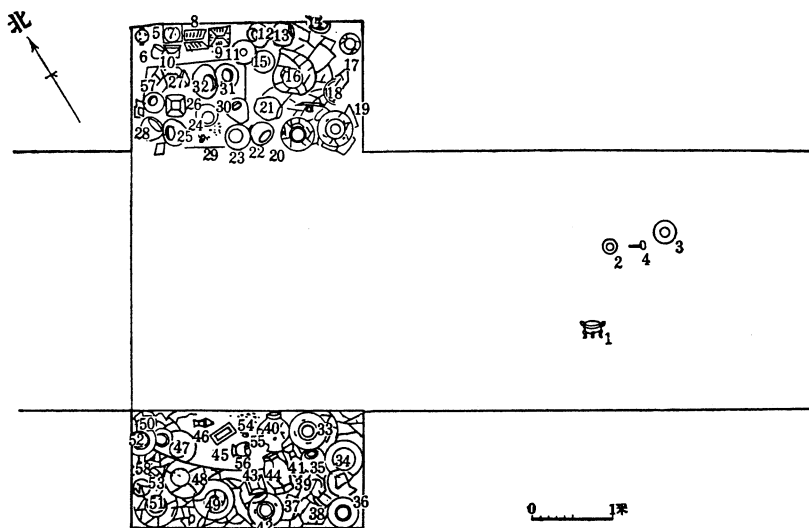


Figure 3. Western Han burial from the Changsha region. Note the mirrors' relative isolation compared to the other grave goods that are sequestered in two recesses. The legible half of the stone mirror's inscription reads "ten-thousand years and a thousand autumns."

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. bronze tripod | 2. bronze mirror |
| 3. soapstone mirror | 4. ring-handled iron knife |
| 5. soapstone tripod | 6. soapstone rice cooker |
| 7. soapstone well | 8. soapstone oven |
| 9. soapstone granary | 10. soapstone disk |
| 11, 12, 15, 17, 18, 41. clay pots | |
| 13, 14, 19-25, 33, 42, 28. clay jars | |
| 16, 40, 48, 51. large clay jars | |
| 26, 27, 43, 44. clay square pots | |
| 35, 39, 49, 57, 58. earthenware jars | |
| 32, 36-38. clay small boxes | 45. square clay oven |
| 46. clay incense burner | 47, 52, 53. clay tripods |
| 29, 54. plaster coins | 55. plaster well |
| 56. bronze mortar for medicine | |

From Hunan sheng bowuguan 湖南省博物館, "Changsha Shumu ling Zhanguo mu Ami ling Xi-Han mu" 長沙樹木嶺戰國墓阿彌嶺西漢墓, *Kaogu* 1984, p. 793.

A fourth interpretation of the mirror's role in the burial comes from Michael Loewe's discussions on TLV patterns on Han mirrors. The TLV mirror (*guiju jing* 規矩鏡 or *boju jing* 博局鏡), so called because some of its symbols resemble the letters T, L and V, was a common mirror found in Han burials. Loewe wrote:

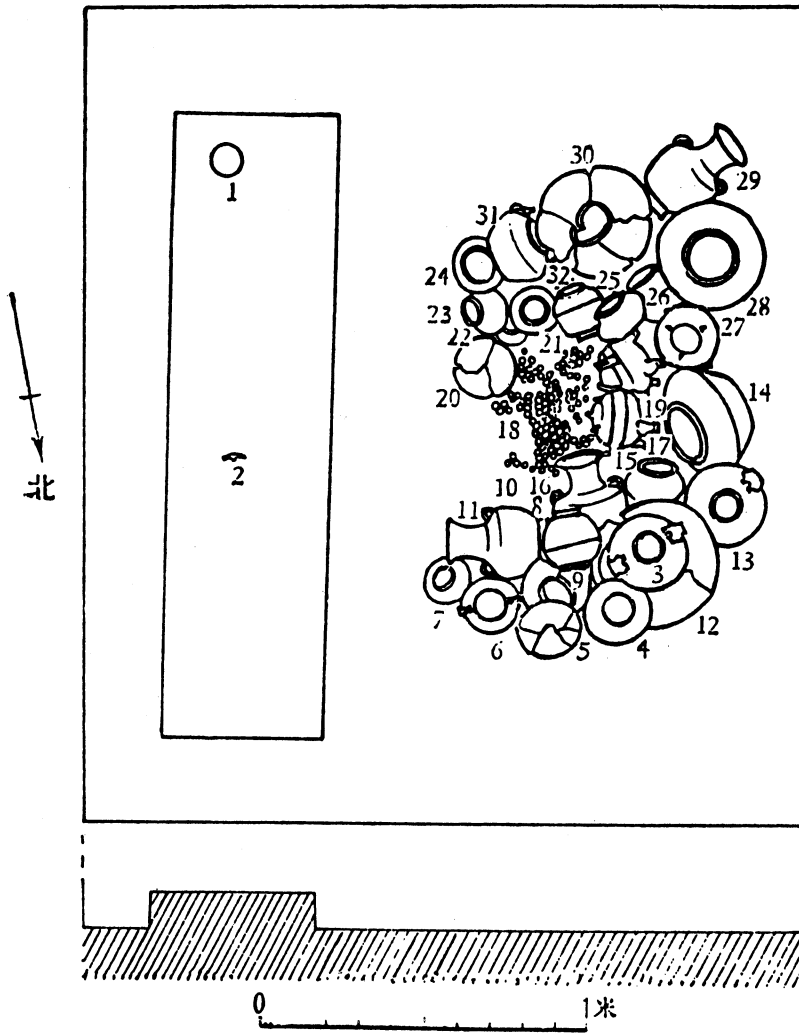


Figure 4. Western Han burial from Fuquan shan, west of Shanghai. The raised platform on which the mirror rests was presumably the location of the coffin.

1. bronze mirror
2. bronze belthook
- 3, 13, 31. glazed clay pots
- 4, 7, 9, 10, 12, 14, 17, 21–26, 28, 30. clay jars
- 5, 8, 20, 32. glazed clay boxes
- 6, 15, 19, 27. glazed clay tripods
- 11, 16, 29. glazed clay pots
18. coins

From Wang Zhengshu 王正書, "Shanghai Fuquan shan Xi-Han muqun fajue" 上海福泉山西漢墓羣發掘, *Kaogu* 1988, p. 695.

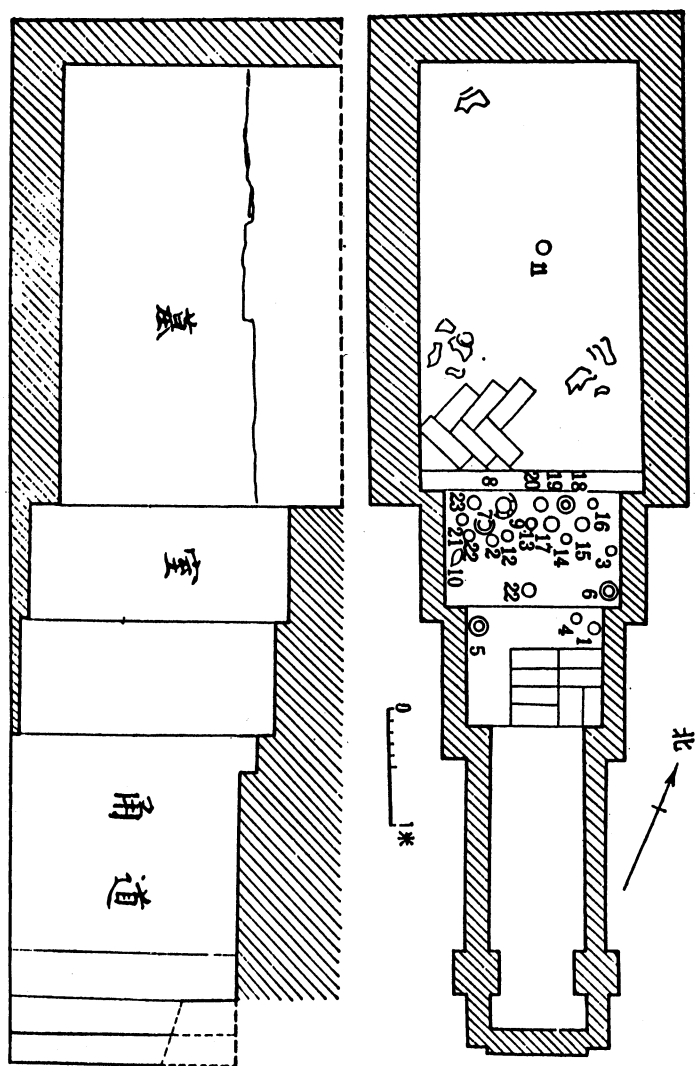


Figure 5. Southern Qi burial from Gan County, Jiangxi Province. Note the mirror's relative isolation in the burial chamber 墓 as compared to the other goods which were left outside the chamber.

1-4. bowls

6. water basin

9. patterned pan

11. bronze mirror

15-19, 21-23. pans

5. three-legged burner

7, 8. trays

10. oven

12, 13. cups

14, 20. three-legged ink slabs

From Ganzhou shi bowuguan 贛州市博物館, "Jiangxi Gan xian Nan-Qi mu" 江西贛縣南齊墓, *Kaogu* 1984, p. 346.

In addition the inscriptions or the decorative details of the mirrors convey explicitly or symbolically the presence of the world to come, where it was hoped that the spirit of the deceased person would enjoy the fruits of paradise. For, above all, the TLV mirrors served to provide a means of communication between the dead and those known realms of the cosmos to which philosophers had been content to restrict their attention.¹⁸

Loewe suggests that, in addition to its other properties and functions, the TLV mirror may have been fashioned after the diviner's board (or cosmic board), *shi* 式, several of which have been excavated from tombs of the Han Dynasty and Six Dynasties. The diviner's board consisted of a round rotating disk that turned atop a square panel; the square panel was positioned in respect to the four cardinal points and the round disk was apparently lined up with the sun or perhaps the Dipper. The TLV mirror was a stylized version of this diviner's board, permanently fixed in the most auspicious position in order to situate the holder within the cosmos.¹⁹

Loewe's theory has gained wide acceptance and has even been presented as fact in some recent papers. For example, Judy Chungwa Ho wrote:

The T-L-V mirror, with the "T" shapes attached to its sides and the "L" shapes attached to the outer circle, represents the ideal alignment of all the cosmic forces analogous to a diviner's board, or *shi*. In this way the T-L-V mirror has added divinatory significance in ensuring good fortune, all the better to escort the deceased in his afterlife journey.²⁰

I am hesitant to accept this explanation on several grounds. First, literary references to the diviner's board appear in the middle of the Western Han Dynasty, as do excavated diviner's boards,²¹ but

¹⁸ Michael Loewe, *Ways to Paradise*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979 (reprinted Taipei: Southern Materials Center, Inc., 1994), p. 61.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 75–81. See also Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe (ed.), *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 1, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 724. In support of this theory, there exist coins (or perhaps coin-like talismans) of unknown provenance that make use of the TLV pattern, one of which also has a Dipper, thus linking the Dipper, an element found on the diviner's board, to the TLV pattern. However, dating these coins is difficult. See Li Zuoxian 李佐賢, *Guquan hui* 古泉匯, 1864, 11.2b.

²⁰ Judy Chungwa Ho, "The Twelve Calendrical Animals in Tang Tombs," in *Ancient Mortuary Traditions of China*, Los Angeles: Far Eastern Art Council/Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991, p. 67.

²¹ The same Fuyang burial site that yielded the "Myriad of things" also possessed two diviners' boards.

the TLV pattern also existed on a gaming board called *liubo* 六博. Loewe explained the identical designs as follows:

A possible explanation of the overriding similarity between the TLV pattern and the marks of the gaming boards may be that the pattern derived from the diviner's board and was transferred not only to mirrors, but also to other types of board that were used in divining ...²²

However, *liubo* boards have been excavated from the Qin Dynasty (e.g. at Shuihudi) and even earlier from the Warring States Period (e.g. at the Zhongshan Mausoleum), long predating the middle of the Western Han.²³ Literary references to *liubo* also seem to predate the Han (e.g. in the *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策).²⁴ In other words, the *liubo*'s TLV pattern is earlier than the diviner's board, and until archaeology uncovers a diviner's board that is at least 200 years older, there is no evidence that the diviner's board was the ancestor of the TLV pattern.

Second, if it is assumed that the diviner's board pattern was indeed transferred to both the mirrors and the gaming boards – that the diviner's board was ancestor to both – it is still unlikely that the mirrors and gaming boards *both* independently interpreted the diviner's board in terms of Ts, Ls and Vs, when the diviner's board had none of these symbols.

Third and most importantly, Loewe's link between the mirror and the diviner's board is derived from stylistic similarities, but his analysis works solely on the positioning of the symbols and not on the symbols themselves. Thus, anything positioned along the eight principle points of the compass (i.e. a shape like a Union Jack) would meet his criteria. For example, he wrote that "Each one of the Ls encloses a symbol whose meaning is clear for all, literate or not, to understand; for they display the four beasts of the four directions, which correspond with four of the Five Phases."²⁵ If the

²² Loewe, p. 82.

²³ For dating the diviner's boards, see Loewe, pp. 77, 205. For examples of Qin *liubo* boards, see *Yunmeng Shuihudi Qin mu* 雲夢睡虎地秦墓, Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1981, p. 56. For Warring States Period *liubo* boards, see *Treasures from the Tombs of Zhongshan guo Kings: An Exhibition from the PRC*, Tokyo: Tokyo National Museum, 1981, pl. 49.

²⁴ According to the *Zhanguo ce*, which is thought to be a Han compilation of pre-Qin documents, playing *liubo* was evidence of leisure and prosperity in Linzi 臨淄, a region in Shandong. See Liu Xiang 劉向, *Zhanguo ce*, Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1978, p. 337 (齊一).

²⁵ Loewe, p. 82.

beasts are already on the mirrors, it is unclear why the Ls would also be needed or what specific purpose an L-shape served. The same can be said of the Ts and Vs.

Finally, of the mirrors given valued positions in burials (i.e. inside the coffin), some are TLV mirrors and some are not. The mirrors depicted in the Jining stone reliefs are also not TLV mirrors but joined-arc mirrors, *lianhua jing* 連弧鏡.

These are a few of the hesitations I have toward the current theory that the TLV mirror is derived from the diviner's board and is used to escort the dead on their afterlife journey. By removing this link, the TLV mirror loses its sense of locating the deceased in an ideal position to be conveyed to a paradise. However, this is not to say that both instruments do not share elements of a cosmological and numerological language. The TLV mirror and *liubo* gaming boards are clearly associated with immortals and cosmology. Yet even here some of the interpretations about the mirror can stray too far.

For example, almost every Western scholar who has attempted to explain the cosmology of the TLV mirror has made reference to the mirror's roundness and how it symbolizes the round heavens.²⁶ First, this roundness long predates any TLV cosmology, and those who argue for heavenly symbolism must show how the TLV mirror's roundness is different from the long tradition of round mirrors that predates it. Second and more importantly, only a round shape would accommodate the faces of these mirrors, which are often convex. A convex surface allowed the user to see more of his or her reflection on a relatively small surface area, somewhat like looking at one's reflection on the back of a spoon.²⁷ However, convexity is inherently round and cannot be transferred to a square mirror. Therefore, I am hesitant to accept cosmological interpretations over practical considerations.

These four interpretations – illuminator, apotropaic device,

²⁶ It has been argued that the *combination* of the mirror's roundness and the square in the TLV design is evidence of heaven/earth symbolism. Yet the simple circle-and-square combination occurs on other Han objects without suggesting this symbolism, such as on coins and non-TLV mirrors. Conversely, although they use the TLV pattern, *liubo* game boards are square, not round.

²⁷ Not only are many of the existing Han mirrors convex, but those that are now flat may have originally been convex. The Sung antiquarian Shen Gua 沈括 lamented that "Nowadays, when people get hold of ancient mirrors, they actually have the surfaces ground flat." See Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, Vol. IV.1, Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1962, p. 93.

item of toiletry and conveyance of the dead – all share the feature of utility. It is perhaps possible that the mirror exhibited more than one of these features. However, instead of assigning the mirror a specific *function* in the burial, I will argue that the mirror may have been a *symbol*, a representation of a greater concept; the mirror may have been symbolic rather than functional in the same way that, in modern terms, a wedding ring found in a churchyard grave would be a symbolic rather than functional device.

To elaborate on this symbol, the following analysis will first elucidate the concept of longevity (*shou* 壽) in Han afterlife. Second, it will examine the metaphor for that longevity, namely metal and stone. Third, it will attempt to demonstrate why people in the Han Dynasty valued the durability of metal and stone. Finally, it will argue that bronze mirrors were the epitome of metal. The conclusion will draw these four separate points together, demonstrating that the mirror may have been a symbol of longevity in mortuary ritual.

II. Longevity like metal and stone 壽如金石

A. The concept of *shou* 壽

Although the term *shou* is usually rendered ‘longevity’, it is not necessarily limited to the lengthened years of life. For example, in the *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露, ascribed to Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (?179–?104 B.C.) but most likely including later material as well, the author described the immortality of the ruler as follows:

故雖絕地，廟位祝牲，猶列于郊號，宗于代宗，故曰：聲名魂魄施於虛，極壽無彊。

Thus, even though he is cut off from his territory, his temple position and beseeching offerings will rank among the other sacrifice recipients, and he will be given a permanent kindred designation at Mt. Tai. Therefore, it is said that his reputation and soul extend to oblivion, and he enjoys extreme longevity without end.²⁸

²⁸ Su Yu 蘇輿, *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng* 春秋繁露義證, Taipei: He lu tushu chubanshe, 1974, pp. 142–143 (7.18b–19a) (三代改制質文).

The territory from which he is cut off is the region of his descendants responsible for making ancestral sacrifices to him. On the authority of the Han standard histories, the title *zong* 宗 is given to emperors who become permanent ancestors and are immune to fading away. According to the “Li lun” 禮論 in the *Xunzi* 荀子, the term *jiao* 郊 is a sacrifice that joins the kings of history together with venerable heaven. Su Yu in his commentary suggests that Dong Zhongshu is using this

Here, *shou* clearly refers to the perpetuation of reputation and soul beyond death. Similarly, the *Han jiuyi* 漢舊儀 describes imperial ancestral worship as wishing *shou* upon Gaozu, the lineage progenitor.²⁹ Even the *Daode jing* 道德經 records as follows: “Those who die but are not forgotten have longevity 死而不忘者壽.”³⁰ In all of these cases, remembrance is the key to afterlife existence.³¹

term in the same way. Like most commentators, he identifies *Daizong* 代宗 as Mt. Tai (i.e. 岱宗) and the sacrifice as the *fengshan* 封禪 sacrifice. As supporting evidence, he draws upon the manuscript on the *fengshan* sacrifices by Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 in which seventy-two rulers were honoured with titles and posthumous names at Mt. Tai. Furthermore, he cites the *Baihu tong* 白虎通, which describes how those rulers' names were perpetuated by being carved on Mt. Tai. See Li Disheng 李滌生, *Xunzi jishi* 荀子集釋, Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1979, p. 448; *Shi ji* 史記 117.3064 (*Shiki kaichū kōshō*, Vol. 11, p. 91); Chen Li 陳立, *Baihu tong shuzheng* 白虎通疏證, 6.18a.

²⁹ Wei Hong 衛宏 (1st cent.), *Han jiuyi buyi* 漢舊儀補遺, 下 in *Congshu jicheng* 叢書集成, Shanghai: Shangwu yinshu, 1935–1937, p. 30.

³⁰ Chapter 33. Eduard Erkes in 1953 devoted an article to this phrase, but he based his translation on 亡, to perish, rather than 忘, to forget. He dismissed the latter as a variant that made “no sense”. However, both Mawangdui texts of the *Daode jing* use 忘, to forget, and this usage is identical to the *Chunqiu fanlu* usage. See Eduard Erkes, “死而不亡,” *Asia Major*, Vol. III (New Series/1953), pp. 156–161.

³¹ The theme of remembrance after death also occurs in certain types of Han mirrors. The ‘blade-of-grass mirror’, *caoye jing* 草葉鏡, which dates to at least the end of the second century B.C., regularly included an admonition not to forget someone who was gone. When describing a group of such inscriptions, Kong Xiangxing 孔祥星 wrote in his 1992 catalogue of mirror designs as follows:

“毋忘”類還有“毋忘大王，心思美人”。“長相思，毋相忘，常貴富，樂未央”，“君行卒，予心悲，久不見，侍前稀。”等。

Of the ‘don’t-forget’ type [of mirror inscriptions], there were still others such as “I won’t forget my great king; my heart thinks of the beautiful person,” “Let us always remember one another and never forget one another; let there be constant honour and blessings with unending pleasure,” and “Your journey has terminated, so my heart is grieved; never to see you for so long, I must dwell on past hopes.”

See Kong Xiangxing 孔祥星, *Zhongguo tongjing tudian* 中國銅鏡圖典, Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1992, p. 196.

The last inscription seems explicit in its reference to remembrance in death. By the same token, Han mortuary inscriptions sometimes use identical language. For example, a Shandong inscription dated A.D. 141 states: “When will we meet again? Let us be careful to not forget one another” 何時復會，慎勿相忘. See *Zhongguo shufajia xiehui Shandong fenhui bian* 中國書法家協會山東分會編, *Han bei yanjiu* 漢碑研究, Jinan: Qi Lu shushe, 1990, p. 351. Thus mirrors and mortuary inscriptions sometimes share this theme of remembrance that transcends death.

If *shou* sometimes refers to a desire for the perpetuation of soul and social identity after death, then other usages of the term *shou* become clear. For example, in the *Shi ji* 史記, *Han shu*, *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 and other Han texts, the terms *shouling* 壽陵, *shoucang* 壽藏 and *shouzhong* 壽塚 refer to funeral mounds that were usually built while the occupant was still alive. They refer to imperial tombs, such as those of Emperor Guangwu (r. 25–57)³² and Emperor Ming (r. 57–75),³³ and to less impressive tombs, such as that of Zhao Qi 趙岐 (d. 201), commentator to the *Mencius*, who only wanted to be buried in a sheet and placed on a bed of sand in his tomb.³⁴

The term *shou* was also applied to the coffin itself. Liang Shang 梁商, father-in-law of Emperor Shun (r. 125–144), demanded a quick, thrifty burial, but when he died he was buried with elaborate ceremony. His coffin, supplied by the Dongyuan Office, was called a *shouqi* 壽器.³⁵ Li Xian 李賢 (651–684), a Tang commentator to the *Hou Han shu*, also identified a *shouqi* used for the mother of Emperor Huan (r. 146–168) as a coffin supplied by the Dongyuan Office. He further explained that *shou* in this term as well as in terms such as *shouling*, *shoutang* 壽堂 and *shougong* 壽宮 referred to the desire these objects would long endure.³⁶

Shou as applied to coffins is not limited to the imperial level. The *Li xu* 隸續 by Hong Gua 洪适 (1117–1184) includes a tomb inscription (dated A.D. 113) from Sichuan which identifies the vault as a “ten-thousand harvests, lengthened years and increased longevity vault” 萬歲延年益壽槨.³⁷ Like Li Xian, Hong Gua links this usage of *shou* with the terms *shouzhong* and *shoucang*. Hong Gua’s collection also includes a tomb tile (dated A.D. 78) of Ru Boning 汝伯寧 identifying his grave as a “ten-thousand year residence” 萬歲舍 and another tomb tile (dated A.D. 82) of Cao Shuwen 曹叔文 identifying his grave as a “ten-million year official residence” 千萬歲署舍.³⁸ Yang Shuda 楊樹達 in his collection of Han

³² *Hou Han shu* 1 下 .77 (*Hou Han shu jijie* 1 下 .18b).

³³ *Hou Han shu* 2.118 (*Hou Han shu jijie* 2.14b).

³⁴ *Hou Han shu* 64.2124 (*Hou Han shu jijie* 64.17b).

³⁵ *Hou Han shu* 34.1177 (*Hou Han shu jijie* 34.9b).

³⁶ *Hou Han shu* 10.442 & 64.2124 (*Hou Han shu jijie* 10 下 .5a & 64.17b).

³⁷ Hong Gua, *Li xu* (1168), in *Shike shiliao xinbian* 石刻史料新編 (1.10:7087–7202), Taipei: Xinwenfeng chubangongsi, 1986, 20.9a.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.4b. Ru Boning’s tile inscription is lacking the character directly before 萬 and so could also be a “ten-million year residence”.

funerary references likewise links these tiles and others with the term *shoucang*.³⁹

Therefore *shou* is often used to signify more than the longevity of human life and can be associated with the perpetuation of social identity and of the grave itself.

B. *Metal and stone as the metaphor of shou*

So far *shou* has been described positively, that memory, souls and graves can withstand the test of time. However, other sources lament that an ideal *shou* is out of reach. A good example of this can be found in the eleventh of the Nineteen Old Poems, which concludes:

人生非金石，豈能長壽考，奄忽隨物化，榮名以爲寶。

A human life doesn't have the permanence of metal and stone.

Surely we cannot lengthen its years!

We suddenly transform, following all things,

But a glorious name will be a treasure.⁴⁰

A stele from A.D. 181 in Sichuan provides a further example. The boy Feng Sheng died at the age of eleven, and the erection of his stele was justified as follows:

故共刊石，敘述才美，以銘不朽。…壽無金石，身潛名彰，顯於後葉。

So together we cut the stone and created a narration of the boy's talent and beauty. By engraving this narration, it won't decay.

... Our longevity is not that of metal and stone. The body disappears, but the name is made manifest, displayed for later generations.⁴¹

In both of these negative examples, *shou* ends when life ends, but both specifically refer to this *shou* as the longevity of physical life (*rensheng* 人生 and *shen* 身 respectively), not that of the name which lived on. More importantly, both identify metal and stone as the benchmark of ideal longevity.

Mirror inscriptions regularly employed this metaphor. One of

³⁹ Yang Shuda, *Han dai hunsang lisu kao* 漢代婚喪禮俗考, Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1933, p. 93.

⁴⁰ Sui Shusen 隋樹森, *Gushi shijiushou jishi* 古詩十九首集釋, Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju, 1989, pp. 17–18. The thirteenth poem also specifies its usage of *shou* as 'human life' 人生.

⁴¹ Hong Gua, *Li shi* 隸釋 (1167), in *Shike shiliao xinbian* (1.9:6747–7042), Taipei: Xinwenfeng chubangongsi, 1986, 10.8b.

the briefer inscriptions recorded, “May your longevity be that of metal and stone, and may you amass future generations without end” 壽如金石累世未央.⁴² Longer inscriptions develop this theme of durability in other ways, such as telling of long-lived immortals. The following inscription is on a Han TLV mirror in the Sackler Museum at Harvard University:

I made a felicitous mirror, and truly with great skill. It shows transcendent ones not knowing old age. When thirsty they drink at the source of sweet wine; when hungry, they eat dates. They travel floatingly through the world-under-heaven and roam within the four seas. Longevity, solid like metal and stone, is the bastion of the realm. Should you rule three millenia, the metal [of the mirror] will still be there.⁴³

In addition to the immortals and the metal-and-stone metaphor, this mirror specifically refers to its own imperishability because of its metal medium.

From another point of view, the relationship between metal and longevity was not only metaphorical but also causal. That is, the metal-based elixirs of long life were the focus of Han alchemy. Emperor Wu (r. 141–87 B.C.) was advised to make special eating and drinking vessels of artificial gold that would lengthen his years,⁴⁴ and according to the *Yantie lun* 鹽鐵論 by Huan Kuan 桓寬 (1st cent. B.C.), the eating of metal and drinking of pearls was thought necessary to live as long as heaven and earth.⁴⁵ Thus, alchemists thought metal’s property of durability could be imparted upon the human consumer of metals, metals of which quicksilver was a favourite. Coincidentally, quicksilver was the metal that gave mirrors their shine.

C. The durability of metal

The long-lasting nature of metal may seem obvious, but the Han perspective of metal must be further explored in order to understand why it became a metaphor for longevity.

⁴² Karlgren, p. 23, no. 66. If *shou* can refer to the perpetuation of social identity, the wish for future generations is not unrelated. Those generations would foster remembrance through sacrifices in ancestral worship. The wish for personal longevity and the wish for lineage longevity are fused.

⁴³ Grenville L. Winthrop – *Retrospective for a collector*, Cambridge, MA: Fogg Museum of Art, 1969, pp. 62–63 (trans. H.W. Huber). Huber’s translation of ‘dates’ for *zao* 棗 should be rendered ‘jujubes’.

⁴⁴ *Shi ji* 28.1385 (*Shiki kaichū kōshō*, Vol. 4, p. 47).

⁴⁵ Wang Liqi 王利器, *Yantie lun jiaozhu* 鹽鐵論校注, Shanghai: Gudian wenxue chubanshe, 1958, p. 208.

To continue with the theme of elixirs, the Eastern Han alchemical guide *Zhou yi cantong qi* 周易參同契 praised metal's durability as follows:

金入於猛火，色不奪精光，自開闢以來，日月不虧明，金不失其重，日月形如常，金本從月生。

Even when metal enters the blazing fire,
Its quality has never had its essential brilliance snatched away.
Ever since the time of the creation
The sun and moon have never lost their light,
And metal has never lost its weight.
The forms of the sun and moon are constant
And metal is originally born of the moon.⁴⁶

Metal can be pulverized, melted and reshaped, but throughout all its transformations, it is still metal. This relationship between metal and the moon again brings to mind the Jining stone relief in which five mirrors circle the moon's toad.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Wei Boyang 魏伯陽, *Zhou yi cantong qi guzhu jicheng* 周易參同契古注集成, Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1990, p. 17.

⁴⁷ The "Heavenly questions" 天問 of the *Chu ci* 楚辭 draws together the images of the moon, death and toads in the following conundrum:

What is the peculiar virtue of the moon, the Brightness of the Night, which causes it to grow once again after its death? Of what advantage is it to keep a toad in its belly?

See David Hawkes, *The Songs of the South*, Penguin Books, 1985, p. 127.

The "Ten Questions" 十問, a text from Mawangdui, makes a similar statement when discussing life and death:

君若欲壽，則順察天地之道。天氣月盡月盈，故能長生。

If you desire longevity, then you must obediently observe the way of heaven and earth. The vital energy of heaven waxes and wanes monthly (i.e. with the moon). Therefore it is capable of long life.

See Mawangdui Han mu boshu zhengli xiaozu 馬王堆漢墓帛書整理小組, *Mawangdui Han mu boshu* 馬王堆漢墓帛書, Vol. 4, Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, p. 146.

The moon was associated with immortality in other ways, such as the place where a hare pounds the elixir of life and a place to which Chang E 嫦娥 fled after she stole the elixir of life from the Queen Mother of the West. In some stories, Chang E becomes the toad. See Xiao Chengquan 蕭成全, "Chanchu yu Zhongguo gudai minjian xisu" 蟾蜍與中國古代民間習俗, *Sichuan Cultural Relics*, no. 5, 1992, pp. 9–14. See also Loewe, pp. 86–133.

The rest of the Jining stone relief is full of immortal imagery, such as immortals riding a dragon, tiger and stag (collectively known as the *sangqiao* 三騫). The three walking toward the mirrors are striding over waves, another common characteristic of immortality. The "Zaibian" 災變 in the *Baihu tong* linked mirrors with

The *Yilin* also repeatedly praised such vitality. To cite but one example:

金梁鍊柱，千年牢固，完全不腐，聖人安處。

Metal rafters and iron columns –
For a thousand years firmly secure
Without the least bit of decay.
[This is] the peaceful abode of a sage.⁴⁸

In a similar vein, Ban Gu praised the erection of the ‘metal walls’ 金城 of Chang’an in his “Poetic exposition on the two capitals”, *Liangdu fu* 兩都賦.⁴⁹

The enduring strength of metal was likewise praised at the cemetery. As cited above, the stone in the boy Feng Sheng’s stele enabled his reputation to endure, but this observation is by no means uncommon. For example, the stele of Yang Tong 楊統 (d. 168), chancellor of Pei, recorded the following:

迴鐫石立碑，功銘鴻烈，光于億載，俾永不滅。…立言不朽，先民所臧，載名金石，貽于無疆。

By engraving the stone and erecting the stele, the inscription of merit is made illustrious. It will be radiant for a hundred-thousand years so that it will never be extinguished.

... Establishing one’s words so that they do not decay is what our ancestors treasured. Recording one’s name on metal and stone is to hand it down to infinity.⁵⁰

The stele of Lou Shou 堅壽 (d. 174) ends in a similar fashion:

身歿聲響，千載作珍，綿之日月，與金石存。

The body dies but the name flourishes, prized for a thousand years. It is as long-lived as the sun and moon, its existence on par with metal and stone.⁵¹

the moon during lunar eclipses. In such a case, yin was losing its brightness, and the spouses of the feudal lords were to beat upon metal mirrors. See Chen Li, 6.15b–16a; Tjan Tjoe Som, *Po hu t’ung; The Comprehensive Discussions in the White Tiger Hall*, Vol. II, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1952, p. 492.

⁴⁸ *Yilin* 14.11b.

⁴⁹ *Hou Han shu* 40.1336 (*Hou Han shu jijie* 40.9b).

⁵⁰ *Li shi* 7.16b. The penultimate line refers to the *Zuo zhuan zhushu* 左傳注疏 35.27b–28b (Xiang 24).

⁵¹ *Li shi* 9.9b. Another stele (10.21a) likened the stele with a mirror: “Thereupon we cut the stone and erected the stele in order to make manifest his soul, causing later generations forever to possess a mirror of him” 乃伐石興碑，以旌厥魂，俾後永有鑑焉。

Moving from the cemetery into the grave, metal again plays a prominent role. In its scholastic division of the afterlife between the *hun*-soul 魂 and the *po*-soul 魄, the *Baihu tong* 白虎通 affirmed that the latter soul, which remained in the grave, was modelled upon metal and stone, *xiang jinshi* 象金石, referring to that soul's enduring nature.⁵²

In a similar fashion, articles found in the grave acknowledge metal's constancy. For example, while normal land-purchase contracts were made of wood or bamboo, purchase contracts for grave sites were often made of metal. Tomiya Itaru 富谷至 wrote that the grave deeds, which remained in the grave, used metal as their medium with the goal of preservation in mind.⁵³ By the same token, the corpse itself is sometimes surrounded by an oddly large amount of metal, such as in the case of a set of three bodies from an Eastern Han burial in Henan depicted in *Kaogu xuebao* (Fig. 6).⁵⁴ The three are covered in coins as if the coins had been strung together and worn like a suit, somewhat like an alternative to the famed jade funeral suits. Bronze mirrors are also located inside each coffin at the head of each corpse.

D. The metal medium of the mirror

余昔于吳市得見青明鏡，即異之及晞日映水，光采流曜有殊衆鑒。乃始知曠世金精，實不貲之異物也。

Previously when I was in the Wu Market and managed to examine a bright copper mirror, I considered it a marvel comparable to the sun at dawn reflected in the water. Its radiant hues and emanating brilliance were far removed from ordinary mirrors.⁵⁵ Thus I under-

⁵² Chen Li, 8.29a (情性); Tjan Tjoe Som, p. 571.

⁵³ Tomiya Itaru, "Kōsen no koku no tochi baibai" 黃泉の國の土地賣買, *Kenkyū Shūroku* (Osaka University) 研究集錄 (大阪大學), no. 36, 1988, pp. 1–32. In the 1981 catalogue of grave deeds compiled by Ikeda On 池田溫, the great majority of Han grave deeds were engraved on lead, more malleable than bronze but less durable (yet they indeed survive to the present). Of those not using lead, the majority used stone. See Ikeda On, "Chūgoku rekidai boken ryakukō" 中國歷代墓券略考, *Tōyō bunka kenkyūjo kiyō* 東洋文化研究所紀要, no. 86, November 1981, pp. 213–224.

⁵⁴ *Kaogu xuebao* 1965, no. 1, p. 145.

⁵⁵ Sun Sheng seems to use the terms *jing* 鏡 and *jian* 鑒 interchangeably in this short passage, although the latter is rare in mirror inscriptions (e.g. Karlgren, p. 72, no. 257). The latter was also the term for a large bowl-shaped pot, a pot for collecting dew (similar to the *fangzhu* 方諸) or, when containing water, a vessel that served as a reflecting device. Loewe (through personal correspondence) suggests that Sun Sheng's *jian* refers to this device.

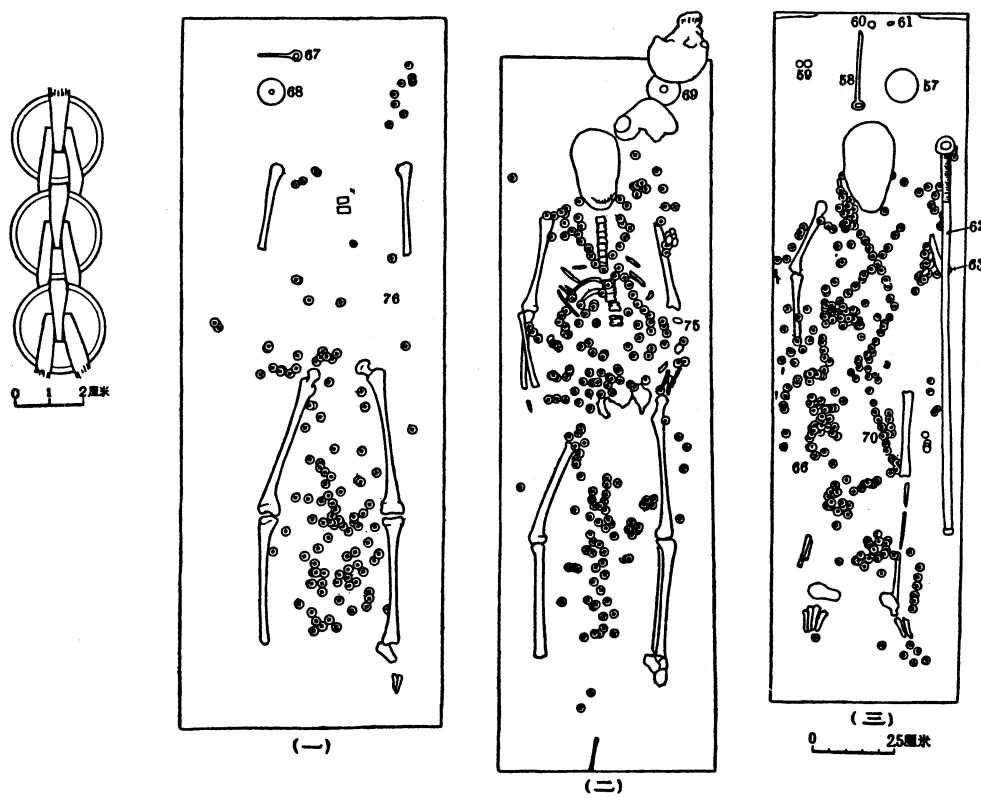


Figure 6. Eastern Han burial from Shan County, Henan Province. Twenty-one mirrors were excavated from ten graves at this site, and according to the report, "Their excavated locations were usually within the coffins next to the heads" (p. 147).

- | | |
|----------------------|------------------------------|
| 57. bronze mirror | 58. small iron knife |
| 59. silver rings | 60. ink |
| 61. bronze thimble | 62. iron knife |
| 63. small belthook | 66, 70, 75, 76. bronze coins |
| 67. small iron knife | 68. bronze mirror |
| 69. bronze mirror | |

From Huanghe shuiku kaogu gongzuodui 黄河水库考古工作队, "Henan Shan xian Liujiaqu Han mu" 河南陕县刘家渠汉墓, *Kaogu xuebao* 1965, No. 1, p. 154.

stood for the first time that this essence of metal from the distant past is truly a priceless rarity.⁵⁶

Sun Sheng 孫盛, a Jin Dynasty official, here described the mercurial shine of an ancient mirror which he called the very ‘essence of metal’, and indeed the *Jin shu* classified oddities involving mirrors under the metal phase of the five phases.⁵⁷ Yet how closely were the mirror and metal associated in the Han?

Some Han mirror inscriptions directly equate the mirror with metal. As noted above, the Sackler TLV mirror identified itself as metal when it proclaimed that this metal would endure three thousand years. Nor is this example unique, for a different TLV mirror inscription begins, “In the greenness of the metal I see my form” 金之青視吾形.⁵⁸

More importantly, these inscriptions regularly describe the mirror-making process, explicitly vaunting the metallic content. In some inscriptions, the metallurgy is the sole message, such as the following:

漢有善同出丹陽大師得同合煉五金成

Han has good copper which comes from Tan-yang; a great master obtains the copper, and he completes [the work] in refining together five metals.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Yan Kejun 嚴可均, *Quan shanggu sandai Qin Han sanguo liuchao wen* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1958, p. 1816 (全晉文 63.1a). For Sun Sheng’s biography, see *Jin shu* 晉書 82.2147.

The character 青 can either refer to copper (i.e. ‘the green’) or to purity (i.e. a variant of 清), both of which have precedence in mirror inscriptions. If the latter is true, it creates an interesting parallel between ‘pure and bright’ 清明 and ‘the essence of metal’ 金精. A fragment attributed to the Eastern Han scholar Wang Yi 王逸 labels each essence of the five phases, and “the essence of metal is called pure and bright 金精曰清明.” See Ma Zong 馬總, *Yilin* 意林, Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1970, 4.12b. My thanks to Dr Loewe for this information.

⁵⁷ *Jin shu* 27.811. The metal phase is associated with the west, autumn and dying, themes likewise appropriate in this current discussion. The metal phase can even impart its qualities of toughness on people, as in the case of the western nomads. See *Hou Han shu* 87.2869 (*Hou Han shu jijie* 87.1b). A mirror often identifies its own metal as the 商, the musical note corresponding to metal in the five phases. See Karlgren, p. 53.

⁵⁸ Kong, p. 279. Karlgren (p. 67) wrote that 青 is sometimes a loan character for 精, which would then render the phrase, “In the essence of metal I see my form.” This rendering would parallel Sun Sheng’s usage.

⁵⁹ Translated by Karlgren, p. 33, no. 107. The character for copper, *tong* 銅, is here written without the metal radical.

On others, almost thirty characters are devoted to the source of the copper, the addition of the silver and tin, the refining and engraving.⁶⁰ These mirrors literally boast of their metallic content, referring to their metal as 'the auspicious' 祥, 'the flower' 華 and 'the hard one' 剛. The usage of such metaphors, of references to the artisan's 'own method' 自有紀 as well as to the secrecy of the refinement process 幽澌三商 all suggest parallels with alchemic ritual. By the same token, the common simile "longevity like metal and stone" found on these mirrors may be partially self-referential because the mirror itself was made of durable metal.

Occasionally a descriptive mirror inscription will bring together the themes of metal's durability and the mirror's ancientness. The following is a rare (but not unique) mirror inscription found on a typical Han 'multiple-nipple, bird-and-animal' mirror, *duoru qishou jing* 多乳禽獸鏡:

維鏡之舊性兮質剛堅，處于名山兮俟工人，澌取精華兮光耀煒，
升高宜兮進近親，昭焯煥(?)兮見躬身，福兮進兮日以前，
食玉英兮飲醴泉，倡樂陳兮見神仙，葆長命兮壽萬年，周復始兮傳子孫。

As for the mirror's nature of ancientness, it is characterized by its solid durability.

Residing in the famed mountains, it awaited the labourer.

Smelting extracted its essential efflorescence, causing its radiance to be bright.

It elevates lofty uprightness and advances family closeness.

When it reflects a bright shine (?), you can examine your body.

Blessings and advancement are daily before you.

You will eat jade flowers and drink from sweet springs.

As extravagant pleasures become laid out, you will encounter divine immortals.

You will nurture long life and cause your longevity to reach ten-thousand years.

Reverting, you will return to the origin.

May [the mirror] be passed down to your children and grandchildren.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 51, no. 173. One of the most interesting metal references in a mirror inscription comes from a pair of mirrors reproduced in *Xiqing xujian* 西清續鑑 19.7a–10b, the second half of which reads: "The protective spirits perfectly maintain one's life; mercury reveals the essence of yin." Although labelled a Han mirror 漢封象鑑 by the cataloguer, its eight-trigrams design is normally associated with the Song.

⁶¹ Kong, p. 359. A 'multiple-nipple, bird-and-animal' design consists of a ring of nipples, usually seven, interspersed with fabulous birds, winged immortals, dragons and other auspicious creatures. Most excavated examples date from the

As this inscription begins, the mirror's nature is ancientness which is based on the durability of its metal. Because mirrors dated back to at least the Spring and Autumn period (722–481), it is likely that people in the Han already knew these bronze instruments could last for hundreds of years, just as the bronze ritual vessels of the Shang and Zhou had already done.

A second feature of this inscription is its reference to two different types of immortality. Like many mirrors, this one depicts an encounter with immortals, but the last line with its clear reference of 'returning to the origin' 復始 stresses ancestral worship.⁶² The "Meaning of sacrifices" 祭義 chapter of the *Li ji* recorded that ancestral temples "taught the people to go back to antiquity and return to the origin, never forgetting their founder" 教民反古復始，不忘其所由生也。⁶³ Thus this mirror, which begins with the theme of its ancientness, wishes its bearer longevity, or *shou* 壽, and hopes the bearer will enjoy ancestral-cult remembrance.

III. Conclusion: the mirror as the symbol of longevity

So far I have attempted to develop a linear argument. First, perpetuation was a focus of the grave and afterlife. This perpetuation was often epitomized by the term *shou* 壽. Second, the common metaphor for *shou* was metal and stone. Third, metal exemplified perpetuation in the Han Dynasty. Finally, the mirror was consciously identified as metal, even as the essence of metal. As both the final mirror inscription and that of the Sackler mirror indicate, the mirror was imparted with the trait of ancientness because of this metal.

Beyond this line of reasoning, we must scrutinize not only the mirror's position in the burial but also the mirror's role in the fu-

middle of the Eastern Han, although a few date as early as the Wang Mang interregnum. A large number have been excavated from the Changsha region. This particular example is kept in the Cultural Administrative Office of Xi'an.

I am tempted to translate the last line as "May you be transmitted there (i.e. the origin) by your children and grandchildren." However, other mirror inscriptions demonstrate that the mirror itself is clearly lasting through the generations. The same phrase occurs on stone mortuary inscriptions as well.

⁶² For another example of an inscription referring to encountering immortals, reaching longevity 壽 and returning to the origin 周復始, see Karlgren, p. 30, no. 97.

⁶³ Sun Xidan, p. 1118. References to encouraging the people to 'return to the origin' occur at least ten times in the *Li ji*.

neral ritual. When describing the mortuary vessel that housed a suspended mirror known as a *wenming*, the Eastern Han commentator Fu Qian observed that “At the greater dressing, [this object] is also sealed inside.” The Ming scholar Xie Zhaozhe, who as we saw marvelled at the great number of mirrors found in graves, also linked the mirror with the dressing of the corpse:

云古人新死，未殮，親識來吊，率以鏡護其體，云以防屍氣變動，及殯，則內之棺中。

It is said when a person of ancient times had recently died and his corpse had not yet been dressed, his relatives and acquaintances would come and mourn. They would generally use a mirror to protect the body. It is said the mirror was used to prevent the body's vital energy transforming and stirring. When it came time to coffin the body, the mirror was then placed inside the coffin.⁶⁴

Modern archaeology amply demonstrates the close proximity of the mirror to the corpse (e.g. Figs. 6–7) and would seem to confirm Fu Qian's observation and Xie Zhaozhe's speculation that the mirror was placed inside the coffin. In other words, the mirror should not be classified with other grave goods because, by the time of the burial, it was already a part of the coffin.⁶⁵

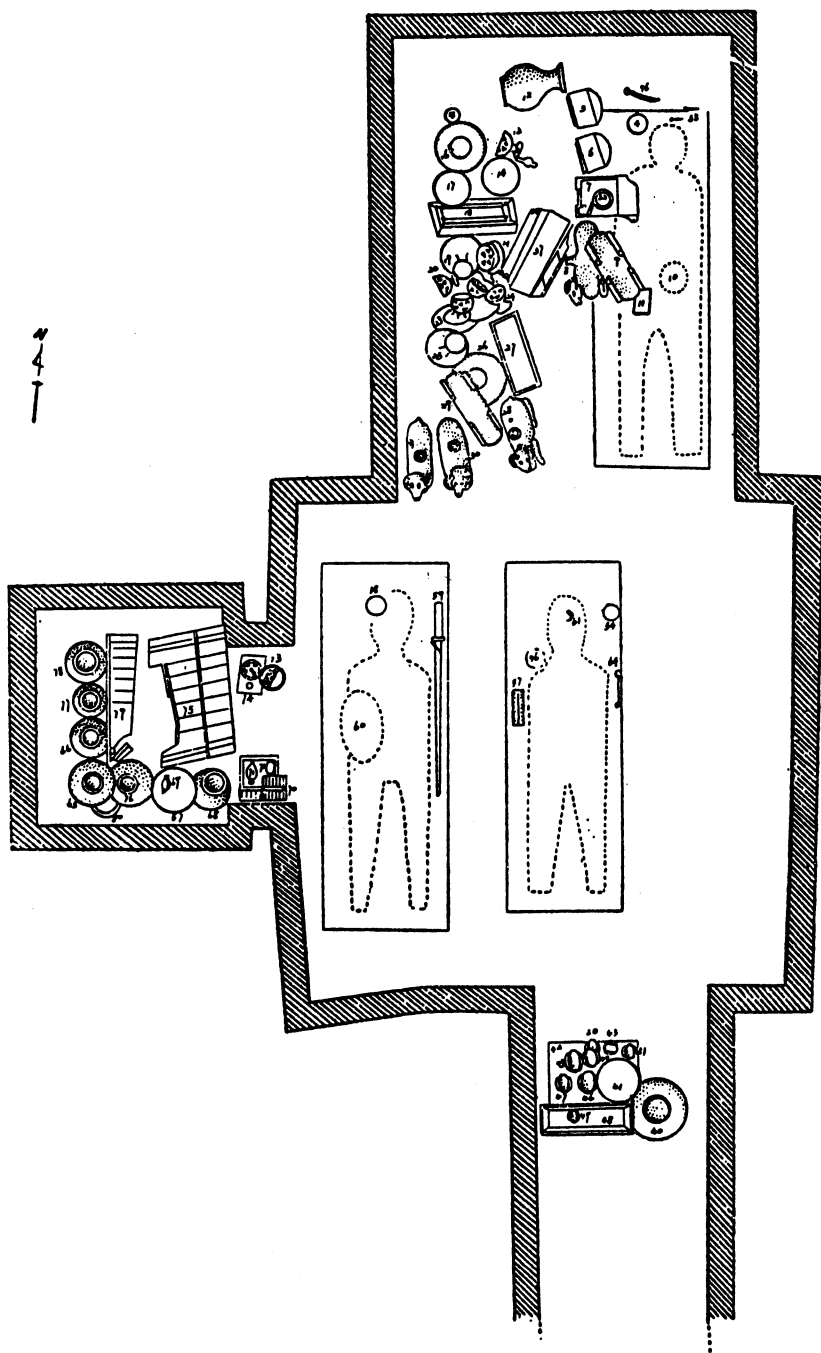
What happened during this ‘greater dressing’ or *dalian* 大殮? Another Eastern Han commentator, Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200),

⁶⁴ Xie Zhaozhe, p. 347.

⁶⁵ Coffining and burial are distinctly separated in time. The former occurred a few days after death, but the latter often depended upon appropriate auspicious days and months. The *Dongguan Han ji* cites a particular village practice near the beginning of the Eastern Han that stipulated this time period would not last beyond a month for economic reasons. See Wu Shuping 吳樹平, *Dongguan Han ji jiaozhu* 東觀漢記校注, Henan: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1987, 14.509. Eastern Han stelae regularly record time periods that exceeded six months and sometimes even a year. Yet for imperial burials, this time period was exceptionally shortened, perhaps for political necessity and perhaps because the tombs were prepared well in advance of death.

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Figure 7. Han Dynasty burial from Hewang Reservoir, Yingyang County, Henan Province. The archaeological report lacks a listing of individual items but records that “a single bronze mirror appears close to each head.” According to the report, the burial also included *boshan* incense burners, clay pots, a colourful square box and six clay containers shaped like sheep. From Henan sheng wenhua ju wenwu gongzuodui 河南省文化局文物工作隊, “Henan Yingyang Hewang shuiku Han mu” 河南滎陽河王水庫漢墓, *Wenwu* 1960, No. 5, p. 61.



described a main feature of this mortuary tradition as the placement of jade objects around the body. In the case of an imperial burial, six objects were placed above, below and all around the corpse, including a jade *bi* 璧 to symbolize heaven and a jade *zong* 琮 to symbolize earth.⁶⁶ Such opulence is extremely rare in excavated burials, but other types of jade objects and plugs are frequently uncovered.⁶⁷

Placing jades in the mouth and other orifices, the use of jade suits, and decorations depicting jade on the coffin and in the tomb were well known in the Han. For example, the Red Eyebrows were said to have observed the preserving effects of jade: "Among everything that the bandits had uncovered, all [the corpses] which had been dressed with jade casings looked as if they were still alive" 凡賊所發，有玉匣殮者，率皆如生。⁶⁸ Yang Wangsun 楊王孫, buried naked because he opposed opulent funerals, wrote, "the mouth is stuffed with jade stones in hope that transformation will not occur" 口含玉石，欲化不得，⁶⁹ which is similar to Xie Zhaozhe's explanation as to why mirrors were put in coffins. Like metal, jade was invested with the trait of longevity⁷⁰ – immortals even drank from jade fountains or ate jade flowers – and mirrors are sometimes found together with jade plugs in Eastern Han burials.⁷¹

Because metal and stone (especially jade) were closely linked with longevity, and because the mirror was placed inside the coffin in a manner similar to jade, perhaps a parallel may be drawn between the longevity symbols of jade and mirrors.

To summarize, Fu Qian wrote of a tradition from the Dongyuan

⁶⁶ *Hou Han shu* 志 6.3143 (*Hou Han shu jijie* 志 6.3a). This use of jades is further evinced in other early works such as the *Han jiuyi*, p. 34, and the *Zhou li*, in *Shisan jing zhushu* 十三經注疏 20.23a (春官·典瑞).

⁶⁷ For a discussion on burial jades, see Na Zhiliang 那志良, *Guyu lunwenji* 古玉論文集, Taipei: Gugong congkan jiazhong, 1983, pp. 101–109.

⁶⁸ *Hou Han shu* 11.484 (*Hou Han shu jijie* 11.13a). The casing was made of jade slats, each one *chi* 尺 (c. 23 cm) in length, which were bound together with gold wire. The casing extended from the waist to the feet.

⁶⁹ *Han shu* 67.2908 (*Han shu buzhu* 67.2a). For a similar criticism, see Liang Shang 梁商 in *Hou Han shu* 34.1177 (*Hou Han shu jijie* 34.9a).

⁷⁰ For a discussion on the relationship between jade and immortality, see Robert L. Thorp, "Mountain Tombs and Jade Burial Suits: Preparations for Eternity in the Western Han," in *Ancient Mortuary Traditions of China*, Los Angeles: Far Eastern Art Council/Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991, pp. 33–37.

⁷¹ For example, see *Kaogu* 1964, p. 479, for an Eastern Han burial from Baimushan, Liangshan County, Shandong Province.

Office of placing mirrors in coffins, coffins which the Dongyuan also identified as *shouqi*. The adjective *shou* was used to describe coffins as well as the grave itself because it was desired that they long endure. *Shou* was strongly linked with metal in mirror inscriptions, and the mirror's very nature was ancientness, characterized by its enduring metal.

Therefore, I believe at least one of the mirror's roles was to symbolize longevity in the grave. The earlier, functional theories on the mirror's role may still have some merit – I do not wish to imply the mirror had only one usage. Likewise, this case is not airtight because future archaeology may validate or eliminate my hypothesis. Yet until then, I believe the medium of mirrors, as well as what mirror inscriptions say about that medium, must be taken into account when determining the mirror's role in the coffin. Like bronze vessels of dynasties prior to the Han, the bronze mirror has proved its boasts of durability, even up to the present day.