A000-Asia-China-Liangzhu-Cong square cylinder-One Tier-Jade- early Liangzhu Period, ca. 3200 BCE





Case: 5

Male god of the soil with his symbols of 2 + 2 and in his square form derived from the idea of the square shape of the earth.



Cloud motifs in an arrangement of 4-5-4-5-4-5 placed on the alternate opposing sides.

This numerology is composed of two pairs of two alternating with five, 2 and 5 being the based on the symbolism of the figures 5 and 2 which are emblazoned on a square, the shape of the earth, which is of the color yellow, the color of the jade used here (See Laufer 1912: 149).

 Cloud motifs are a sign of heaven and hence would have been an auspicious omen for those who were sacrificed within the Mother Earth *cong*..

The form of the *cong* is preserved in the second hexagram of the *I-Ching*, which stands for Earth, which provides a schematic of the *cong* shape.



  

Accession Number:

Formal Label: China-Liangzhu-Cong square cylinder-Twot Tier-Jade- early Liangzhu Period, ca. 3200 BCE

**Display Description:**

This *Cong* isin the yellow color of Earth. The cylindrical tube represents both the birthing canal through which all life emanates and correlatively the pit into which sacrificial victims are offered (Li-Ki 20 [Tsi-fah] from Couvreur, Liki II, 259). Opposing masks of the cubic faces represent Mother Earth and the Son of the Sun, probably an anthropomorphic ancestral figure associated with fructifying soil. On the other two opposing faces are cloud motifs.

Liangzhu Congs are comprised of a square or nearly square exterior prism enclosing a circular inner column. The square represents Eh and the circular column represents Heaven. The color of the cong also hints at this symbolism. The late Zhou ritual classic, *Zhou Li* p, *Chou Li*  wg(周禮) in the middle of the 2nd century BCE, compiled some three thousand years after the present example was manufactured, stipulated that "jade is used to make the six instruments by which the king worships Heaven and Earth and the four quarters [Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter]. By the green *bi* (p), *pi* (wg) [round jade disk], heaven is worshipped; by the yellow cong (wg), tsung (p), Earth [is worshipped]" (Biot 1851). This cong may have been once more yellow, and its present creamy off-white color is thought to have been produced by minerals leaching from the decaying body into the nephrite during burial, a process that occurs in the first weeks after interment.

This one-tier cong has a wide opening that is approximately 7/8 of the implement's outer diameter. The significance of this proportionality is unknown. According to Hayashi Minao, a Japanese expert of Liangzhu jades, two-tier congs are the earliest and were produced in the early Liangzhu period, ca. 3200 BCE, based on archaeologically excavated examples (Hayashi 1973; Hayashi 1990:6). In later Liangzhu phases congs were elongated with multiple tiers. In the early Liangzhu period the central hole was characteristically wide, as in this example, and as the congs were elongated the central holes, generally, were narrowed.

The square exterior is comprised of single, repeated cartouche-like panels on each of the four corners representing an anthropomorphic mask suggesting a shamanic trance. This iconography undoubtedly harkens back to a pre-Neolithic period when shamanic imagery was the symbolism of hunter-gatherers and was the imagery that was inscribed on petroglyph panels. Indeed, Hayashi Minao argues that the name of the cong/tsung derived from zhu/chu meaning "master" which we expand to "master of animal powers" (Hayashi 1990:6).

The interior of the column was believed to be the conduit for the communication with the numinous spirits that were depicted on its external surface.

As congs became more elongated the original paring of animal and anthropomorphic masks became obliterated, with only the human mask surviving. At the end point of this trend the mask became mere ridges that no longer had even an abstract likeness to a human mask. Finally, the cong was no longer made of jade the divine substance but of wood. Its secularization was complete.

The evolution of the cong mask, therefore, appears to have undergone a transformation from that of a shamanic device of invoking animal powers to that of purely human ancestral powers by eliminating the animal panels to that of a series of purely abstract ridges suggesting a semiological transformation as well: from symbolizing the numinous power of shamanic elders to symbolizing the numinous power of ancestors to symbolizing the historical succession of generations purely abstractly.

**LC Classification:** NK5750.2.A1

Date or Time Horizon: Liangzhu culture, lower Yangzi River Valley, early Liangzhu Period, ca. 3200 BCE Geographical Area: Liangzhu culture, lower Yangzi River Valley

**Map:**



Source: Google Earth

**GPS coordinates:**

Northeast corner: N 30°24'48", E 120°00'17"

Northwest corner: N 30°24'41", E 119°58'58"

Southeast corner: N 30°23'20", E 120 00'19"

Southwest corner: N 30°22'55", E 119°58'28"

Cultural Affiliation: Liangzhu culture, lower Yangzi River Valley, 3300-2250 BCE

Medium: Jade

Cultural Affiliation: Liangzhu

Medium: jade

Dimensions: Height:5.375"    Width:3"     Depth:3"

Weight: 1244 grams

Condition: original

Provenance:

**Discussion:**

Liangzhu (3400–2250 BCE) in Yuhang County, Zhejiang, was a highly stratified Neolithic jade city-state in the Yangtze River delta where élites controlled a sphere of influence north to Shanxi and south to Guangdong.

DNA recovered from Liangzhu graves shows high frequencies of Haplogroup O1 linking it with modern Austronesians.

The use of jade and other expensive wares (such as silk, lacquerware, and ivory) in grave sites characterized the social symbolism of Liangzhu élites. About 4200 BP Liangzhu succumbed to a series extreme floods since the cultural layers are interrupted by intrusions of mud and sand. It is also possible that an asteroid created Taihu lake 4500 BP, which contributed to its demise.

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