



Western Zhou. Bronze Square Kettle
49cm high. Excavated from the Guoguo tomb,
Sanmenxia, Henan Province in 1990. Kept in Henan
Cultural Relics Research Institute.

mysterious color in the previous dynasty.

Extant bronze ware of the Western Dynasty was mainly unearthed in Zhouyuan prefecture (between Qishan and Fufeng counties, Shaanxi Province), cradle of the Zhou clan, and Fengjing and Haojing (on both sides of Feng River in Chang'an County, Shaanxi Province), which were capitals of the dynasty. Most of them were ware used by nobles and ministers. A great number of those, possibly buried by nobles on their hurried escape during social turmoil, were excavated from cellars. Many bronze ware were awarded by the emperor, exchanged among kingdoms or cast by themselves were unearthed in the regions of kingdoms.

The evolution of the Western Zhou Dynasty's bronze art experiences rose and fell. Some key representative work mostly appeared in the early and late period. The works in the early Zhou Dynasty were quite similar to the ware in the late Shang Dynasty in the aspect of varieties, shapes, patterns and accessories. Only individual ware and patterns have differences. In addition, bronze ware always had long inscriptions on the surface in this period, which is considered an outstanding feature of the bronze ware from the Western Zhou Dynasty.

During the middle period from Emperor Muwang (976–922 BC) to Emperor Yiwang (885–877 BC), there were great changes in the types, shapes and patterns. The popular wine vessels gradually disappeared and other items changed. Utensils became dominant, and chimes were used as instruments. The curled, ripple and ribbon pattern and other abstract designs replaced the Shang Dynasty's *Taotie* (a mythical ferocious animal) image and Kuilong (one-legged monster in a fable) dragon pattern, took the dominant theme. Bronze ware in this period is regarded as the transformation from the Shang to Zhou in quality and style, highlighting its style and features of the time. However, the decline of the state power and the patriarchal clan system



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also had a negative influence to the ritual ware, resulting in a pervasive poor production.

At the end of the Western Zhou Dynasty, society was under intense turmoil with fierce internal and external contradictions. The Zhou court lost its influence and authority, which led to its demise. Although bronze ware cast in this period showed a last brilliance with some famous heavy ware and long inscriptions with immense historic value, the impression of them to the later generations was an illusion due to the weak economy, spiritual strength and the previous efforts in craftsmanship improvement.

Bronze Ware in the Eastern Zhou Dynasty

The Eastern Zhou Dynasty witnessed the second peak in the development of bronze ware in China.

After the fall of the Western Zhou, the new successor Emperor Pingwang, in 700 BC, was forced to abandon the original capital Haojing and moved it to Luoyi (today's Luoyang, Henan), marking the start of the Eastern Zhou. Consisting of the Spring and Autumn Period (770–476 BC) and the Warring States Period (475–221 BC), the Eastern Zhou Dynasty experienced intense social turmoil and was called an age of “collapsed ritualism and music system.” During this period, the Zhou's imperial reign declined and nobles contended for hegemony, resulting in years of conflict and economic centers relocating to kingdoms. “Contention of a hundred schools of thought” appeared in ideological circles. Confucianism, Taoism, and the school of Mohist, Legalists, Logicians and Naturalists created several controversies in philosophy, politics and other respects, having significant influence on culture and art at that time.



New reforms challenged the original ritual and musical system. Bronze ware, the physical carrier of “ritualism,” was also changed. Although bronze ritual and musical instruments were paid special attention as the symbol of power and wealth in the noble and upper class, profound changes had taken place in the following two aspects.

The first change was the arrogation of the old system. The *Ding* application system was stringently regulated with the patriarchal clan system and hierarchy in the Western Zhou was broken and changed. This phenomena were proven by the unearthed bronze *Ding* from the tombs of some nobles of the Eastern Zhou. Generally, two sets of hierarchy-indicator *Ding* were applied for a higher level. For instance, nobles, normally applying seven *Ding*, used nine *Ding*, the qualification of the emperor, which was forbidden in the Western Zhou. It was the same for musical instruments. For example, Ji Huanzi of the Lu Kingdom employed the dance routine of the emperor in his ancestral temple. The contemporaneous Confucius (572–479 BC) scolded him, saying: “If it can be stood, whatever can’t be stood?”



Warring States Period. Zenghou Yi Tomb Jiangu Bronze Stand 50cm high. It was excavated from the Zenghou Yi tomb, Suixian county, Hubei in 1978. Kept in Hubei Museum.



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Warring States Period. Hollow *Ding* with *Panchi* Pattern

50cm high. Unearthed from Liuquan, Xinjiang county, Shanxi Province in 1980. Kept in Shanxi Archeology Research Institute.

The vessel has two layers. The outer layer is hollow, consisting of a snarled Panchi pattern for decoration.

Second, the change in shape, adornment and pattern showed bronze ware switched to have living and practical use. The function of ware for sacrifices, rites and music systems faded out, while the practical demand led the direction of bronze ware production. Bronze ware steadily evolved to become the deluxe utensils in nobles' luxury banquets to the divine ware for offering sacrifice to ancestors. Various gorgeous bronze ware in the Shang and Western



Warring States. Figure-shaped Bronze Lamp
21.3cm high. Unearthed from Zhucheng, Shandong Province in 1957. Kept in the National Museum of China.

