SHANG AND WESTERN ZHOU JADES

THROCKMORTON FINE ART
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AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECTACULAR JADES DISCOVERED IN SICHUAN PROVINCE, CHINA

Elizabeth Childs-Johnson

The recent discovery of finely worked jade objects and associated artifacts at Jinsha, Sichuan Province, has broadened our understanding of southwest China's status as a jade-working center during the late Neolithic era through early historic periods. It also helps to document the special role jade played in the formation of Chinese civilization. Jade objects are the richest remains found in some 60 sacrificial pits excavated since 2001 at Meiyuan, in Jinsha village, located a short distance northwest of Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan (fig. 1A). These sacrificial pits show cultural links to similarly spectacular yet slightly earlier sacrificial pits (Pit 1 and 2) 38 km northeast of Chengdu at Sanxingdui in Guanghan county, discovered in 1986 where site excavations stretched from 1986 to 1994. A third pit was discovered in 1987 at neighboring Cangbaobao (Sichuan Kaogusuo 1998: 78-90), and a fourth at Taipingchang in Hanzhou county (also known as Yuelliangwan), as early as 1929 (Sichuan Kaogusuo 1999:9-10; Dye 1931; Graham 1934; Childs-Johnson 1995:82-83). The Jinsha jades are somewhat later than the stellar, and quite well known, jade artifacts produced by eastern and coastal cultures during the Jade Age, the last phase of the Neolithic period in China, which lasted from ca. 3500 through 2000 BCE. (Childs-Johnson 2009: 291-403).

The surprising quality and richness of the approximately 5,000 artifacts found at Jinsha, of which 3,000 are jades or related works in stone (Chengduo Kaogusuo 2006: 7-9), challenges art historians and archaeologists to re-think assumptions and conclusions about the inter-relationship of regional centers, such as the Sichuan cultures, and the metropolitan centers further north and east. The jades from the Sichuan excavations, on the one hand, reflect types of jade artifacts characteristic of the metropolitan centers ranging in date from the Jade Age to the early historic eras of Erlitou (Xia), Shang, and Western Zhou. On the other hand, they show a beguiling tradition of working jade that is entirely independent and characteristic of local taste and usage. Below I briefly review the context of excavated finds from Jinsha and then briefly discuss the apparent differences and similarities of Sichuan jades and their counterparts from elsewhere in China.
The Archaeological Site of Jinsha

Jinsha (Golden Sands) is a village in the northwestern suburbs of Chengdu. It is administratively part of Supo Township in the Qingyang District of the capital, Chengdu (fig. 1A). (Despite having the same name, the village is not located along the Jinsha River, which forms the border between the provinces of Sichuan and Yunnan.) In February 2001, workers at a construction site in Jinsha uncovered antique jades and large deposits of elephant tusks (figs. 1B and 2). Thereafter the name of the village, where the first finds were identified and subsequently excavated, has been used to signify the entire site, which now has expanded to encompass an area of approximately five square kilometers. The overall area includes more than twenty excavation sites, of which the most important are architectural and residential remains and a modest cemetery excavated from 1995 to 2000 at neighboring Huangzhong village, and Meiyuan (Plum Garden), where most of the site artifacts were found. At Meiyuan, excavated from 2001 to 2005, and identified as the "Sacrificial Pit Area," some 60 sacrificial pits have been identified and some 5,000 artifacts recovered.

Dating of the Jinsha finds was accomplished by comparison with ceramic remains from the known stratigraphy of Shierqiao Period 1 and late Period 1 cultures in the Chengdu area. The archaeologists who excavated the pits at Meiyuan from 2001-2005 have concluded that the site was in use for approximately 1,000 years and for at least three chronological phases. Strata 5-6 date to the early Spring and Autumn through the late Western Zhou periods; stratum 7 dates to the early Western Zhou; the deepest strata, numbered 8-12, date to the late Shang period. Strata 1-4 date to later periods and contain no Jinsha culture remains; pre-Shang strata remain unexcavated (Chengdu Kaogusu 2006:12-14).

In addition to objects made of jade (and other stone), works found in other media include gold, elephant ivory, bronze, lacquered wood, horn (deer antlers), tortoise plastras, tiger fangs, wild boar tusks, bone, and silver. Jades are by far the most numerous goods, totaling over 50% of all objects recovered, with bronzes in second place, totaling 28% of the finds. Few jades or other valuable objects were found in burials, but this may be due to the fact no elite cemetery has yet been discovered. Residential or "palace" foundations have been identified at Lanyuan (Orchid Park) located 500 m distant from the sacrificial pits (Chengdu Kaogusu 2006: 3-5).

Figure 24BC: Sacrificial Pit No. 2, Meiyuan showing primarily elephant tusks, deer antlers, wild boar tusks, jade disks and ceramics (left), and details of pits elsewhere exposing jade collared disks, chimes, spear points, bracelets, and zhang (right)
The pits at Meiyuan are identified as sacrificial due to their contents, and to their geographical context, including Meiyuan's location along the Modi River. According to site archaeologists, Meiyuan served as Jinsha's religious center and primary locale for sacrificial ceremonies. Site archaeologists theorize that after carrying out some sort of sacrificial ceremony at the river's bank, the sacrificial offerings were buried in pits which were then filled with soil. Other artifacts were offered in sacrifice by being "drowned" in the Modi River (see fig. 2ABC). The site researchers maintain that these ceremonial sacrificial practices lasted through the early Spring and Autumn period (Chengdu Kaogusuo 2006: 5). There are no comparable types of sacrifices known at metropolitan centers of Shang and Western Zhou. In metropolitan sites of the Shang period, sacrifices took place near elite burials or within elite house foundations, and often included human beings as well as animals and inanimate objects. With the possible exception of a few ceramic objects, none of the sacrificed artifacts at Jinsha were utensils of daily use; the overwhelming majority were ritual and symbolic objects. None of the sacrificed objects appear to have been intentionally broken. This may differentiate the site's pits from the two well-known ones from nearby Sanxingdui (of slightly earlier date), where many objects appear to have been intentionally broken before burial (Xu 2001).

**Two Jade-Working Traditions at Jinsha and Sanxingdui**

Two jade working cultures that were part of the mainstream of the development of civilization in northern and eastern China, the Longshan culture and the Erlitou culture (the late phases of which are identified by many scholars with the overlapping early historic Xia period), influenced the Jinsha and earlier Sanxingdui cultures in Sichuan. This influence and interaction can be seen continuing through the Shang period at Sanxingdui and through the late Shang and early Western Zhou periods at Jinsha. The Longshan and Erlitou cultures were responsible for innovating and creating a large proportion of the jade types that appear in the sacrificial pits of Sanxingdui and Jinsha. The jade types appearing in Jinsha and Sanxingdui pits, nonetheless, show that the Sichuan cultures borrowed from the Longshan and Erlitou cultures selectively and idiosyncratically. The Sichuan sites conspicuously do not include all of the representative Erlitou and Longshan jade types, but rather only a few, primarily zhang insignia blades, collared disks, and ge dagger axes. None of those types originated with the Sanxingdui or Jinsha cultural traditions in Sichuan. A small number of cong prismatic cylinders that are a hallmark of the earlier Liangzhu culture of southeast China also appear at both sites, but these cong do not display the robust design characteristics and skillful workmanship of the Liangzhu cong. Rather, all are characteristic of the early cong types that steadily diminished in number and size during the early historic periods of Xia, Shang, and Western Zhou. There is one exception to this pattern, that being a tall, 10 layered Liangzhu cong that clearly is an heirloom (see Chengdu Kaogusuo 2002: colorpl. 82, p. 83).

The Sichuan jades thus raise a number of interesting questions. Were all of them imported from northern and eastern metropolitan cultures as items of trade, or as gift items in diplomatic exchanges? Do they represent loot acquired by conquest or raiding? Are they
indigenously produced regional interpretations of mainstream Longshan and Erlitou types, or the creation of migrant craftspersons from mainstream jade working cultures further north working for southwestern Sichuan proprietors?

Several basic data help in partially answering these questions. First, raw nephrite jade is known locally in mines and river beds near Sanxingdui and Jinsha, particularly at the Baisha (White Sands) River, which originates at Dujiangyan, and at Longxi in Wenquan District northwest of Chengdu. A few samples have been collected and identified by site archaeologists as nephrite (Chengdu Kaogusuo 2006: 18), but none of this material has yet been scientifically analyzed and compared with the Sanxingdui and Jinsha excavated objects or differentiated from jade material worked at Longshan and Erlitou period sites in northern, eastern, and central China. A type of (non-jade) stone used to create sculptures at Jinsha is known to have been sourced locally from nearby Longshan Mounts, in Pengzhou District northwest of Chengdu (Chengdu Kaogusuo 2002: 164). This stone type is unknown anywhere other than Sanxingdui and Jinsha during this time period. Grinding, boring, and polishing tools for working jade have been discovered within the sacrificial pit sites of both Sanxingdui and Jinsha. Thus it is clear that jade and stone were worked locally. The jades found at Sanxingdui and Jinsha appear to fall into two categories: those produced locally (including local copies of imported pieces) and those that were imported through trade or as loot.

The same pattern characterizes bronze castings from both Sanxingdui and Jinsha sites. The striking and unique large-scale bronze masks, life-size bronze figural statuary, and bronze sacred trees, for example, discovered in the two pits at Sanxingdui are demonstrably of local manufacture. Where as ritual bronze vessels, mostly in the form of zun and lei shapes, may be identified as goods imported by trade or as loot from northern and northeastern early through middle Shang sites. The zun and lei discovered at Sanxingdui are stylistically and formally similar to well-known early and middle Shang types found at sites including Feixi in Anhui, Panlongcheng in Hubei, Xingan in Jiangxi, and the early Shang capital at Zhengzhou in Henan, as well as less-well known sites, such as Shuangyantang near Dachang north of Wushan in the Three Gorges area (Childs-Johnson 1996: 40-42).

Jay Xu has suggested without explanation that the Sanxingdui bronze vessels were made in the "middle Yangtze valley." (Xu 2001: note 36, p. 32 and p. 36) What indicates that the ritual vessels come from outside Sichuan is not only their compatibility with metropolitan types at Zhengzhou and elsewhere, but the fact that holes were cut into their bases by Sichuan artisans subsequent to their casting, indicating that Sichuan ritualists used them for purposes of display during ceremonies that were unrelated to the ancestral sacrifices of their metropolitan northern neighbors living at Zhengzhou, Henan (for which the bronze vessels would originally have been made). This combination of locally produced bronzes and imported but "re-purposed" bronzes characteristic of Sanxingdui suggests that a similar pattern was at work with regard to jades at Jinsha. Jade symbolic tool types identified as chisels, adzes, and axes typify what may be identified as local products of Sichuan origin. Copies of imported types of northern origin include, on the other hand, completely different types, primarily zhang insignia, collared disks, and ge dagger axes.
Locally worked jade types of Jinsha and Sanxingdui

The types of jades from Jinsha sacrificial pits that may be identified as local products include ones well known in stone dating to the late Neolithic Baodun culture, as represented in Sichuan at the Xinjin and Shierqiao sites in the Chengdu Plain (Chengdu Kaogusuo 2002: pp. 126-140). Plentiful examples of stone chisels, adzes, and axes are known from excavations of those sites, as represented by those shown in fig. 3. These were utilitarian stone (sometimes serpentine) tools that were recreated in jade as symbolic objects during the subsequent Sanxingdui and Jinsha eras, contemporary with the historic Xia, Shang, and Western Zhou periods. The examples in jade from the Jinsha and Sanxingdui pits are all strictly symbolic objects, non-utilitarian in character. The most prominent are jade versions of the chisel, the adze, and the axe. Present evidence suggests that the formulation at Sanxingdui and Jinsha of a set of symbolic tool types in jade was a response to the stimulus and ongoing influence of the late Neolithic Longshan and early historic Erlitou period jade-working cultures to the north and east.
One of the most commonly sacrificed tool-turned-insignia jades that may be identified as locally worked is the chisel illustrated in fig. 4 and in Catalog No. 26.

Excavators identify this type as a short version of the chisel type. It is comparable to prototypes as illustrated above from late Neolithic Baodun sites (Chengdu Kaogusuo 2000: p.104). Stone and jade versions share a sleek long and flat tongue shape that is symmetrically broad on the front and back planes, and symmetrically narrow in profile. The top end, viewed from the front or back plane, is rounded to a hump shape; from the side it appears as a pointed equilateral triangle. The bottom is typically straight edged. This chisel type in rare instances is perforated with a hole and in its jade version is usually evenly modeled as well as highly burnished. The second chisel type, also found in pits at both Jinsha and Sanxingdui, is a thinner and longer version of the tongue shape with a pointed top and straight-edged bottom; it resembles a pencil in its overall shape, and it is not perforated (fig. 48).

A second common tool-turned-insignia is the adze: like the chisel, it is shaped like a tongue with a rounded top and straight edge bottom, but one of the top edges is worked into a sharp diagonal, visible in profile, and crescent-shaped when viewed from the front. The adze is also well represented at Sanxingdui (fig. 5AB). As pointed out by the site archaeologists, both this adze type and the chisel types are also known in jade at sites as far south as Vietnam and in southern Guangxi and Yunnan provinces (Chengdu Kaogusuo 2002: 127, notes 1 and 5, p. 127, and 2006: 24). Sanxingdui and Jinsha jade insignia, as represented by chisels and adzes, evidently were not only local in origin, evolving from tools of the late Neolithic era into insignia types during historic eras, they also had a substantial southern distribution.
Utilitarian fu axes were also worked into a symbolic jade form (fig. 6AB) although they are less numerous than jade chisels and adze types at Jinsha (Chengdu Kaogusuo 2006: colorpls. 100-101). Commonly, the utilitarian fu axe takes the shape of a fat and broad almost square form, without perforation, and with two beveled edges forming the cutting edge. Two typical examples are 5.66 cm long by 4.7 cm wide, and 6.8 cm long by 3.83 cm wide. Jade versions of these axes are also strictly symbolic in function. These jade chisels, adzes, and axes were most likely created as types of insignia following the precedent set by mainstream Longshan and Erlitou period traditions where tool and weapon types are converted into symbolic forms.

Figure 6AB: Jade axes from sacrificial pits, Meiyuan, Jinsha

**Imported Jade Types at Jinsha and Sanxingdui**

In contrast to the jade insignia chisels, adzes, and axes of Sichuan and adjacent regions, which clearly represent a reworking in jade of a regional stone tool tradition, the numerous collared disks, zhang, and ge dagger blades found in the sacrificial pits at Jinsha and Sanxingdui, Sichuan, appear to be imported objects, or copies or enhancements of imported objects. However, they are much more difficult to characterize than the jade chisels, adzes, and axes that were made locally. Some examples of collared disks and zhang and ge blades are clearly imports; and others are surely imported items that have been enhanced or reworked. Some appear to be local copies of imported originals. Still other jades appear to have been invented by local or traveling artisans. What is challenging about the imported jade types is that they cover a range of some 1,000 years, and in this respect comprise a mix of metropolitan types, running from the late Neolithic, Longshan, and Erlitou periods through historic Shang and early Western Zhou periods. By far the most numerous examples at Jinsha and Sanxingdui correspond in type to the Longshan and Erlitou periods rather than the Shang or Western Zhou periods. The presence of these jade objects in Sichuan is part of a much wider distribution of Longshan and Erlitou period jade types found at many southern sites far removed from China’s Central Plain. Such jade types are also known from sites in Hunan, Fujian, and Guangdong provinces, as well as in Hong Kong and Vietnam.

Late Neolithic Longshan period jades derive from various sites in the north Central Plains and from the middle Yangtze river valley. As represented by the Shijiahe (Hubei) and Shandong Longshan cultures of the late Neolithic period. Standardized jade types in-
clude six major categories: 1: gui adz insignia, 2: zhang hoe insignia, 3: dao knife insignia, 4: yue broad axe insignia, 5: collared rings and bracelets, and 6: various hair and body orna-
mments (Childs-Johnson 2009: figs. 20-21, pp. 358-362). The jade set of the overlapping
late Erlitou period comprises similar jade types with the exception that a new type, the
gge dagger axe, is prominently represented (Childs-Johnson 1995: fig. 1, p. 65). These met-
ropolitan types serve as the springboard for comparing regional examples represented
at Jinsha and elsewhere in Sichuan.

Metropolitan types prominent at Jinsha, such as collared disks, ge dagger axes, and
zhang hoe insignia in all cases reflect standards set by Longshan and Erlitou period jade-
working traditions. For example, the so-called “collared disks” as represented earliest by
an excavated example from Dantu, Wulian district in Shandong (fig. 7A) are thin disk
shapes with a central perforation extended on both sides into a raised collar. These disks
are sometimes described as T-shaped bracelets. Some are identified as bracelets on the
basis that several have been found on the wrists of corpses and their inner diameters
are usually similar in measurement, varying from over five to over six cm in diameter;
probably large enough to allow a hand to slip through (Feng and Tong 1979: fig. 2, p. 34
and Hansford 1968: pl. 9a-b). As a type, the collared disk may have plain front and back
surfaces or have numerous circular incised rings that provide a decorative texture to the
surface of the disk. A third variation is the same type of disk with a raised collar that takes
the shape of a coiled feline dragon, as represented by Catalog Nos. 27, 28, and 29 in the
Throckmorton exhibit. Both plain and decorated versions are common at Jinsha and
Sanxingdui (see fig. 8AB). Jade disks exactly similar in type to those at Jinsha are known
in unbroken chronological succession at various metropolitan centers dating from the
early, middle, and late Shang periods. Yuan or collared disks from the early through mid-
dle Shang site of Xingan in Jiangxi (fig. 7B) and the late Shang tombs, M5 of Fu Zi (Fu Hao)
(Zhongguo Kaogusuo 1980: plates 93: 3-94) and M54 at Huayuanzhuang (fig. 7C), both at
Anyang, Henan, serve as representative examples. Due to the fact that in working tech-
nique, form and style the collared disks from the Central Plain and Sichuan are identical,
it is likely that these jades at Jinsha and elsewhere in Sichuan are imports (trade items,
gifts or loot) from their northern neighbors.

Figure 7ABC:
Collared disks from Dantu,
Shandong, Shandong
Longshan period: Xingan,
Jiangxi, early-middle
Shang period; M54,
Huayuanzhuang, Henan,
late Shang period
The ge dagger axes at Jinsha and related Sichuan sites illustrate a similar situation to the collared disk in that they too appear to be a type acquired initially as a gift or as loot from metropolitan Xia and Shang sites. There are two primary variations of the ge dagger axe at Jinsha. One is clearly Erlitou and early Shang in origin, as represented by the ge in fig. 9A from Erlitou and the comparable examples from Jinsha and Sanxingdui in fig. 9B. The type continues to evolve during the early and middle Shang periods as represented by jade examples from Zhengzhou in Henan (fig. 9C) Panlongcheng in Hubei (fig. 9E), and Xingan in Jiangxi (fig. 9F) and into the late Shang period, as represented by numerous examples from Fu Zi's tomb, MS Zhongguo Kaogusuo 1980: pls. 107-112, especially 112). This version of axe may also appear without any haft décor, as a plain extended long blade at Jinsha and Sanxingdui (see e.g., Chengdu Kaogusuo 2006: colorpls. 78 and 87) and elsewhere at metropolitan Xia and Shang sites, as represented by the early Shang ge at Panlongcheng, Hubei (fig. 9E top) (also see Hubai Kaogusuo 2001: fig. 119: 1-2, p. 180).
The second variation of the ge dagger-axe is a quixotic type marked by faceted edges aligning left and right sides of the blade (fig. 10A). As the site excavators have pointed out, this type mimics a similar shape in bronze from Jinsha and Sanxingdui (Chengdu Kaogusuo 2002: p. 142; 2006: No. 11, pp. 56-57). Since this type is unknown outside these Sichuan sites, it may be provisionally identified as being of Sichuan origin and manufacture. Nonetheless, since Erlitou craftsmen created faceted edges of other weapon types, such as the yue broad axe (fig. 10B) (see Childs-Johnson 1995: fig. 3, p. 67), as represented at Jinsha (fig. 10C), Erlitou cultural traditions again are prominent as a potential source of inspiration for this variation on the ge dagger-axe insignia in southwestern China.

The zhang blades from sacrificial pits at Jinsha and Sanxingdui are the most tantalizing form of what, along with ge dagger-axes and collared disks, appear to be imports from northern metropolitan sites. As an eccentric form, the zhang also lent itself to whimsical experimentation and apparently to diverse ritual uses in a variety of different locations. The standardized metropolitan type of zhang invented during the late Neolithic, Longshan, and Erlitou periods is well represented at Erlitou, but also at Shandong and Shijie Longshan period sites in north-central China and in the middle Yangtze River valley (fig. 11). The form has been well documented at a whole series of related Longshan period sites in Shaanxi and Shanxi as well as at distant southern sites, including Fujian, Guangdong, Hunan, Hong Kong, and Vietnam (Childs-Johnson 1995; Deng Cong 1994). The utilitarian ancestor of the zhang was most likely the ordinary farmer’s hoe as represented earliest amongst Neolithic finds at Hemudu in Zhejiang of the fourth - third millennia BCE, but the origin of the jade zhang as a symbolic insignia based on an agricultural tool clearly occurred at a much later time, during the Longshan and Erlitou periods of the late third millennium BCE (Childs-Johnson 1995: 68-70).

The classic zhang type, unlike the gui insignia or ge weapon insignia, was short-lived, lasting from approximately 2600/2300 of Longshan date through the Erlitou period ca. 1600 BCE. Although stone and jade zhang continue to appear, whether as heirloom or perpetuated forms in sites dating to the early Shang, the type later disappeared when it was conflated with the ge dagger-axe or gui adze insignia blade during the Shang period (see Gu Fang and E. Childs-Johnson article on classic Shang and Western Zhou jade types in the Catalogue).
The classic metropolitan zhang blade of northern origin at Jinsha and other related Sichuan sites represented by the translucent green example illustrated in fig. 12B. The type resembles what in the west may be mistaken as a sword or scepter: a rectangular haft that gives way to a decorated section and a long thin blade that flares and ends in a triumphant concave crescent. The blade at 42.2 cm long is identical in style, form, and working technique to the exquisite example, 48.5 cm long, excavated from a tomb at Erlitou in Henan (fig. 12A). Other spectacular metropolitan examples recently analyzed from American museums may extend 52 cm long (Childs-Johnson 2009: chapter 11), only a few centimeters shy of the longest versions currently known, such as the 61 cm long example from Sanxingdui (fig. 12C).
Stylistically sclerotic examples and similarly lifeless, small-scale examples also exist at Jinsha and Sanxingdui, as represented by the 5.3 cm long example at Jinsha (fig. 13A) and others at Sanxingdui (fig. 13B). It has been suggested (Chengdu Kaogusuo 2006: 107) that the small version represents a form of mingqi, a small-scale copy of an object designed primarily for burial with the dead. At Jinsha and Sanxingdui these objects are not found in burials but rather in sacrificial pits. The stiff and stylistically hardened effect of many zhang examples from Jinsha and Sanxingdui is due to the fact that their silhouetted handle décor is rendered as if cut at 90 degree angles rather than modeled into delicately rendered dentils created through laboriously abrasion. These examples may be local creations of Sichuan artisans.

Another variation of zhang insignia from Sichuan at Jinsha, Sanxingdui and Taipingchang shows a sharply defined V-shaped fork rather than soft crescent shape on the blade’s upper end (fig. 14). This eccentric stylistic variation first appears amidst prototypical Shandong and Shijiahe Longshan types (see fig. 11 above). Numerous examples are known from the Sichuan sacrificial pits (e.g., Sichuan Kaogusuo 1999: fig. 141: 1-4).

Corroborating evidence for the theory that most ge, collared disks, and zhang found at Jinsha and Sanxingdui were imported items that originated at Erlitou or northern Longshan centers is provided by another variation of the zhang blade at these Sichuan sites. This variation of the zhang is characterized by atypical blades decorated with incised imagery (figs. 15-16). The two zhang types are conflation of zhang and ge elements: the haft is typified by a rectangular extension with elaborate dentil décor typical of zhang (explaining why sometimes the blade is mislabeled yazhang or toothed zhang), but with a blade that is not characteristically zhang in type but rather ge dagger-axe in style. The blade tip ends in the point of a dagger-axe rather than in a fork or crescent flare of the zhang blade. Furthermore, at the top of this conflated hybrid is an openwork profile of an animal. Two simplified abstract cicada motifs also appear incised into the front and back of the same blade (fig. 15). The latter motifs are clearly later in date than the blade: they are crudely carved on an otherwise polished and burnished piece of carefully worked jade (see the explanation of Zhang Qing in Chengdu Kaogusuo 2002: 151). It is as if the local artisan wished to improve or enhance the religious significance of this imported type by adding abstract cicada motifs.
The second example of whimsical interpretation catering to local interest is a similar conflated hybrid of zhang and ge from Sanxingdui (fig. 16). Comparable in type to the Jinsha example, the Sanxingdui version is decorated at its tip with a perforated bird motif and is decorated on front and reverse sides with an incised outline image of a decorative small-scale zhang. It is suggested that these types are representative of reworking and reworking of imported jades from northern sites that are enhanced with themes of local religious interest. The large number of zhang blades found in the Jinsha pits in comparison to other jade insignia types (over 200 zhang compared to 50 ge; see Chengdu Kaogusuo 2006: 19-21) and the prominence of the zhang blade motif elsewhere in Sanxingdui and Jinsha art (see e.g., small-scale bronze and gold leaf images of zhang, Sichuan Kaogusuo 1999: colorpls. 76 and 136: 4) document the reverence felt by local rulers and elites for this type of jade implement.
Two other zhang blades help to reinforce the theory that certain blades were reworked or created to satisfy local interests in the Chengdu Plain. These include a third example from Jinsha (fig. 17) and a fourth from Sanxingdui (fig. 18). The form of both blades are debased references to the original triumphantly shaped zhang type of Erlitou and Longshan origin. One barely flares at the top; the other is a simple slab cut diagonally at top and bottom. Images strictly Sichuan in origin decorate the front and back of each of these blades. One features the theme of standing and kneeling human figurines in local Sichuan costume with idiosyncratic hand gestures arranged in registers, alternating with bands comprising geometric frets and hills out of which emerge zhang-shaped blades and elephant tusks, in addition to another unidentified artifact shape. Clearly these images were worked by Sichuan artisans since they appear elsewhere as locally cast bronze images or decorating locally cast bronze spirit trees (see e.g. Sichuan Kaogusuo 1999: fig. 129, p. 233). Decorating the other diagonally cut trapezoidal zhang blade are registers of similar standing figurines holding elephant tusks. These zhang type jades (figs. 15, 16, 17, 18) are either representative of reworked imported jades of northern origin or native locally worked jades copying metropolitan types that were reinterpreted to satisfy the religious needs of the local population in the Chengdu Plain of Sichuan.
Conclusion

The numerous jades discovered at sites in Sichuan associated with the early historic period of metropolitan China may represent in part what has not yet been excavated or well documented from earlier sites in the Yellow and middle Yangtze river valleys, namely richer and more extensive remains of Longshan and Erlitou period jades. Site archaeologists and various scholars have noticed that although there is continuity of local traditions at Jinsha and Sanxingdui, there are also sudden changes, particularly noticeable in certain ceramic types comparable with the Yangtze river valley Longshan period culture of Shijiahe in Hubei. In addition and most noticeable is the sudden burst of bronze casting and jade working shown by the numerous pit finds at Jinsha, Sanxingdui, and Taipingchang. Did earlier jade-working techniques of late Neolithic, Longshan, and early historic Erlitou periods alone stimulate the dramatic production in the Chengdu area? Or, did bronze-casting techniques of early through middle Shang stimulate the casting of strikingly novel and majestic forms unknown at metropolitan Shang sites?

There is probably truth in both assessments. For example, in jade, there are two different traditions represented: jade-working that was local and based on utilitarian tools transformed into jade insignia types, and jade-working yielding objects imported as trade goods, gifts, loot, or other means from cultural sites of mainstream China to the north and east of Sichuan. Perhaps Longshan and Erlitou period artisans were sent south to mine jade, or to work locally mined jade at Wenchuan in Sichuan. Such a scenario is plausible because it is known that bronze ores were mined near the Sichuan Yunnan border and the Jinsha River in Yunnan and exported widely; a highly radiogenic lead has been scientifically traced to those southwestern mines and is found not only in bronzes at (relatively nearby) Sanxingdui, but also in early Shang bronzes at Zhengzhou in Henan, Xingan in Jiangxi, Feixi in Anhui, and Panlongcheng near Wuhan in Hubei, and Shuangyangtanqiang in the Three Gorges Area (formerly Hubei) (Childs-Johnson and Jin 2003; Jin 1998).

Early Shang bronzes from Shaanxi and Shanxi have not yet been thoroughly tested, but the characteristic Yunnan lead may well be found in those bronzes also; as proposed by the late Tong Enzheng, there was contact and trade within a crescent-shaped area linking the northwest, the Chengdu Plain, and the middle Yangtze river valley (1987).

Clearly, Longshan, Xia, and early Shang peoples were aware of the valuable resources of their neighbors in the Chengdu Plain. Trade to and from the Chengdu region exploited various river routes, including the Yangtze itself, as well as its tributaries running north and south. Early Shang settlements at Panlongcheng and Xingan, for example, are excellent examples of Shang entrepreneurial and corporate interests in southern resources. Perhaps archaeologists will discover new sites of Longshan and Shang settlements further west in the Three Gorges Area which would corroborate the direct links that are so amply demonstrated by the intermixture of local and imported jade-working traditions at Jinsha, Sanxingdui, and Taipingchang.
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