



Miniatures in the Ancient Chinese and Southeast Asian Societies

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- A “小品” (xiao pin) is a miniature version of a normal (life-sized) thing.
- These small objects could have had different possible functions: burial gifts, devotional items, toys, collectables for literati, or maybe product samples.



As a Devotional Item: Lohan from Sui - Early Tang Dynasty (6th - 7th Century)



As a Toy: Chuiwan (捶丸) from Jin – Yuan Dynasty (1115-1368)



明 杜堇《捶丸仕女圖》



As Collectables for Literati: Scholarly Objects from Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127)



As Product Samples? A Set of Three Xing Ware Vessels from Tang Dynasty (618-907)



As Burial Gifts: Mingqi

- 'Spirit article' is a translation of the Chinese word mingqi (明器).
- Mingqi are portable tomb furnishings, mainly objects and figurines, that are specifically designed and produced for the dead.



3 categories of tomb furnishings during mid to late Eastern Zhou (5th to 3rd century BCE)

- 1) Mingqi (明器, spirit Articles, sometimes were called guiqi, 鬼器 the ghost vessels);
 - 2) Shengqi (生器, lived objects): vessels of everyday use;
 - 3) Jiqi (祭器, sacrificial vessels): previously used in communal ritual affairs.
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- Xunzi (荀子, c.310-237BCE) used the terms mingqi and shengqi to designate two types of burial goods.

- According to Zheng Xuan (鄭玄, AD127-200), an authoritative commentator on the Protocols of Ceremony (儀禮), a deceased high official was entitled to bring with him not only mingqi and shengqi, but also jiqi.
- How could a mingqi be distinguished from practical utensils and sacrificial vessels?



- "Confucius said, 'In dealing with the dead, if we treat them as if they were entirely dead, that would show a want of affection, and should not be done; or, if we treat them as if they were entirely alive, that would show a want of intelligence, and should not be done. On this account the bamboo artifacts made for the dead should not be suited for actual use; those of earthenware should not be able to contain water: those of wood should not be finely carved; the zithers should be strung, but not evenly; the mouth organs should be prepared, but not in tune; the bells and chime stones should be there but have no stands. These objects are called 'spiritual articles' because they are created to honour the spirit of the dead.'"

- Xunzi: "The spirit articles should resemble real objects but not be usable." (荀子：「明器貌而不用」)
- Mingqi should retain the form of practical objects but negate their usefulness.





Wu Hung's *Analysis of Mingqi*

2 significances for the study of ancient tombs about mingqi

- 1) The definition of mingqi as a specific category of objects leads us to identify such objects among archaeological finds, to examine their material and visual properties and to trace their regional variations and historical development.
- 2) As stated in ancient texts, the distinctive form and meaning of spirit articles can be recognised only in comparison with other types of objects in a tomb. Such ritual prescriptions lead us to discern the classification of grave furnishings and their interrelationships.

- The earliest spirit articles (mingqi) in China were special earthenware made for the dead, including some of the finest vessels from prehistoric times.
- The production of pottery and ceramic spirit vessels continued into later periods.
- A major change took place from Eastern Zhou to Han dynasty, when such vessels were replaced by sculptural forms representing human and animal figures (yong, 俑), architectural structures and objects.

Painted Pottery Figurines (Warring States, 475-221BC)



Miniaturisation

- Miniaturisation is an essential feature of Chinese tomb figurines. All Eastern Zhou figurines are limited in size.
- Emperor Jing's (西漢景帝, 156-141BC) mausoleum, Yangling (陽陵), is among the largest from the early Han, the figurines in it are only one-third of a Qin warrior in height; those from some non-imperial tombs are considerably smaller, about one-ninth of a Qin figure.

Painted Pottery 'Nude' Warriors from Yangling



- They can be considered 'miniatures' not only in comparison with their natural models, but also because their limited height and volume resulted from a conscious decision to drastically reduce the scale of tomb figurines.
- It was a conscious decision because the figurines in Yangling were made not long after the Qin terracotta warriors.



'Half Tael (半兩)' Miniature Coins (Diameters: 9-10mm [left] and 4.5mm [right])

- Miniature 'half tael' coins similar to the pictures below, were excavated in Yangling along with the painted pottery figurines.



- Why didn't the Han emperors follow the Qin example and furnish their tombs with life-sized sculptures?
- In fact, excavations of Yangling have begun to reveal a project which was no less ambitious than that of the Lishan Mausoleum in conception.



- The basic purpose of the Han tableaux was to fashion a miniature world.
- The miniatures in Yangling and other Han tombs not only substituted for the real human world, but constituted a world free from the natural laws of the human world, thereby extending life in perpetuity.



- Disparity in figurines' physical dimensions became even more pronounced in early Tang tombs, in which figures of identical types were often rendered in different sizes.
- 1) The degree of importance of a figurine in the constructed afterlife of the deceased;
- 2) the placement of a figurine inside a tomb.



- According to Tang official regulations, tomb figurines representing supernatural beings were not exceed about 30cm high, and the images of ceremonial guards, musicians and attendants were not to be taller than about 20cm.
- But excavated examples, including those from the tomb of the Jinxiang princess and many other elite Tang burials, demonstrate that these regulations were seriously violated.



- In reaction to such violation, ritual specialists became more adamant in advancing 'correct' behaviour in conducting funerary rites.
- This counter-movement reached its height during Song Dynasty, when some leading Neo-Confucian scholars compiled detailed ritual prescriptions.



- Regarding tomb figurines, Zhu Xi wrote in his influential Family Rites (朱子家禮):
- “Carve wood to make carts and horses, male and female servants, and all the things needed to care for the deceased. The objects should resemble those used in real life but be smaller.”



- A similar statement also exists in Sima Guang's *Writing on Rituals*.
- These instructions provided fundamental guidelines in funerary practices when Neo-Confucianism became the official doctrine during the Ming and Qing dynasties.





China & Southeast Asia

China & Southeast Asia

- From sometime during the Tang Dynasty, ceramics began entering the life of maritime Southeast Asia.
- In the early 13th century, Zhao Rugua (趙汝适, 1170-1231), a superintendent of trade and minor member of the Song imperial family, recorded in his Description of Barbarian Peoples (諸番志, ca. 1225) that merchants long had traded Chinese pottery and other goods for Southeast Asian pearls, tortoiseshell, beewax, and incense woods.

- Chao recorded that in the Phillipines, outsiders greatly fear natives who skulk in the jungle and shoot arrows at passers by.
- However, 'when the trader takes them a porcelain jar, they bow and take it, and then uttering cries of joy, run away with it.'



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Small blue-and-white jar
Yuan Dynasty, 14th century
Height 4.1 cm

Jarlet of globular form decorated in underglaze blue with a disconnected classic scroll. No footrim and the base unglazed.

元代 青花卷雲紋小罐



105

Small blue-and-white jar
Yuan Dynasty, 14th century
Height 5.7 cm

Jarlet potted in the form of a miniature guan decorated in underglaze blue with a crape-myrtle scroll with wind-swept leaves. No footrim and the base unglazed.

Note: Compare with the Oriental Ceramic Society of Hong Kong, *Chinese Blue and White Porcelain* (1975), No. 2.

元代 青花紫鸚絳花紋小罐



106

Small blue-and-white jar
Yuan Dynasty, 14th century
Height 8.8 cm

Jarlet with two loop handles and the body divided into six panels by vertical beaded appliques, coated with a translucent pale blue glaze reminiscent of qingbai and decorated in alternate panels in underglaze blue with chrysanthemum sprays with cross-hatch centres, wind-swept leaves and flaming pearls. No footrim and the base unglazed.

元代 青花紫鸚絳折枝菊紋雙耳小罐



107

Small blue-and-white jar
Yuan Dynasty, 14th century
Height 6.8 cm

Jarlet with two loop handles and the body divided into four panels by vertical beaded appliques, decorated in underglaze blue in each of the panels with chrysanthemum sprays and wind-swept leaves. No footrim and the base unglazed.

元代 青花紫鸚絳折枝菊紋雙耳小罐



108

Small blue-and-white jar
Yuan Dynasty, 14th century
Height 8 cm

Jarlet potted in the form of a star fruit, decorated in underglaze blue with chrysanthemum sprays and wind-swept leaves. The foot and the recessed base unglazed.

Note: For a similar jarlet coated with a qingbai glaze, see Adrian Joseph, *Chinese and Annamese Ceramics* (London, 1972), Pl. 4.

元代 青花紫鸚絳折枝菊紋雙耳小罐



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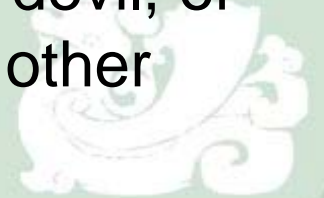
Small blue-and-white jar
Yuan Dynasty, 14th century
Height 5.2 cm

Jarlet of globular form with two loop handles; coated with a translucent bluish-white glaze of qingbai type and decorated in underglaze blue with a chrysanthemum scroll and wind-swept leaves. No footrim and the base unglazed.

元代 青花紫鸚絳折枝菊紋雙耳小罐



- In 1599 Fathers Alonso de Humanes and Gabriel Sanchez sent the following account of a visit to the island of Bohol:
- “During one visit which we made to the town of Lobo, a significant thing occurred. To do away with their delusions and rid them of certain apprehensions which the devil had implanted in them, a constable gave us notice that in one village nearby there was a chief who in his house kept many cups and small jars full of charms, together with other instruments for casting lots and divining whether in case of illness sacrifice should be offered to the devil, or whether particular directions should be taken in other matters.



- “(Cont’d) Father Gabriel Sanchez therefore decided to go there in order to do away with such execrable instruments. But not much more effort on his part was required, and upon arriving at the house the man himself had to take down and collect all the cups and jars, none of the Indians who were with him daring in any way to touch the objects lest they die at the touch. They feared too, so influenced were they by those superstitions, that if those objects were thrown into the river the crocodiles would become enraged against them.

- “(Cont’d) But the Father, allaying their dread and disabusing them of their false forebodings, since he had touched them and remained alive, made them take the things out into the open and calling the young men to join him they all spat on them and trampled them (for these acts, among these people as among all other nations, denote the greatest contempt, abhorrence and dishonour). Finally he had these objects burned and thrown into the river. Thus were those people undeceived and were brought closer to our own true and unconquerable Catholic religion.”



- The Bataks of northern Sumatra used jars from Ming dynasty for holding medicines and magic potions.





Robert Finlay: “The Pilgrim Art”

Shipwreck Examples

- 1) Pandanan wreck near Palawan Island in the Philippines yielded more than 5000 Chinese and Vietnamese ceramics.
- 2) A Chinese ship the Turiang sank 160km off the Malaysian coast, perhaps as a result of being top-heavy with a sizeable cargo of Thai pottery, supplemented with wares from China and Vietnam.



- 3) The Hoi An Hoard wreck, a Thai ship found by fishermen off central Vietnam, went down with some 250,000 pieces of pottery, mostly from kilns in the Hong River delta, including cobalt-decorated stoneware and a large number of Kendi jars.



- They all sank on the way to ports in continental and maritime Southeast Asia, locations where merchants found the best customers for relatively unsophisticated jars and plates.
- They all carried pottery from different regions of East Asia, evidence of the cosmopolitan nature of the trade by the fourteenth century.



- The Chinese, Vietnamese, and Thai wares are similar in shape and decoration, suggesting a common pool of knowledge about markets thousands of kilometres apart, probably as a consequence of clients in the Philippines and Indonesia ordering desired pottery by sending drawings and wooden models to various kiln centers.



Vietnam

- Ceramics of continental Southeast Asia were greatly influenced by China.
- As Vietnam bordered on China, however, its pottery owed a much greater debt to the technology and aesthetic traditions of the Middle Kingdom than did that made in Cambodia and Thailand.
- According to legend, a Chinese potter came to the Hong Rover valley in the 2nd century AD, where he built the first kiln and passed on his skills to the natives.

- Chinese culture continued to hold large sway in elite circles of Annan, not only because of the outlook of Viet aristocrats, but also as a consequence of turmoil to the north impelling well-to-do Chinese to seek safety in the Hong River area.
- When the Southern Song fell to the Mongols, 30 ships filled with refugees escaped to Hanoi, and when Mongol troops invaded Annan in 1284, they discovered more than 400 senior Song bureaucrats and court officials living there.

- Acknowledging the skill of the potters. Kublai Khan demanded white pottery in tribute from Annan, along with pearls and rhinoceros horn, and some Chinese potters of the Yuan copied Hong Valley wares for export to Southeast Asia.



- The Yuanshi (元史, History of Yuan Dynasty) records an edict of 1262 in which Kubilai Khan defined the form of tribute that he expected a Vietnamese prince to supply the following year. The usual tropical luxury items, such as pearls and rhinoceros horn as well as white porcelain bowls, were requested.
- 「卿既委質為臣，其自中統四年為始，每三年一貢，可選儒士、醫人及通陰陽卜筮、諸色人匠，各三人，及蘇合油、光香、金、銀、朱砂、沉香、檀香、犀角、玳瑁、珍珠、象牙、綿、白磁盞等物同至。」

- In the early Ming dynasty, the Yongle emperor (永樂帝) ordered armies totaling 215,000 into Vietnam and the Ming endeavour persisted for almost 20 years, from 1407-1427.
- Within a few years of the death of Yongle in 1424, the Xuande emperor (宣德帝) ordered the troops to withdraw from the unpacified south.

- Le Loi (黎利, r. 1428-1433) founded the Le dynasty (黎朝, 1428-1527), a regime ideologically based on Neo-Confucianism, devoted to a Chinese-style bureaucratic government, and focuses on imperialist expansion.
- The Cham people (占城人) had made stoneware for several generations, but after conquest by northern Vietnam, potteries imported from there took precedence, and local kilns went out of business.
- When they resumed again in the early 15th century, the Cham kilns produced blue and white stoneware, copies of wares from the Hong River that were themselves modelled on Jingdezhen porcelain.

- Chinese and Muslim merchants imported Jingdezhen blue and white to Vietnam from the early 14th century inasmuch as it was on the route from Quanzhou to the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean.
- Hong River potters shifted entirely to production of blue and white stoneware only in the aftermath of the Ming invasion, when conditions of peace and prosperity made such industry practicable.

Vietnamese Blue Glazed and Green Glazed Miniature Vessels (15th–16th Century)



- Given the intensity of Buddhism in Vietnam, the lotus naturally remained a highly popular decoration.
- In the fifteen century, the Le dynasty encouraged the export of ceramics to increase the kingdom's revenue.
- The Ming government restricted private overseas trade much of that time, thereby providing Vietnamese and Thai potters with an opportunity for selling their wares in foreign markets.



- Merchants in southern Chinese ports also may have relocated to Vietnam to avoid the Ming restrictions.
- Blue and white stoneware was exported from the Hong Valley and Champa to the Archipelago and Southwest Asia.



- Exports of pottery from mainland Southeast Asia fluctuated according to the status of Chinese shipping, expanding when China went into a period of withdrawal, losing ground when it reemerged.
- Mainland Southeast Asia had a second opportunity in the late seventeenth century, during the Ming-Qing dynastic turnover.



Thailand

- Chinese merchants may have been responsible for introducing pottery production at Sawankhalok, 'the Place of Heaven', in Northern Thailand.
- It was a centre that eventually grew to include one thousand kilns spread over an area of more than 6km.
- Chinese incising techniques and Chinese embroidered silks served as major sources of inspiration for embellishments on Khmer pottery.

- Legend claims that King Ramkamhaeng (d. 1317) of the Sukotai kingdom (c.a. 1238-1419), the first polity established by Thai-speaking people, paid state visits to Kublai Khan in the late 1290s, supposedly returning with a Chinese bride and hundreds of potters from Hebei province.



- Presumably this fable stems from the migration of Chinese potters to the Thai region during the death throes of the Southern Song regime.
- They established kilns at Sukotai in north-central Thailand and introduced celadon production to the older kilns at Sawankhalok.



Thai Sawankhalok Ware Miniature Vessels (15th–16th Century)



- The most popular motif on dishes was a fish, one of the Buddhist emblems of good fortune as well as a reference to the god Vishnu, who was reincarnated as a fish and rescued mankind from a flood.



Longquan Celadon 'Twin Fish' Dish Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368)



- Chinese ceramics played a vital role in the whole cycle of existence – birth, sickness, marriage, feasting, worship, war, and death.
- The ceramic continued to serve as a gesture of reverence for transcendent power, an adornment linked with longstanding devotion.



Two Thai Sawankhalok Ware Celadon Miniature Figurines (15th Century)



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