

Inscribed Bronzes in Early Western Zhou Tombs: Funerary Gifts, Gifting and Social Network

西周早期墓葬中的有銘銅器: 助葬, 饋贈及其所反映的社會關係的考察

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This research intends to engage the notion of the biography of the object in the study of inscribed bronzes in early Western Zhou tombs.¹ Different from the use-life cultural historical approach that focused on the changes to the morphological or functional characteristics of an object, a biographical approach seeks to understand the way objects become invested with meaning through social interactions they are caught up in, and the persons and events to which they are connected.² In other words, as an object moves across time and space, and between people, social and cultural contexts in which it will live, the way it interacts with people would change, leading to reinterpretation and renegotiation of its meanings and values at different stages of its life history.

Inscribed bronzes in early Western Zhou tombs present us valuable evidence to examine the changing meanings the objects could have experienced as they moved across contexts and people, and to reveal broad social relations between people embodied by the objects. Inscriptions on bronzes often recorded the name of the person who commissioned the vessel, the dedicatee to whom the vessel was intended for, and the event (e.g. gift awarding) leading to the making of the vessel. Through the study of this textual information, scholars are able to discover the circumstance surrounding the 'birth' of a vessel: who, when, why and for what purpose it was made, and to directly link a vessel with an individual or a lineage. Presumably, the vessel was then used by its patron to conduct various daily social and ritual activities.

Mortuary practice, on the other hand, produced another chapter of the life of bronzes. The deposition of bronzes in tombs terminated their use by the living and concluded their life

¹ The notion of the cultural biography of the object has gained popularity in archaeology after the publication of two influential papers on biography of commodities by anthropologists Appadurai and Kopytoff over two decades ago, see Kopytoff, I., "The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, edited by A. Appadurai, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, pp. 64-91; Appadurai, A., "Introduction: commodities and the politics of value," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, edited by A. Appadurai, 1986, pp. 3-63.

² Gosden, Chris and Y. Marshall. 1999. The Cultural Biography of Objects. *World Archaeology* 31.2: 169-78.

journey.³ With the assistance of inscriptions on bronze vessels in a tomb, we are able to identify cases where the deceased was accompanied by vessels made by others (sometimes quite a number of them). This contextual evidence shows that many vessels have moved from their original patrons or lineages to the new owners by the time they were buried and that they had developed relations with new individuals, specifically the deceased in this case. As they moved to and used in different contexts by different individuals, bronze vessels could acquire new symbolic meanings, one of which is that they could become an embodiment of social relations between individuals and groups.

The context in which objects moved would impact the way they acquired or changed meanings. The movement of bronze sacrificial objects is limited as they were considered inalienable goods to their owners.⁴ There is little evidence to show bronze vessels were commonly used as gifts (other than in the funerary context) between nobles during their social interactions. Gifts recorded on numerous inscriptions on Western Zhou bronzes typically include cowries, clothes, servants, land and *jijin*, not bronze vessels.⁵ Indeed the vessels are often made as a result of those gifting. Some Shang dated bronze vessels in Western Zhou tombs could be war booties, as a passage in “Zhou Benji” of *Shiji* recorded that King Wu awarded Shang sacrificial vessels in ancestral temples to lineage lords who were charged to rule regional states (“封诸侯，班赐宗彝，做分殷之器物。”). For example, an early Western Zhou tomb (99M1) at Waliu near Zhenzhou contained twelve bronze vessels among which seven were inscribed showing lineage signs such as Ju, Qi and Shi that were closely associated with the Shang. Those vessels can be dated to the third phase of the Yinxu period based on their style.

³ Of course, in some sense, the biography of the object continued in modern time when it was discovered as burial goods, material culture, research data, cultural relics, museum collection and so on. But the modern chapter of its biography is out of scope of our discussion here.

⁴ In an often quoted passage in *Zuo Zhuan*, for instance, it is said that bronzes and names cannot be lent to others and they solely belonged to an individual noble. Since the vessel was considered as the embodiment of ritual, thus an individual's power. Another interesting passage in *Liji* stated that even the owner of the sacrificial vessels need to leave the country, the vessels shall stay and need to be stored in the house of other nobles with equivalent status. Numerous bronze inscriptions in the Western Zhou recorded gifting occasions between various levels of authorities. But the gift list usually included, the *jin*, raw material for the vessel (*jijin*). Typically, bronze vessels are not the subjects for awards. Also see Constance A. Cook, “Wealth and the Western Zhou”, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, Vol. 60, 1997(2): 253-94.

⁵ There are other circumstances that could prompt the movement of bronze objects in the Zhou period: ritual and political activities (such as tributes to the Zhou king), war, bribery, marriage, and funeral. See Yuan Yanling, “Zhou dai qingtong liqi de shenchan yu liudong (The production and movement of bronzes in Zhou period),” *Kaogu* 2009, 10: 68-77.

Prof. Zhu Fenghan suggested that those vessels could be war booties obtained by the deceased after the conquest.⁶

However, studies on both historical and archaeological evidence suggest that one primary ritual activity that could prompt the movement of bronze vessels is the funerary ritual. Bronze vessels could be donated as funerary gifts and buried as part of ritual sets for the deceased in tomb. In a series of studies of funerary gifting during the Zhou time, Prof. Cao Wei concluded that the early Western Zhou practice was a continuation of Shang funerary tradition which can be traced to tomb No.5 at Anyang. He further proposed that the practice of funerary gifting was intimately linked to the nature of the sacrificial practice during the early Western Zhou period.⁷ Another study found cases of funerary gifting of bronze artifacts in three early Western Zhou tombs at Beiyao, Luoyang. A *gui* in tomb M37, a *ge* in tomb M139 and five *ge* in tomb M172 have pertinent ink inscriptions of names on them. These objects were identified as funerary gifts to the deceased, and the names on them are those of the gift givers.⁸ By the time of the Eastern Zhou, funerary gifting or *fengfu* had developed into an elaborate practice. The announcement of the gift lists to the deceased in public and the emergence of etiquettes between the giver and receiver of the gifts all suggest that funerary gifting was already transferred into a prominent social practice.⁹

Many bronze vessels buried in the same tomb but made by various persons could have been given to the deceased during his or her lifetime or more likely to the deceased's family as funerary gifts, but archaeologically it is difficult to identify at what point or points during his or her lifetime (or end of it, for that matter), the deceased or his or her family had received the vessels. But as a gift received during lifetime or at funeral, the vessel represented an act of social interaction between individuals and lineages. Collectively the vessels in a tomb could encapsulate layers of social networks and relations. Some vessels, particularly those contributed

⁶ Zhu Fenghan, *Zhongguo Qingtongqi zonglun* (A Comprehensive Study on Chinese Bronzes), Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Press, 2009, pp. 1376-1377.

⁷ Cao Wei, "Shilun xizhou shiqi de fengfu zhiduo (A preliminary discussion on fengfu system of the Western Zhou)", in *Zhouyuan yizhi yu Xizhou tongqi yanju* (The Zhouyuan Site and Western Zhou Studies). Beijing: Kexue Press, 2004 (reprint), p. 165-175.

⁸ Cai Yunzhang, "Luoyang Beiyao Xizhou mu moshu wenzi luelun (A brief discussion on the ink inscriptions in the Western Zhou tombs at Beiyao Luoyang)," *Wenwu* 1994.7: 64-69, 79.

⁹ For studies on fengfu practice of Eastern Zhou period, see Cai Wei, "Dongzhou shiqi de fengfu zhidu (Funerary gifting in Eastern Zhou)", in *Zhouyuan yizhi yu Xizhou tongqi yanju* (The Zhouyuan Site and Western Zhou Studies). Beijing: Kexue Press, 2004 (reprint), p. 165-175.

as funerary gifts, have not been used by the deceased when alive, but became part of the ritual set accompanying the deceased in spirit world. The vessels themselves could be ‘new’ to the deceased, but social relations and networks they embodied would not. Bronze vessels in a tomb could be a comprehensive and condensed reflection of social relations developed and accumulated through time between individuals and lineages.

This research, therefore, attempts to examine social networks embodied in inscribed bronzes in tombs through two case studies, the burials of the Yu lineage at Baoji and the burials of Yan state at Liulihe. Inscribed bronzes in both the Yu and Yan tombs documented active and extensive social networks among lineages. Material in Yu tombs allow us to trace the social interactions between lineages through time, and that in Yan tombs to identify interactions among lineages in the Yan state. Given that funerary gifting is an important part of mortuary practice performed by the living, and the behavior of the living was conditioned by specific social and cultural context, this research will also hypothesize on the possible causes that led to active social networking in both cases by examining their social, cultural and political circumstances.

Gifting Activities of the Yu Lineage at Baoji

The early and middle Western Zhou tombs of the Yu lineage were discovered at three adjacent locations in Baoji: Zhifangtou, Zhuyuangou and Rujiazhuang. Neither the Yu lineage nor its polity was mentioned in traditional historical texts. Inscriptions on a number of bronze vessels from the tombs show that the group self-named as ‘Yu’ (虢). Material culture from these tombs demonstrated a number of distinctive cultural characteristics, leading scholars to argue that it could be descendent of the Qiang or Di people in Gansu or the Ba people in Sichuan, and could have migrated to Baoji during the late Shang period.¹⁰ Given Baoji’s geographical proximity to the Zhou metropolitan area, it is likely the Yu lineage was a close ally of the Zhou at least during the early Western Zhou period. Indeed, it has been suggested that the Yu could have participated in Zhou’s campaign against the Shang.¹¹

The Yu tombs at the three locations span from King Cheng to King Mu period. Tombs at Zhifangtou were the earliest, roughly of King Cheng period, followed by those at Zhuyuangou

¹⁰ Lu Liancheng and Hu Zhisheng 1988. *Baoji Yuguo mudu* (The Yu State Cemetery at Baoji). Beijing: Wenwu Press, pp. 446-462.

¹¹ Zhang Tian’en 2008 [reprint]. Xizhou Yushi yicun jige wenti de tantao (Several issues on the remains of the Yu clan of the Western Zhou). In *Zhou Qin wenhua yanjiu lunji* (A collection of researches on the Zhou and Qin Culture), pp. 151-65. Beijing: Kexue Press.

from King Cheng to King Zhao period, and lastly those at Rujiazhuang of King Mu period. Tomb BZFM1 at Zhifangtou, BZM13 and BZM7 at Zhuyuangou and BRM1 at Rujiazhuang, were identified to be those of Yubo of four generations in a chronological order. The deceased of tomb BZM4 at Zhuyuangou was identified as Yuji, possibly the head of a minor branch of the Yu lineage.¹²

Inscriptions revealed that an overwhelming majority of inscribed bronze vessels in these tombs were made by a variety of lineages (Table). Among the thirty-two inscribed bronzes in the four tombs (BZFM1, BZM13, BZM7 and BZM4), only eight to eleven can be attributed to the Yu lineage.¹³ Some bronze vessels in the earlier tombs, BZFM1 and BZM13, for example, are of typical styles of late Shang to early Zhou and feature short inscriptions commemorating deceased father so and so. It is possible some of them were awarded to the Yu lineage by the Zhou after the conquest of the Shang. However, inscriptions on a number of other bronze vessels in these tombs revealed that they were made by a few lineages active in neighbouring regions. Styles of these vessels displayed many distinctive early Western Zhou features. These vessels were most likely contributed to the Yu lineage as funerary gifts or gifts at other occasions by those lineages. In addition, inscribed bronzes from the Yu tombs dated from the beginning to the middle Western Zhou at three locations were able to present us with a historical view of the change and dynamics of social interactions between the Yu and other lineages.

Inscribed Bronzes Documenting Regional Social Network

Three tombs were excavated at Zhifangtou, all of which were partially damaged. Tomb BZFM1 of the early phase of the King Cheng period, identified to be that of a Yubo, yielded fourteen vessels, in which five were inscribed. Two square-based *gui* (BZFM1:6 and BZFM1:7) of typical early Western Zhou style were inscribed with 'Boge made this treasured sacrificial *gui*'. A square *ding* (BZFM1:4) inscribed with 'Bo zuo bao (Bo made this treasured [vessel])' could be made by the Yubo as well. A pair of *li* of same shape and decoration (BZFM1:11 &12)

¹² Ibid.

¹³ A square *ding* (BZFM1:4) bears 'bo zuo bao' in tomb BZFM1; a square *ding* (BZM4: 10) bears 'bo zuo yi' and a *yan* bears 'bo zuo bao yi' in tomb BZM4. If the 'bo' on all three vessels is Yubo, inscribed vessels that can be attributed to the Yu lineages will be eleven, if not, they will be eight. Further, without an exception, inscriptions on bronze vessels cast by members in the Yu lineage did not mention temple name of the ancestors. It is more likely therefore vessels whose inscriptions containing the phrase of 'commemorate Father yi, *gui* and so forth' were cast by individuals in non-Yu lineages, even though we can directly identify neither the individuals nor the lineages.

were inscribed with ‘Zebo made this *ding* for travel’. Their slender body and deep belly betrays the style of the *li* during the late Shang and early Western Zhou period. They were roughly contemporary with the two *gui* by Yubo. Studies of the history and geographic distribution of the Ze lineage by Prof. Lu Liangcheng suggested that the Ze was a lineage whose territory was bordered with the Yu on the south. The lineage remained active in the region until the late Western Zhou and had marriage ties with another lineage the San in the area.¹⁴ The inscription on a *zhi* (BZFM1:14) reads ‘X fu yi’. The first character is a bow-shaped ideogram. Over sixty bronze objects made by this lineage known to date, fifteen were archaeologically excavated. Nine of the fifteen were found in western Guanzhong, suggesting that the lineage could have lived in the area and had interactions with the Yu.¹⁵

The tomb of another Yubo, BZM13 at Zhuyuangou dated to King Cheng and King Kang period was intact. It contained twenty-one bronze vessels, including twelve cooking vessels (five round *ding*, two square *ding*, three *gui*, one *yan* and one *dou*), eight drinking vessels (two *you*, one of *zun*, *he*, *zhi*, *gu* and *jue* each) and two watering vessels (one *pan* and one *hu*). Nine of these vessels were inscribed, but none of them was commissioned by Yubo or other members of the Yu lineage. Yet, the assemblage of bronze vessels and other tomb features made this burial comparable to the other tombs BZFM1, BZM7 and BRM1 that have been attributed to the head of the Yu lineage. Thus, the deceased of this tomb could be another Yubo. Inscriptions on vessels in this tomb, though short, were able to reveal that these vessels were originally made by multiple individuals of various lineages. Three lineages Ge, Shi and Tan can be identified based on the inscription on a *ding*, a *dou* and a *jue* respectively. Bronzes made by these lineages were frequently found in late Shang and Western Zhou tombs. Tombs of one branch of the Ge lineage for instance were found at Gaojiaobao, Jingyang, east of Baoji in the Wei river valley.¹⁶ Prof. Zou Heng traced the find-spot of Tan bronzes and proposed the Tan lineage originally lived at Anyang and migrated to Guanzhong area in the Western Zhou period.¹⁷ Bronzes made by the Shi lineage have been found in Shaanxi, Henan, Shandong, Liaoning and others. Most

¹⁴ Lu Liangcheng 1984 “Xizhou Zeguo shiji kaolue jiqi xiangguan wenti” in *Xizhoushi yanjiu*. Xian: renming zazhi bianjibu, p.241.

¹⁵ Shaanxisheng Kaogu Yanjiusuo 1994. *Gaojiabao Geguomu* (The Ge Lineage Cemetery at Gaojiabao). Xi’an: Sanqin Press, p.129.

¹⁶ Shaanxisheng Kaogu Yanjiusuo 1994. *Gaojiabao Geguomu* (The Ge Lineage Cemetery at Gaojiabao). Xi’an: Sanqin Press.

¹⁷ Zou Heng, *Xia Shang Zhou kaogu lunwenji* (A Collection of Essays on Xia Shang Zhou Archaeology), Beijing: Wenwu Press, 1980, p.317.

noticeable is the Shi lineage cemetery at Qianzhangda, Shandong.¹⁸ It is possible that different branches of the Shi lineage migrated to various locations including western Shaanxi during the relocation of the lineages by Zhou King in the early Western Zhou.¹⁹ Inscriptions on a round *ding* (BZM13:18) and a *pan* (BZM13:25) indicated that they were made to commemorate Father Xin likely by the same person. The poor execution of the inscriptions implies that they were unlikely war booties from the Shang. Both vessels could be contributed to the deceased as gifts.

圆鼎	BZM13:13	由 X 册册作父辛宝
	BZM13:18	秉 X 父辛
	BZM13:17	戈
方鼎	BZM13:19	子 X
豆	BZM13:23	史父乙
觶	BZM13:5	X 贯
爵	BZM13:6	覃父癸
壶	BZM13:24	父己
盘	BZM13:25	秉贯父辛

* X refers to the character that can not be printed in word file.

Tomb BZM7 between late King Kang and King Zhao period yielded twelve vessels and a set of three bells, among others. The bronze assemblage included cooking and drinking vessels. Eight of the vessels were inscribed, among which three vessels a zun and two *you* were commissioned by Boge 伯各 (‘Boge made this treasured and sacrificial vessel’), presumably from the Yu lineage. The tomb occupant was thus identified as Yubo whose personal name was Ge. The most noticeable patron of the vessel in this tomb was Fenggong 丰公. On a round *ding* was inscribed with ‘Fenggong X (personal name, but unreadable) zuo zunyi (Fenggong x made this sacrificial vessel)’. Coincidentally, a contemporary tomb M215 at Beiyao, Luoyang, dated between King Kang and Zhao period, yielded a bronze willow-leaf shaped sword inscribed with “Fengbo” 丰伯. Willow-leaf shaped sword was a distinctive weapon type closely associated with the Yu lineage.²⁰ It was likely used as a symbol for group identity and a gender signifier for the

¹⁸ Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo, *Tengzhou Qianzhangda mudu* (Tengzhou Qianzhangda Cemetery), Beijing: Wenwu Press, 2005.

¹⁹ Li Chaoyuan, “Qianzhangda mudu zhong de Shi jiqita (The ‘Shi’ in Qianzhangda cemetery and other related issues)”, in Qingtongqi Xuebuji, Beijing: Wenwu Press, 2007, p. 40-47.

²⁰ Yan Sun, “Reconstructing Cultural Biographies of Bronze Willow-Leaf Shaped Swords in Western Zhou China” in *Charting the Life Histories of Artifacts and Goods in East Asian Prehistory and History* (temporary name), edited by Francis Allard, Yan Sun and Gideon Shelach, to be submitted to the Cambridge University Press, in process of editing.

male elites of the Yu lineage. Fengbo who owned the sword and Fenggong who owned the *ding* belonged to the same lineage. The sword is another example indicating contacts between the Yu and Feng lineage. A pair of *gui* (BZM7: 4&5) with the exact shape and decoration were inscribed with ‘made this treasured vessel’ without disclosing the name of the patron, but their style did not match the flamboyant taste of the zun and *you* cast by Boge, indicating they were likely contributed by some else. Ideogram 册册 appeared at the end of the inscription on a *zhi* (BZM7:9) dedicated to deceased father Ji.

圆鼎	BZM7:2	X 父癸
	BZM7:3	丰公 X 作尊彝
簋	BZM7:4	作宝彝
	BZM7:5	作宝彝
尊	BZM7:8	伯各作宝尊彝
卣	BZM7:6	伯各作宝尊彝
	BZM7:7	伯各作宝尊彝
觶	BZM7:9	X 作父己彝 X 册册

Tomb BZM4 dated slightly later than tomb BZM7, contained fifteen bronze vessels covering cooking, drinking and watering categories. Two-third of the vessels was inscribed. Three vessels, a zun, a *you* and a pan bear the same name Yuji suggesting he was likely the occupant of the tomb. Inscriptions on a finely cast square *ding* and a yan read ‘Bo made the [treasured] vessel’. It is unclear if this Bo is a Yubo. Inscriptions on a *zhi* (BZM4:3) read ‘Lingbo made this treasured vessel.’ An undecorated *zhi* (BZM4:5) dedicated to deceased father Ji carried the same bow-shaped ideogram that was on an earlier *zhi* in tomb BZFM1 mentioned above. A *hu* (BZM4:8) whose bulging belly was quadrupled into four registrar’s with bands on each side carried inscriptions stating it was dedicated to father Yi. Such decorative scheme betrayed the influence of the bronze culture from further northwest. An ideogram before “fu yi” depicted a person holding cowries in each hand. Inscriptions on a jue (BZM4:6) indicate the vessel was dedicated to father Gui by Hezi.

方鼎	BZM4:10	伯作彝
甗	BZM4:14	伯作宝彝
鬲	BZM4:9	口 鼎
尊	BZM4:2	鱼季作宝旅彝

卣	BZM4:1	鱼季作宝旅彝
盘	BZM4:9	季作宝
解	BZM4:3	夔伯作宝彝
	BZM4:5	Y 父己
爵	BZM4:6	禾子父癸
壶	BZM4:8	父乙

Social Interactions across Generations between the Yu and Other Lineages

Inscriptions in these four tombs were able to reveal a diverse social network the Yu engaged with other lineages in the Qian river valley during the early Western Zhou period. Each of these four tombs contained vessels made by other lineages. Further comparing inscriptions in Yu tombs of different periods, we were able to see social contacts between these lineages were not sporadic, but could have lasted for several generations.

Vessels of the same lineages were present in Yu tombs of different generations. A pair of *li* made by Zebo was buried in tomb BZFM1 of early King Cheng period. A high-fired proto-porcelain *dou* bearing a character ‘Ze’ (painted by brush and fired) was found in the Yubo tomb at Rujianzhuang BRM1 dated to King Mu period. Two bronze *zhi* one from BZFM1 and one from BZM4 were from the same lineage whose ideogram looked like a bow-shaped form. The stylistic differences of the two vessels suggest they were cast at different periods. The Ling lineage’s connection with the Yu can be observed from a *zhi* cast by Lingbo in tomb BZM4 and a *li* from a later one BRM2 at Rujiazhuang.²¹ The *li* was made by a woman from the Ling lineage. Tomb BRM2 at Rujiazhuang was attributed to Jingji, the wife of Yubo who was buried in tomb BRM1 at Rujiazhuang. The presence of Lingji’s vessel in Jingji’s tomb indicates it was a gift, quite likely a funerary gift, to Jingji.

The ideogram ‘cece’册册 were found on bronzes from three Yu tombs of different periods: on a *yan* in tomb 2003BZFM2 at Zhifangtou, a *ding* in tomb BZM13 and a *zhi* in tomb BZM7. The *yan* is of typical late Shang and early Zhou style; the *ding* and *zhi* of style between King Cheng and King Kang period. The vessels were made by different individuals as sacrificial vessels to commemorate different ancestors. Given that they all bear the same ideogram, it is possible that their patrons could belong to the same lineage. If so, these vessels would be another evidence of cross-generation contacts engaged by the Yu lineage. A *he* in tomb

²¹ Lu Liancheng and Hu Zhisheng 1988. *Baoji Yuguo mudi* (The Yu State Cemetery at Baoji). Beijing: Wenwu Press, pp.420- 421.

2003BZFM2 and a *dou* in tomb BZM13 were both inscribed with ‘Shi fu yi’. Both vessels were likely made at the same time by the same individual of the Shi lineage to commemorate father Ji. Both are of typically late Shang style. It is unclear if they were funerary gifts from the Shi lineage to the Yu, or were originally war booties acquired by the Yu lineage.

BZFM1/2003BZFM2	BZM13	BZM7	BZM4	(BRM1/ BRM2)
Early Phase of King Cheng	King Cheng to Kang	King Kang to Zhao	King Kang to Zhao	King Zhao to Mu
矢伯作旅鼎				‘矢’字原始瓷豆(BRM1:65)
Y 父乙			Y 父己	
			夔伯作宝彝	夔姬作宝鼎 (BRM2:12)
史父乙 (2003BZFM2)	史父乙			
XX 册册作父己尊彝	卣 X 册册作父辛宝	X 作父己彝 X 册册		

Prof. Lu Liangcheng’s reconstruction of the geopolitical situation at Baoji in the Qian river valley suggested the region was occupied by several lineages or polities namely the Jing, Ze, San and Yu. They were intimately linked through marriages, Jingji married into the Yu and Zeji married into the San. Collectively these peer lineages or polities formed a shared political and cultural arena within which they competed and at the same time cooperated. We proposed that funerary gifting or gifting at other occasions as indicated by the inscribed bronzes from the Yu tombs were important means of social interaction among these lineages. These inscribed bronze vessels are not only the material witness of social interaction between the Yu and other lineages, but part of it. As the vessels moved from their original owners to the Yu tombs, their meanings could have been transformed. To the Yu lineage, they were not merely bronze vessels with ritual functions, but more a representation of certain social relations. The action of burying other lineages’ vessels in its tombs by the Yu lineage could indicate mortuary practice was used to honour, reconfirm and continue its social relations with others.

Gifts in Zhou’s Regional States: a Case Study of the Yan of the Early Western Zhou Period

The Yan was one of the regional states established by the Zhou court in its northern frontier in the second half of 11th c. BCE. The establishment of the Yan is well documented in inscriptions on two bronze vessels *Ke he* and *Ke lei* excavated from the cemetery at the capital of

the Yan at Liulihe, 43 km southwest of today's Beijing.²² Archaeological excavations at Liulihe over the past three decades have yielded a cemetery of over 200 burials, 26 chariot and horse pits, and remains of a walled settlement surround by a moat, a drainage system and residential areas, all of which were in use during the Western Zhou period (late 11th c. BCE to c. early 8th c. BCE)²³. Finely cast bronze ritual vessels primarily dated in the early Western Zhou period during the reigns of King Wu, Cheng, Kang and Zhao were also unearthed in the burials of the Yan nobles of different levels. Inscriptions on those bronzes documented not only Yan's frequent diplomatic and political exchange with the Zhou court, but social and political interactions among the elites within the Yan state.

Burials belonging to Yanhou and his family members were severely looted. The practice of funerary gifting is best represented by two richly furnished burials M251 and M253. Both tombs are rectangular earth pit and dated to King Cheng and King Kang's reign. Tombs M253, 5.1 meters by 3.5 meters and M251, 4.5 meters by 3.7 meters, are larger than most burials in the cemetery. They were located next to each other in the same tomb cluster, implying the deceased were likely from the same lineage. Each tomb contains vessels made by a number of individuals in various lineages, providing valuable contextual evidence to examine social networks in the Yan state.

Bronze Vessels as Gifts

The deceased in tomb M251 was offered with twenty-two bronze vessels: thirteen food vessels (six *ding*, four *gui*, two *li* and one *yan*), seven drinking vessels (three *zhi*, two *jue*, one *zui*

²² Zhongguo Shehuikexueyuan Kaoguyanjiusuo and Beijingshi Wenwuyanjiusuo. 1990. The Excavation Report of Burial M1193 at Liulihe, Beijing. *Kaogu* 1990 (1): 20-31.

²³ Beijing Daxue Kaoguxi and Beijingshi Wenwu Yanjiusuo, "1995 nian Liulihe Zhou dai Juzhi Fajue Jianbao (A Brief Report on the Excavation of Zhou Residential Site at Liulihe in 1995)," *Wenwu* 1996 (6): 4-15; Beijing Daxue Kaoguxi and Beijingshi Wenwu Yanjiusuo, "1995 nian Liulihe Yizhi Muzang Fajue Jianbao (A Brief Report on the Excavation of Zhou Cemetery at Liulihe in 1995)," *Wenwu* 1996 (6): 16-27; Beijingshi Wenwu Yanjiusuo, *Liulihe Xizhou Yanguo Mudi, 1973-1977* (Yan State Cemetery of the Western Zhou Period at Liulihe, 1973-1977), Beijing: Wenwu Press, 1995; Beijingshi Wenwu Yanjiusuo, Beijing Daxue Kaogu Wenboyuan and Zhongguo Shehuikexueyuan Kaoguyanjiusuo, "1997 nian Liulihe Yizhi Muzang Fajue Jianbao (A Brief Report on the Excavation of Burials at Liulihe in 1997)," *Wenwu* 2000 (11): 32-38; Liulihe Kaogudui, "1981-1983 nian Liulihe Xi Zhou Yanguo Mudi Fajue Jianbao (A Brief Report on the Excavation of the Yan Cemetery of the Western Zhou at Liulihe from 1981 to 1983)," *Kaogu* 1984 (5): 405-416, 404; Liulihe Kaogudui, "Liulihe yizhi 1996 niandu fajue jianbao (A Brief Report on the Excavation at Liulihe Site in 1996)," *Wenwu* 1997 (6): 4-13; Zhongguo Shehuikexueyuan Kaoguyanjiusuo and Beijingshi Wenwuyanjiusuo, "The Excavation Report of Burial M1193 at Liulihe, Beijing," *Kaogu* 1990 (1): 20-31.

and one you), and two watering vessels (one pan and one he). Impressively, eighteen of the vessels (82%) were inscribed. Inscriptions indicate that these vessels were commissioned by ten to thirteen individuals. Personal or lineage name of ten individuals can be identified: Boju 伯矩, Ganzi Yue 干子钺, X, Ya 亚 X, Mai 麦, Shu 庶, Gongzhong 公中, Boding 伯丁 X, X (unreadable ideogram), and an individual from the Ge 戈 lineage. The patrons of the remaining three inscribed vessels are not specified: a *jue* (M251:5) was inscribed with ‘Fu Xin’, a *ding* (M251:24) with ‘Fu Gui’ and another *ding* (BZM251:20) with ‘X made this treasured vessel’. The *jue* and the *ding* M251:24 likely were made by two individuals since they addressed to different ancestors.

Five individuals of various lineages each contributed two vessels: Yue from the Ganzi lineage contributed a *zun* and a *you* drinking set; an individual in Ya X lineage a *he* and a *ding*; Boju a pan and a li; X a pair of *gui*; and Boding X a pair of *gui*. Further, the two *zhi* were made by two individuals related by kinship or office. One *zhi* recorded that a person named Gongzhong received gift of cowries and made the vessel, and the other *zhi* that Gongzhong awarded cowries to Shu who then cast the vessel. A weapon *ge* dagger axe in the tomb also bears ‘Fu Xin’. It and the *jue* M251:5 could be made by the same person. Inscriptions on vessels made by Boju, Yue in Ganzi lineage, and the Ya X lineage, all referred ancestors as Father Yi, Wu, Jia, Xin, a fairly common practice of Shang or eastern cultural tradition.²⁴ However, on a pair of *gui* the patron referred to his ancestor as “cultured grandfather” or *wenzu* 文祖, a Zhou’s practice of naming ancestors. It is likely the patron was from a lineage of Zhou ancestry.

尊	M251:7	干子钺父戊
卣	M251:6	干子钺父戊
盃	M251:1	亚 X 父乙
鼎	M251:17	亚 X 作父乙卣 尊彝
盘	M251:2	X 伯矩作寶卣 尊彝
鬲	M251:23	在戊辰，匱侯賜伯矩貝，用作父戊卣 尊彝
鬲	M251:16	麦作彝
甗	M251:25	戈父甲
爵	M251:4	X
觶	M251:8	乙丑，公中賜庶貝十朋，庶用作寶卣 尊彝
觶	M251:9	乙丑，X 賜公中貝十朋，用作寶卣 尊彝

²⁴ Edward L. Shaughnessy, *Sources of Western Zhou History: Inscribed Bronze Vessels*, University of California Press, 1991, pp.167-168.

鼎	M251:24	父癸
鼎	M251:20	X 作寶卩 尊彝
簋	M251:10	X 作文祖寶卩 尊彝
簋	M251:11	X 作文祖寶卩 尊彝
簋	M251:12	伯丁 X 作宝彝
簋	M251:13	伯丁 X 作宝彝
戈(weapon)		父辛
爵	M251:5	父辛

Inscriptions on bronzes in tomb M253 presented a similar picture. The tomb also yielded twenty-two vessels: thirteen food vessels (six *ding*, four *li*, two *gui* and one *yan*), six drinking vessels (two *jue*, two *you*, one *zun* and one *zhi*), and three watering vessels (*pan*, *he* and *hu*, one of each). Thirteen of the vessels were inscribed and the inscriptions indicate that bronze vessels were cast by at least seven individuals. Among them, four vessels, a *you*, a *yan*, a square *ding* and a *gui*, were made by Yu. Another *you* (M253:5) only inscribed with ‘*zuo bao yi*’ is strikingly comparable to the *you* commissioned by Yu in its shape, decoration and style of the inscription. The same ‘*zuo bao yi*’ inscription was repeated on a *zun* (M253:2). Both vessels could be made by Yu as well. Given the dominance of his vessels in the bronze assemblage, the deceased in the tomb is most likely Yu himself.

However, more than half of the inscribed bronzes belonged to other individuals. A pair of *jue* with identical size, shape, decoration and inscription, was cast by someone from the Wei lineage. Other five inscribed vessels could have belonged to five individuals from different lineages among which three lineages are identifiable: the Qi on a *zhi* (M253:3), the Jiuguan on a *ding* commissioned by Jin (M253:12), and the Yajiyi on a *ding* (M253:24).

方鼎	M253:11	休朕公君，匱侯賜鬲貝，用作寶卩彝
簋	M253:14	王 ^本 于成周，王賜鬲貝，用作宝卩彝；伯鱼作寶卩 尊 彝
甗	M253:15	王 ^本 于成周，王賜鬲貝，用作宝卩彝
卣	M253:4	王 ^本 于成周，王賜鬲貝，用作宝卩彝
卣	M253:5	作寶彝
尊	M253:2	作寶彝
圆鼎	M253:12	匱侯令堇禧太保于宗周，庚申，太保赏堇貝，用作太子癸宝尊，X
鼎	M253:21	X 父丙
鼎	M253:24	亚箕矣作彝
觶	M253:3	其史作祖己寶卩 尊 彝

爵	M253:6	未
爵	M253:7	未
盃	M253:10	X 父辛

The distribution of inscribed bronzes in both tombs presented a consistent picture: vessels made by a number of individuals from multiple lineages constituted a major portion of bronze assemblage of the tomb. Further, it seems that the composition of the vessels indicated a sense of deliberate, orderly collection: each individual contributed one or a pair of vessels, typically of different types. Each contribution therefore covered a different type of ritual function. Collectively the vessels in the tomb were able to cover a broad range of bronze types, so the need of performing different kinds of ritual functions could be fulfilled. A wide diversity of patrons of the bronze vessels has complicated efforts by modern scholars to identify the deceased of the tomb, but regardless who the deceased was, it is unlikely that these bronze vessels could be the worldly possession of the deceased.

Most of the bronze vessels were likely gifts to the deceased in his lifetime or at his funeral. They are the material witness of social interactions accumulated during lifetime of the deceased and of the reconfirmation of that relationship during mortuary ritual. Many of these individuals and lineages were in the Yan state. Based on the gifting activities recorded on inscriptions, some of individuals such as Yu, Jin and Boju were likely officials of the Yan state. The *ding* (M253:24) made by the Yajiyi lineage in tomb M253 is an example of social interaction between lineages within the Yan state. The Yajiyi lineage was considered an important member of the Yan state during the early Western Zhou period.²⁵ One of its branches may situate in Jinniucun area in Niulanshan area north of Liulihe.

The bronze collection in tomb M251 is particularly significant. It presented us a convincing case that bronze vessels were funerary gifts. An array of paired vessels offered by each individual together formed a somewhat coordinated, well arranged set. The deceased, even being accompanied by these vessels in spirit world, might have not used some of them before. The contribution of vessels by others and the deposition of these vessels by the deceased's

²⁵ Zhang, Yachu. 1995. Studies of Bronze Inscriptions of the Yan, in Chen Guang (ed.), *Essays on the Study of the Yan Culture*: 223-230. Beijing: Shehui Kexue Press.

family in mortuary practice is a way to reconnect, relive and reconfirm the social ties between individuals and lineages.

Gifting Activities Documented in Inscriptions

Bronze vessels as gifts (funerary or otherwise) were just one of many mechanisms through which social interactions in the Yan state were carried out. Inscriptions also recorded frequent gifting activities between the individuals at various levels in Yan state. In tomb M251, a *li* (M251:23) cast by Boju stands out from the rest of the vessels by its inscription and flamboyant design. The vessel was completely covered with animal face motifs decorated with water buffalo horns projecting from its surface. The same motif is repeated on the lid, where two sculpturally rendered water buffalo heads are joined to form the handle of the lid. The choice of the flamboyant design perhaps mean to match the significant awarding event recorded on the lid and neck of the *li*. The inscription reads “On the day of *wuchen*, Yanhou awarded Boju with cowries, (Boju) cast this sacrificial vessel for his father Wu.” Inscriptions on a *pan* also indicated Boju’s patronage. Another yan made by Boju was found in a cache in Shanwanzi, Kazuo.²⁶ A *yu* cast by Yanhou and a *gui* cast by Yu (the occupant of burial 253) together with other early and middle Western Zhou bronze vessels were also discovered in caches in Kazuo area suggesting the region might have served as Yan’s colony or military post for a period of time.²⁷ Given these evidence, it is likely that Boju served under Yanhou and played an important role in the establishment of the Yan state.

In the same tomb, there are two *zhi* whose shape, size and decoration are strikingly comparable. Inscriptions on one *zhi* recorded Gongzhong received gifts of cowries from an individual X whose personal name is unreadable and cast this sacrificial vessel. On another *zhi*, it recorded that Gongzhong (the awardees mentioned in the first *zhi*) awarded Shu ten strands of cowries and Shu then used the award to cast this sacrificial vessel. Coincidentally, the two awards occurred on the same day *yichou*. It is likely that an important event took place on the *yichou*

²⁶ Kazuoxian Wenhuaquan, Chaoyang Diqu Bowuguan and Liaoningsheng Bowuguan 1977. Liaoningsheng Kazuoxian Shanwanzi Chutu Yi Zhou Qingtongqi (Yin Zhou Bronzes from Kazuoxian Shanwanzi, Liaoning). *WW* 12 (1977): 23-27, 43.

²⁷ Sun, Yan 2003. “Bronzes, Mortuary Practice and Political Strategies of the Yan in North China”, *Antiquity* (vol. 77, no. 298) 2003: 761-770.

day which caused the awarding of cowries and subsequently the commission of the vessels. It is likely the three individuals X, Gong and Shu were connected by office or by lineage. Both of their vessels were buried in the same tomb, indicating the vessels were transferred hands, likely given as funerary gifts.

In tomb 253, the four vessels cast by Yu were to commemorate the awards (cowries) he received from Yanhou, and from the Zhou king for his participation in Zhou state ritual ceremony (*dahui*) in Chengzhou, presumably on behalf of Yanhou.²⁸ Similarly, The *ding* cast by Jin recorded Jin was sent as an envoy of Yanhou to Zongzhou (Hao) to pay respect to the Grand Protector Taibao, the father of Yanhou, and presented him with a special kind of sweet food. Taibao awarded cowries to him on the day of Gengshen, and Jin cast this vessel for his deceased son Gui. There have been discussions on the relations between Jin and Yu. Either they were connected as father and son or they were connected by office.²⁹ That Jin's sacrificial vessel for his eldest son ended up in Yu's tomb indicated that that Jin and Yu could be related by office or kinship, and the vessel could be a gift.

Gift-giving activities were also recorded in inscriptions on bronze vessels in other early Western Zhou tombs at Liulihe. The inscriptions on a *ding* and a *zun* in tomb M52 recorded Fu received awards from Yanhou and commissioned the vessels as sacrificial objects for his father Yi. The awards included three strands of cowries at one time (inscriptions on the *ding*), and cowries, clothing and male and female servants at another time (inscriptions on the *zun*). Inscriptions end with the lineage sign “*ju*”, suggesting Fu was the member of that lineage, the

²⁸ Apparently another *gui* was cast at the same time with these four vessels, but it was not buried in this tomb. It was found in a cache at Xiaopotaigou, Kezuo, Liaoning. The excavation report of hoards at Xiaopotaigou is not published. For a general introduction of this site, see Wang Shimin, “Xizhou Shidai Zhuhou Fangguo Qingtongqi Gaishu,” (General Discussion of the Bronzes of the Vassal States of Western Zhou Period) in *Zhongguo Qingtongqi Quanji* 6, ed. Zhongguo Qingtongqi Quanji Bianji Weiyuanhui (Beijing: Wenwu Press, 1997), 1-34, pl.12.

²⁹ There are different proposals on the identity of and relations between Yu and Jin. Zhang Yachu and Li Jian suggested that Jin was Yu's father and they belonged to the Jiuguan clan based on inscribed clan emblem on Jin *ding*. However, Cao Shuqin and Yin Weizhang proposed that Yu was from the Shang *Yaqiyi* clan based on the inscriptions on an early Western Zhou bronze *ding* from Niulanshan, Shunyi county, northeast of city Beijing. The *ding* was commissioned by a person named Yu as well. See Zhang Jian, “Tan Xizhou Yanguo Yinyimin de Zhengzhi Diwei,” (The Discussion of Political Status of the Shang Clans in the Yan) in *Beijing Jiancheng 3040 ji Yanwenming Guoji Xueshu Yantaohui Huiyi Zhuanji*, ed., Beijing Wenwu Yanjiusun (Beijing: Yanshan Chubanshe, 1997), 265-274; Zhang Yachu, “Yanguo Qingtongqi Mingwen Yanjiu,” (The Study of Bronze Inscriptions of the Yan) in *Yanwenhua Yanjiu Lunwenji*, ed. Cheng Guang (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 1995), 223-230; Cao Shuqin and Yin Weizhang, “Yayi Tongqi jiqi Xiangguan Wenti,” (“Yayi” Bronzes and Related Questions) in *Zhongguo Kaoguxue Yanjiu---Xianai Xiansheng Kaogu Wushinian Jinian Lunwenji*, ed. Zhongguo Kaoguxue Yanjiu Bianweihui (Beijing: Wenwu Chubanshe, 1986), 191-199.

remnant subject of the Shang. In addition, a bronze *ji* inscribed with “Yanhou” was found next to the deceased. It is unclear when Fu received this gift from Yanhou. The prominent role this object was given in burial, however, suggests great attention could be given to this object during the funerary ritual. Similarly, Inscriptions on a *gui* in tomb M53 recorded that Yanhou awarded three strings of cowries to You to commemorate the recent death of You’s father Wu and You then used the cowries to commission the vessel for his father.

Awarding and gifting was a political exercise in which not only political authority between the giver and the receiver was acknowledged but relations between them were augmented. Inscriptions at Liulihe showed that the gifting, typically in form of cowries, was particularly frequent in Yan state. Funerary gifting, in form of bronze vessels, was another practice being performed that would honor the past and harbor the future social relations between individuals and lineages.

Demographical Diversity and Political Solidarity

Active social networks in the Yan state could have been prompted by its complex demographic composition and political circumstance during the early Western Zhou period. The newly formed Yan state composed of various lineages with different cultural backgrounds, and collectively they formed its political establishment. According to the inscriptions on the famous *Ke he* and *Ke lei* in tomb M1193, six clans including Qiang, Ma, Zha, Yu, Yu and Chang were bestowed to Ke, the first Yanhou during the investiture ceremony. Similar assignments of clans to regional states have been recorded in *Zuozhuan* that claimed that the enfeoffment of Lu, Wei and Jin included the bestowal of various groups of populations.³⁰ Bronze inscriptions discussed above from the Yan cemetery also documented that individuals from various lineages hold political offices in the Yan.

³⁰ For detailed discussion of this issue, see Yin Weizhang, “Xinchutu de Taibao Tongqi Jiqi Xiangguan Wenti,” (The Newly Excavated Taibao Bronzes and Related Questions) in *Yanwenhua Yanjiu Lunwenji*, ed. Cheng Guang (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 1995), 253-265; Sun Hua, “Yanhou Keqi Mingwen Qianjian---Jiantan Shaogong Fengyan jiqi Xiangguan Wenti,” (The Inscriptions on the Bronzes of the Marquis Ke---The Discussion of the Enfeoffment of Shaogong and Related Questions) in *Yanwenhua Yanjiu Lunwenji*, ed. Cheng Guang (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 1995), 278-280; Fang Shuxin, “Taibao Lei, He Mingwen Kaoshi,” (The Studies of the Inscriptions on *He* and *Lei* of Taibao) in *Yanwenhua Yanjiu Lunwenji*, ed. Cheng Guang (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 1995), 287-289.

The diversity of lineage groups was also indicated to some extent through the layout of the Yan cemetery and clustering of its burials. The Liulihe cemetery was spatially organized into four zones each consisting of clusters of burials mingling rich and large tombs with poor and small ones. Each cluster roughly consists of two rows of burials facing each other (north and south) along an east-west axis. Large and rich graves (such as M22 and M105 in zone one, M52 and M53 in zone two, M1193 and M202 in zone three and M251 in zone four) were located north of other burials in their respective clusters. In zone one and two, the undiluted Shang burial customs, including *yaokeng*, human and dog sacrifices can be observed. Leftover subject of the Shang such as You and Fu from the Ju lineage mentioned above were buried in zone two. In contrast, human and dog sacrifices and waist pits are largely absent in burials in zone three and four. The southern part of zone three where ramped burials are located was reserved for Yanhou and his family members. The rest burials in this zone likely belong to the Zhou clan and those associated with them. It is hard to tell the clan identity of zone four (where both tomb M251 and 253 reside) based on available material.

Further, the Yan is located in a region far away from the Zhou metropolitan area. The region was occupied by populations with hybrid cultural tradition between the Shang and Zhou and distinctive local flavor. To survive and succeed, achieving internal political solidarity would be especially important for the Yan state. It is in this context that we can understand the political significance of gifting for the population in Yan state. Different lineages were essentially ‘artificially’ put together under the Yan umbrella in the new region. Geographic dislocation would introduce social disorientation. Active social networking would bring them together and build a shared sense of solidarity and cooperation, which would be essential for the survival of the Yan, and ultimately of these lineages themselves in this new land. Awarding and funerary gifting seems important means deployed by these lineages to achieve that.

Discussion

Bronze vessels could have both functional and symbolic roles in Western Zhou tombs. Many vessels contain traces of liquids and grains, and animal bones when excavated. They could have been intended to continue to be used in the spirit world in a similar way as before. The wear and repair marks, the sign of aging, indicate they could have been used for long time before being buried. At the same time, bronze vessels become the prime material symbols of

social status and wealth in Western Zhou society. Their manufacturing, distribution and use are highly controlled and accessibility to them is limited to social elites. Many studies have been therefore focused on the scale and scope of bronze assemblage in tombs, largely aiming to reconstruct the social status of the deceased.

Bronze vessels in Western Zhou tombs could convey more symbolic meanings other than wealth and status, and combining inscriptions on and mortuary context of bronze vessels allow us to uncover their movement and meanings in changing contexts and to expand our understandings on the dynamics and complexity of social relations encapsulated in them. As case studies in the research, the Yu and the Yan had different cultural and political background and strength: the former is a non-Shang, non-Zhou lineage near Zhou's metropolitan area; the latter a major but remote regional state of the Zhou. But both have engaged into active social networking among lineages, probably due to their geopolitical circumstances.

However, other tombs in early Western Zhou period have presented different practices. Some of them contained primarily bronze vessels made by the deceased. For example, a tomb of King Cheng period at Taiqinggong in Luyi, Henan, yielded seventy-five bronze vessels, of which fifty-four were inscribed. Forty-eight bronze vessels inscribed with the name of an individual in different flavors: chang zi kou, zi kou and kou. Together with lavish display of other tomb furnishings, mortuary practice was used to celebrate and advertise the extraordinary personal achievement.³¹ Some tombs contained primarily bronze vessels made by persons in the same lineage, such as tombs of late Shang and early Western Zhou at Qianzhangda, Tengzhou, Shandong. Inscribed bronzes in these tombs were overwhelmingly inscribed with the Shi lineage sign. For example, the richest early Western Zhou tomb M11, contained thirty vessels, all of which bear 'Shi'. Other early Western Zhou tombs contained vessels owned by the same family but of different generations. For example, tombs of the Ge lineage M1 and M4 at Gaojiabao contained vessels of prior generations, indicating object movement within the family.³²

The absence of other's bronze vessels in one's tomb does not necessarily imply the absence of social networking. It is unclear whether funerary gifting (in forms of bronzes) had

³¹ Henansheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo and Zhoukoushi wenhuaju, *Luyi Taiqinggong Changzikou mu* (The Tomb of Changzikou at Taiqinggong in Luyi), Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou Guji Press, 2000.

³² Zhu Fenghan, *Zhongguo Qingtongqi zonglun* (A Comprehensive Study on Chinese Bronzes), Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Press, 2009, pp.1264-1265.

taken place in these communities, but if it did, mortuary practice in those communities could act as a 'filter' to exclude other's objects entering the tomb of the deceased. So the intent of their mortuary rituals could be focused more on the individual, family or lineage, rather than social networks. What inscribed bronzes in the Yu lineage and the Yan state tells us is that not only gifting/funerary gifting were conducted frequently in both places, but also their mortuary practice could become an arena in which social relations between lineages could have been acknowledged, appreciated and reinforced. The diverse pictures inscribed bronzes in tombs revealed that mortuary practice could have been designed and performed by the living to honor different aspects of their social lives: personal achievement, family or lineage tie, or social relations with others. Inscribed bronzes in tombs can help us identify and understand those different practices.