

Lecture Outline of Neolithic Art

1. Two major categories about the visual quality of the vessel: shape and ornament.
2. The process of making pottery (in the first stage, "making biscuit," the sole purpose in this process is to transform a dough of moist clay into an elegant shape, which is manifest through the silhouette of the object; the next stage is to decorate the object with incision or painting. In this stage, the focus is the surface rather than the shape.)
3. The northwest tradition is represented by the Yangshao culture, dating about 5000-3000 BCE. But it actually lasted longer in further northwest, in the site called Majiayao, about 3300-2000 BCE. The east coast tradition is represented by the Longshan culture, 3000-1900 BCE. These dates were known through scientific methods.
4. The Yangshao culture is known for its painted pottery. Thick walls; volume; red color (high oxygen level); geometric, abstract ornament. It branches out into several local types. The earliest ones are known as Banpo and Miaodigou types. 5000-4000 BCE. In the later Majiayao type, the emphasis shifts from geometric to some spiral patterns, and totally on dynamic movement and illusionistic depth.
5. Jade or nephrite is hard and can only be cut by materials harder than it, which was even rarer in nature. Before iron was known, to work the material is extremely time-consuming. So it is not difficult to imagine that such works, which require a large number of highly skillful artists working in groups with the most advanced technologies on some of the rarest materials, could only be priceless.
6. The art of jade carving developed to a rather sophisticated level in Liangzhu, which was considered a later branch of the Longshan culture. Some lavish burials and sacrificial sites were discovered, which contained a lot of jade objects. Materiality and technology as the symbol of wealth and status, indicate a hierarchic society.