Wu Hung

This paper concerns the symbolism of jade — not so much the symbolism of manufactured jade artefacts, but the symbolism of jade itself as an art medium. Such interest is not new of course; from at least the Han dynasty, Confucian writers had defined certain virtues of jade — first in the Book of Rites and then in Xu Shen’s Sinograms dictionary. Historians also recorded an alternative interest in the magical potential of jade to induce longevity; thus it is said that Emperor Wu of the Han had a jade cup inscribed with the words ‘Long Life to the Lord of Men’, and that the same emperor also indulged himself with an elixir of jade powder mixed with sweet dew. These records attest to specific concerns, however, not universal belief. We have no reason to assume that an ordinary Han person would have shared Emperor Wu’s resources or ambition to pursue immortality, or that Xu Shen’s discourse around 100 AD would have disclosed the meaning jade held in the second century BC.

Since my goal here is not to reiterate some Confucian theories or Daxian anecdotes about jade, I cannot accept this literary evidence as the basis for my discussion. My goal, as suggested in the title of this paper, is to...
of their specific function and meaning. (A noticeable exception, however, is Robert Thorp's paper, 'Mountain Tombs and Jade Burial Suits,' which relates the Mancheng tombs and jade suits to other Western Han examples.) To bring Thorp's study into a sharper focus, I want to propose a different strategy in this paper. Before focusing on the jade suits or any other jade objects from Mancheng, I would like to take an imaginary journey to the burial site. Our guide will be the tombs' architect who, though anonymous and invisible, left enough clues for us to follow two millennia later.

The ritual path to the Mancheng tombs was well marked out. The topographical map in figure 1 shows two small hills, as two pillars of a gate, flanking the entrance to the burial ground on Lingshan Hill (the Hill of Spirits). This design recalls Sima Qian's description of the First Qin Emperor's magnificent Mount Fang Palace, which was situated so that 'the peaks of southern mountains formed its pillar gate.' In the case of the Mancheng tombs, the two hills define an east-west axis, which extends into Liu Sheng's tomb (Mancheng tomb no.1) inside the rocky mountain. The burial of Liu Sheng's wife (Mancheng tomb no.2) was located 120 metres to the north of this axis, a position which indicates the subsidiary status of her occupant. This, in turn, proves that the two Mancheng tombs must have been conceived together according to a master plan, because their relative positions pertain to the structure of a male dominated royal family. This initial observation implies two principal features of the Mancheng tombs: their location inside mountain cliffs and their emphasis on a horizontal ritual path. These two tombs thus differ markedly from all known pre-Han tombs and a majority of Western Han tombs. In short, before and during the second century BC, most tombs in central and south China were 'vertical pit' graves. Exemplified by the famous Mawangdui Tomb no.1 of the early second century BC, a 'vertical pit' grave consists of a timber structure buried at the bottom of a deep earthen pit (plate 7). No entrance is provided to enter the layered wooden encasements, which form a self-contained unit, tightly sealed and again protected by charcoal and white clay. Tomb furnishings are packed in the separate compartments around the coffin, filling up most spaces. The Mawangdui tomb is rich in its documentation of religious beliefs, which, however, are conveyed mainly by painted images not by an architectural system that employs a variety of 'symbolic materials'.

2. All archaeological information on the Mancheng tombs used in this paper is provided in CASS and Hebei 1980.
3. Sima Qian, Shi ji, p. 256.
4. This idea was suggested to me by Mr. Roger Covey in a presentation he delivered to my seminar course on Han funerary art at the University of Chicago in 1994.
6. For religious ideas reflected in the various images painted on the series of coffins and the famous silk banner from Mawangdui Tomb No.1, see Wu Hung, 1992.
The desire for a continuous architectural space underlies the designs of the Mancheng tombs, which are among the earliest "horizontal pit" graves in China. The passage of Liu Sheng's tomb, fifty metres in length, extended the axis of the burial site into a mountain cavern and led to a series of interconnected chambers (figure 2). At the end of the passage, a vestibule was flanked by two side-chambers. The chamber on the right (if we assume a position facing inward) was filled with hundreds of pottery jars and large cases containing all sorts of goods for a royal household. The opposite, left chamber originally held a tile-roofed and wooden-framed building; four chariots, along with skeletons of eleven horses, were found inside. Apparently this left chamber was supposed to be a royal stable, the right one, a storage room.

Two horse-drawn chariots occupied the vestibule. Behind them, a grand cave originally contained another wooden-framed structure (plate 2). Like the stable, this structure had collapsed long before the excavation; only roof tiles and metal nails scattered on the ground allowed the excavators to speculate on its original form (figure 3). Inside this building, two seats were originally covered with silk tents. Vessels, lamps, incense burners, and figurines were lined up in rows in front of as well as beside the central seat. A group of smaller drinking vessels, a miniature chariot, and as many as 2,034 bronze coins, were found behind this seat and before a thick stone gate. It is interesting to ask why there were two covered seats and why two groups of vessels and chariots were placed before and behind the central seat. A possible answer to the first question is that the two seats were prepared for the two sons of the deceased prince, because a Han theory of the soul teaches that each person has a heavenly soul (tun) and an earthly soul (shu), which would separate upon death.11

11 For a detailed explanation of the theory, see Yu 1987.
One standing on the central axis and the other to the side and slightly behind, the relationship between them seems to mirror that of the two Mancheng tombs: Liu Sheng’s tomb defines the focus of the graveyard; his wife’s burial, as well as her burial chamber within the burial, was deliberately off centre (figures 1 and 4). Moreover, we read in Han literature that a royal couple could have separate covered seats. Thus, when the necromancer Shao Weng summoned Madame Li’s spirit for Emperor Wu, ‘he settled a tent, displayed food and wine, and asked the emperor to take his seat in another tent’. Such archaeological and literary evidence supports the hypothesis that although Dou Wan had her own burial in Mancheng Tomb no.2, as a wife she could not enjoy an independent sacrificial space. Her shanju2 which were ‘the seat of her spirit’ had to be affiliated to that of her husband and had to be housed in the sacrificial hall in Mancheng Tomb no.1.

To answer why one group of tomb furnishings appeared before the central seat while another group appeared behind it, we should first note a major difference between these two groups of objects: those placed before the seats were real chariots and vessels; those behind the seat were ‘copies’, including miniature chariots and vessels made of lead. This difference is explained in ancient ritual texts such as the Book of Rites. Mingji (vessels of the shades) are for ghosts; jiji (sacrificial vessels) are those of men. According to Confucius, mingji vessels resembled real objects but could not be put to use; in this way they expressed both the affection and distinction between the living and the dead. I have argued elsewhere that the distinction between mingji and jiji, as well as the separation between the two souls, was related to two kinds of ancestral rituals centred on the temple and the tomb.6 During most of the Three Dynasties, the temple inside a town was the centre of a living community; tombs on the outskirts of a town constituted a silent realm of the dead. This dualism in ancestral worship, however, underwent some important changes during the Han. Most important, the temple of a large clan or lineage gradually disappeared, and the rituals, ritual paraphernalia, and ritual structures originally associated with it found a way to enter a family’s graveyard. This general trend enables us to understand the arrangement of Liu Sheng’s tomb: the central ritual space, with its ‘seats of the spirits’ and sacrificial vessels, was absent in ‘vertical pit’ tombs and may have been derived from the ancestral temple.7 Despite being relocated inside a dark tomb, this space maintained its traditional role of indicating the continuation of life. It was contrasted with the space behind the central seat, where mingji paraphernalia were dedicated to the dead prince concealed on the other side of the stone gate.

The stone gate, therefore, possessed a double significance: it blocked the rear coffin chamber that was the private quarter of the dead, and its solid stone surface indicated an abrupt change in building material. Not surprisingly, the tomb’s last and least free-standing structure, built immediately behind this gate, was made of pure stone (plate 3). This stone chamber thus opposed the stable and the central hall, both of which were made of wood and tile. This opposition could not be accidental: eighteen of the nineteen figures in the wooden-framed central chamber were made of clay, but four stone figures, two male and two female, guarded the stone rear chamber (plate 6). There is no doubt that the architect consciously selected different materials for different sections of the tomb: wood and clay for the front section, consisting of the central hall, the stable and the storage room, and stone for the rear coffin chamber. Since this architectural dualism underlies the tomb’s general plan and frames the meaning of individual objects, we must first understand the symbolism of stone and wood in the Mancheng tomb, before advancing into the stone chamber, which housed the prince’s corpse clad in his jade suit.

The Chinese Discovery of Stone

The second and first centuries BC have a unique significance in Chinese art history: during these two hundred years the Chinese found a new art and architectural material—stone.8 Before this time, temples and tombs were uniformly timber-framed (figure 5), and very few stone tables or statues furnished a pre-Han graveyard.9 Even the ambitious First

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7 According to the Han jiao (Traditional Rites of the Han), a shenju (seat of the spirit) was placed in an imperial shrine in the capital. This passage is cited in Fan Ye 1965, p. 314b.
8 This historical process is discussed in greater detail in Wu Hung 1995.
9 To my knowledge, the only pre-Han funerary stone inscription is found in the mausoleum of a Zhongshan king. However, since the stone retains its natural shape and the inscription has nothing to do with the deceased, it is difficult to identify it as a ‘memorial stele’. See Hebei 1979, Fan Bangjin 1990, p. 52.

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Plate 3 Stone burial chamber in Mancheng Tomb no. 1. CASS and Hebei 1980, pl. 101.
Qin Emperor seemed quite satisfied with his terracotta soldiers and bronze chariots. From the first century AD on, however, all sorts of funerary monuments – pillar gates, memorial tablets, offering shrines, and statues in human and animal forms – were customarily made of stone (plate 4). Inscriptions on these structures often contain a standard statement by the patrons: ‘We choose excellent stones from south of the southern mountains; we took those of perfect quality with flawless and unyellowed colour. In front we established an altar behind we erected a [stone] offering shrine.’

What caused this dramatic change? The ancient Chinese, who for many centuries had largely ignored stone as an architectural material,1 seem suddenly to have ‘discovered’ it and imbued it with fresh meaning. Stone was opposed to wood; and their opposition was understood in symbolic terms. While all the natural characteristics of stone – strength, plateness, and especially endurance – became analogous to eternity, wood, which was relatively fragile and vulnerable to natural elements, was associated with temporal, mortal existence. From this dichotomy emerged two kinds of architecture: structures made of wood used by the living and structures made of stone dedicated to the dead, the gods, and immortals; the latter included the Queen Mother of the West and deities of sacred mountains.2 The double association of stone with death on the one hand and with immortality on the other strengthened the link between death and immortality. Indeed, we find that this link, which was finally established in people’s religious thinking during the second and first centuries BC, prepared new ground for imagining and constructing the afterlife, and was responsible for many changes in funerary art and architecture, including the use of stone.

In a previous article, I proposed that the pre-Han concept of immortality can be defined as an ‘immortality in this world and in this life’;3 Pursuit of this kind of immortality aimed not at overcoming death but at infinitely prolonging life. In this sense, ‘immortality’ simply means ‘longevity’ – it had little to do with the notion of an afterlife and was antithetical to the establishment of a tomb. But during the early Han, the concepts of immortality and the afterlife drew increasingly close. The result was the appearance of a new kind of immortality – ‘immortality after death’ – in both religion and religious art. The idea of shenq, or ‘liberation from the corpse’, was circulated by necromancers. It is said that after Emperor Wu’s religious advisor Li Shaoyun died, the emperor ordered his tomb opened. Nowhere could Li’s corpse be found, and only empty clothes remained in his grave chamber. The emperor was thus convinced that the magician had actually escaped this world through some posthumous mystical transformation.4 Sima Qian also recorded that the same emperor once travelled to the tomb of the Yellow Emperor at Mt. Qiao. While offering a sacrifice to the ancient divine ruler, he posed a question to his religious advisors: ‘I have heard that the Yellow Emperor never died – how is it that he had a tomb?’ The advisors told him that the Yellow Emperor had indeed become an immortal and that only his clothes were buried in his grave.5

The crucial significance of these anecdotes is that they document a new belief: a tomb was no longer conceived merely as an underground home of the dead, but also as a place for the magical transformation of the dead. A tomb was therefore an entrance to immortality and began to convey the sense of eternity itself. Different means were explored in order to achieve this new goal in funerary art: the Mawangdui tomb featured an early depiction of immortal mountains flanked by winged immortals and auspicious animals (figure 6).6 Around the same time, rock-cut tombs appeared, reflecting an active, indeed aggressive attitude, in the search for eternity and monumentality. The painted immortal land and the solid rock tomb shared an

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1. Passage from the inscription on Wu Liang’s memorial stele; see Wu Hung 1983, p. 23. A similar statement is found in a long inscription from Shangdong, Shandong. Enigmatic marble carvings found in great Shang royal tombs, including imitations of bronze ritual vessels and large and small sculptures, must be distinguished from ordinary stone products. Some texts record the construction of certain stone buildings before the Qin-Han period. For example, it is said that King Zhao of Yan honoured the philosopher Zou Yan with a ‘stone palace’. Sima Qian, Shi ji, p. 2345. However, such instances are extremely rare.

2. Sima Qian recorded a ‘stone chamber’ of the Queen Mother of the West in the Shi ji, pp. 3163–4. Extant stone structures dedicated to gods and immortals include pillar gates at Daminglu in Henan, one forming the entrance to the sacred mountain Shangshu and the other belonging to the temple of a legendary figure Qinzi (the Mother of Qin). See Chen Mengda 1981, pp. 10–11.


4. Ge Hong, Baopu 21, June 2, 6. This record is an elaborate version of a passage in Sima Qian, Shi ji, p. 1386.

5. Sima Qian, Shi ji, p. 1396.

6. For the belief in immortality as reflected in Mawangdui Tomb no. 1, see Wu Hung 1992.
unspoken premise, that although death was inevitable, it might be taken merely as a necessary stage in one’s achievement of immortality. Emperor Wen of the Western Han, for example, began his testamentary edict of 157 BC with a philosophical statement: ‘Death is a part of the abiding order of heaven and earth and the natural end of all creatures’. However the same emperor constructed for himself a mausoleum dug into a rocky mountain, with a special stone sarcofagus meant to last forever. He also carefully planned his own funeral in advance, so that when death took place he would be safely transported into his stone palace.

Emperor Wen’s mausoleum, Ba Ling, is one of the earliest known stone funerary structures in China. Sima Qian recorded that the emperor once led a group of courtiers to this mountain-tomb southeast of the capital.

Plate 5. Stone sculpture in front of Huo Qubing’s tomb.

Chang’an. Confronting his future burial (and therefore his death), the emperor’s heart was full of sorrow and he began to sing a melancholy song. But his mood soon changed when he began to inspect the arrangement of his otherworldly dwelling: ‘Oh! Using stone from the Northern Mountains to make my outer coffin, securing it with linen cloth and again gluing the cloth with lacquer, how can the coffin still be shaken? This desire for a posthumous eternity must explain the sudden popularity of rock-cut tombs among some Western Han princes and the emergence of monumental stone sculpture in one graveyard. Archaeologists have found groups of rock-cut graves near Qufu and Yixian. Dating from the late second to first century BC, these enormous cave tombs probably belonged to princes of the Lu and Chu principalities. The stone sculptures in the graveyard of General Huo Qubing (140-117 BC) are well-known (plate 5), but can be reviewed in terms of this new passion for stone. Huo Qubing died in 117 BC. Four years later, Liu Sheng was buried in his rock-cut tomb at Mangcheng. He was also accompanied by stone figures (plate 6), although far smaller than the Huo Qubing statues, show a similar style of minimal modelling on stone blocks.

The Mangcheng tombs are not the largest among the excavated rock-cut graves. The burial at Bidaoshan near Xuzhou, for example, is far grander and consists of nineteen chambers covering an area of 350 square metres. But they may the only ones fortunate enough to have escaped grave robbers and to leave us numerous art treasures preserved in an intact architectural context. We are thus able to reconstruct the two types of building of wood and stone, which were once juxtaposed inside the cave tomb: Two features of the stone structures in Mangcheng Tomb no.1 strike us. First, the builders of the tombs were obviously carpenters, who were good at various kinds of woodwork but had very limited knowledge of masonry techniques. In constructing the rear chamber, they first cut and polished stone into thin, narrow panels that resembled wooden boards (plate 3). The clumsiness in craftsmanship, however, only highlights the urgency of the need for a stone chamber to complete the tomb’s symbolism. Significantly, the timber-
but opens onto the central sacrificial hall, and because its scale is far beyond what would be required for drainage. About two metres tall and with a vaulted ceiling, this tunnel surrounded by solid rock was more likely constructed for worshippers to allow them to walk around the burial chamber. A similar architectural device may be found in an Indian rock-cut temple, in which a stone stupa, the symbol of the Buddha’s Nirvana and relics, stood at the rear end of a cenotaph hall and was surrounded by a passageway for the rite of circumambulation (figure 8). Elsewhere I have suggested that ideas about Indian art, including the concept of the cave temple, had reached China around the second century BC, but the rock ‘tunnel’ in Liu Sheng’s tomb may have been designed based on such information.

If this hypothesis contains any truth, however, the builders of the Mancheng tomb must have conceived the stupa as a burial device and replaced it with Liu Sheng’s burial chamber. A Buddhist holy symbol was thus transplanted into a Chinese funerary context.

The Jade Body

Long before Han times the Chinese had developed the love for jade, and the extensive use of burial jades can be traced back to at least the Neolithic age. But the ‘discovery’ of stone as a popular architectural and sculptural material during the Western Han prepared a new basis for redefining jade’s meaning. Jade was classified as a kind of stone, but it was no ordinary stone due to its extraordinary beauty and hardness. The term yu shi, ‘jade stone’, gained a metaphorical significance, referring to two homogeneous entities of different quality. Jade was called shi zhi mei zhi (faint among stones) or zhì zhi jian zhe (hardest among stones).

It was idealized against its humble relatives; the abundance of ordinary stone emphasized the rarity of jade. Logically, if the ideas of eternity and immortality were generally associated with stone because of its strength and endurance, these concepts would be most effectively symbolized by jade, which was now considered the ‘essence’ of stone (yu zhi, zhi jing ye).

That jade was the essence of stone could be understood both metaphorically and literally. The ancient Chinese believed that in its natural state, an extraordinarily beautiful jade must conceal itself inside a stone-like boulder. Many tales and allegories were rooted in this fascination, the most famous being the story of the legendary jade Heshi bi (He’s disc). Interestingly, when we return to Liu Sheng’s tomb, we find that its stone coffin chamber also served as an ‘envelope’, enclosing numerous carved jades which transformed the dead prince into a ‘prince of jade’.

The transformation took place in the symbolic realm. The fundamental technology of this transformation was ‘layering’: sets of carved jades were successively applied to the corpse – into it, sealing it up, securing, covering it, and encasing it. In this process, the corpse gradually disappeared and was replaced. It became less a body of flesh vulnerable to physical decay, but more and more like a solid statue untouchable by time or the elements. At least four layers of jades were found above Liu Sheng’s and Dou Wan’s bodies. The innermost layer consisted of a set of jade plugs that stopped up the nine bodily orifices. The seven plugs shown in plate 7 include two flat eye covers, short tube-like plugs for the ears and nostrils, and a large amulet for the mouth; the other two plugs were for the anus and the sex organ. The idea behind this practice was later summarized by
Ge Hong in the early fourth century, 'When gold and jade are inserted into the nine orifices, corpses do not decay.'

This initial step of plugging the orifices was followed by protecting the corpse with large and small jade bi discs. In Liu Sheng’s case, eighteen bi were placed around his upper body—three large ones on the chest, five under the back, and five on either side (plate 8). More bi protected his lower back and shoulder blades. All the discs bore traces of cloth upon their discovery; the excavators therefore suggested that they were originally tied together and attached to a large piece of thick fabric.\(^9\) If their opinion is reliable, than these ritual discs must not be viewed as individual objects, but must be taken collectively as a ‘jade shroud’ covering the most crucial parts of the dead body.

The jade suit then encased the corpse as well as all its protective plugs and the bi-shroud. Scholars have written about the historical development of this type of mortuary equipment.\(^9\) I will not repeat their opinions here. Instead, I want to return to a simple but fundamental question: What is this object? Is it really a ‘jade suit’ or a ‘jade box’ as recorded in texts?\(^9\) In other words, instead of extracting its meaning from its nomenclature, I want to detect its original conception based on a close observation of the object itself.

This observation has convinced me that, although called a ‘jade suit’ or a ‘jade box’, it was actually designed and created as a ‘jade body’.

The most direct evidence for this argument is the existence of a jade head with basic facial features (plates 9 and 10). In the cases of both husband and wife, jade plaques were specifically shaped and fitted together to represent a rudimentary nose; Dou Wan even has a pair of jade ears. Each face bears three thin slits which represent two eyes and a mouth. Interestingly, although eye plugs had been applied to prevent the corpse from decaying, here slits were created to allow the ‘jade prince’ to see again. A later jade body, belonging to a Zhongshan king of the first century AD, even has sculpted eyes and mouth (plate 11). With such faculties, the jade figure seems to stare into the darkness before him with an unchanging expression.

Not only do the ‘jade bodies’ of Liu Sheng and Dou Wan possess facial features, but the modelling of different body parts attests to a consistent attention to representing basic anatomy. This attention seems unique to this royal couple, since in other cases the torso of the deceased is covered either with real clothes or jade armour. For example, the ‘jade suit’ of a 2nd century BC prince of the Southern Yue kingdom consists of exposed body parts—a head, two hands, and two feet—as well as a jacket and a pair of trousers (plate 12).\(^9\) Excavators have

\(^9\) See Needham 1974, p. 284; Thorp 1991, p. 34.
\(^9\) See, for example, Lu Zhaoyin 1981, Kao and Yang 1985; Thorp 1991.
\(^9\) The terms guì (jade suit) and yùzī (jade box) are found in the Hēng shù and the Hâu Hêng shù (History of the Later Han); for sources, see Shi Wei (1972).
noticed remarkable differences between these two sections in terms of materials, manufacturing, and construction method. The jade pieces used to form the exposed body parts are carefully cut and polished, with even thickness and smooth edges. Small holes drilled at the corners allowed the pieces to be linked together to shape precise, three-dimensional forms. In contrast, the jade pieces of the clothes are often materials leftover from making other jade products. Without perforated holes, these coarse and minimally polished pieces were tied together with thick ribbons and attached to a fabric lining. A somewhat different case is represented by a set of jade body parts from the tomb of Liu Ci at Linyi in Shandong province (plate 13), which has again been incorrectly termed a partial jade suit. The set consists of a head with a pronounced nose, a pair of hands with folding fingers, and two feet; the torso of the deceased was presumably covered by clothes made of fabric.

The concept of clothes disappears entirely in the 'jade bodies' of Liu Sheng and Dou Wan, which are in fact naked jade figures in full view. In each case, the round arms are smoothly connected to two hands; fingers are painstakingly shaped with jade plaques of different shapes and sizes (plate 14a). The legs imitate human legs, not a pair of trousers (plate 14b). The torso shows subtle curves; the joining of stomach and legs, and especially the round buttocks, are sensitively represented (plate 14c and d). These so-called 'suits' have no buttons or openings (as the Southern Yue suit does). Instead, Liu Sheng's jade body is equipped with genitals to preserve the prince's sexuality and fertility (a feature which the Southern Yue prince's suit lacks).

Several writers have proposed that since the Mancheng finds are complete 'suits', they must be later than the partial 'suits' such as the one from Linyi. But these two examples - in fact two types of jade bodies - reflect more than a typological evolution. The Linyi set, as I have just argued, shows the exposed parts of a fully dressed figure. We can thus call it metonymic, a representation in which parts stand for the whole. The Mancheng set, on the other hand, is metaphoric because it substitutes for the corpse in its entirety. In retrospect, we realize that the first two layers of jades - the plugs and the shroud with 17 discs - only block orifices and cover the chest; they protect and partially transform the corpse, but do not substitute for it. The 'jade suit', on the other hand, represents the completion of a magical transformation. This 'suit', actually a transformed body, was then placed into the coffin and was again surrounded by
a painted banner was placed between the two innermost coffins. Different interpretations of this painting abound, but every scholar agrees that the central image portrays Lady Dai, who appears above a large bi disc intertwined with two rising dragons (plate 15). No such painted images were found in Liu Sheng’s tomb; instead, carved jades were placed in the space between the two coffins. These include a large bi - the most elaborate one from the tomb - which is decorated with a pair of dragons in ornate openwork patterns (plate 16). Next to the bi was a jade figure, representing a gentleman seated in a formal posture, with arms resting on a low stand (plate 17). The inscription on the bottom identifies the figure as an immortal, called "ge gu ren" or "jade gentleman of antiquity". The placement of this figure resembles that of the Mawangdui portrait. But instead of portraying Liu Sheng’s physical and hence temporary appearance, this jade figure reconfirms his newly gained eternity.

This essay has deliberately downplayed the role of textual sources in order to stress the potential of the archaeological evidence. But now, reaching the end, I want to cite three passages from ancient books. Written before, during, and after the Han, these are in one way or another related to the symbolism of jade I have just proposed. The first passage is from Zhanzangzi; this Eastern Zhou philosopher vividly described those agile men unaffected by time and other natural rules: There is a Divine Gentleman living on faraway Cushe Mountain, with skin like ice or snow, and gentle and shy like a young girl. He doesn’t eat the five grains, but

"It is also possible to interpret this figure as playing a protective role. Evidence for this argument can also be derived from Mawangdui: some peach-wood figures, conventional images with apotropaic function, were found between Lady Dai’s two innermost coffins.

Plate 15 A detail of the painted banner from Mawangdui Tomb no. 1, Hunan 1973, fig. 38.
Plate 16 Bi disc, Mawangdui tomb no. 1, CASS and Hebei 1980, colour pl. 15.
to longevity, of course, but as a true believer, he asked his wife to observe the miracle of his corpse. ‘Don’t bury me immediately, so that everyone can have a chance to know how wonderful and effective this elixir is.’ His wife followed his instruction to display his body in the summer heat. After several days, it did not change colour even slightly. When the family finally held funerary rites for him and tried to put his body into a coffin, it felt as hard as stone. Li Yu was buried with the jade powder that he had not finished eating.

The third and last source are Han dynasty folk songs written around the time of the Mancheng tombs. One song goes: ‘No one is made of gold and stone; how could one escape death?’ However, when an entire grave has been turned into stone and even the corpse has been transformed into jade, this premise was reversed, as expressed in another song: ‘At death he has attained the way of holy immortals.’ Indeed, we may say that Liu Sheng and Dou Wan had achieved immortality, but only through death and only through the alchemy of funerary symbols.

\[\text{Watson 1968, p. 33; translation slightly modified. Ying-shih Yu remarks: The only difference between the fun [solid] and the huo [immortal] is that while the former leaves the body at death the latter obtains its total freedom by transforming the body into something pure eternal, that is, the heavenly ch'i [breath, ether, etc.]. Yu 1987, p. 307.}\]

\[\text{Hsi Wei shu (History of Later Wei), cited in Li Fang 1960, p. 3572.}\]

\[\text{Those are lines from the Han folk song ‘Bu chu Ximen xing’ (Strrolling out the western gate).}\]

\[\text{Translation from Birell 1988, p. 75.}\]

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