An impressive number of small human figurines of clay and stone have been discovered at many prehistoric sites in China. These early images, however, differ from the "tomb figurines" studied in this chapter in function and belong to separate traditions. A tomb figurine is by definition a funerary object designed to be buried with the dead, but many of the early objects were not found in graves. Moreover, the prehistoric practice of making figurines appears to be unrelated to later tomb figurines. In the sixth century BCE, Confucius spoke of yong (a) or tomb figurines, as a relatively recent phenomenon and criticized "those who first made" them.

Based on abundant unearthed materials, modern archaeologists have indeed been able to date the beginning of tomb figurines to around the time of Confucius.

Confucius denounced yong because their lifelike form implied human sacrifice for funerary purposes. His criticism did little to slow the burgeoning manufacture of tomb figurines, however, because their invention was an essential part of a powerful artistic movement that started in the Eastern Zhou (722-256 BCE) and continued through the Qin (221-206 BCE) and Han (202 BCE-220 CE). This movement reinvented Chinese ritual art. The use of sacrificial bronzes, the privileged ritual objects of the early dynasties, declined in favor of the furnishing of tombs with luxury goods, as the shift in the center of ancestor worship from the lineage temple to a family graveyard generated new rites and ritual paraphernalia. Tomb furnishings taken
directly from the living world were increasingly replaced by replicas and representations to construct an ideal afterlife for the dead. Among these replicas, tomb figurines raised particular problems because of their mimetic relationship to the human body. Thus, although Confucius generally advocated the use of “spirit articles” (rung qi 精鬼) or surrogates in furnishing graves, he distinguished yong from funerary objects of nonfigurative forms, including “straw spirit figures” (chén xìng 陳聖), which only symbolized human beings but did not imitate them.5

To the art historian, Confucius’s criticism of tomb figurines is particularly interesting because of the apparent concern with a visual problem: his rejection of yong had less to do with the practice of burying symbolic human figures in tombs than with the form of these figures—to him yong were simply too close to human beings in appearance. The question then became what kind of figures should be made for a tomb. As we have seen, Confucius favored the traditional nonfigurative chén xìng. But archaeology demonstrates convincingly that from the middle Eastern Zhou to the Han the majority of Chinese experimented with a wide range of possibilities within the representational category of yong. Although figurative yong were common in funerary practices during this period, the question of how a yong should be made persisted and determined the different forms of tomb figurines and the diverse ways of arranging them in burials. Should a yong be manufactured of wood, clay, bronze, or stone? Should it mimic or distort a natural human form? Should it be a life-size figure? Should it be a one-piece sculpture or have movable body parts like a puppet? Should it have painted features or be dressed in silk robes with gilded hair? Should it be placed alone or in a tableau with other figures and objects? The responses to these and other questions were not only subject to regional traditions and stylistic trends but often reflected the decisions of individual patrons and artists.

Confucius’s criticism of tomb figurines signals, moreover, a special moment in Chinese art history. For the first time, representations of human forms were intensely pursued and problematical. To be sure, although some human images were attempted in Shang (sixth–fifth centuries BCE) and Zhou metropolitan art before the sixth century BCE, these images were few and often incorporated nonhuman features.6 Even after the sixth century BCE, when human images increased dramatically, they appeared mainly as decorative motifs on objects. Tomb figurines constituted the first major tradition of figurative representation in Chinese art. They remained the dominant form of such representation for some five hundred years until pictorial carvings and murals gained wide popularity after the first century BCE; subsequently tombs featured both figurines and pictorial images. Only recently have art historians begun serious inquiries into these works.7 These recent studies have demonstrated the rich potential of this subject, especially for advancing our understanding of ancient Chinese representations of the human body and face. Each figurine is a particular rendering of the body and face; each figurine also helps construct a symbolic space for the dead in a tomb. The study of tomb figurines should therefore focus not only on these works as isolated sculptural forms but also on their relationship with the dead and the symbolic space they create. This chapter attempts to explore and define some essential aspects of tomb figurines.

The first two sections, “Substitution” and “Role,” analyze the function of tomb figurines and their relationship with human subjects. The next two sections, “Tableau” and “Framing,” discuss the display of figurines in tombs and their relationship with the dead. The fifth and sixth sections, “Material Symbolism” and “Body and Face,” deal with the physical properties and visual representations of tomb figurines. Instead of defining these aspects at a purely theoretical level, I substantiate my discussion with historical examples and, in the process, outline some important developments in Chinese tomb figurines from the sixth to first century BCE. These six sections form the basis for the seventh and last section of the essay, which is devoted entirely to a case study of the various figurines in the famous Li-shan 陵山 Mausoleum of the First Emperor of Qin.

Substitution

The connection made by Confucius between tomb figurines and human sacrifices gave rise to the theory that these figurines were invented as substitutes for real human bodies.8 First formulated in the commentaries on such ancient writings as Mencius and the Book of Rites, this theory is generally supported by the findings of modern archaeology. The emergence of tomb figurines is associated with a decline in human sacrifices. The practice of human sacrifices peaked in China during the late Shang, toward the end of the second millennium BCE. Close to 4,000 human sacrifices have been found in the Shang royal cemetery at Anyang 安陽; Henan; additional sacrifices are recorded in divinatory inscriptions on Shang oracle bones.8 This practice survived through the Zhou, but the quantity and frequency of human sacrifice dropped dramatically. Especially after the sixth and fifth century BCE, tombs containing more than ten human sacrifices became extremely rare; even the burials of some powerful Warring States (403–221 BCE) rulers were accompanied by no or only one or two human sacrifices.9

It was in this context that tomb figurines appeared and became a regular, though still minor, component of tomb furnishings. In the north, clay and wooden figurines have been found in tombs dating from the sixth and fifth centuries BCE in Shandong and Shansi.10 In the south, the 209 tombs of the same period at Changsha 常德 in Hunan yielded fourteen wooden figurines.11 The excavation of 84 tombs in a large cemetery at Deshan 德山 in Changde 常德 in Hunan further demonstrates the increasing appearance of

On Tomb Figurines  •  15
tomb figurines during the following centuries. None of the early Warring States tombs in this cemetery contained figurines, and two tombs dating from the middle Warring States period yielded seven figurines. The largest group of figurines, 23 in all, came from five late Warring States tombs constructed during the third century BCE.

The relationship between tomb figurines and human sacrifice is confirmed by their spatial arrangement in tombs. Figurines in Eastern Zhou burials were often placed next to or around the deceased, an arrangement clearly following the burial pattern of human sacrifices in earlier and contemporary tombs. In one rare case, figurines and human sacrifices were used in combination: Niujiao 南郊 Tomb 7 at Changzi 长子 in Shanxi contains three human victims along the east and south walls and four figurines near the west and north walls (see Fig. 1:1). Apparently, these seven “figures” together surrounded and protected the dead person in the middle.9 This example encourages us to examine the use of tomb figurines as surrogates or substitutes more closely. Considerable care was expended on the three human victims in this tomb; each is buried in a separate coffin and embellished with bronze and jade ornaments.10 Since clearly they were not slaves or even commoners, the well-dressed figurines in this tomb seem to have substituted for human subjects of higher social rank and roles.

Numerous archaeological excavations have enabled scholars to distinguish two main types of human victims in early Chinese burials: “companions in death” (ren zan 人伴) and “human offerings” (ren sheng 人牲). The “companions in death” included relatives, consorts, subordinates, guards, and servants. It is commonly believed that these people were executed to follow their deceased masters, and their bodies were carefully preserved and embellished. A “human offering,” on the other hand, was considered a kind of “sacrificial animal” (sheng 兽) and always suffered a violent death. The 90 “companions in death” found in Shang royal tomb 1001 at Anyang, for example, were bodyguards, concubines, attendants, and a small troop of the royal army. These men and women were buried in individual grave pits inside and outside the main tomb and were furnished with weapons, ritual vessels, ornaments, and sometimes their own companions in death. In contrast, 73 human skulls and headless bodies constituted the human offerings for this tomb; they were killed and dismembered when the tomb was sealed, and their body parts rammed into the earth to fill up the grave pit and ramps.

The majority of early tomb figurines represent guardians, servants, and entertainers. They clearly stood for human companions, not sacrificial offerings.11 This understanding is clinched by several “inventories of grave goods” (qun or 諸) unearthed in Eastern Zhou tombs, which identify the figurines in the tombs as “dead servants” (wang tong 死侍 or miong tseng 死盛).

These manufactured figures were thus supposed to serve the deceased master in the underworld. On the other hand, these examples reveal a new dimension of meaning for tomb figurines: although labeled “dead,” the figurines found in these tombs are lively images of servants and attendants equipped with various instruments of their trades. These figurines—and yong in general—thus not only substituted for human sacrifices but also realized their supposed functions. Whereas one had to imagine the service of an executed companion in death in the other world, the actual service performed could be represented by figurines. Tomb figurines thus transformed imagination and belief into concrete visual forms.

The advantage of figurines in representing “living” images and situations, however, did not mean that they instantly replaced all companions in death. As long as they remained substitutes, these manufactured images were considered inferior to human bodies. This must be why, for a long period after the invention of tomb figurines, they were used together with human victims to furnish a large tomb. The Niujiao Tomb 7 is one such example. A more complex case is a fifth-century BCE tomb from the ancient state of Qi at Langjiazhai 郎家寨 near Linti 静之 in modern Shandong, which contained not only companions in death and human offerings but also figurines.12 Following the Shang practice exemplified by Tomb 1001, the dismembered bodies of six human offerings were mixed in the dirt to fill the grave pit. Seventeen companions in death, all young
females, were buried in wooden coffins in individual graves surrounding the man lying in the middle. Possibly the concubines of the deceased male, these women wore jewelry and possessed personal belongings. Two of them were accompanied by young female companions in death, evidently their own maidservants. Six of the other fifteen women were accompanied by small pottery figurines. A similar situation was found in another Qi tomb, excavated more recently at Zhangqiu 落 in Shandong, and dating from the middle Eastern Zhou. This suggests that even during the fourth and fifth centuries BCE, at least in the state of Qi, the death of a prestigious nobleman still demanded human sacrifices; figurines were used by lower-ranking people as substitutes. The combined use of figurines and human sacrifices did not end with the Eastern Zhou. As we will see, both types of human "bodies" were used, on an astonishing scale, to furnish the Lishan Mausoleum of the First Emperor.

Role

In drama, "role" refers both to a character and to a part in a play. As used in discussions of visual art, the term pertains to the function/representation of a figurative image as well as the image's narrative/symbolic context. A role can be an individual character or a generic social category. Ancient Chinese tomb figurines rarely, if at all, represented named individuals; rather, they signified certain general "roles" considered essential to an ideal afterlife. This symbolic function of figurines was reinforced by props: furniture, instruments, and apparatus—real or surrogate objects that facilitated these manufactured figures in fulfilling their assigned roles.

An Eastern Zhou burial, Changqiguan 長子館 Tomb 1 at Xinyang 新陽, Henan, contained a set of figurines. Built as a large wooden box, the rectangular tomb chamber was divided into seven compartments (see Fig. 4.1). Figurines were found in the six compartments surrounding the central one, which contained the body of the deceased in two, nested coffins. The roles of the figurines were revealed by their physical form as well as the objects surrounding them. The transverse front room, which was furnished with bronze ritual vessels, musical instruments, and an "attendant" figurine, represented an audience hall for formal ritual performances. The compartment on the left side of the coffin chamber housed a procession of two chariots, each with a figurine representing a driver. The compartment on the right was a kitchen equipped with cooking utensils and actual food and two cock figurines. At the rear of the tomb, the compartment on the left, behind the chariot room, represented a study. It was furnished with a large couch, a box of writing utensils, and bamboo slips. Two exquisite figurines found in this room probably represented secretaries. On the right, the kitchen was backed by a storage room, in which a servant figurine guarded several large jars. The mundane domestic scenes staged in these four side rooms are complemented by a mystical one: the room directly behind the coffin chamber houses a sculpture representing a long-tongued creature with deer antlers. Conventionally known as a "tomb guardian beast" (zhengmushou 禮齒獸), it occupies the center of the room and is surrounded by figurines at the four corners. Unlike other figurines in the tomb, these four figures have no robes, and their bodies are crudely carved. Most intriguingly, one of them has a bamboo needle piercing the chest. This feature identifies these figures as evil spirits to be quelled through ritual
practices, not companions in death supposed to be functional in the underground world.

Except for the coffin chamber and the room behind it, the tomb comprises a series of domestic spaces structured around a variety of domestic roles: cook, servant, attendant, driver, secretary. The selection of these particular roles reveals a specific construction of the afterlife for the tomb occupant. But since the afterlife was imagined differently in various regions and by people of different gender, occupation, and social class, tomb figurines representing different roles were created to constitute different images of the afterlife. Although the Changtaiguan tomb contained no musicians or dancers, entertainers are often the only role types found in some contemporary tombs, including those at Langjiazhuang, Zhangqiu, and Fenshiba in Changzhi County, Shanxi province. A Qin tomb (Tomb 2) at Xianyang, Shaanxi, demonstrates yet another type of figurine: it contained the two earliest known images of cavalrymen—a role thought to be related to the occupation of the deceased (Fig. 1.3). 25 Another Qin tomb from a nearby location yielded clay models of an ox-drawn carriage and a granary, images reflecting specific concerns with economic life. 26

The First Emperor also made a clear choice of figurines for his tomb. The life-size or near-life-size terra-cotta figures found around his grave represent limited roles: military personnel, court officials, entertainers, and keepers of the emperors' horses and pets. But clearly the first category, which is represented by thousands of officers and soldiers, had his utmost attention. His example was followed by two early Han "underground armies," albeit in miniature forms. 27 One of these two groups was found at Yangjiawan near Xi'an, close to two large tombs whose occupants have been identified as Zhou Bo 周勃 and his son Zhou Yafei 周亚夫, both famous early Han generals. 28 The official capacities of the deceased thus
explain the nature of their tomb figurines. A majority of early Han tomb figurines, however, favored domestic roles, such as attendants, servants, guards, and performers. Encouraged by examples set by the early Han royal house, these roles soon dominated the production of tomb figurines nationwide. In the south, the famous Mawangdui 毛公盡 Tomb 1, constructed before 168 B.C., contained 191 figurines, of which 176 represent household roles. In the east, a large rock-cut tomb at Bidingshan 彭王陵 near Xuzhou 徐州 in modern Jiangsu consisted of a 35-meter-long passageway and nineteen chambers. In all, 422 painted pottery figurines were placed in different sections inside the tomb, including guards stationed in shallow niches along the passageway, male and female attendants serving in various tomb chambers, and dancers and musicians performing in a "music and dance hall."

The intense interest in domestic roles during the early Western Han led to the creation of some especially beautiful images, which can be considered the cultural icons of the period. One example, found at Bidingshan and other contemporaneous tombs, is a graceful dancer caught in the moment of a formal performance (see Fig. 1.4). Her elegant outline is accentuated by a tight-fitting robe and extremely long sleeves. Slightly bending her upper body, she tosses her right sleeve over one shoulder while dangling the left sleeve in relaxation. It is this kind of "indoor" role, not the miniature soldiers from Yanghaiwan, that best demonstrates the artistic achievement of Western Han tomb figurines.

Tableau

A "tableau" in a tomb is a group representation of figurines and props arranged in a coherent spatial framework and governed by a unifying scale of proportions. By this definition, although the figurines and objects in each compartment of Changtaiquan Tomb 1 formed a large assemblage, they did not constitute a tableau because the objects lacked the consistent scale necessary for a coherent visual display. The figurines, about one-third life-size, were grouped with full-size utilitarian objects derived from real life. Moreover, some of the objects were "tokens" of larger entities: chariot fittings stood for a whole chariot, for example. Other objects, such as the couch in the "study," were assembled for easier burial.

Two standard tactics in forming a tableau are (1) reducing the props to the scale of miniature figurines and (2) enlarging the figurines to human proportions. The first is exemplified by figurines made in north China during the Eastern Zhou. Unlike the wooden figurines found in the south, the northern figurines were handmade from soft clay and painted either bright red, yellow, and brown or entirely black. Many are tiny: the figurines from the Langjiazhuang tomb are about 10 cm high; examples of similar sizes have been found at Fenshuiying in Shanxi, Huixian 河南 and Luoyang 洛陽 in Henan, Fengxian 陝西 in Shaanxi, and several locations in Shandong. The faces and bodies of these miniature images are rudimentary; what makes them special are the large tableaux they often constitute. The most significant group was discovered in 1990 in a large tomb at Zhangqiu in Shandong mentioned above. Both companions in death and human offerings accompanied the deceased in this tomb. A grouping of 38 miniature figurines further accompanied a female companion in death. Consisting of 29 figures, five musical instruments, and eight birds, these images constituted a large assemblage of a female dancer and dance performers. There are ten female dancers, ranging from 57 to 79 centimeters tall; their varying costumes and gestures indicate finer groupings in a dance formation. Two male musicians are drummers; the other three play bells, chime stones, and a zither. Ten additional figures have their hands folded in front of them, a gesture that led the excavators to identify them as the audience for the dance and musical performances. This tradition of representing musical and dance performances in miniature continued to develop in Shandong in the early Han. In a second-century A.D. earthenware tableau excavated from Jiantan 江南, for example, an orchestra provides musical accompaniment for a singer, dancers, and a troupe of acrobats; an audience of standing dignitaries arrayed in two rows watches them (see Fig. 1.5). In contrast to the Zhangqiu group, here a rectangular platform provides the individual figures a shared ground and betrays a stronger desire to construct a coherent setting for a miniature presentation.

Fig. 1.5 Atrebat, musicians, and audience, painted earthenware, Western Han, first century B.C.; Unearthed at Wuyingzhan, Jiangnan, Shandong.
We know of only one example of the second tactic in forging a tableau—in the entire course of Chinese history, only the First Emperor of Qin commissioned tomb figurines of human proportions. In contrast to his miniature predecessors, the emperor's underground army signified his desire for the gigantic in two senses. The first is comparative: a Qin figure is much larger than a pre-Qin clay figurine (see Fig. 1.6). The second is contextual and refers to the scale of the army from the point of view of an imaginary human observer (see Fig. 1.6, p. 4). Visitors to the site find themselves enveloped by the army, surrounded by it, enclosed within its shadow. Interestingly, the early Han rulers abandoned the First Emperor's desire for monumentality in favor of a more moderate visual display. Figurines from Emperor Jing's 150-141 BCE mausoleum, Yangling, although among the largest from the early Han, are only about one-third the height of a Qin warrior; those from Houxian in Xuzhou and other places are even smaller, about one-ninth the size of a Qin figure. Although these Han figurines are larger than pre-Qin examples, they are miniatures because they are much smaller than their natural models and because their size resulted from a conscious decision to reduce the scale of tomb figures drastically. It was a conscious decision because these works were made not long after the Qin warriors in the Xianyang-Chang'an area, when the memory of creating thousands of life-size statues must have still been alive.

Why did the Han emperors not follow the Qin example and furnish their tombs with life-size figurines? Some scholars attribute this decision to frugality and other economic concerns, but this reason does not explain why no Han emperor attempted life-size figurines, especially given the accumulation of imperial wealth after the initial years of the dynasty. Recent excavations at Yangling, the mausoleum of Emperor Jing, who was famous for his frugality, have begun to reveal a project no less ambitious in concept than that of the Li Shan Mausoleum. Various kinds of figurines and grave goods were buried in at least 86 sacrificial pits around the emperor’s tomb. These pits range 3 to 5 meters long. Located close to one another in a well-defined area, their uniform orientation and parallel positioning suggest that they were designed as a unit. Their contents mirror various aspects of a Han royal household. The southern section of Pit 17, for example, was filled with grain and can be identified as an underground granary. The 70 terra-cotta soldiers marching behind two carriages in the northern section of this pit may have been intended to protect this important source of food. Pit 21 was divided into three sections housing a variety of sculpted domestic animals, including oxen, dogs, sheep, pigs, and chickens, all carefully modeled and painted to achieve a lifelike effect. Stoves and cooking utensils attended by domestic servants were also displayed in this pit (see Fig. 1.7). Stationed at the four corners of this subterranean building were terra-cotta guards, equipped with weapons for short- and long-range fighting.

Neither these figurines nor the tableaus they formed were just smaller and less elaborate versions of the Qin examples. The basic purpose of the Han tableaus was to fashion a miniature world. This desire is best illuminated by Yangling. Everything in this tomb was a miniature version of a real thing—not only figures and domestic animals but also buildings, chariots, weapons, stoves, pots, measuring cups, and so on. The answer to the question why these tiny imitations were painstakingly made at a uniform scale of reduction must be found in the specific artistic goals of the miniature. It has been suggested that miniature representations consciously create an interior space and time in a fictional world. Unlike life-size figures, which attempt to map art upon life, the metaphoric world of the miniature skew the temporal and spatial relations of the everyday world. Buried underground, the miniatures at 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.

Framing
A large tableau, in turn, constructs a symbolic space for the deceased—the supposed master of the sculptured concubines and servants, the owner of the imitation chariots and livestock, and the viewer of the staged music and dance performances. This function of figurines is especially important because the deceased was often not represented by a portrait in a tomb during this period. His or her posthumous existence was in most cases indi-
cated by framing, which served to define one or more special position(s) for the dead in a tomb. Even when a portrait of the deceased did exist, framing still played an important role in reinforcing the centrality of the portrait and in defining alternative places for the dead in the same tomb. In this light, we can return to Changtaiqian Tomb 1 (see Fig. 3.2, p. 19). The only architectural unit in this tomb that did not contain a figure was the coffin chamber in the middle. Surrounded by the series of domestic spaces represented by five of the six side rooms, the deceased, although unseen, achieved the status of master of this underground household through the "framing" of the figurines.

Moreover, some of the five side rooms provided individual frames for the deceased. The chariot procession, for example, had only drivers but no passengers, and the couch in the "study" was clearly not intended for the secretary figurines, which were placed against a wall in the room. Is it possible that both scenes were constructed for the invisible soul of the deceased? This question is partially answered by Mawangdui Tomb 1 of Lady Dai #8, the wife of Li Cang #4, the first Marquis Dai and chancellor of the Changsha principality in the early Han.6 Like the Changtaiqian tomb, it was constructed as a large box consisting of side rooms surrounding the central coffin chamber (see Fig. 1.8). Unlike the Changtaiqian tomb, however, the three rooms on the east, west, and south sides of the coffin chamber were filled with layers of household goods, including 48 suits of clothes, dry food, medicine, and clay replicas of household articles. Tightly packed to fill each compartment, the arrangement of these objects rejected the possibility of a visual display. Rather, these objects were the material possessions that accompanied Lady Dai into the afterlife. Piled together with these goods were 105 "servant" figurines—a different sort of property in her posthumous home.

But the north room at the head of the coffin chamber was different. Here figurines and objects were arranged in various sections as if on a stage. Silk curtains were hung on the walls, and a bamboo mat covered the floor. Eating and drinking vessels were displayed in front of an empty couch furnished with thick cushions and back by a painted screen—a seat prepared for an invisible subject. We realize the identity of this subject from the things placed around the seat: in front of the couch were two pairs of silk shoes, and next to the couch were a case and two toilet boxes containing cosmetics and a wig—all personal belongings of the deceased woman.6 Joining these objects to frame an "empty center" for Lady Dai's soul were several groups of figurines in this room. Ten large ones, each 69–78 centimeters tall, seem to represent Lady Dai's personal attendants. Eight other figures have been identified as singers and dancers, performing in the company of five musicians. This performance was staged at the east end of the room, opposite the couch at the west end. One could well imagine the invisible soul of Lady Dai, enjoying food and drink, and watching the performance from the couch.

"Framing" played an even more central role in the design of the famous Maosheng Tomb 1 of Liu Sheng, the prince, who ruled as the prince of Zhongshan and in present-day Hebei from 154 to 113 BCE. The main chamber of the tomb originally housed two empty seats covered with silk tents (see Fig. 1.4). Vessels, lamps, incense burners, and figurines were lined up in rows in front of as well as beside, the central seat. All the figurines represented attendants and were placed next to vessels, as if they were serving food and drink to invisible guests. I have suggested elsewhere that the two covered seats were likely prepared for the soul of Liu Sheng and his wife Don Wan, who was buried in the same family graveyard but had no such seat in her own tomb.6 If this suggestion is true, then the framing in Maosheng Tomb 1 especially emphasized the dominance of the prince, whose seat was alone surrounded by figurines and related objects. In these and other cases, figurines helped construct a net of, or "position," for the dead. An extremely important concept in ancient Chinese visual culture, it allowed a subject to be represented without literally portraying it. This concept underlay an entire system of visual and verbal presentation and representation and served different political and ritual
purposes. The political treatise "Mingtang wei 明堂位 (Positions in Bright Hall) in the Book of Rites, for example, defines the ruler's authority not by describing his actual power but by locating his central position within layers of frames constituted by the courtyards, the feudal lords, and the barbarian chieftains in the four quarters of the world. In the domain of religion, ritual canons of ancestor worship—the dominant religious form in pre-Buddhist China—instruct that in a family temple, a deceased ancestor should be symbolized by a piece of plain wood with no representation of a figurative likeness. Called a pai wei 坛位 (literally, a "tablet-position"), this object functions as a placeholder; its sole significance lies in locating the subject, not in portraying it. Such tablets were restricted to ancestral shrines and never put in tombs. In a tomb the deceased was often symbolized by an empty space, which achieved its visual signification as a we through framing. We can thus understand why ancient Chinese created numerous tomb figurines but few sculptured images of the dead: these figurines helped construct the deceased's we, hence the invisible presence of his or her soul.

Two types of framing, which I call arresting and movement, further signify two different states of the soul. "Arresting" means to pin the soul to a stationary position, typically with the help of an empty seat or couch, as in the Majanghui and Mawangdui tombs. "Movement," on the other hand, means to create a transient position for the soul, typically with the help of an empty chariot or a riderless horse. Ancient ritual books instruct that a funerary procession to a grave should include an empty chariot for the departing soul of the dead, a "soul carriage" (san che 色車). When this carriage was installed or represented in a tomb, however, it became a vehicle to transport the soul of the deceased to the immortal world after entombment. It is unclear when this belief first arose. But the chariot procession in Changshaqian Tomb 1 and the bronze chariots next to the First Emperor's grave probably reflect this tradition. In Mawangdui Tomb 1, two elaborate horse-drawn chariots were stationed in the vestibule before the main chamber, facing outward. Based on their orientation and other evidence, I have proposed that the first is a "lead chariot" (diao che 道車) and the second, the soul carriage of the deceased prince. Finally, about a hundred bronze horses, chariots, attendants, and guards excavated from a late second-century BC tomb at Letai 蕭台, Gansu province, constituted perhaps the largest procession of a posthumous journey. Several carriages, empty inside, bear the names of the concubines of the deceased. The deceased himself is symbolized by the largest riderless horse. While this horse is slowly walking, another horse from this tomb, also riderless, is shown flying in the sky. One of its hoofs rests lightly on a swallow with outstretched wings, suggesting the unworldly nature of the journey: the invisible soul is on its way to heaven.

Material Symbolism

"Material symbolism" pertains to the value of a material for making tomb figurines beyond its usefulness as a natural sculptural medium and implies a conscious selection of a material based on such a culturally constructed value. Although arguably the material of tomb figurines must always have some symbolic meaning, a clear awareness of such meaning was not evident when tomb figurines first appeared in China. Available archaeological evidence shows that from the fifth to third century BCE, the materials used to manufacture tomb figurines corresponded generally to the geographical division of north and south; the use of these materials was thus not based on individual choice but determined by cultural conventions. Almost all figurines from the Chu region in the south are made of wood; most figurines from the northern states are pottery. The Lishan Mausoleum of the First Emperor, constructed toward the end of the third century BCE, was probably the first to employ different materials for its figurines. Although most figurines in this mausoleum were made of terra-cotta, bronze and other precious metals were used to make two miniature chariots and their drivers. It was not until the late second century BCE, however, that a complex system of material symbolism was developed in planning figurines for a tomb. This development is best exemplified by Mawangdui Tomb 1 of Liu Sheng.

Built before 150 BCE, this tomb consisted of a series of interconnected chambers dug into a mountain cliff (see Fig. 1, above). This design identifies it as a new type of burial called a "horizontal grave." Unlike a "vertical grave" such as Changshaqian Tomb 1 or Mawangdui Tomb 1 (see Figs. 17 and 18), a "horizontal grave" more closely imitates a real residence, with a central axis linking a number of chambers into a spatial continuum. The tunnel-like entryway to Liu Sheng's tomb, which was fifty meters long, led
to a vestibule flanked by two side-chambers—a "storage room" on the right and a "stable" on the left. Behind the vestibule was the central chamber discussed above, in which stood the two canopyed "spirit seats" (tong zwu 重屋 or zhuo zwu 扼座). A thick stone gate separated the main chamber from the burial chamber, which formed the rear section of the tomb and contained the deceased prince clad in his "jade suit."

Figurines were found in at least five locations in the tomb: (i) the numbers refer to those on Fig. 183) around the central "spirit seat" in the main chamber, (2) next to this seat and under its canopy, (3) behind this seat and before the stone gate of the rear section, (4) behind the stone gate flanking the passage leading into the rear chamber, and (5) inside the prince's coffin in the burial chamber. Significantly, these five groups of figurines were made of five different materials or combinations of materials. These five materials can be divided into two groups corresponding to the two principal sections of the tomb: clay, wood (with bronze accessories), and bronze were used to make figurines for the main hall, and stone and jade for the figurines in the rear burial chamber. This division reflects the material symbolism of this tomb on three levels.

First, within each of the two sections, the different materials signify different kinds of subjects and constructed a hierarchical social relationship. Clay is contrasted with bronze in the main chamber. The eighteen clay figurines represent servants or attendants, who surround the "spirit seat" of the deceased. Two gold inlaid bronze figurines were found next to this seat; their precious material and extraordinary workmanship suggest that they were Liu Sheng's personal belongings, placed next to his "spirit seat" to indicate his invisible presence. (We have seen a similar situation in Mawangdui Tomb 1.) Behind this seat, eleven miniature wooden chariots constituted a symbolic ritual procession. Although the wood has largely decayed, all 209 of the remaining bronze fittings are inlaid with intricate gold patterns, which suggests that this miniature procession was prepared for Liu Sheng and probably served to transport his soul from the burial chamber to the "spirit seat" to receive offerings. In the burial chamber, stone is contrasted with jade. Four stone figurines, two male and two female, lined up along the entrance represent attendants. Liu Sheng's corpse was accompanied by a unique figurine made of pure white jade (see Fig. 110). It shows a gentleman seated in a formal posture, with arms resting on a low stand. The inscription on the bottom identifies the figure as an immortal, called "Gu yu ren," or "Jade Gentleman of Antiquity."

Second, the different materials also constructed the architectural units to which the figurines belonged. The main chamber containing the clay figurines and wood chariots was itself a timber structure covered with clay tiles. The canopyed "spirit seat" in this chamber, where the inlaid bronze figures were placed, had an elaborate bronze frame inlaid with gold thread. The stone figurines guarded the stone burial chamber. Even the jade figure did not exist alone; jade was used to construct Liu Sheng's burial suit and also covered the interior of his wife's coffin.

Third, the tomb's overall design was based on the dualism of (i) the wood and clay constructions in the front section and (ii) the stone constructions in the rear section. Precious metals and jade further marked the place of the deceased in the two sections. The stone figurines found in the burial chamber are, in fact, among the earliest stone sculptures known in China. Prior to the second century BCE, the Chinese seldom used stone to make human and animal images; even the ambitious First Emperor seemed quite satisfied with his terra-cotta soldiers and bronze chariots. Once introduced into funerary art, however, stone was contrasted with traditional materials to generate new meanings. Stone was opposed to wood and clay: all its natural characteristics—strength, plainness, and especially endurance—made it an analogue of eternity. Wood and clay, which are relatively fragile and vulnerable to the elements, were associated with temporal, mortal existence. This dichotomy came to explain two kinds of architecture.
and sculpture; those made of wood and clay for the living and those made of stone dedicated to the dead, the gods, and immortals. The double association of stone with death and with immortality strengthened the link between death and immortality. Indeed, as I have discussed elsewhere, this link prepared a new ground for constructing the afterlife and was responsible for the popularity of stone funerary monuments during the Eastern Han.

The dualism of wood/clay and stone/jade was internalized in the design of the Mancheng tomb to symbolize two different notions of posthumous immortality. One notion, which had appeared long before the Han but continued to prevail during that dynasty, conceived the afterlife as a continuation of this life. The other notion, largely a Han invention, approached immortality as a consequence of a magical transformation, achieved either by transporting the soul of the deceased to an immortal land or by transforming the body into an immortal. These two ideals were integrated in the Mancheng tomb and given symbolic expressions in different sculptural and architectural materials. With its tiled timber structures, clay figurines, and wood miniature chariot procession, the front section of the tomb mimicked the world of the living. But the rear section, with its stone chamber, stone and jade figurines, and the jade suit, was no longer a natural extension of this world, but a place where the deceased was changed into an immortal.

Body and Face

The invention of tomb figurines intensified a dialogue between the face and the body in Chinese art. From the beginning, the face and the body of a figurine constituted two distinct but combined fields of representation in constant negotiation. The exposed face remained a direct subject of image-making; differences among images were conceived mainly in stylistic terms. The treatment of the body was more complex and followed at least three fundamentally different representational modes. One was to represent not so much the body as the clothes and paraphernalia. The artist focused on the external appearance of a figure—costume, ornaments, weapons, instruments—and created an image that effectively signified the figure’s gender, status, and social roles. Tomb figurines of this kind were numerous and produced in both north and south. In the southern Chu area, such images were often carved from a single block of wood; the outstretched arms and hands were sometimes made separately and attached to the body with dowels. Two extraordinary examples of this type came from Yuli, Tomb 6 at Jiangling (Fig. 1.10). Over half a meter tall, the figures have identical faces and costumes but are posed differently: one stretches both arms out to hold something; the other stands in attendance with her arms folded in front of her body. Arguably among the most naturalistic renderings of human forms in the pre-Qin period, these images realized their representational function by combining sculpture and painting. As we will see, although made of clay and much larger, the Qin figurines from the Lianghun Mausoleum employed similar representational means and were prompted by the same desire to mimic external appearances.

A second mode of representing the body was to render it as a puppet with movable parts. Ancient texts praise such figurines in terms of their “lifelikeness,” but they are lifelike because they imitate the mechanism of the body, not because they represent a clothed appearance. An image of a soldier from Changshan, for example, has a stylized, shield-shaped face. The focus of representation is his complex body, which has movable arms and hands holding a weapon. In another example, two large figures from Baoshan, Tomb 7 in Hubei, each more than a meter tall, the arms were made of separate pieces of wood, and the ears, hands, and feet were carved individually and then attached to achieve more complex gestures (see Fig. 1.12). The sculpted body, however, served only as a mannequin on which to drape silk clothing. The torso below the neck was crudely carved;
only the exposed parts received careful treatment. The head and face are subtly modeled, finely painted, with a mustache and a braid made of real hair attached. Such differences between the face and the body reveal the divergent nature of representation: the face is created as an external surface, whereas the body is conceived as an internal structure hidden by clothing.

Originally dressed in clothes made of fabric, these two Baoshan examples also illustrate a third mode of making the body of a figurine. These “dressed” images are described in ancient texts as “wooden figurines in fine silk.” The robes of the Baoshan figures had decayed long before their excavation, but a considerable number of clothed figurines, dating from the Eastern Zhou to Han, have survived. Often found together with painted figurines in a single tomb, these elaborately dressed examples seem to represent roles considered especially important by those who commissioned them. For example, a well-preserved late Eastern Zhou tomb at Maoshan 慕山 in Hubei belonged to an aristocratic woman who died in her early forties. Among the eight figurines found in this tomb, four were stored in the head compartment above the coffin chamber. About 60 centimeters tall and wearing silk robes embroidered with intricate bird and flower patterns,

these female images differ markedly from those in the side chamber, which are crudely painted and much smaller, about 30 centimeters tall. The head compartment also contained personal belongings of the deceased such as a mirror, a comb, a pair of shoes, and underclothes, as well as fine bronzes and lacquer wares. In contrast, the side compartment held mainly food and pottery vessels. Given the different contexts, the figurines in the head compartment likely represented personal attendants of the deceased, and those in the side compartment stood for household servants.

Constructed about a century after the Maoshan tomb, Mawangdui Tomb 1 provides a more complex case of different types of figurines in a single burial. As mentioned above, most of the 131 figurines found in the various
part of the figurative representation; indeed the development of this type of figure reveals increasing attention to the hidden body. The bodies of the Baoshan figurines are crude wooden skeletons. Some “dressed” figurines from Mawangdui have a well-defined torso, with smooth shoulders and widened hips. This development led to a decisive change around the mid-second century BCE, when a kind of “naked” figure was produced in great quantities (see Fig. 1.14). Unlike all tomb figurines made before and afterward, these earthenware images eliminate the contrast between the face and the body and unify them into a coherent representation. Instead of imitating a figure’s clothed appearance, the artist started from the body inside the clothes to re-create a natural human image. Most impressively, the modeling of these figures demonstrates a keen interest in the physicality of the human body rarely seen in Chinese art: each figure was carefully molded to represent the slightly bulging muscles of the chest, the subtly protruding collarbones, the round buttocks, and the often hidden bodily features such as the navel and sexual organs. The entire surface of the body was smoothed and covered with orange paint to imitate the color of the skin. Traces of fabric on the surface of some figures prove that they were originally clothed. The figurines are now armless; next to each shoulder is a flat circular surface, with a round hole in the center running through the chest. Scholars believe that this hole allowed movable arms to be installed on the body but that, due to the perishable material of the material from which the arms were fashioned, they have completely decayed.

These figurines thus pose a question: Why were their bodies so painstakingly sculpted and painted if they were going to be covered? The answer must be that to the artist and patrons both the body and the clothes were equally important subjects of representation. The naked body had first to be made and then to be dressed, because this replicated life. The making of these figurines thus signified a particular notion of realism based not on verisimilitude but on mimicking a process of fashioning. This artistic goal drew parallels between human and divine creativity. Interestingly, it was around this time that a creation myth to account for mankind was invented in China. The central figure of this myth is Ni Wu 神巫, an ancient deity who attained the status of a “fashioning deity” sometime during the late Eastern Zhou or Han. One of her main merits was the creation of human beings, as described in the second-century text *Explanations of Customs* (Fengzi tong 凤臝通). People say that when Heaven and Earth opened up, mankind did not yet exist. Ni Wu hooded yellow earth and fashioned human beings. Though she worked tirelessly, she did not have enough strength to finish her task, so she drew her cord in a narrow through the mud and lifted it out to make human figures. That is why the rich and the noble are those men of yellow earth, whereas the poor and the lowly—all ordinary people—are the human beings made from the cord’s fibrous.
The imagery of this myth clearly derives from contemporaneous artistic production. But this also means that the making of funerary figurines by anonymous artisans was likened to the creation of mankind by a supreme deity.

Case Study: The Figurines of the First Emperor

Since its discovery in 1974, the “underground army” of the First Emperor of Qin has been the subject of numerous studies. The purpose of this section is not to provide additional information or a new identification for this particular group of sculptures. Rather, I hope to widen the scope of observation to relate this army to other groups of figurines in the same mausoleum. My questions are thus not restricted to the iconography and styles of the individual terra-cotta warriors, or even to the identity and ritual function of the whole army. Rather, I am asking why figurines of different sizes, materials, and construction were made for various sections of this mausoleum; how these figurines were related to the human and animal sacrifices and numerous objects buried in the mausoleum; and, most important, how these figurines signified the posthumous existence of the deceased emperor. In posing these questions, I hope to synthesize in a single case study the various aspects of tomb figurines analyzed in the preceding sections of this chapter.

Archaeological surveys and excavations of the Lishan Mausoleum have begun to reveal the tomb’s general plan (see Fig. 1.1). The necropolis was centered around a “funerary park” (liang yuan 復園) enclosed by two sets of walls. The huge pyramid-shaped tumulus occupied the south half of the inner enclosure. The grave chamber beneath this artificial hill has not been excavated, but Sima Qian 賽若建 recorded that this space had been transformed into a physical representation of the universe for the deceased emperor. A large architectural complex originally stood north of the tomb mound to house ritual offerings presented to the deceased emperor. Surrounding the tumulus were many individual storage pits, sometimes connected to the tomb chamber by underground passageways. Two exquisite bronze chariots, along with remains of some wooden chariots, were found next to one such passageway. A walled area in the northeast corner of this central enclosure contained rows of small and mid-sized tombs, probably for those consorts of the emperor who had borne him no sons and who were forced to follow their lord in death.

In the space between the two walls of the funerary park, archaeologists have found the foundations of several groups of buildings for ritual administrators and imperial servants. The sections on either side of the tumulus are especially rich in archaeological deposits. So far, large pottery figurines found in the west and southwest sections belong to three groups with different functions: administrators of a royal “stable,” keepers of an imperial “zoo,” and a group of twelve standing figures that may represent civil officials. In a large underground structure to the east of the tumulus were found life-size pottery figures wearing only short skirts and making dramatic gestures (see Fig. 1.6). These characteristics led the excavators to identify them as acrobats.

It is clear that the central area within the double walls was the First Emperor’s private domain, and the space between the two walls symbolized his royal palace. Excavations beyond the two walls reveal a different symbolism. Buried in a broad area surrounding the funerary park were replicas of the Qin Imperial Guards and the bodies of courtiers as well as slaves. This area seems to mirror the political institution of the Qin Empire. About 150 meters east of the funerary park lay a straight row of seventeen tombs of considerable size. Their occupants were of noble rank but appear to have suffered unnatural deaths: some of them had been cut into pieces before burial. On the basis of historical records, scholars have suggested that the deceased were likely the princes and ministers executed in 208 B.C., after the death of the First Emperor. Buried near the emperor’s tomb, these men constituted a special kind of human sacrifice. Slightly east of these tombs was a huge underground stable, and further east is the famous underground terra-cotta army. Both sites yielded abundant ceramic sculptures (discussed below). West of the funerary park, almost symmetrically in layout with the seventeen noble burials and the stable on the east
side were the burials of numerous convicts—some of whom had been buried alive.

We can map the distribution of various groups of figurines against the general structure of the Lishan Mausoleum as a way of understanding their meaning. The discussion above has defined a number of perspectives for investigating these images, such as the specific location of a figurine in the mausoleum and its relative proximity to the First Emperor’s burial chamber; the relationship between a figurine and accompanying animals or objects; and the material, size, and method of construction of a figurine.

Based on these factors, we can classify the Lishan figurines into four categories: (i) the two bronze chariots, possibly intended for the emperor’s posthumous journey, (ii) terracotta figurines representing administrators and servants in royal stables and parks, (iii) terracotta figurines representing officials and entertainers, and (iv) terracotta figurines representing generals, officers, and soldiers of the Qin Imperial Guard.

Both bronze chariots have four horses and a driver, but they are of two different types. The first, 235 centimeters long and 152 centimeters tall, is a canopied “lead chariot” with a shallow carriage; the second, 317 centimeters long and 168 centimeters tall, is a closed wagon covered with a broad and slightly rounded roof. The driver of each chariot, also made of bronze, is about half life-size. The sculptors clearly intended to create highly realistic images of contemporary figures. Not only are the drivers’ faces and clothes represented in painstaking detail, but they wear jade pendants and were painted in their entirety. An important feature of the two chariots is their sectional construction. Unlike a conventional one-piece sculpture, each chariot consists of numerous individual parts, made independently and then assembled. Their manufacturing process thus initiated the production of real chariots. The second chariot in particular is a marvel of bronze technology: with 3,464 individual parts and weighing 1,241 kilograms, it renders with amazing accuracy a fully equipped chariot in half size (see Fig. 137).

One puzzling feature of these bronze chariots is the absence of the passenger in the second vehicle, whose unusually extravagant construction and decoration has convinced many scholars that it is a bronze copy of the First Emperor’s private sleeping wagon (juan xiang che 鉈相車). The location of the chariots provides a clue to this puzzle. Unlike the figurines in the other three categories, these two chariots and their drivers were buried right next to the emperor’s grave (see Fig. 135 above). The underground wooden chamber that housed them was attached to the western ramp of the underground tomb and was therefore connected to the emperor’s posthumous home. In terms of material, these two chariots differ not only from the wooden battle chariots of the underground army but also from the chariots buried in the adjacent chambers, which, although elaborately painted, were made of wood and almost entirely disintegrated upon excavation. In fact, it is possible that the bronze and wooden chariots from these adjacent chambers together formed a special procession, stationed immediately outside the First Emperor’s tomb. As mentioned above, ancient tombs were often furnished with a “soul carriage” for the deceased. Oriented toward the outside of a tomb, this carriage symbolized the posthumous journey of the soul to immortal paradise. This orientation was shared by the Qin bronze chariots, which faced west, away from the First...
Emperor’s tomb chamber. It is possible, therefore, that these two chariots and their drivers belonged to a symbolic ritual entourage and that the roofed wagon was the emperor’s “soul carriage.” This hypothesis would explain not only the special location, orientation, typology, material, and decoration of the chariot but also the lack of a passenger. Chinese archaeologists later found a second group of bronze and wood chariots on the north side of the burial mound. Perhaps multiple soil chariots were made. Stationed on all four sides of the tomb, they would have facilitated the emperor’s posthumous journey in any direction.

The second category of figurines includes terra-cotta statues of male figures in either standing or kneeling-sitting postures. Most of these buried pottery figures accompanied real animals, either sacrificed horses in several subterranean stables or deer and birds in an underground zoo. Two large stables and the zoo are located between the two walls of the funerary park, to the west of the tumulus. One stable, 177 meters long, was a wooden gallery containing several hundred horses killed before their burial. The eleven life-size standing pottery figures found inside this stable represent stable administrators of different ranks. Next to this stable, 51 pits in three rows formed an underground zoo. Each pit in the middle row contained an animal or bird, along with a pottery basin to symbolize the continuing supply of food or drink. Fourteen pottery figures, each buried in a square pit two meters deep, were found on either side of the middle row. Clearly representing zookeepers or animal trainers, without caps or weapons, all wear simple clothes. A pottery jar buried with each figure perhaps served as a reminder to feed the animals in the afterlife.

In contrast to the standing administrators of the nearby stable, the zookeepers are considerably smaller and sit on their feet. Pottery figures of similar sizes and postures have also been found outside the walls of the funerary park. Most of them represent stable boys or grooms working in the underground stable on the east side of the funerary park. It is possible that the smaller sizes of these figures correspond to their lower official status, a practice common in many other tombs dating before and after the Qin. According to one estimate, this stable, probably representing a “government stable” rather than a “royal stable,” consisted of 500 to 400 individual pits, each containing a real horse or a pottery groom or a real horse and a pottery groom. As with the zoo, the horses were buried with pottery basins and jars, and the grooms were accompanied by oil lamps and iron tools. These animals and figures were intended to provide services to the First Emperor in the world underground.

The discovery in 1999 of the life-size acrobats—a main component of the third group of figurines in the Lishan Mausoleum—was an important event in Chinese art history, not least because it revealed the astonishing achievements of ancient Chinese sculptors in representing the human body. These Qin figures challenge the conventional view that traditional Chinese art eschewed realistic rendering of the human body. Statue no. 5, for example, represents a powerful male, 177 centimeters tall, standing firmly on bare feet (see Fig. 1.16 above). The sculptor’s mastery of human anatomy and his superb artistry are apparent in his ability to endow the figure not only with a convincing masculine torso but also with an air of inner strength while omitting excessive details. Unlike the stable administrators and zookeepers in the previous group, these acrobats were not buried with real animals but act on their own. Twelve standing figures have recently been found southwest of the burial mound. Among them, eight stand in a row with hands concealed in broad sleeves. The writing implements that they wear have led the excavators to identify them as civil officials.

The fourth category of figurines found in the Lishan Mausoleum consists of the famous underground army. These figures differ from those in the two previous categories in two major ways. First, this group formed a relatively independent unit at the outer rim of the mausoleum district; and second, both people and animals are represented in clay, along with actual battle chariots and bronze weapons. Different theories as to the identity of this army and its components have been proposed. A dominant opinion among Chinese archaeologists is that the four pits together constituted a replica of the Qin Imperial Guards. Pits 1, 2, and the unfinished Pit 4 represented the three branches of the Guards and the smaller Pit 3 was the headquarters of the whole army (see fig. 1.13). Containing some 8,000 life-size statues of men and horses, these are the largest tabulae of tomb figurines ever realized in human history.

The enormous rectangular Pit 1, extending 210 meters east to west and 61 meters north to south, was surrounded by a continuous gallery on all four sides. Within this rectangle, a series of nine corridors running east to west contained a terracotta legion of some 6,000 warriors and 160 horses. This predominantly infantry regiment was complemented by the regiment in Pit 2, which was a unit of war chariots and cavalry. Situated about twenty meters north of Pit 1, this roughly L-shaped pit held some 599 pottery warriors and 472 horses divided into four groups: a square group of kneeling archers on the eastern side, a square group of war chariots in the southern half, a rectangular group of chariots and foot soldiers at the center, and a rectangle composed of mounted cavalry in the northern half.

Because the regiment for Pit 4 was never installed, its identification as the intended location for the Central Army of the Qin Imperial Guards remains hypothetical. Pit 5, the smallest of the four, clearly replicated a military command post where the commander in chief of the underground army was stationed. His war chariot, yoked to four terra-cotta horses,
dominated the center of this irregularly shaped subterranean chamber (see Fig. 1.19). Richly painted with lacquer patterns, this canopied vehicle was attended by four unusually tall guards and flanked by 68 officers. The figure of the commander-in-chief, however, was not found in the pit. Some scholars have hypothesized that he may be the occupant of a large Qin-period tomb fifteen meters to the west of this pit. Another possibility, however, is that this absent commander in chief was the First Emperor himself. As in the case of the empty bronze wagon found next to the First Emperor’s tomb chamber, the emperor’s likeness was beyond representation, and his posthumous existence could be indicated only by his physical absence.

Research on the manufacture of these clay figurines has concluded that each statue was produced by making the head, hands, and torso separately and then joining them. The torso was modeled by hand; the other two parts were fashioned with molds. Whether modeled or molded, each part was first made in rudimentary form and then covered with layers of finer clay, in which were carved the details of hair, beard, eyes, mouths and chins, muscles and tendons, collars, pleats, belts and belt hooks, leg bindings, and armor plates. Enormous effort was expended on imitating.
varying hairstyles, the tissues and ribbons on the armor, and the thousand grooves on a shoe sole. The focus was clearly the outward appearance of the warriors, which identifies their military functions and ranks. Thus, although each figure projects an impression of individuality, its basic function is still to represent a role. On the other hand, by assembling different sets of body components and by hand-finishing the facial features, the sculptors were able to give each figure a distinct appearance. As a result, although these warriors can be classified into several types based on costumes and weaponry, the subtle variations in their faces defy a rigid typology. These figures are therefore “neither realistic portraits of individuals nor idealized types”; rather, the goal was to create “a reality of a different order.”

This goal, as well as the material and context of the figures, reveals their indebtedness to different regional traditions of pre-Qin funerary figurines. As discussed above, in Chu it was customary to bury wooden figurines together with other grave goods, including real objects made of different materials, to form larger representations of social life, such as a chariot stable or a kitchen. The tradition seems to have been continued in the Qin terra-cotta figures, which were also accompanied by real animals, chariots, weapons, and utilitarian objects. As Ladislav Kesner has pointed out in his excellent study of the Qin terra-cotta warriors, these clay figures exemplify one of several modes of representation found in the Lishan Mausoleum. Each mode represents a different degree of figuration—real human and animal sacrifices, clay figures and horses, or bronze figures and horses. Together these real and manufactured images constituted “a reality appropriate for the emperor’s eternal sleep.”

It is also significant that in this posthumous “reality,” those most closely associated with the emperor—his consorts, courtiers, and relatives—were represented by human sacrifices, whereas those of lower status who performed more general governmental and military roles were represented by clay statues. We can trace this convention to some Eastern Zhou tombs discussed above, in which human sacrifices and clay figurines appeared in a single burial context to connote a social hierarchy.

This connection points to the relation between the Qin terra-cotta figures and the northern tradition of Warring States figurines. Most pre-Qin figurines from the north, including those from the predynastic Qin kingdom, were made of clay, but their tiny size allowed only rudimentary representation of faces and costumes. Although continuing the tradition of clay sculpture, the enormous arrays of uniformed terra-cotta figures in the Lishan Mausoleum reflect the First Emperor’s yearning for the gigantic—that is, his wish to have the figures both dwarf pre-Qin terra-cotta figurines and astonish human observers. It is at this juncture that we can link the underground army with Qin politics and the First Emperor’s personal