



PRIMITIVE

LIVING + COLLECTING

ARCHAIC CHINESE HARD STONE ARTIFACTS

Since Neolithic times, the Chinese have been master carvers of jade and other hard stone ritual and decorative objects. Various forms of hardstone artifacts have been dated to as early as 5000 BC, and they performed a ritual function in aristocratic burials as late as the Han dynasty (206BC to 222 AD). The actual meaning of these objects is not clearly known, but they were likely intended to serve as status symbols and help the soul of the deceased on its journey to heaven. Consequently, the enormous labor involved in perfecting their abstract shapes and lustrous finish is striking testimony to these symbols of wealth and prestige, and their more recent production represents the continuity of Chinese culture through the repetition and imitation of revered classical forms.



Chinese Hard Stone Bi (detail)



Chinese Hard Stone Bi

Bi - Round discs with concentric central holes were called “bi” (pronounced bee) and were perfected by the Liangzhu culture. Recent scholarship suggests that these round forms were meant to evoke the “dome of the heavens” or the path of the sun itself. The distinctive bi discs of the earlier Hongshan culture were rectangular with rounded corners, and many had two much smaller holes at the top for suspension. The bi form was the highest emblem of noble status as well as the most important funerary object for guiding the spirit of the deceased to heaven. Today, these perfect objects convey both prestige and a strikingly organic purity of design. To many people, they represent the “circle of life,” a continuous form with no beginning, middle or end, but a distinct center containing the unknowable truths.

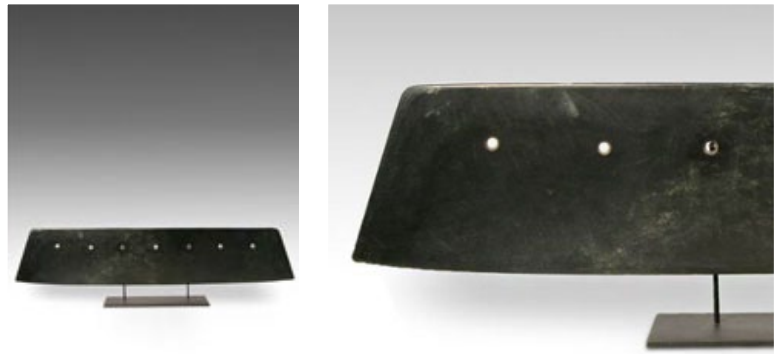
Cong - The impressive, yet enigmatic “cong” is a box-enclosed cylinder form with squared cross-section and a wide circular hole or opening. The cong was also introduced by the Liangzhu culture and is usually ornamented by carved or incised faces on its opposed corners. The form exists both as a short, almost bracelet shape and also in tall, tubular towers of 12” or more in height, which were delineated by uniform “stacking” registers. Workmanship



Chinese Cong Form Vase

and styles vary, with both delicate thin-walled examples and monolithic thick-walled pieces with a relatively small bore. Today, Congs are appreciated for their distinct contemporary form, which is both anthropomorphic and abstract at the same time.

Ceremonial Blades - Large and often imposing blades of polished hard stone date back to stone-age cultures of China, which originally had to rely on stone for utilitarian tools and weapons. Following the development of metal craft, these blades continued to be made as honorific symbols of power and rank. Axes were the earliest blades created and are represented by Yue, Fu, Chan forms. More ornate ceremonial blades, including the Zhang, Ge, and Ko, were often ostentatiously carved and inscribed with mythical and anthropomorphic designs.



Chinese Hardstone Ritual Blade (and detail)

All of these ceremonial stone designs were created in ages past for funerary and ritual purposes and to ease the spirit's transition to a higher realm. In today's home or office environment, they convey both prestige and a strikingly organic purity of design which can easily enhance both traditional and contemporary spaces.