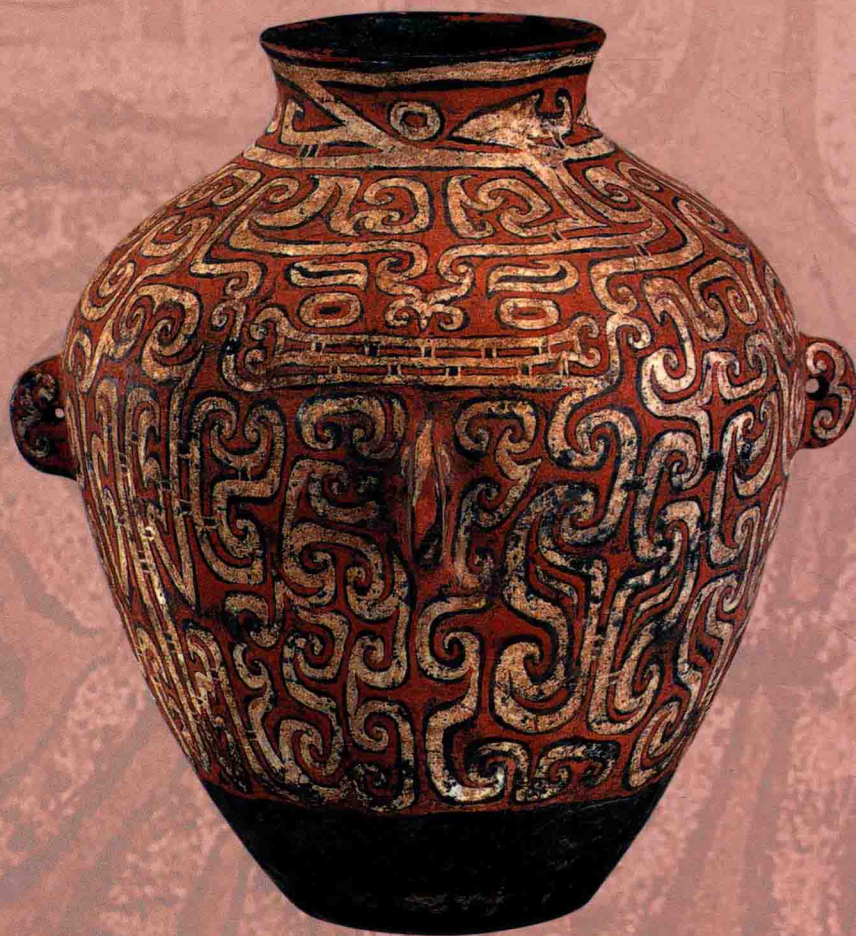


Li Li

CHINA'S CULTURAL RELICS

Unearthed History of 10,000 Years

Translated by Li Zhurun, Li Mingcheng & Pan Yin



CHINA
INTERCONTINENTAL
PRESS

⑥ Cultural China Series

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Foreword

The Chinese civilization is one of the four most ancient in the world. Relative to the Egyptian, Indian and Tigris-Euphrates civilizations, it is characterized by a consistency and continuity throughout the millenniums. Rooted deep in this unique civilization originating from the Yangtze and Yellow River valleys, a yellow race known as the "Chinese" has, generation after generation, stuck to a unique cultural tradition. This tradition has remained basically unchanged even though political power has changed hands numerous times. Alien ethnic groups invaded the country's heartland numerous times, but in the end all of them became members of a united family called "China."

Cultural relics, immeasurably large in quantity and diverse in variety and artistic style, bespeak the richness and profoundness of the Chinese civilization. These, as a matter of fact, cover all areas of the human race's tangible culture. This book classifies China's cultural relics into two major categories, immovable relics and removable relics. "Immovable relics" refer to those found on the ground and beneath, including ancient ruins, buildings, tombs and grotto temples. "Removable relics" include stone, pottery, jade and bronze artifacts, stone carvings, pottery figurines, Buddhist statues, gold and silver articles, porcelain ware, lacquer works, bamboo and wooden articles, furniture, paintings and calligraphic works, as well as works of classic literature. This book is devoted to removable cultural relics, though from time to time it touches on those of the first category.

Far back in the 11th century, when China was under the reign of the Northern Song Dynasty, scholars, many of whom doubled



as officials, were already studying scripts and texts inscribed on ancient bronze vessels and stone tablets. As time went by, an independent academic discipline came into being in the country, which takes all cultural relics as subjects for study. New China boasts numerous archeological wonders thanks to field studies and excavations that have never come to a halt ever since it was born in 1949. This is true especially to the most recent two decades of an unprecedented construction boom in China under the state policy of reform and opening to the outside world, in the course of which numerous cultural treasures have been brought to daylight from beneath the ground.

Readers may count on this book for a brief account of China's cultural relics of eight kinds—pottery, jade, bronze ware, porcelain, sculpture, painting, furniture, and arts and handicrafts articles. We'll concentrate, however, on the most representative, most brilliant works of each kind while briefing you on their origin and development.

Unfortunately, the book is too small to include many other kinds of cultural relics unique to China, for example those related to ancient Chinese mintage, printing and publication of Chinese classics, traditional Chinese paintings and calligraphy. To cite an old Chinese saying, what we have done is just "a single drop of water in an ocean." Despite that, we hope you'll like this book, from which we believe you'll gain some knowledge of the traditional Chinese culture.



Painted Pottery



Among all cultural relics found in China, what we categorize as “pottery” was the first to come into being. Archeological documentation shows that the earliest pottery ware discovered so far was produced about 10,000 years ago. It is in fact a pottery jar found in the Immortal's Cave in Wannian County, Jiangxi Province, south China. The jar is also the oldest in such conditions as to allow a restoration in its entirety.

Origin of Pottery Art

For people in the earliest stage of human development, it is earth on which they lived that gave them the earliest artistic inspiration. That may explain how the earliest pottery was made. The process seems pretty simple: mixing earth with water, shaping the mud by pressing and rubbing with hands and fingers until the roughcast of something useful was produced, placing the roughcast under a tree for air drying and then baking it in fire until it becomes hardened. Before they began producing clay ware, prehistory people had, for many, many millennia, limited themselves to changing the shapes of things in nature to make them into production tools or personal ornaments. For example, they crushed rocks into sharp pieces for use as tools or weapons, and produced necklaces by stringing animal teeth or oyster shells with holes they had drilled through. Pottery making, however, was



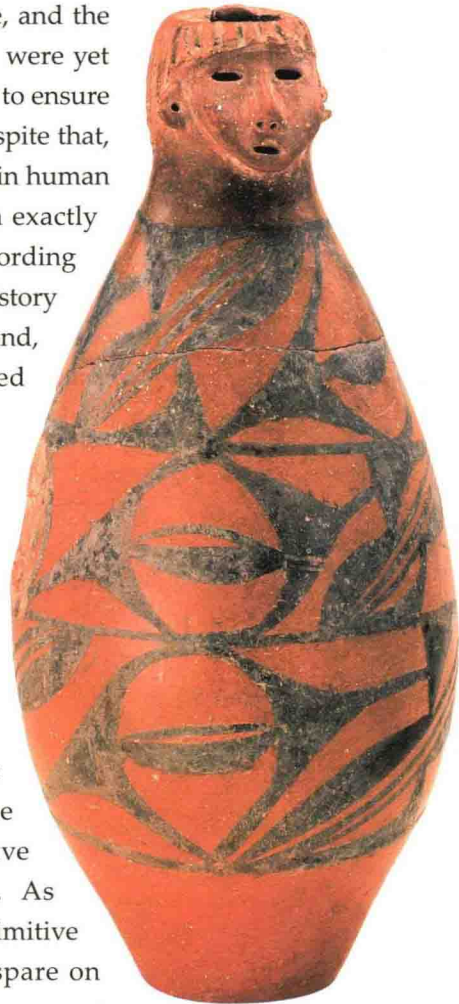
Picture shows a white pottery vessel of the Longshan Culture, which was unearthed at Welfang, Shandong Province.



revolutionary in that it was the very first thing done by the human race to transform one thing into another, representing the beginning of human effort to change Nature according to Man's own design and conception. Prehistory pottery vessels are crude in shape, and the color is inconsistent because their producers were yet to learn how to control the temperature of fire to ensure quality of what they intended to produce. Despite that, prehistory pottery represents a breakthrough in human development. Regretfully, scholars differ on exactly how and when pottery—making began. According to a most popular assumption, however, prehistory people may have been inspired after they found, by accident, that mud-coated baskets placed beside a fire often became pervious to water.

Development of Painted Pottery

At first, pottery vessels were produced just for practical use, as their producers had no time and energy to spare to “decorate” their products for some sort of aesthetic taste. Among the earliest pottery ware unearthed so far, only a few containers have crude lines painted red round their necks. As life improved along with development of primitive agriculture, people came to have time to spare on undertakings other than for a mere subsistence—crop farming, hunting, animal raising, etc. While still serving people's practical needs, pottery became something denoting people's pursuit of beauty as well. Painted pottery came into being as a result,



Picture shows a pottery jar of the Yangshao Culture that existed 5,600 years ago, which was unearthed at Dadiwan, Qin'an County, Gansu Province. The upper part of the jar takes the shape of a human head.



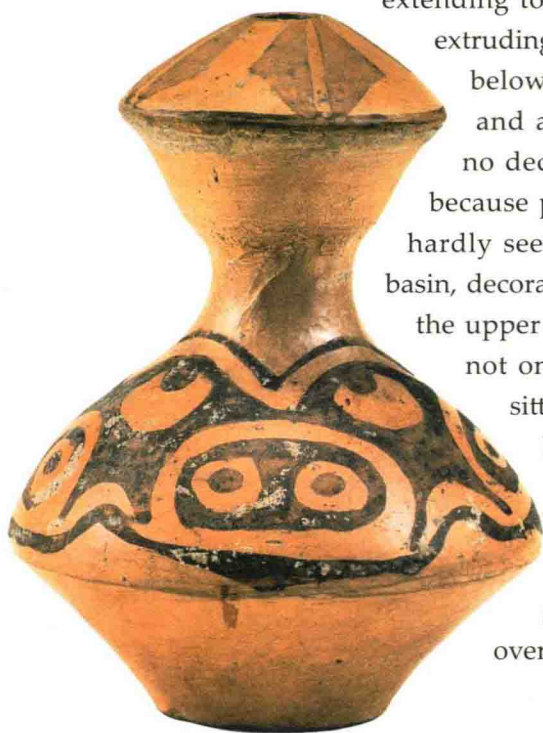
representing a great leap forward in the development of pottery-making. Among prehistoric relics we have found, painted pottery ware are the earliest artifacts featuring a combination of practical use and artistic beauty. Painted pottery—making had its heyday 7,000–5,000 years ago, during the mid- and late periods of the New Stone Age. The most representative painted pottery ware, mostly containers and eating utensils, were produced in areas on the upper and middle reaches of the Yellow River including what is now Gansu and Shaanxi provinces, on which decorative lines and animal figures painted in color are found.

Without furniture with legs, prehistory people just sat on the ground when they ate or met. For this reason, decorative patterns and figures were painted on parts of a pottery vessel fully exposed to view—for example, the part below the inner or outer side of the mouth of a bowl and, in some cases, decorations on the inner side

extending to the bottom. On a basin with an extruding belly, we find decorative patterns below and on the fringe of the mouth and above the curve. In comparison, no decoration is seen below the curve because people sitting on the ground can hardly see that part. In the case of a large basin, decorative patterns are found inside, on the upper side of the inner wall. These are not on the outer wall, because people sitting round the basin cannot see it.

Decorative patterns are found on the outer wall of a jar, mostly on the shoulder or above the belly.

Small bottles in the shape of a gourd have decorative patterns all over them.



Picture shows a pottery pot produced 4,500–3000 BC, which was unearthed at Qin'an, Gansu Province. It features a slender neck and a painted pattern resembling the face of a pig.



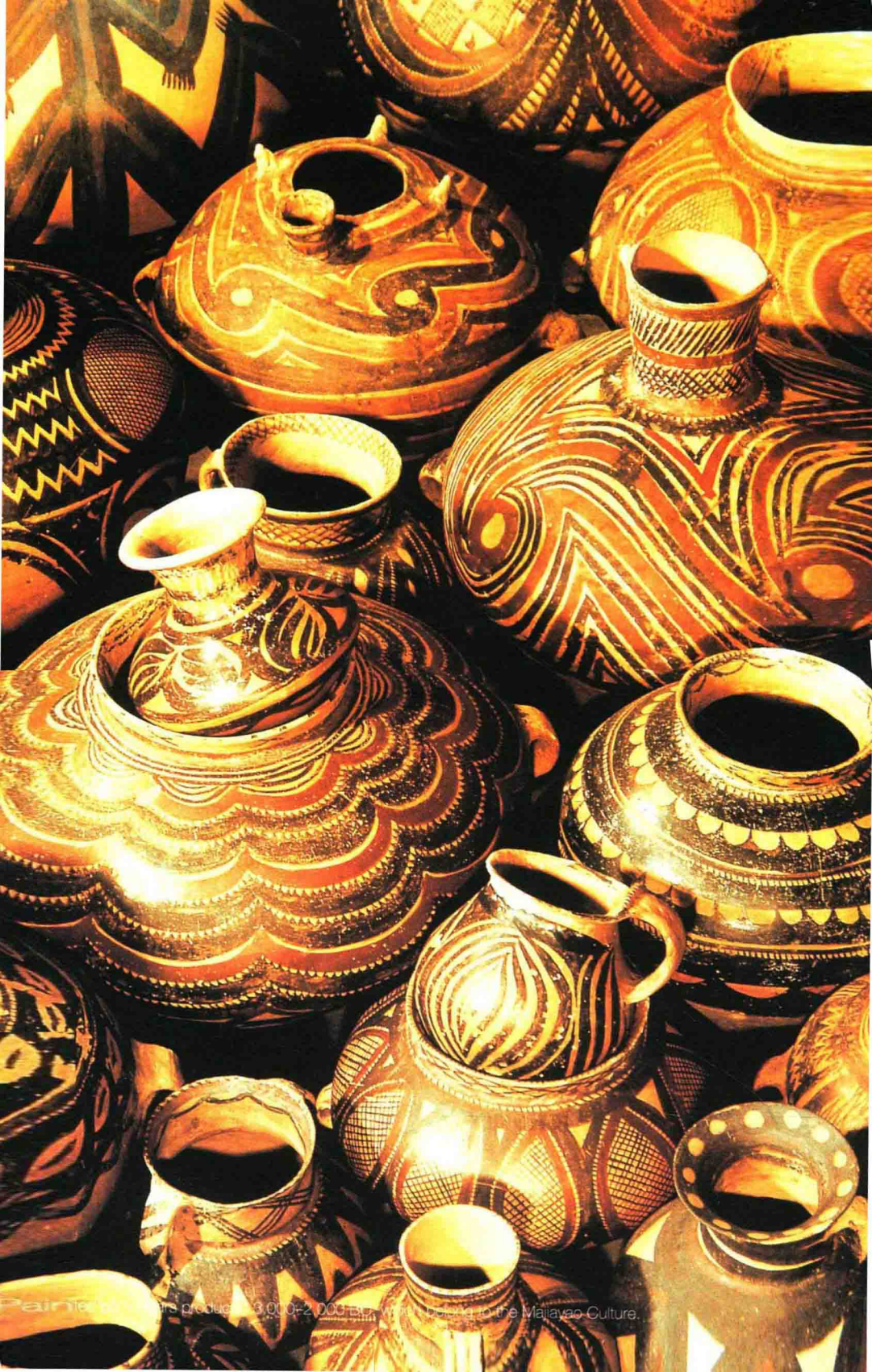
Painted Pottery of the Yangshao Culture

Painted pottery of the Yangshao Culture is recognized as the most representative of the prehistory painted pottery found in China. Back in 1921, ruins of a primitive village were found at Yangshao Village, Mianchi County, Henan Province, which were to be identified as belonging to a highly developed matriarchal society existed in central China. Many cultural relics have been unearthed from the site since then. Included are pottery utensils for daily use, which are valued not only for their cultural importance but also for the workmanship with which they were produced. Earth to be used for making the roughcasts with was rinsed and, for that, most products are of the same color as their roughcasts. To be more precise, products produced with roughcasts of fine mud are red, and those produced with roughcasts of fine mud mixed with fine grains of sand are brownish red. Most decorative patterns were painted in black, and the rest in red. Sometimes a thin layer of red or white coating was applied to the roughcasts, on which decorative patterns were then painted, in order to ensure a greater contrast of the colors. The Yangshao Culture dates back to



Here is a painted pottery bowl of the Dawenkou Culture that existed 4,500–2,500 BC. It was unearthed at Peixian County, Jiangsu Province.





a period from 5,000 BC to 3,000 BC. Primitive sites and ruins found later in other parts of central China are culturally similar to the Yangshao ruins. For that, the Yangshao Culture has been recognized as synonym of the culture prevalent in central China during the matriarchal clan society—in a region with Gansu, Shaanxi and Henan as center while encompassing Hebei, Inner Mongolia, Shanxi, Qinghai, as well as parts of Hubei. In 1957, the so-called “Miaodigou branch of the Yangshao Culture” became known with excavation of a primitive site at Miaodigou in Sanmenxia City, Henan Province, which archeologists believe existed during the transition of the Yangshao Culture to the Longshan Culture. Painted pottery utensils found at Miaodigou were produced around 3,900 BC. Flying birds, distorted bird patterns done with crude lines and frogs in a style of realism are the main patterns on them.

Fish and distorted fish patterns, sometimes with fishing net patterns, characterize pottery utensils found at Banpo in Shaanxi Province. Archeologists believe these represent another branch of the Yangshao Culture, which is earlier than the Miaodigou branch. Images of frogs are painted on the inner side

The Longshan Culture

It is generally referred to the culture of the late Neolithic age in the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River in China. It was named after the town of Longshan when the cultural relics were found at Chengziya in Longshan town, Zhangqiu county of Shandong province in 1928. At this cultural relics site, wheel-made, highly polished black pottery and thin-walled eggshell pottery utensils were frequently found, therefore, it was also called black pottery culture, and was later renamed the Longshan Culture. The Longshan Culture had its influence in the expansive middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River. The cultural connotations in different regions were different, and the origins of the culture were also different, so it was, as a matter of fact, not a single archaeological culture. In terms of the social development, it belonged to the age of patri-clan social age.



Picture shows a painted pottery cup produced 3,000–2,000 BC. Identified as of the Tanshishan Culture, the cup was unearthed at Minhou, Fujian Province.

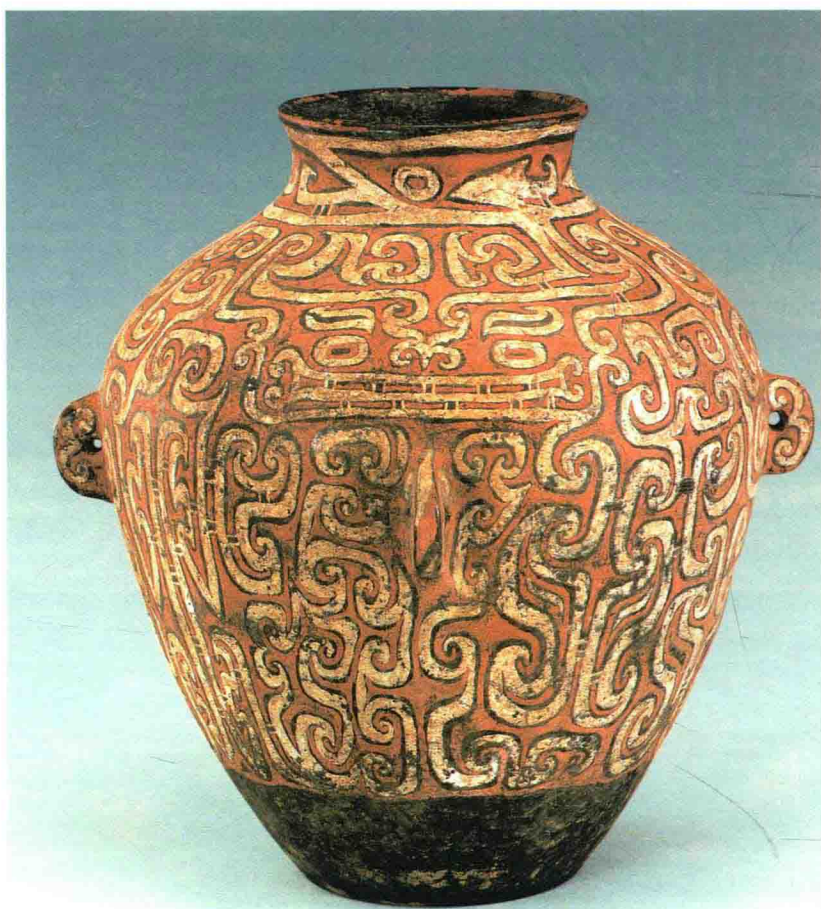


Picture shows a painted pottery pot in the shape of a boat, a relic of the Yangshao Culture that existed 4,800–4,300 BC. It was unearthed at Baoji City, Shaanxi Province.



of pottery basins found at Banpo, and deer are the only animal figures on Banpo pottery ware.

What merit even greater attention, however, are painted pottery utensils found at a place also called "Miaodigou" on the foot of Mt. Huashan in Shaanxi. These are beautiful with strings of decorative patterns painstakingly designed and arranged. Research has led to the discovery that the workmen first used dots to mark the position of each pattern on the roughcast of a utensil, and then linked the patterns with straight lines or curved triangles to form a decorative



A painted pottery jar produced 2,000–1,500 BC. It was unearthed at Aohan Banner (county), Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region.





Produced 4,800–4,300 BC, this pottery basin is one of the cultural relics unearthed at the Banpo ruins of the New Stone Age in Xi'an, Shaanxi Province. The decorative pattern features a human face with two fish in the mouth.

belt vigorous and rhythmic in artistic style. A careful viewer won't miss those lines cut in intaglio or relief, forming rose flowers, buds, leaves and stems. Pottery utensils of the same Yangshao Culture that are found in different places invariably have different theme patterns for their decorative belts. Nevertheless, patterns with rose flowers as the theme decoration are found on pottery of all types, indicating an inherent link of theirs.

Discovery of the Banpo Neolithic Village in 1954 is regarded as an important supplement to studies of the Yangshao Culture. Ruins of the primitive village that existed over a period from 4,800 BC to 4,500 BC are in perfect conditions. Decorative patterns on pottery utensils unearthed from there take the shape of human faces, fish and deer and other animals, and archeologists link them to witchcraft characteristic of primitive religions.

One example is a pottery kettle with the ends bent upward and fishing net-like patterns painted on its body—obviously modeled after a primitive dugout canoe which, archeologists say, expresses

