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Jade *cong*

China, Neolithic period, Liangzhu culture, about 2500 BC

Cong, essentially tubes with a square cross-section and a circular hole, are among the most impressive yet most enigmatic of all ancient Chinese jade artefacts. Their function and meaning are completely unknown. Although they were made at many stages of the Neolithic and early historic period, the origin of the *cong* in the Neolithic cultures of south-east China has only been recognised in the last thirty years.

The *cong* is one of the principal types of jade artefact of the Liangzhu culture (about 3000-2000 BC) around Lake Tai in Jiangsu province. Spectacular examples have been found at all the major archaeological sites. The main types of *cong* have a square outer section around a circular inner part, and a circular hole, though jades of a bracelet shape also display some of the characteristics of *cong*.

The principal decoration on *cong* of the Liangzhu period was the face pattern, which may refer to spirits or deities. On the square-sectioned pieces, like this example, the face pattern is placed across the corners, whereas on the bracelet form it appears in square panels. These faces are derived from a combination of a man-like figure and a mysterious beast.

J. Rawson, *Chinese jade: from the Neolith* (London, The British Museum Press, 1995, reprinted 2002)



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Height: 3.400 cm

Width: 12.700 cm

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Room 33b: Chinese jade