

Gold and Silver Wares of the Song Dynasty

Unearthed from a Cellar in Pengzhou, Chengdu

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While constructing a building on West Avenue in Pengzhou 彭州 in November of 1993, an underground brick cellar was discovered. Staff from the Pengzhou Museum was immediately dispatched and after clearing the site, unearthed a large hoard of gold and silver vessels dating to the Song Dynasty. Below, a select number of these vessels with distinctive shapes are introduced.

I. Structure of the Cellar

The cellar was rectangular in shape, measuring 1.2 meters in length, 0.8 meter in width and 0.9 meter in depth. A layer of bluish bricks lay evenly at the bottom and the four walls were each covered with three sandy red stone slabs. The hoard consisted of more than 340 gold and silver vessels stacked according to size and type, with the smaller vessels on top and the larger ones on the bottom. Similarly shaped vessels were stacked together, with smaller ones inside larger versions. Amidst the hoard, 323 vessels were silver container types and 27 were constructed out of gold.

II. Artifacts

1. Gold vessels

The 27 gold vessels included cups, large and small bowls, hairpins, and what may be hair knot covers. All of the latter were created by soft-working, hammering and punching.

Two bowls take the shape of a chrysanthemum flower raised on a ring foot.

One of these, CPJ:1, measuring 10.4 cm in diameter, is characterized by 32 fluted petals marked on inner and outer sides and by a ring foot engraved on its exterior with a 7 characters inscrip-

tion, reading “shaoxi gaiyuan shun zihao 绍熙改元舜字号” (Figure 1), which includes reference to the date AD 1190.

Another small bowl, CPJ:3, slightly smaller measuring 8.1 cm in diameter, the only one of its kind, takes the shape of five wide foliates on inner and outer surfaces, that end in a wide slightly everted lip of five softly rounded petal tips. The interior is decorated at the center with another multi-level variation of the five-petal motif simulating stamen and pistil, petal and sepal arrangement of an actual flower (Figure 2).

Two small gold worked attachments, represented by CPJ:6 take identical shapes of half a melon fruit with five lobes, delicately decorated with flower sprays and ends simulating on the one end a curling stem and on the other end a stippling of stamens or seeds (Figure 3).

CPJ:4, a deep cup, 7.8 cm in diameter, has an almost straight body with slightly flaring mouth. The cup rests on a ring-foot engraved on the outside with one character “ji 吉 auspicious” (Figure 4).

Another unique cup, CPJ:7, measuring 8.2 cm in diameter, has no foot but rather a round bottom, and takes the shape of a six-petal mallow flower. An inscription was originally executed in ink, approximating seven characters that unfortunately have faded and are now not decipherable (Figure 5).

2. Silver vessels

About 381 silver vessels were found and most of them are container types with their own internal variations. These types include small and large bowls, plates, cups, long-necked vases, short-necked vases, basins, mortar jars, trays, incense burners,



Figure 1. Gold bowl (CPJ:1)



Figure 2. Gold bowl (CPJ:3)



Figure 3. Gold bowl (CPJ:6)



Figure 5. Gold cup (CPJ:7)



Figure 4. Gold cup (CPJ:4)

plum-blossom vases, melon-shaped vases, various cover and lid types, ewers, bowl warmers, spittoons, tea-cup stands, pedestals, etc. Although numerous fragments of silver ware were also found, their original shapes could not be recovered.

Of the ten plum-blossom shaped vases, two are decorated from neck down with ruyi cloud motifs. One, CPJ:34, measuring 19.9 cm tall, is characterized by a short and small circular neck and mouth, emerging out of a broad and round shoulder that gradually attenuates below into a narrow

and concave bottom. The outer neck rim is engraved with the family name “Dong Zhai 董宅,” in addition to a longer incised inscription on the bottom of the vessel. Only two characters may be distinguished (Figure 6). Two other, similarly shaped plum-blossom vases are decorated at their bulging shoulders with the phoenix spirit bird and cloud motif, and of these two CPJ:36 preserves its cover and measures 21.3 cm in height. The base of the latter is incised with “Zhou jia shi fen 周家十分, jun x zhi 君□置,” part of which may be translated “Zhou Family ten parts” (Figure 7).

Out of 23 short-necked vases, four have conical mouths.

An example, CPJ:38, measuring 15.2 cm tall, has an upright neck, a drum-shaped body, and a high ring-foot. Two Dong 董 family name graphs

are incised on the convex bottom (Figure 9).

Ten of these latter vases have globular bodies on narrow ring feet with contracted necks and flaring rims. On the base of one example, CPJ:42, is inscribed “Dong zhai 董宅,” or “Dong Household” (Figure 10). Two other of these vase types, as represented by CPJ:82 measuring 20.5 cm tall, are decorated with raised narrow strings that encircle the exterior of the vessel at four different points. An inscription on the latter, reading “ding mao yu yang xing ke 丁卯鱼羊行可” is incised on the exterior of the ring foot (Figure 8).

Of the 22 bowl types found, seven were bamboo-hat in shape. Representative CPJ:84, measuring 11.9 cm in diameter, has a wide flaring mouth, slanting body, concave foot shaped like a moon cake, and is inscribed “xing fu 行父.” Four examples of a second type bowl are shaped and decorated with large, interlocking lotus petals. CPJ:102, measuring 9.2 cm in diameter is representative (Figure 12). The latter bowl is thicker than usual, with multi-layered petals forming an upright mouth and slightly curved body resting on a ring foot. The negative design of the lotus petals appears as a graceful linear pattern on the interior of the bowl.

Ten other bowls, although undecorated, take an identical shape of an inverted tortoise shell. One, CPJ:120, measures 9.4 cm in diameter and sits on a high ring foot. Inside the bowl, at its center is a 26 petal lotus leaf in bas-relief surrounding a tiny central tortoise with extended legs, tail and head. Engraved on the outer edge of the foot are four characters, “Zhang Jia shi fen 张家十分” or “Zhang Family ten parts”, a reference to the 10 bowls belonging to the Zhang Family.

Of the 50 cups, six belong to the type whose body forms an octagonal drum raised on a flaring hollow ring foot.

Representative, CPJ:152, measures 9.1 cm in diameter and at its interior center the octagon gives way to a circular motif of sinuous interlocking floral tendrils. Four other cups are decorated with lotus motifs. Two cups are decorated on their exterior with the image of two high relief dragons emerging out clouds, the latter of which are treated as bas-relief trefoils, as incised small-scale spirals, and as a rim motif of angular thunder motifs.

One of these cups, CPJ:151, measuring 8.5 cm in diameter, has a round lip and mostly upright

body that sits on a circular raised foot. One of the two dragons, affixed to the exterior surface of the cup stretches its head to the top of the lip as if to peer over the edge to partake of the cup contents (Figure 13).

Six other small cups include two that take the shape of a six-lobed pear flower. On one, CPJ:170 with 11.4 cm diameter, the asymmetrically shaped lobes emerge at the lip as softly undulating petals with subtly curving body, and plain, high ring-foot. The center interior is decorated with a gilded raised six-petal flower. The exterior of the foot is incised with an inscription reading “Shi shi zhuang lian 史氏妆奁,” indicating this cup is the property of the Shi Clan (Figure 14). A pair of bowls were created as mallow flower shapes with curving body and high ring-foot.

One, CPJ:172 with a 12.3 cm diameter, is particularly rich, with a body divided into six lobes separated as panels that are outlined with framing bands composed of tiny interlocking lotuses, mallows, pomegranates, peonies, and peaches against a dotted background. In turn, the interior is gracefully enriched by an additional medallion of six petals, raised to a second higher level of relief, with protruding hollow stamen (Figure 15). This refined masterpiece of softly worked silver simulates the real mallow flower.

Of the 32 dishes, there are two types, one characterized by a round rim totaling fourteen in number and the other by a foliate rim, totaling seventeen in number.

A representative example of the first type, CPJ:187, measuring 17.8 cm in diameter, is a shallow dish resting on three short legs formed as V-shaped leaves. The everted rim of this tripod dish is decorated with a square thunder pattern and the flat interior with a circular medallion of interlocking acanthus vines (Figure 20).

Another example of the first type is CPJ:197, a round dish with a shallow curved body on a flat base, 17.2 cm in diameter. The everted rim is decorated with a band of floral scrolls against a stippled background and the interior features the theme of two lions playing with an embroidery ball. An inscription is incised under the lip and reads “Wang jia shi fen ji 王家十分记” “Wang Family ten part ji dishes.”

Amidst the seventeen dishes with foliate rim,



Figure 6. Silver plum-blossom vase (CPJ :34)

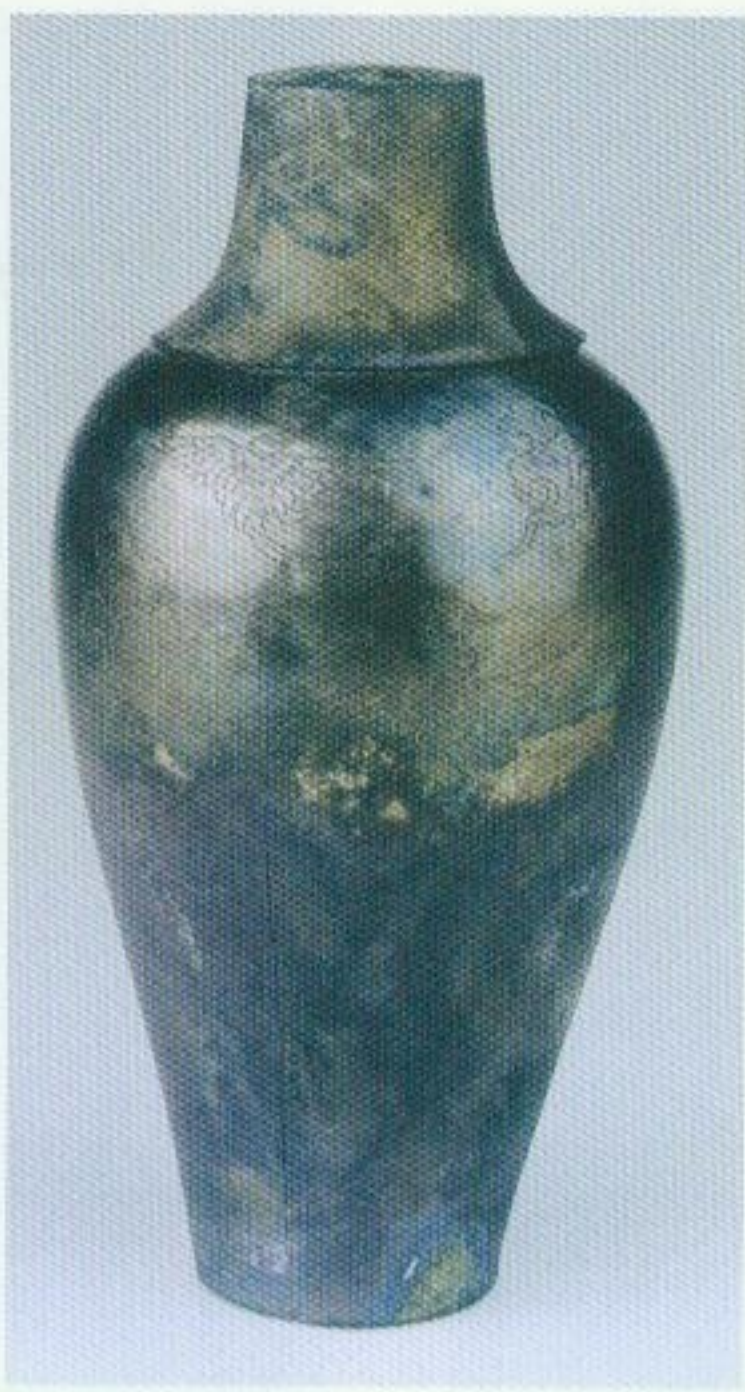


Figure 7. Silver plum-blossom vase (CPJ :36)



Figure 8. Silver vase (CPJ :82)



Figure 9. Silver vase (CPJ :38)

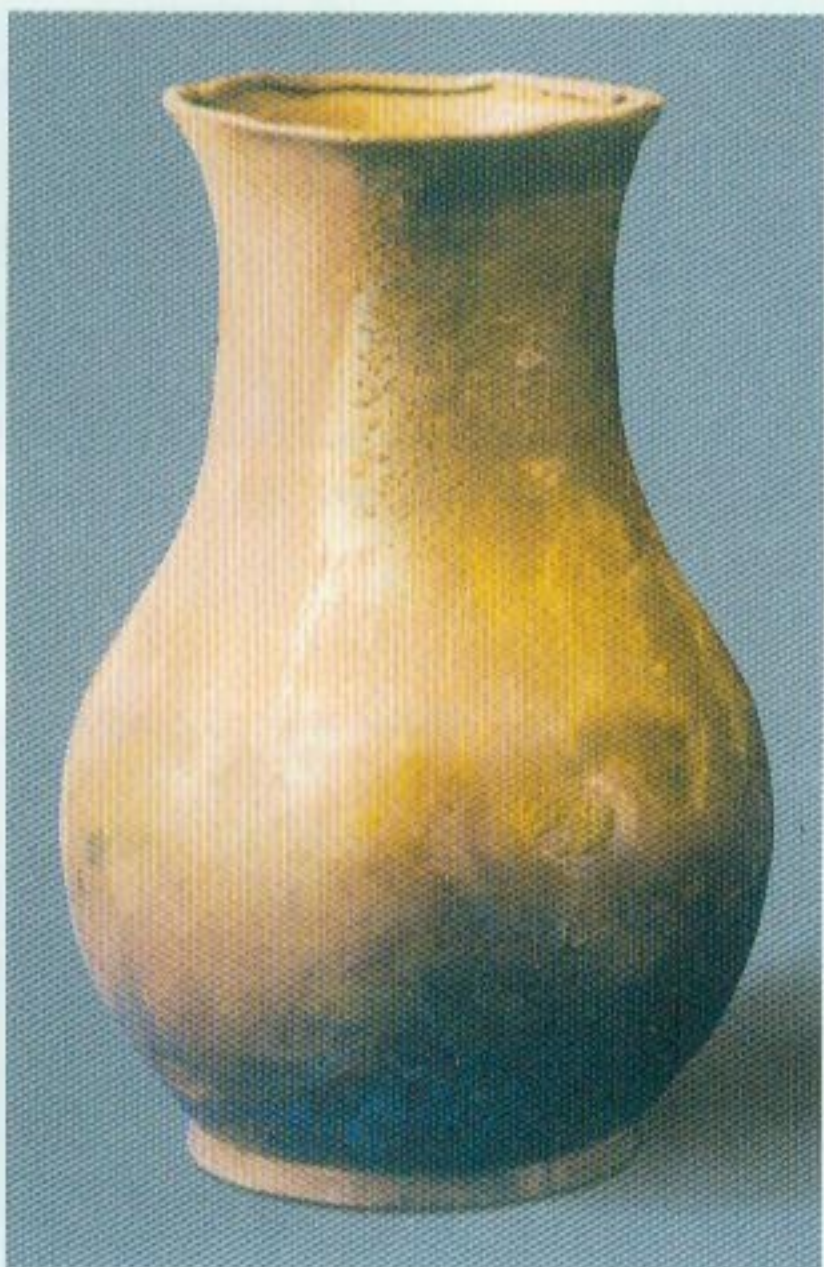


Figure 10. Silver vase (CPJ :42)

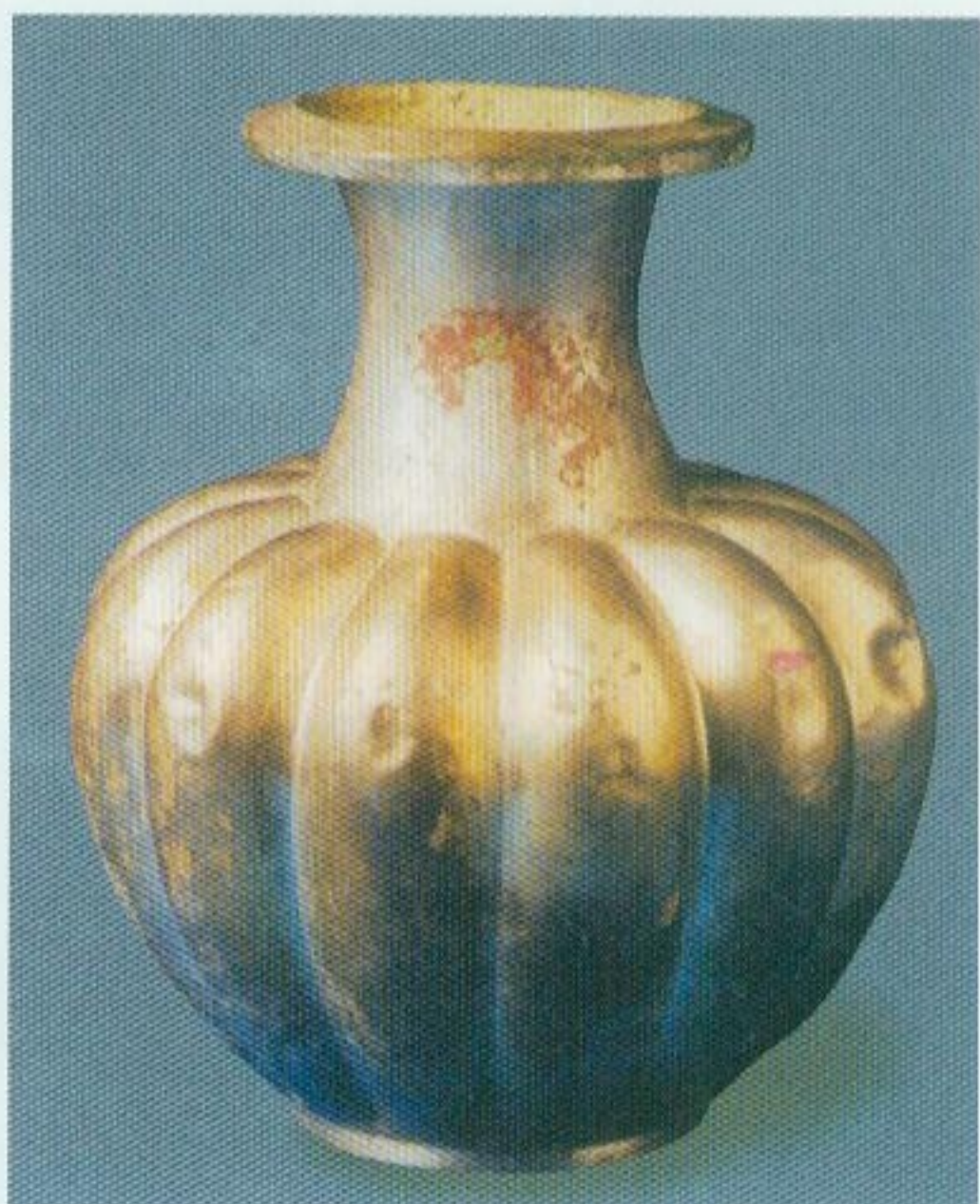


Figure 11. Silver vase (CPJ :232)

ten have exactly ten petals each. All of the latter types are shallow broad dishes with flat base and curved rim, designed to be seen from above.

The everted rim of the dish, CPJ:205 measuring 18.9 cm in diameter is decorated with a band of miniscule interlocking flowers against a ground composed of fish motifs. This type is inscribed on the exterior base with “gong ping yong 公平用” (Figure 16).

Another pair of dishes with foliate rim is represented by CPJ:216 with a 18.5 cm in diameter (Figure 17). The latter type takes the shape of a hibiscus flower with ten (rather than the naturalistic five) tenderly shaped petals creating a wave-like outline at the vessel rim. This shallow flat dish type is exquisitely worked as a masterpiece of multiple petal layers three overlapping and gradated in size from the smallest in the interior suggesting



Figure 12. Silver bowl (CPJ:102)

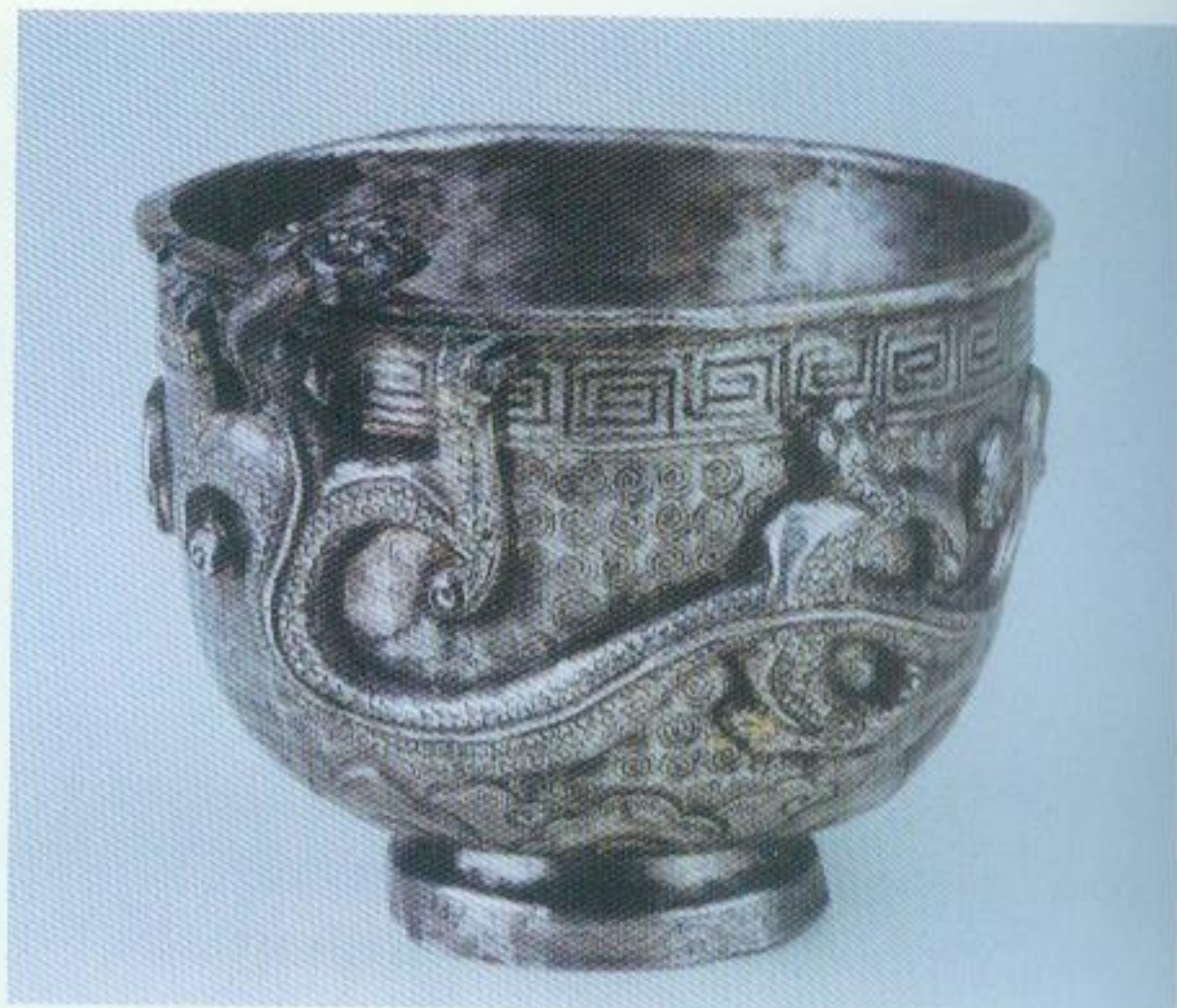


Figure 13. Silver cup (CPJ:151)



Figure 14. Silver cup (CPJ:170)

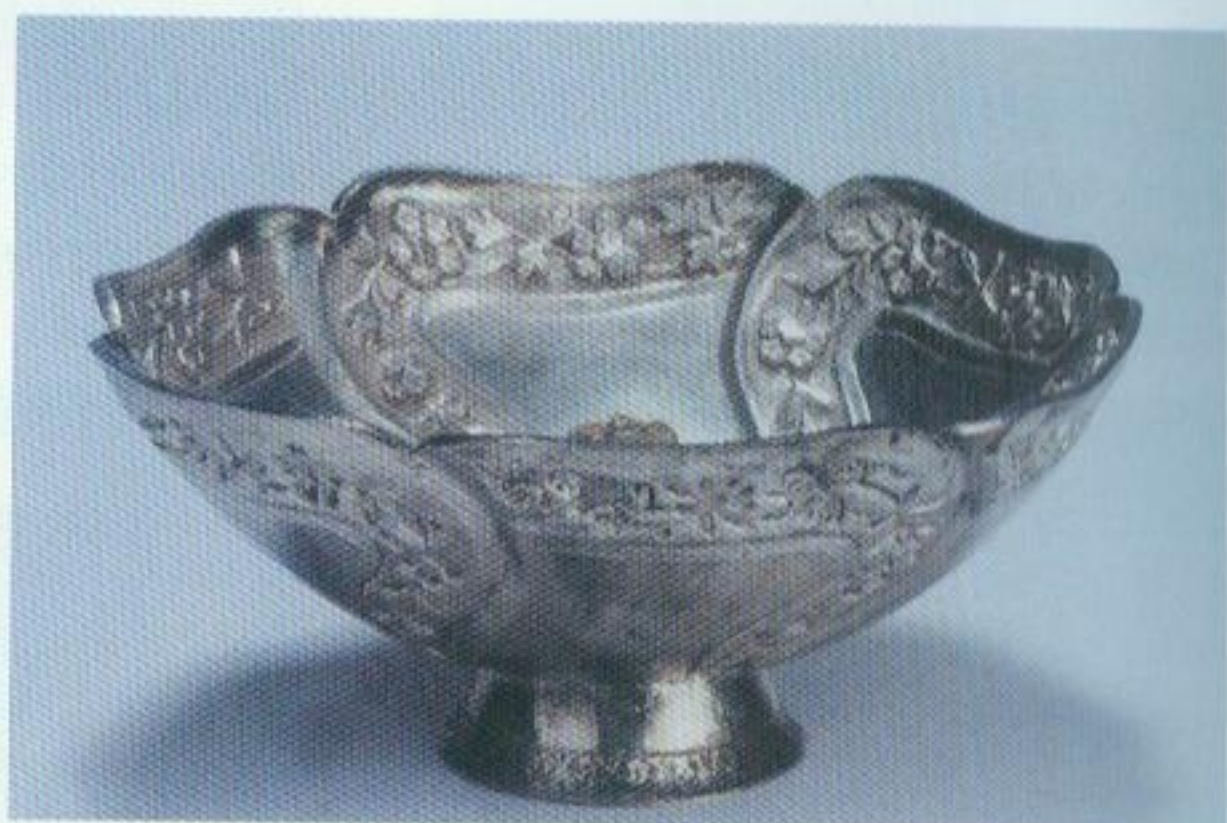


Figure 15. Silver cup (CPJ:172)



Figure 16. Silver dish (CPJ:205)



Figure 17. Silver dish (CPJ:216)



Figure 18. Silver ewer and bowl warmer (CPJ:226)

pistils and stamens to the largest of the two surrounding encircling layers of ten petal shapes at the exterior. Each of these undulating bas-relief layers is carefully incised with delicate groups of multiple hair thin wavy lines. The family name “Dong 董” is inscribed on the interior of the rim and a group of inscriptions on the exterior are illegible.

Nine sets of tall pouring ewers and bowl warmers vary in terms of the shape of their warmer mouth and the ewer shoulder.

Five sets of ewers with angular shoulders, lotus shaped covers, and warmer bowls with edges that are rectangular in edge outline, were identified.

The tall ewer, CPJ:226, measuring 31.6 cm tall is representative (Figure 18). The cover is formed out of a lotus with three layers of petals supporting a standing elephant and below attached to a straight neck. The ewer has an upright rim, sloping shoulder, bulbous body, false ring foot, a

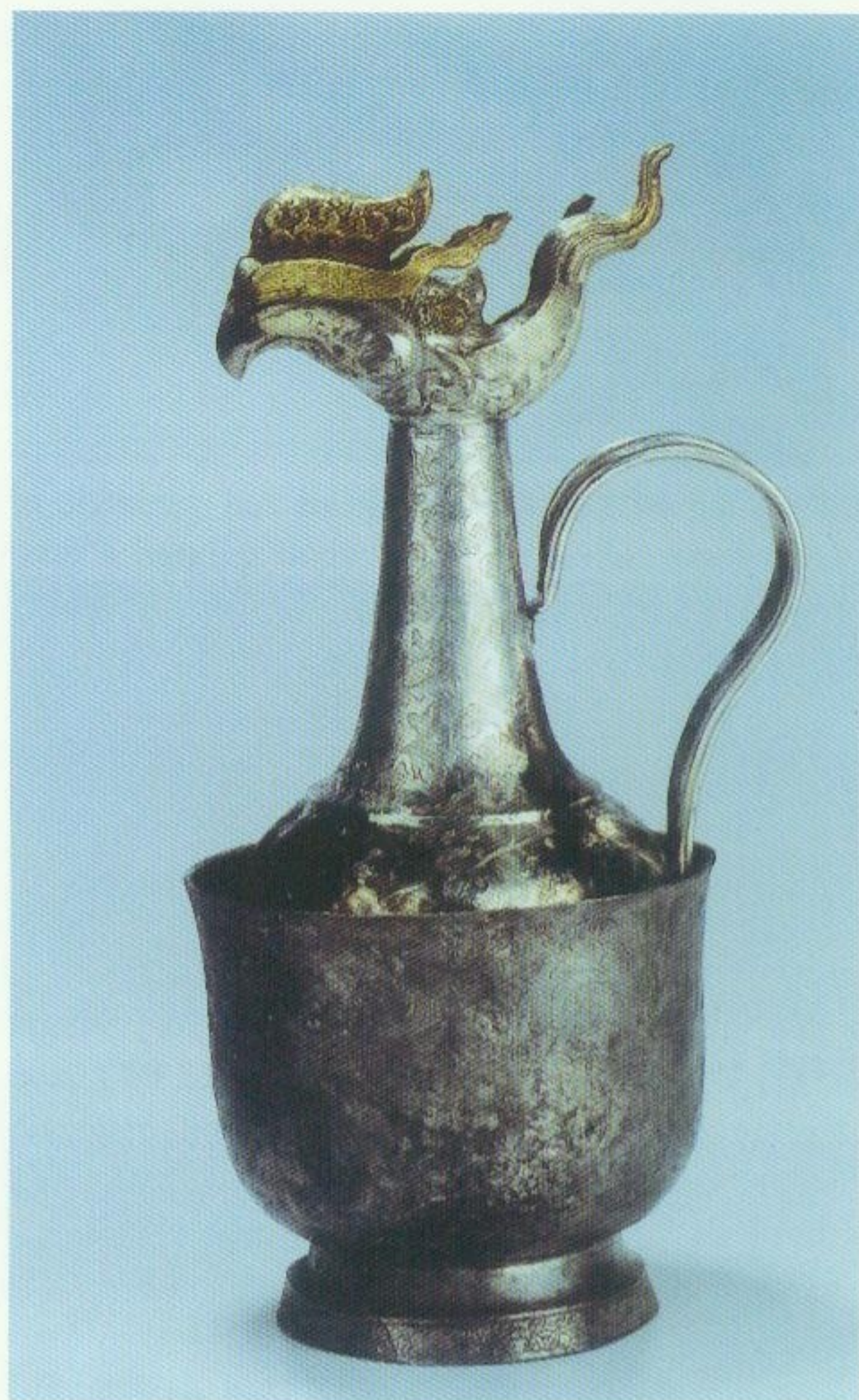


Figure 19. Silver ewer and bowl warmer (CPJ:224)

gently bowed narrow spout and elegantly arched handle in the shape of a question mark. Both of the latter emerge from the middle of the bulbous body, although the opposite, upper part of the handle is attached at the edge of the neck. The exterior of the vessel is decorated with bands filled with different types of designs or, varying from pendant leaf shapes, interlocking serpentine dragon bodies, upward leaf shapes filled with small animal masks and flanked by cloud wisps, to linear cloud scrolls. The exterior of the rim is inscribed in three parts, with “chong pu 充浦” “Luo zu yi lang 罗祖一郎” and “X si guan X X 司官 司官.”

One unique set of ewer and warmer bowl has matching imagery of the supernatural *feng* bird amidst multiple flowers. The ewer, CPJ:224, 31 cm in total height, is crowned by a lid in the shape of the head of the *feng* bird. The latter fits tightly

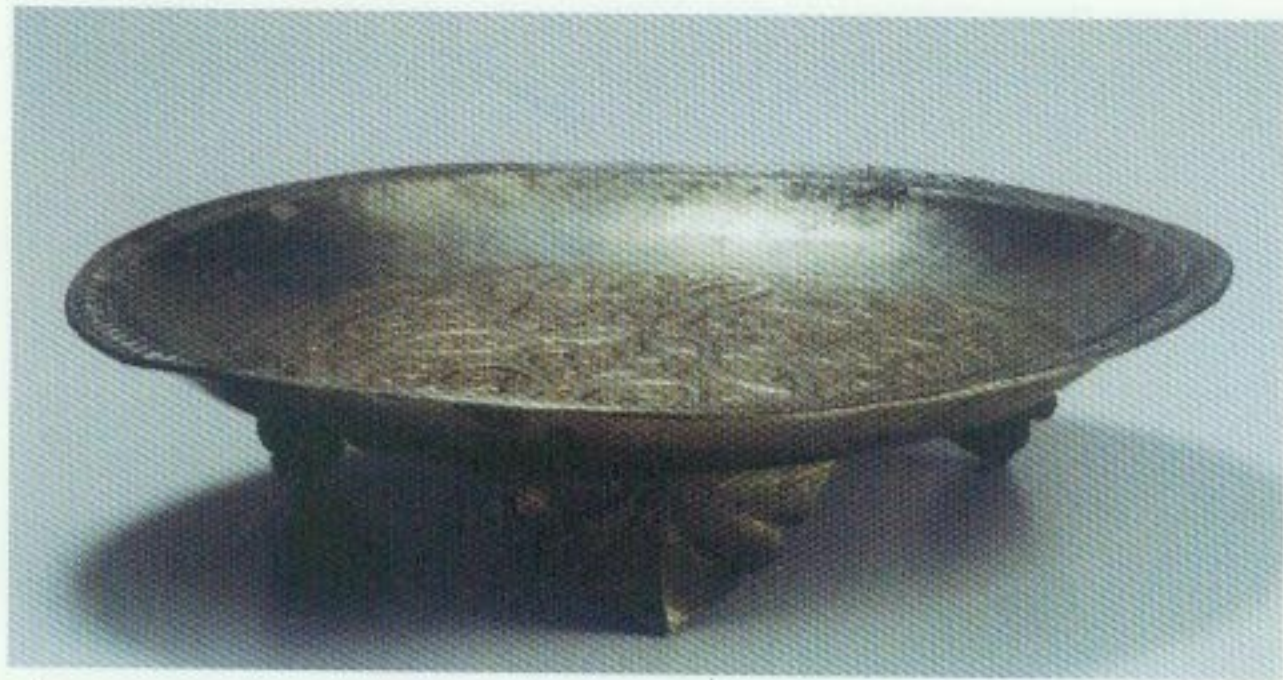


Figure 20. Silver dish (CPJ :187)



Figure 21. Silver cup-stand (CPJ :233)



Figure 22. Silver cup-stand (CPJ :314)



Figure 23. Silver cup-stand (CPJ :343)



Figure 24. Silver incense burner
(CPJ:319, 322, 324)



Figure 25. Silver cover of incense burner (CPJ :327)

over an upright rim, and crowns a long contracted neck, that gives way to a generous drum like body and a slightly convex flat foot. The narrow hollow handle is strongly arched and the spout is

mostly missing. There are three incised inscriptions under the rim, one of which reads “Wang jia shi fen 王家十分,” or “Wang Family ten parts,” implying that the Wang Family owned ten of these ewer types. The body is decorated with a dense rich pattern of double *feng* birds and interlocking flower types. The matching warmer bowl with,

slightly everted rim, CPJ:218, is 13.6 cm tall with a mouth stretching 15 cm. The latter example is covered with the same delicately incised double feng bird and flower complex as on the ewer. Flower types in the complex vary from chrysanthemum, mallow, lotus and hibiscus types. The warmer bowl is gilded, tall, mostly upright in shape, and rests on a high ring-foot (Figure 19).

One gilded silver vase, CPJ:232, measuring 10.5 cm in diameter, has a melon shaped body and two similar incised inscriptions, reading “Ji qing hao 吉庆号” on the exterior of the foot and on the underside of the bottom. The vase has a flaring rim, contracted neck, broad shoulder and ball-shaped body with twelve lobes that rest on a narrow ring foot (Figure 11).

Of the 90 extant cup-stands, 23 are in the shape of a mallow flower. Representative is CPJ:233, 10.5 cm in diameter with an upper part taking the shape of a cup, with slightly flared mouth and upright body. The cup is attached to a six-petal mallow shaped plate with high and hollow ring-foot. Various inscriptions are incised on the exterior of the foot and interior of the plate, one of which reads “de hao 德号” (Figure 21).

63 other cup stands are circular in shape. Representative is CPJ:314, 6.1 cm in diameter with the plate 20.2 cm in diameter. A circular cup with pinched neck rests inside a circular plate that is raised on a high and wide ring-foot. The base of the ring foot and edge of the plate are decorated with bands of vine scrolls. A single character “Qi 齐” is incised on the interior of the foot (Figure 22).

There are two cup-stands in the shape of symmetrically broad pairs of tree leaves, delicately worked with hair-thin incised veins symmetrically extending on parallel sides of the leaf. One example is CPJ:343, varying between 3.3 to 4.3 cm in diameter; it is an elliptical diamond shape marked at the center by an oval hole to contain a cup. The bottom is convexly bowed. The oval hole is inscribed with the family name “Dong 董” (Figure 23).

Ten incense burners are known and all sit on high ring-feet. Incense burners usually include three parts, the pedestal at the bottom, the plate in the middle and the cover on the top. CPJ:319, 25.2 cm in diameter is composed of a cover in the shape

of a lotus knob, a contracted neck, broad shoulder, arched belly and upright rim. The plate is divided into ten petal lobes and each petal is decorated with three different types of flowers.

CPJ:322, 48.6 cm in diameter, although incomplete in lacking a middle plate, is square in shape. The body is decorated with lotus flowers and lotus leaves.

CPJ:324, with a ring-foot, measuring 38 cm in diameter, has an upright rim that curves inward over a bulging body. The lip curves outward into a mallow shape with ten petal shapes and two symmetrical “U” shape ears, affixed at the top. The body of the burner is decorated with cloud scrolls, white cranes, and lotus petal designs. The family name of “Dong 董” is incised on the exterior of the rim and elsewhere on the interior of the foot and rim (Figure 24).

Other incense type containers, totaling four in number, are composed of two parts, a cover and a box. CPJ:327, with a cover measuring 27 cm in diameter slightly curves with sides that are upright. The exterior of the latter cover is decorated with the double feng spirit bird amidst different types of flowers, whereas the box is divided into five semi-circles and an all-over pattern of floral sprays (Figure 25).

III. Conclusion

The majority of the gold and silver objects unearthed from this cellar are similar to Song Dynasty examples unearthed elsewhere from hoards buried at Mianyang 绵阳, Deyang 德阳, Pingqiao 平桥 of Suyang 溧阳 of Shaowu 邵武 counties. They are also comparable to artifacts unearthed from tombs that can be dated on the basis of historical data. For example, the spittoon from the tomb of Zhang Tongzhi 张同之 of the Southern Song Dynasty at Huangyueling 黄悦岭 in Jiangpu 江浦 County and the tall ewer from Xu Jun 许峻 tomb of the Southern Song at Chayuanshan 茶园山 in Fuzhou 福州 are identical to those found in the Pengzhou cellar, thus indicating that the Sichuan 四川 hoard dates to a similar era of middle and late period of the Southern Song Dynasty. The inscription of “Shaoxi gaiyuan 绍熙改元” on the chrysanthemum bowl from the Pengzhou cellar furthermore is a historical reference to the first year of the reign era “Shaoxi,” dating to AD 1190.

Based on the latter date and comparable data from tombs, we may conclude that most of the Pengzhou vessels date to comparable periods of middle Southern Song, while others may date back to the late Northern and early Southern Song.

Why these vessels were buried in cellars is most likely related to the historical situation which involved fighting that broke out between the Song Chinese and Mongolians who, as invaders forcibly ruled in north China during the Southern Song period. Based on the variety of inscriptions incised on the vessels, it is evident that they derive from different places, mostly from the south but also from local Sichuan. They were produced for both government officials and private residents. Most of them belong to a family named "Dong," and their ancestors from Tianshui 天水 of Longxi 陇西 commandery in northwest China. A few were owned by a family named "Qi." The complex and various types and shapes of these gold and silver vessels, the rich stylistic variety of some 480 inscriptions, and working technique are valuable for understanding gold and silver wares of Song Dynasty China.

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Notes: The original report was published in *Cultural Relics* 《文物》 200.8: 4-20, 10 figures and 20 color plates, signed by Xie Tao 谢涛, Ding Wumin 丁武民 and Zhou Jing 周静. The English version is abridged in Chinese by Xie Tao, translated by Xin Hua 新华 and revised by Elizabeth Childs-Johnson 江伊莉.

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