

Brief Tour Planning Worksheet for Group 4 – Arts of China up to 1368 CE

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INTRODUCTION:

Welcome to the Minneapolis Institute of Art, or "Mia" as we call it. Today we will be on a tour titled "Dead Serious: Various Beliefs about the Afterlife", focused on exploring objects from ancient China. You will see objects that are small and fragile, some that are larger and sturdy, and one that is very large and definitely not fragile. In some cases, we know a lot about the culture that produced the art; in other cases, we know very little about the culture that produced the art. We believe that all the cultures involved had some kind of belief in the afterlife -- either the objects were found in tombs or they are linked to a religion or philosophy that had specific ideas about the afterlife.

A reminder: please do not touch the objects or their glass cases, so that others may be able to enjoy them for years to come. Please turn off your cell phones. If you decide to back up to make room for others, please look first so you don't bump into someone or something.

Now, we will begin our tour in the gallery behind me. It is not as dark as a tomb, but perhaps it is as small as a tomb. As we walk into this gallery, imagine that you are walking back in time 5,000 years.

ORGANIZATION:

1. **Stem Cup, 2500-2000 B.C. Unknown artist, China, 2000.156.1**
2. **Buddha, late 6th century Unknown artist, China, 2000.207**
3. **Funerary Mask of a Young Woman, 916-1125, Unknown Artist, 2002.220.1**
4. **Wellhead, 1st-2nd century Unknown artist, China 2000.146A**
5. **Zither (*Ch'in*), 5th century BCE Unknown artist, China 2002.8**
6. **Bi Disc, 1100-771 BCE Unknown artist, China 50.46.378**
7. **Tomb Retinue Dignitary, early 8th century Unknown artist, China 49.1.1, 10**
8. **Sarcophagus of Prince Yuan Mi, 524 Unknown artist, China 46.23.1A-D**

Transitions:

Transition between 1 and 2:

After seeing these very fragile ceremonial cups found in Neolithic Chinese tombs, we know the culture was serious about attending to the eternal needs of the deceased. Now we are going to look at a much larger and sturdier Chinese sculpture that reflects a later belief of the afterlife.

Transition between 2 and 3:

Now we know that the calm and trance-like look on the Buddha's face represents the serenity of achieving nirvana. Next, we will see an elegant face on a golden mask, and I'll ask you to think of how it is similar or different to the Buddha.

Transition between 3 and 4: We have seen how the Khitan funerary mask and tombs demonstrate a shift in thinking and the adoption of new beliefs in the afterlife once they were exposed to the cultural beliefs of the Song Dynasty. Our next stop is a gallery filled with fascinating tomb sculptures from the Han Dynasty, when the Chinese left a clear record of their beliefs.

Transition between 4 and 5:

The Chinese created *ming qi*, like this wellhead, to comfort and placate the spirit of the deceased with items they would need to enjoy the afterlife. But how could the living make music or entertainment available to the deceased? Let's move to the next item to find out.

Transition between 5 and 6: Music definitely brought joy to the lives of the ancient Chinese literati and they wanted to continue to experience that music and joy in the afterlife. Today we have access to music on the radio, on our phones and computers, and on Compact Discs. Let's look next at an object shaped like a CD that was found in an ancient Chinese tomb.

Transition between 6 and 7:

So while the symbolism of the Bi Disks may be a bit of a mystery in Neolithic times, we know they had some significance for the afterlife since they were buried with people of status. This burial practice continues in China thousands of years later—but now we'll see the tomb objects have become much more colorful and complex.

Transition between 7 and 8:

So these colorful tomb characters really give us some insight into the values of Chinese society during the Tang Dynasty. We're now going to wrap up our tour by exploring the messages on an actual artifact that held the body of a prince!

CONCLUSION:

This concludes our exploration of life after death exhibited in these 8 ancient Chinese masterpieces. Each of these wonderful works of art shows the serious commitment to craft in ancient China and gives us some clues to the various belief systems in different eras. We have seen objects expertly made in a variety of media: ceramics, bronze, stone, wood, lacquer, silk and jade. Some were funerary objects to assist the deceased in the afterlife while others served as objects to contemplate our place in this life and the next. As you leave the museum today, I invite you to think about how your personal beliefs about life after death compare to what we've seen today. Thank you for coming to Mia and I hope we will see you again soon!