

## **A Study on Copper-inlaid Bronze Vessels of the Eastern Zhou Period**

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### **Abstract**

In the middle 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE (corresponding to the middle of the Spring and Autumn period), bronze vessels with inlay decorations began to flourish. Copper, gold, silver, turquoise, malachite, and glass made bronze vessels more colorful and stunning. Copper, however, was the first metal used in inlay decorations. The reddish hue of copper contrasted with the color of bronze, creating a new visual effect and turning bronzes from monochromatic in the Shang and Western Zhou period to a more polychromatic “inlay style.” Through archaeologically excavated and museum pieces in collections, this study first classifies copper decoration into five groups and arranges the decoration in chronological order for each group. Next, the five groups are connected to three inlay techniques to discuss their development. Finally, the political and social meaning of copper-inlaid bronze vessels is argued. Copper inlay can be viewed as symbolic, an innovative style, and a technique patronized by high-ranking elites that paralleled antiquarianism in the “ritual restructuring,” further triggering the inlay style of the Eastern Zhou period.

**Keywords:** bronzes, copper inlay, Eastern Zhou period, cast-inlay technique, ritual restructuring