

CAST-IRON STOVE

Provided with a chimney at the round end, five cooking-holes, and a platform in front of the fire-chamber. The four feet are in the shape of conventionalized elephants. In type and style this iron stove corresponds to the Han pottery and Han bronze mortuary stoves, and was discovered in 1909 in a grave north of Hien-yang, Shensi Province, together with a Han porcelanous vase. An inscription in front, consisting of six raised characters (now partially effaced), reads, "*Ta ki ch'ang i hou wang,*" which means, "Great felicity! May it [the stove] be serviceable to the lords!" This is a typical formula of the Han period, and the characters are in Han style of writing. Although this stove could have actually been used, this solemn formula hints at a purely ceremonial purpose and at a high dignitary in whose grave the stove was interred.

The iron core is entirely decomposed, restorations had to be made to hold the parts together, and the whole had to be braced on wooden supports.