

Taoist mythology provided new subject matter.

The Han dynasty was the period of greatest strength of the Taoist school, which produced much of China's rich mythology. Jade, because of its traditional association with death, became incorporated in these myths. Eating jade was believed to produce the powers of flight and invisibility and to grant immortality. Jade trees and flowers grew on the Isles of the Immortals, and a rabbit lived in the moon pounding out the pills of immortality from jade. Alchemists tried to distill from it the elixer of everlasting life. Dragons, spirits of the air, appeared on jade pi disks.

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The jade tablet was a symbol of authority and may be the Han reconstruction of the ancient ritual blades, which by that time were known only through written sources. The decoration is a schematic representation of the Big Dipper.

The back of the bronze mirror portrays a cosmological diagram: the central knob, which would be attached to a stand, represents the "world mountain" which supports heaven and earth. The knob is surrounded by the square of the earth, which is in turn surrounded by the circular heaven and the regions of the unknown, inhabited by dragons and spirits.

Specimens left to right:

Tablet	183490 (R) - <i>neg#s 71650-1</i>
<u>Pi</u> with dragon	182876 (A) - <i>neg# 401678</i>
Bronze mirror	117291 (C)
<u>Pi</u> with dragon	116583 (C) - <i>neg#s 35894, 74132-3</i>
Old man	182892 (A) - <i>neg#s 57651, 74177</i>
✓ Pottery horses	127151 <u>1&amp;2</u> (D)

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