

不周之環

《說文解字》曰：“玉，石之美者。”遠在新石器時代，我們的祖先已鍾情於美麗的石頭，用

玉石來製造飾物器皿；時至今日，我們仍視之為貴重器物。國人用玉的歷史，源遠流長。為尋根溯源，考古學家多年來不斷發掘考證、研究鑑定。出土自興隆窪遺址的玉玦*，正是考古學家孜孜不息、努力耕耘的成果。

《廣韻》載：“佩如環而有缺。”《白虎通》又曰：“玦，環之不周也。”玦是古代一種環形而有缺口的飾物，在新石器時代主要用作耳飾。興隆窪遺址的玉玦，是迄今所知世界最早的玉耳環，質地緻密，屬岫岩閃石玉，是當時硬度最高的玉材。玉玦呈青黃色，有考古學家認為，玉色與內蒙古草原的顏色接近，故古人可能以此為美，在選石造器時也多挑顏色相近的玉材，裝扮自己，美化生活，這反映了古人崇尚古樸自然的審美觀。

玉玦的造型分圓環形及圓柱形兩種，當中又以圓環形居多。出土的環形玉玦中，直徑最小的只有2.5厘米，最大的為6厘米，而最受注目的是興隆窪130號墓出土的一對玉玦。這對玉玦備受重視，是因為學者發現，玉玦的手工極為規整，大小、重量完全一致，兩者皆為直徑4.77厘米，內徑2.1厘米，重23克，分毫不差！究竟在八千年前，我們的祖先如何造出一對如此精巧細緻的玉

玦？他們到底採用什麼工具？何種技術？要解答這些問題，仍有待考古學家進一步發掘與研究。

興隆窪文化為中國玉耳環史寫下第一章。出土的玉玦皆光素無紋飾，通體磨製光滑，形制簡單，呈現樸素古拙、簡潔淡雅的風格。隨着國人製造玉器的技術不斷提升，玉玦發展到後來，裝飾紋樣趨於多樣化，雕工越加精細，造型更見優美，用途也由耳飾發展成為身上的佩飾。

據《史記·項羽本紀》所載，范增曾於鴻門宴上“數目項王，舉所佩玉玦以示之者三，項王默然不應”。范增向項羽使眼色，並舉起所佩玉玦，三次向他示意，盼項羽能當機立斷，除去劉邦，免留後患。此段記載除反映玦飾用途的演變外，也顯示“玦”的涵義有所延伸：因時人以“玦”與“決”同音，而引伸出決斷之意。《白虎通》云：“君子能決斷則佩玦”，可知時人佩玦，除了作為裝飾之外，也是對自身遇事果斷的一種提示或要求。

* 一九八三至一九九三年間，考古學家在內蒙古興隆窪發現聚落遺址，並發掘出一批珍貴文物，以該遺址為代表的文化因此命名為“興隆窪文化”。經考證，興隆窪文化距今八千二百至七千二百年。早前香港中文大學中國文化研究所曾舉辦“世界最早玉耳環”展覽，展出一批興隆窪玉玦。



PAPYRUS & QUILL



A to Z

Without pen and paper, reference to shapes can sometimes be quite brain-racking. Of course, we shall have no difficulty in describing regular shapes because our vocabulary already contains words like “circle”, “rectangle”, “triangle”, “oval” and “diamond” (or “rhomboid”) for the basic forms. If these are not enough, we still have “kite”, “trapezium”, “almond”, “crescent”, “star”, “hexagon”, “octagon” and so on. But when it comes to irregular shapes, it might be a good idea to make use of letters of the alphabet, since they are common visual references.

One illustration is “T-shirt”. We all know what it is. It is so called because the garment, when spread flat, resembles the letter “T”. When we order a T-bone in a steak house, we expect to be served with a steak containing a T-shaped bone with meat on each side. By the same token, a box of W-fold tissue paper will contain tissue paper folded three times, while a Y-adaptor is a common device which we use to split one contact point into two.



In everyday life, there are abundant examples. To name some more, we have “I-girders”, “L-bars” and “T-beams” in the construction industry; “Y-fronts” and “V-necks” in the garment industry. In Hong Kong, some housing estates constitute blocks of irregular shapes. H-blocks and Y-blocks are two such examples. Taking a bird’s-eye view from a helicopter, you should be able to see the H and Y shapes more clearly.



When students get excellent examination results or win a competition, they might make a V-sign to show their excitement. A V-sign is a hand gesture to signify victory, with the index and middle fingers raised and parted and the other three fingers clenched. However, certain words with a similar formation have nothing to do with shapes. For instance, “X-ray” does not mean that the ray takes an X-shaped path. It is so called because at the time of discovery, the nature of X-rays remained unknown and was represented by the letter “X”.

Some English letters also form common expressions. When a river “makes a great S”, that means it meanders in an S-shaped course. Someone who has “come to a Y” in a road is presented with two choices, because he has reached the point where the road branches into two. A “U-turn” is the act of turning a vehicle in a half circle so as to go in the opposite direction. But figuratively, it means a complete change in policy, plans, actions or beliefs. For example, “On second thought, he made a U-turn and withdrew his resignation.”

If someone wants to have a project inspected “from A to Z”, that means he wants to have everything checked thoroughly. This phrase carries the same meaning as “from head to tail” or “from head to toe”. When we say something is “as simple as ABC”, we mean it is very easy to understand or handle. What about something that is done “to a T”? It is something suitable, appropriate or exact. A shirt that suits you “to a T” is one that looks extremely good on you. Here is another example: “The accountant is working out to a T all items of expenditure.”