

2,700-year-old face cream for men found in Chinese dig site

February 9 2021, by Bob Yirka



(A) the bronze jar in situ, (B) the decoration on the bronze jar after cleaning, (C) a large quantity of agglomeration of yellowish white lumps inside the bronze jar. Credit: *Archaeometry* (2021). DOI: 10.1111/arc.12659

A team of researchers affiliated with several institutions in China and one in Germany, has found evidence of a 2,700-year-old face cream for men at a Chinese dig site. In their paper published in the journal *Archaeometry*, the group describes items they found at the dig site and the face cream they discovered.

People have been using materials to color or alter their bodies for thousands of years. Evidence of Egyptians using cosmetics goes back two thousand years, for example, and women in China were found to be using red cosmetic sticks to color their faces as far back as 1450BC. In this new effort, the researchers have found evidence of the oldest use of cosmetics for Chinese males at the Liujiawa site in northern China—a cream that could have been used to make the face appear white.

The team was working at a part of the dig site where artifacts have been dated back to a point in Chinese history called the "Spring and Autumn period"—a three-hundred-year period between 771 and 476BC. The site was once host to a city called Liujiawa, which was the capital of a vassal state called Rui. The Spring and Autumn period ended when China became unified under the Qin dynasty.

The researchers uncovered a section in the [dig site](#) that they identified as a Nobleman's region. They found bronze funerary weapons and a jar made of bronze containing what the researchers believe to be face cream—a soft, yellow-white material. Analysis of the material showed it to be approximately 2,700 years old and made of animal fat and

moonmilk (a kind of carbonate mud found in some caves that turns to a white powder when dried.) When mixed together, the combination would have been a material that could be used as a cream. The researchers suggest the nobleman used the [cream](#) on his face, perhaps as a way to stand out from commoners. They also suggest it could have been used as part of religious ceremonies—prior research has shown that religions of the time believed caves had minerals with magical properties. The find represents the oldest known use of a cosmetic meant for a male wearer in China.

More information: B. Han et al. The rise of the cosmetic industry in ancient China: insights from a 2,700-year-old face cream, *Archaeometry* (2021). [DOI: 10.1111/arcm.12659](https://doi.org/10.1111/arcm.12659)

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