A bird-shaped gold foil recently discovered at the site, said Wang Jian, a professor of international relations at the Beijing Foreign Trade University, added that the discovery would "open a new chapter in the history of ancient China".

"If we can recover a whole set of ceremonial artefacts used in sacrifices that date back more than 3,000 years (among the unearthed cultural relics in 1986), that will be an exceptional achievement from which to comprehend the complexity of the Shu state and the evolution of the universe," he said.

New discoveries may correct lingering views passed down for generations to more hands of what the Shu state was and what its people were like, he said.

"Religious rituals often represent the highest characteristics of early Chinese society," he said. "The discovery of the burial pits will be an essential reference for us to understand the culture of the rest of the region, so that we can study the history of the region better.

"If we have enough information, we can find the right answer to one of the great unsolved problems of the world," he said.

"The quality of the burial scenes could be even better than the presentation of the sacrificial scene," he said. "The presence of these scenes is very important to us.

For researchers, the closest answer may be the study of the tombs of contemporaneous shrines in the rest of the region, but that is still a long way off.

"More than 3,000 years have passed since the discovery of the site in 1986," Wang said. "But so far we can only say that it has a great significance."