

# Decorative Designs in Chinese Art

## 中国文物的纹饰

Understand Chinese culture through art  
Draft

by  
Alex Amies

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## **Front Cover**

Cong with diety and flying bird design

Liangzhu Culture (3,200—2,200 BCE), Shanghai Museum

神像飞鸟纹琮

良渚文化 (公元前 3200~2200 年) 上海博物馆

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Author and photographs: Alex Amies, [alex@chinesenotes.com](mailto:alex@chinesenotes.com)

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## **About the Author**

Alex Amies is a software engineer living in Beijing. His hobby is Chinese language and culture.

## **About this Book**

I wrote this book because I wanted to explore the area of decorative art myself and wanted to share what I have learned with others. I also want to help people realise the value in culture and history. In particular, Chinese culture has the richest culture of any in the world and there is much to be learned from it.

To my Mum, Barbara Amies

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# Summary 总结

This book is for readers to learn something about Chinese culture by looking at art. It describes decorative art on pottery, bronze ware, and many other art works and artifacts throughout Chinese history. It also tells the stories behind the decorative art. Decorative art is different from fine art in that decorative art is most often uses repeated designs and often contains a theme that tells something about the people that use the artifacts. Decorative art has a fascinating story to tell about Chinese culture that is not as easily told using words alone. I hope that readers will be able to appreciate these themes from the content of the book:

- the diversity and richness of Chinese culture through the large number of decorative patterns, artifact types, and symbolic meanings
- the early rise of Chinese civilization through the painted pottery of the Late Neolithic
- the solidification of a central state power through the ceremonial vessels of the Bronze Age Xia and Shang dynasties
- the flowering of Chinese culture through an ever increasing variety of media and sophistication of designs
- the emergence of an economic powerhouse through the silk and porcelain wares exported via the Silk Road to the Middle East and Europe
- the political power of the emperor through the opulence of artifacts featuring gold and other precious materials and rich and exquisite decoration created exclusively for the imperial court
- aesthetic ideals of beauty and simplicity in the porcelain artifacts of the Tang and Song
- social ideals of harmony and longevity through the designs and symbolism in wooden furniture and architecture decorations

The book includes some Chinese text. This is not necessary to understand the content. It is included primary for native Chinese speakers to be able to scan quickly in their native language and for Chinese language students to learn some specialized terms relating to history and art. If you have trouble with the characters showing up as unreadable square boxes or question marks, see the web page Getting and Using Chinese Fonts.

# Introduction 导言

Decorative designs are many and varied in Chinese culture. Most have a story behind them relating to a legend or historical character. The symbols may be particular to a person, rank, or place, relate to a belief, or be for good luck. For example, in Chinese mythology dragons are connected with water and were thought to be responsible for rain. The window screen below shows a dragon spouting water and a fish swimming in the water below. Fish are a symbol of prosperity because of having the same sound as the word plentiful 余.



**Open screen window with dragon design**

Lingyin Temple, Hangzhou

龙纹漏窗

杭州灵隐寺

Traditional Chinese *auspicious patterns* 吉祥图案 are a kind of *decorative design* 花纹 that make reference to or are homophones for symbols of luck and prosperity. The origins of many of these designs go back to the Shang and Zhou dynasties, were developed further in the Tang and Song, and became popular in the Ming and Qing. By the time of the Ming and Qing virtually all designs had to have some meaning and luck and prosperity was the main theme. Stylized pictures of the characters *wealth* 富, *nobility* 贵, *longevity* 寿, and *happiness* 喜 are popular as are real and legendary animals symbolizing good qualities. Bats, as shown in the window screen below, are symbols of happiness and longevity and, also, the word for bat in Chinese sounds like *wealth* 富.



**Open screen window with bat design**

Fayu Temple, Mount Putuo

蝙蝠花纹漏窗

普陀山法雨寺

Most Western people will have noticed that practically all traditional Chinese buildings, furniture, utensils, and other artifacts are literally covered with decorative designs. My interest in Chinese designs was boosted when I read that geometric patterns in Neolithic pottery were likely the origin for Chinese characters. I decided to do some research into Neolithic pottery to see if I could find the connection. A stronger connection that I found was decorative designs and symbolism in Chinese art from prehistory, through every Chinese dynasty, and on to the present day, a period of over 5,000 years.

I think that everybody who sees Chinese art, including artifacts like porcelain and silk clothes, is immediately impressed. Certainly, ancient Romans and other customers of Chinese silk and porcelain around the world were impressed and paid premium prices for the good. However, what most people probably unconsciously feel, but do not know the details of, is the incredible breadth and depth in Chinese art. It is probably not matched in any other culture in the world. My study in preparing these notes has opened my eyes to what a huge subject it is. In these notes I want to focus on decorative designs but it merges into art and the technologies of the mediums that the designs are used with.

One of the great things about looking at historic artifacts is that you can learn about history from an original source without having to learn an ancient language. When I looked at the ancient bronze ware collection in the Shanghai Museum I really liked the patterns and was very impressed with the workmanship so distant in the past. Nearly all historic artwork has a close connection with nature that I admire and that is constant throughout history. This carries through

into very pervasive symbolism in Chinese art. In particular, much artwork has a connection with the identity and role of the people that the artifacts were associated. Well known examples are the association of dings (a cauldron supported by a tripod) with early Chinese sovereigns and pictures of dragons with emperors right up until the end of the Qing. The design below is one of my many favorites. It is an animal mask design from Shang Dynasty bronze ware.



Animal Mask Design 兽面纹

The Chinese term for *decorative design* 纹饰 refers to decorative designs on artifacts, typically vessels like dishes, dings, cauldrons, pots, vases. The materials were originally pottery then bronze ware but the same concepts were then applied to other materials like gold and silver ware, jade, stone carving, silk, furniture and wood carvings, and other artistic mediums. Early decorative designs are mostly either geometric designs, animal figures, individual totems, or something in between. *Fire designs* 火纹 and *lightening designs* 雷纹 are types of geometric designs. *Animal mask* 兽面纹, *bird designs* 凤鸟纹, *animal designs* 动物纹, and *dragon design* 龙纹 are designs that take animal figures, stylize them, and use them to create repeating decorative patterns. The mystical Chinese animal *taotie* 饕餮, which is the basis for the animal mask design, was one of the most commonly sculptured figures in the Shang and Western Zhou dynasties.

Chinese art has an incredible amount of symbolism. Animals were portrayed with exaggerated features or a mixture of features from different animals. It seems like they were being used to portray human characteristics like greed with the *taotie* 饕餮 and hopes for the future with *lucky animals* 瑞兽. With Neolithic art we may only be able to speculate. However, unlike European art, commentary and appraisal of art has been a part of Chinese art since writing began. For example, bronze ware often carried inscriptions, porcelain was stamped with information about its source, and calligraphic and other fine art often included dedications from the author and stamps from other people who appreciated the art. All of this gives an insight into the society and life of people in historic times, which is very rewarding.

It is interesting to speculate why people created art works. What could ancient people have been thinking about without TV soap operas, the Internet, and cell phones? According to the book *The Third Chimpanzee* [Diamond 1993], the origins of art are in selection of a mate. Certainly, we can imagine how beautiful jewelry and clothes can help people select partners in ancient times and we have direct experience in modern times as well. Much ancient art is intended to be opulent and for display of wealth and social position. This is apparent in imperial art, where much porcelain (from imperial kilns), symbols (dragons), and numbers (nine) were reserved solely for the emperor and his immediate family. By contrast, religious art is more about expressing devotion and ideals of balance and harmony, which can be seen in Buddhist art. Other art binds communities, such as the numerous symbols of good fortune, happiness, and long life in Chinese art. Certainly, the purpose is not always clear.

## **Pottery 陶器**

The main theme in looking at early pottery is the emergence of Chinese civilization in the late Neolithic. The development of pottery is linked to the development of agriculture and establishment of fixed residences. Prior to this, hunter-gatherers, who were on the move all the time could not carry such heavy things around.

Making pottery was the first human experience in changing a material into another that could be used for tools and utensils. Pottery is different from earlier implements made from stone and bones in that the clay that pottery is made from can be molded, dried in air, and then hardened in a fire. It is a perfect medium for art, either by sculpture or by painting. The earliest Neolithic pottery in China dates to about 8,000 BCE. The oldest piece found to date is a jar discovered in Wannian County, Jiangxi Province. The jar shown below excavated from Xinglongwa 兴隆洼 site in Aohanqi, Inner Mongolia is representative of early pottery. Simple geometric patterns are apparent on the outside.



**Small Mouth Barrel Shaped Pottery Jar**

Xinglongwa Culture (6,200—5,200 BCE), Capital Museum, Beijing

敛口筒形陶罐

兴隆洼文化（公元前 6200—前 5200 年），首都博物馆

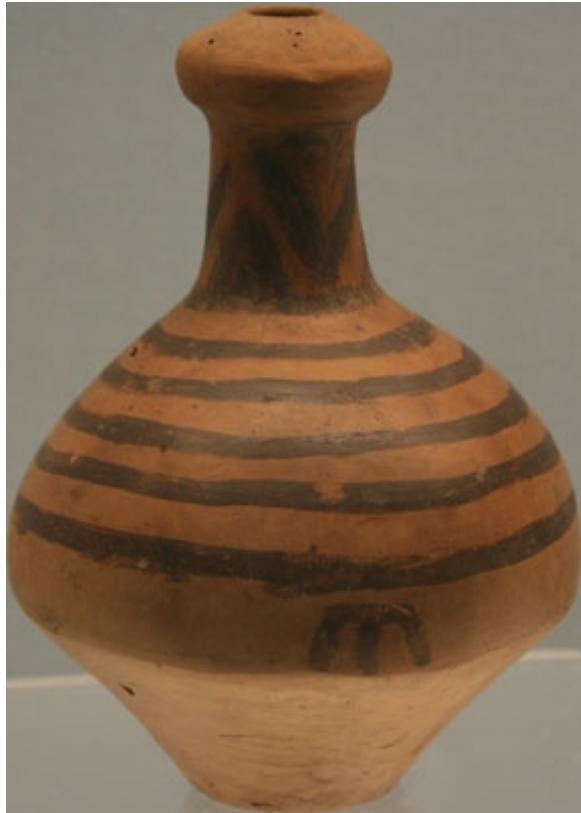
The main technologies relating to pottery that were developed over the Neolithic were firing techniques, paint materials, and use of a wheel. Early pottery differs from porcelain in the lower firing temperatures used. Of course, in the Neolithic there was no way to measure the temperature and early pottery was fired in open fires. The main benefit of firing at low temperatures is reducing the amount of moisture in the clay. Besides moisture in the pores of the clay, there is also water bound (hydrated) in the complex chemical compounds that form clay. This water can also be reduced and that also changes the chemical structure of the clay resulting in harder clay artifacts.

The designs on pottery in the Neolithic were the first large scale use of decorative designs in Chinese history. It laid the foundation for the use of decorative patterns in a wide range of media in the coming millenia.

## Yangshao Culture 仰韶文化

The *Yangshao Culture* 仰韶文化 was a matriarchal Neolithic culture from the central Yellow River basin that dates from about 5,000 to 3,000 BCE. They were a very prolific pottery producing people and we know them mostly through their distinctive painted pottery, frequently including rose patterns. Yangshao was first discovered in 1921 in Mianchi County, Henan Province. Most decorative patterns are black and / or red. From their distinctive pottery the

Yangshao culture has been identified with Gansu, Shaanxi, Henan at the center and also present in Hebei, Inner Mongolia, Shanxi, Qinghai, and Hubei.



**Painted Pottery Pot with a String Pattern**

Banpo style from Yangshao Culture (4,800—3,600 BCE) Shanghai Museum

彩陶弦纹壶

仰韶文化半坡类型（约公元前 4500—前 4000 年）上海博物馆

We call the kind of pottery made by Yangshao Culture people *painted pottery* 彩陶. The painted designs were applied before firing. The firing process fuses the painted design with the clay making it quite resistant to fading and degradation. This is one of the reasons that a large amount of painted pottery has survived. The designs were mostly painted with black or red paint and included geometric patterns, plants, and animals. The main pigment in the red paint is iron and the main pigments in the black paint are iron and manganese.



**Painted Pottery Vase**

Water Vessel, Banpo style from Yangshao Culture (4,500—4,000 BCE)

Capital Museum, Beijing

彩陶瓶

水器， 仰韶文化半坡类型（约公元前 4500—前 4000 年）

首都博物馆

In the early period of pottery making the artifacts were fired in open fires. Temperature was hard to control but gradually people learned to control breakage by slowing the temperature at which the pottery cooled by covering it with ash and other materials. Pinching is the most basic way of making a pottery artifact. To do it you just mould a piece of clay by hand. This method is too crude to produce much of value. The next most sophisticated method is to stack strands of clay. This was one of the first ways of making practical utensils but the pottery was thick and hefty. A further development is to coil strands of clay around a mould. After they have been wrapped around the mould the clay can be smoothed out with a paddle. Some minority groups still make pottery this way.



### **Painted Pottery Vessel**

Miaodigou Style from the Yangshao Culture (c. 4,000—3,500 BCE)  
Excavated at the Miaodigou Site, Hunan. Capital Museum, Beijing

彩陶盆

仰韶文化庙底沟类型（约公元前 4000—前 3500 年）

河南省陕县庙底沟遗址出土 首都博物馆

*Miaodigou* 庙底沟 (c. 4,000—3,000 BCE) was a phase of the Yangshao Culture and successor to Banpo. The pictures above and below show painted pottery vessels from the Miaodigou phase. Discovered in 1956 in Shan County, Henan, Miaodigou, is a significant archaeological site. It is a part of the Yangshao Culture that remained after the transition to the Longshan Culture. In addition to pottery, the people of the Miaodigou phase used stone ware and bone utensils. Many of the pottery artifacts were used in rituals.



**Painted Pottery Food and Drink Vessel**

Miaodigou Style from the Yangshao Culture (c. 4,000—3,500 BCE)

Excavated at the Miaodigou Site, Hunan. Capital Museum, Beijing

飲食器

仰韶文化庙底沟类型（约公元前 4000—前 3500 年）

河南省陕县庙底沟遗址出土 首都博物馆

The potter's wheel was developed sometime around the middle of the Yangshao period.



**Painted pottery bowl with a declining curtain pattern**

Miaodigou Style from the Yangshao Culture (c. 3,600—3,000 BCE)

Excavated at the Miaodigou Site, Hunan. Shanghai Museum

彩陶重幛纹钵

仰韶文化庙底沟类型（约公元前 3600—前 3000 年）

河南省陕县庙底沟遗址出土 上海博物馆

The *Majiayao Culture* 马家窑文化 was related to a fork of the Yangshao Culture that moved westward. Majiayao Culture artifacts were first discovered in Gansu in 1923. Their range included the Upper Yellow River Basin in Qinghai and Gansu. The picture below shows a pot with a string design from the Majiayao Culture.



**Painted Pottery Pot with String Design**

Majiayao Culture (c. 3,100—2,700 BCE)

Shanghai Museum

彩陶弦纹壶

马家窑文化（约公元前3100—前2700年） 上海博物馆

Banshan was a later phase of the Majiayao Culture. A pot with a lattice design from the Banshan phase is shown below.



**Painted Pottery Pot with Lattice Design**

Majiayao Culture, Banshan type (c. 2,600—2,300 BCE)

Shanghai Museum

彩陶网格纹壶

马家窑文化半山类型（约公元前 2600—前 2300 年） 上海博物馆

A jar with a lattice design from the Machang phase is shown below.



彩陶曲折纹罐

马家窑文化马厂类型（约公元前 2200—前 2000 年） 上海博物馆

**Painted Pottery Jar with Zigzag Design**  
Majiayao Culture, Machang type (c. 2,200—2,000 BCE)  
Shanghai Museum

A ring pattern is used to decorate the pot below.



**Painted Pottery Pot with Ring Design**  
Majiayao Culture, Machang type (c. 2,200—2,000 BCE)  
Shanghai Museum  
**彩陶圆圈纹壶**

马家窑文化马厂类型（约公元前2200—前2000年） 上海博物馆

## Dawenkou Culture 大汶口文化

Other Neolithic cultures in China included the *Hongshan Culture* 红山文化 in northeast China, *Dawenkou Culture* 大汶口文化 of Shandong, and the *Xindian Culture* 辛店文化 and *Qijia Culture* 齐家文化 both of Gansu. The pictures below show painted pottery from the Dawenkou Culture.



**Painted Pottery Pot**

Early Dawenkou Culture (c. 4,400—3,600 BCE)

Excavated from Wangyin Site, Yanzhou, Shandong. Capital Museum, Beijing  
彩陶器

大汶口文化早期（约公元前 4400—前 3600 年）

山东省兗州市王因遗址 首都博物馆

The Dawenkou Culture (4,100—2,600 BCE) was a group of Neolithic communities centered around Shandong but also appearing in Anhui, Henan, and Jiangsu.



**Painted Pottery Bowl**

Early Dawenkou Culture (c. 4,400—3,600 BCE)

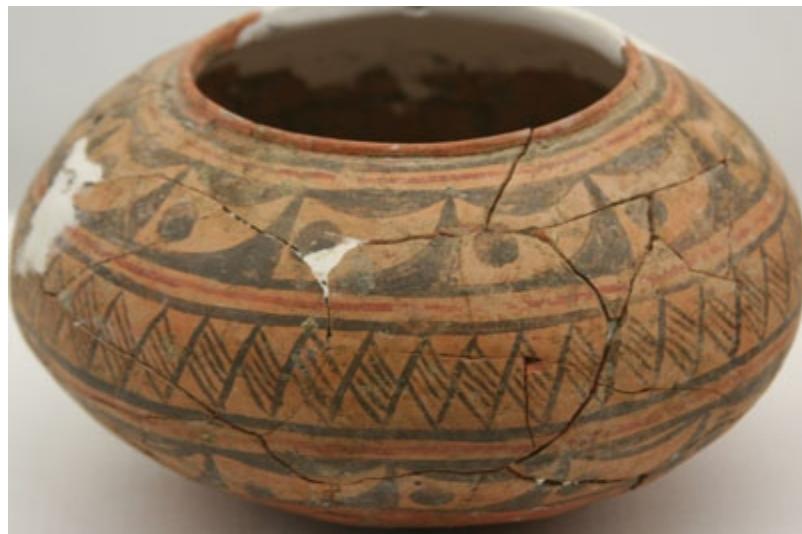
Excavated from Wangyin Site, Yanzhou, Shandong. Capital Museum, Beijing  
彩陶钵

大汶口文化早期（约公元前 4400—前 3600 年）

山东省兗州市王因遗址 首都博物馆

The *Diaolongbei* 雕龙碑 site is located about 25 km northeast of the city of Zaoyang, Hubei. The site was discovered in 1957 and has plentiful late Neolithic artifacts, including dwellings,

cellars, tombs, eating utensils, and tools. The picture below shows a painted pottery container from the Diaolongbei site.



**Painted Pottery Container**  
(c. 3,800—3,300 BCE)

Excavated at the Diaolongbei Site, Zaoyang, Hubei. Capital Museum, Beijing  
彩陶器

盛储器（约公元前 3800~前 3300 年）  
湖北省枣阳市雕龙碑遗址出土 首都博物馆

## **Songze Culture 嵩泽文化**

The Songze Culture was a Neolithic culture south of the lower reaches of the Yangtze River, named after a village in the Shanghai area.



**Gray Pottery Jar with Openwork**

Songze Culture (c. 3,800—3,200 BCE)

Excavated from Siqian Village, Qingpu County, Shanghai. Shanghai Museum

灰陶镂孔罐

崧泽文化（公元前 3800—前 3200 年）

上海青浦县寺前村出土 上海博物馆

*Black pottery* 黑陶 is a style of pottery originating in the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River in the Neolithic Age. It was developed from painted pottery and became widespread starting around 2,000 BCE. It was mostly produced on a fast potter's wheel (kick wheel) that span faster than the slower wheels used previously. Shaping tools were also used. Polishing of the surface was sometimes done when the clay was almost dry. This gives a smooth and shiny appearance.



**Black Pottery Covered Jar with Incribed Design**

Songze Culture (c. 3,800—3,200 BCE)

Excavated from Siqian Village, Qingpu County, Shanghai. Shanghai Museum

黑陶刻纹盖罐

崧泽文化（公元前 3800—前 3200 年）

上海青浦县寺前村出土 上海博物馆

The widespread appearance of black pottery was related to changes in firing technology. Black pottery was fired in kilns at about 1,000 degrees Celsius compared to about 800 degrees Celsius for painted pottery. An iron reducing atmosphere would be created by blocking the smoke passage and leading to an oxygen deficient atmosphere. This resulted in the black color of the pottery. Black pottery was not as suitable for painting on so inscribed patterns, like shown below, were more common.



**Black pottery zun**

Songze Culture (c. 3,800—3,200 BCE)  
Excavated from Meiyuan Ruins. Suzhou Museum

黑皮陶尊

崧泽文化（公元前 3800—前 3200 年）  
梅堰遗址出土 苏州博物馆

## **Longshan Culture 龙山文化**

The *Taosi* 陶寺 site is located in Shanxi along the middle reaches of the Yellow River and is a part of the Longshan Culture spanning from circa 2,500 to 1,900 BCE. The picture of the plate below from the Taosi site has an early painted dragon.



**Painted Pottery Plate with Dragon Design**

Taosi Culture, Early Period (2,300—2,100 BCE)

Excavated at the Taosi Site, Xiangfen County, Shanxi. Capital Museum, Beijing

彩绘龙纹陶盆

陶寺文化早期（公元前 2300—前 2100 年）

山西省襄汾县陶寺遗址出土 首都博物馆

The pot below, also from the Taosi site, shows a curved geometric design somewhat similar to later designs on bronze ware.



**Painted Pottery Pot**

Taosi Culture, Early Period (2,300—2,100 BCE)  
Excavated at the Taosi Site, Xiangfen County, Shanxi. Capital Museum, Beijing  
**彩绘陶壶**

陶寺文化早期（公元前 2300—前 2100 年）  
山西省襄汾县陶寺遗址出土 首都博物馆

**Xiajiadian Culture 夏家店文化**

The pottery utensils below, from the *Lower Xiajiadian Culture* 夏家店下层文化 in Inner Mongolia was produced at the same time as the Bronze Age in parts of China and show definite similarity with geometric patterns in Xia and Shang Dynasty bronze ware.



**Painted Pottery Utensil**

Lower Xiajiadian Culture (c. 2,000—1,500 BCE)  
Excavated from Dadianzi, Aohanqi, Inner Mongolia. Capital Museum, Beijing  
**彩绘陶器**

夏家店下层文化（约公元前 2000—前 1500 年）  
内蒙古自治区敖汉旗大甸子出土 首都博物馆

These two artifacts from the Xiajiadian Culture complete the transition from geometric designs used in the earliest Neolithic pottery to the designs used in Bronze Age bronze ware.



**Painted Pottery Li**

Lower Xiajiadian Culture (c. 2,000—1,500 BCE)

Excavated from Dadianzi, Aohanqi, Inner Mongolia. Capital Museum, Beijing

彩绘陶鬲

夏家店下层文化（约公元前 2000—前 1500 年）

内蒙古自治区敖汉旗大甸子出土 首都博物馆

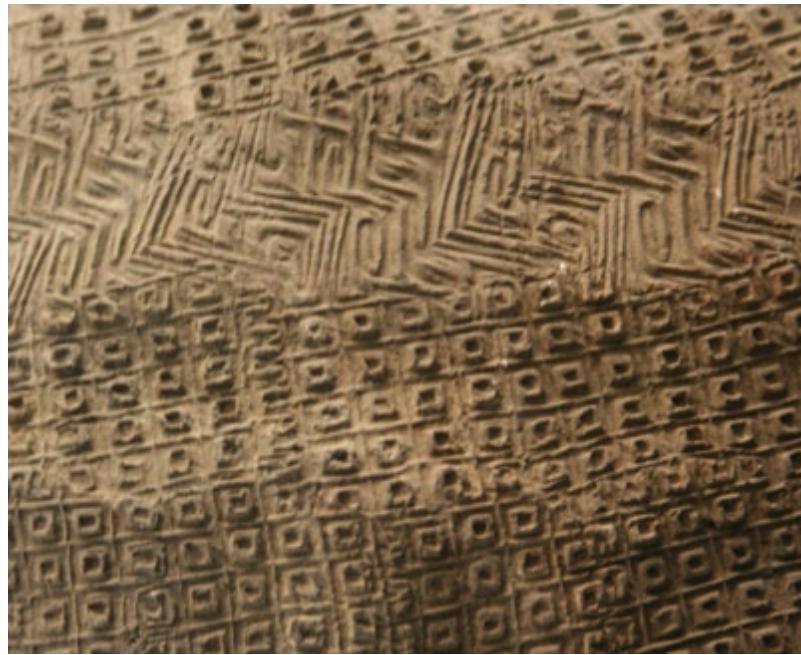
## Later Period 晚期

After the Neolithic pottery continued to be used for food and water vessels and also for additional uses, such as holding flowers, etc. *Terracotta* 赤陶 is an unglazed ceramic that usually refers to a wider range of artifacts, such as roof tiles and decorative figures, than pottery vessels for food and water.



**White Pottery Zun (Wine Vessel) with a Carved Pattern**  
Shang Dynasty (16th—11th century BCE). Shanghai Museum  
**白陶刻纹尊**  
商 公元前 16—前 11 世纪 上海博物馆

White pottery, such as the zun shown above, was widespread in the Shang Dynasty and the Western Zhou. The earliest piece of white pottery dates to circa 5,000 BCE. The white pottery that appeared in the Shang was created from Kaolin clay, which was different to other clay types used for painted pottery and black pottery but very close in composition to the clay used for porcelain. White pottery was a transition to porcelain.



**Pottery with Impressions**

Western Zhou Dynasty (11th — 771 BCE).

Excavated from Luotuo Dun, Qingpu County, Shanghai. Shanghai Museum

硬陶罍上的印纹

西周（公元前 11 世纪—前 771 年）

上海青浦县骆驼墩出土 上海博物馆

Another style of decorations widespread in the Shang and Zhou dynasties was *impressions* 印纹, such as those used on the pottery artifact above. The late Shang was a time of rapid development of white pottery.



**Brown glazed pottery lian with a carved lotus petal pattern**

Eastern Han (25—220 BC), Shanghai Museum

褐绿釉陶刻花莲瓣奁

东汉（公元 25—220 年） 上海博物馆

The stamped patterns were replaced by polished surfaces, such as the artifacts above and below.



**Red Painted Pottery Plate**

Warring States Period (475—221 BCE), Capital Museum, Beijing

朱绘陶盘

战国（公元前 475—221 年） 首都博物馆

The rat is one of the *twelve animals of the Terrestrial Branches* 生肖, sometimes loosely referred to as the Chinese Zodiac. The rat is a symbol of industry and prosperity based on the animals

ability to locate and store supplies of food. The picture below shows a rat figurine from a collection of the twelve animals.



**Animal figurine (rat)**  
Tang (618—907), Suzhou Museum  
**陶生肖俑（鼠）**  
唐（公元 618～907 年） 苏州博物馆

*Zisha* 紫砂 is a style of pottery that uses a purple color clay, traditionally from the city of Yixing in Jiangsu. *Zisha* has been popularly used for tea pots since the late Tang. This is appropriate because Yixing is also an important tea growing center. The clays used have iron contents up to 9 percent, which is the origin of the reddish-brown to purple color. The items are fired in temperatures up to about 1,200 degrees Celcius, resulting in great hardness and density. The picture below shows a zisha brush rest with a cicada.



**Zisha brush rest with a cicada on a branch**

Qing (1644—1911), Suzhou Museum

紫砂桂枝歇蝉笔架

清（公元 1644—1911 年）苏州博物馆

## Terracotta 赤陶

*Terracotta* 赤陶 is unglazed pottery and was commonly used for roof tiles and other outside building items. Some of these items, particularly roof tiles, were also made with glazed pottery. Perhaps the most famous use of terracotta was in Emperor Qin Shuhuang's tomb for the *Terracotta Army* 兵马俑. One of the most common areas to add distinctive decorations were the *eaves tiles* 瓦当, which are the last and most conspicuous tiles on roofs. Some eaves tiles are shown below.



### Eaves Tile with Rolling Cloud Design

Excavated from the Han'ancheng Site, Xi'an, Shaanxi  
Western Han (202 BCE — 8 CE), Capital Museum, Beijing

卷云纹瓦当

西汉（公元前 202—公元 8 年）  
陕西省西安市汉安城遗址出土，首都博物馆

The tile above shows a rolling cloud design and the tile below has a lotus design. Both forms of design are seen in other mediums, including jade and porcelain.



**Eaves Tile with Lotus Design**

Excavated from the Luo Yang Northern Wei Site, Henan  
Northern Wei (386—584). Capital Museum, Beijing

**莲花纹瓦当**

河南省北魏洛阳遗址  
北魏（386-534年），首都博物馆

The character for *happiness* 喜 is commonly used in decorations. The eaves tile shown below from the Humble Administrator's Garden is stamped a stylized variation of this character.



**Eaves tile with xi character**  
Humble Administrator's Garden, Suzhou  
“喜”字瓦当  
苏州拙政园

The best terracotta designs to be found are in temples and palaces. The very impressive looking dragon below sits on top of the Seven Buddha Hall at Bao En Temple in Suzhou.



**Dragon on the roof of Seven Buddha Hall at Bao En Temple, Suzhou**  
苏州报恩寺七佛宝殿的龙

The *Master of Nets Garden* 网师园 inside the *Humble Administrator's Garden* 拙政园, a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage site in Suzhou, has some of the finest and best known *carved brick* 砖雕 artifacts. The carved brick artifacts below are located on the gate structure at the Master of Nets Garden.



**Brick sculpture on Master of Nets Garden gate structure**

Humble Administrator's Garden, Suzhou

网师园砖雕门楼

苏州拙政园

Chinese gardens are good places to reflect on the ideals of peace, happiness, and longevity. The carved brick below features a stylized version of the *longevity character* 寿.



**Long life character on carved brick**

Master of Nets Garden, Humble Administrator's Garden, Suzhou

砖雕门楼的“寿”字

苏州拙政园网师园

Open screen windows 漏窗 in Chinese temples are a feature from classical Chinese architecture. An example of this from Lingyin Temple, Hangzhou is shown below.



**Open screen window**

Lingyin Temple, Hangzhou

漏窗  
杭州灵隐寺

The crane is the most celebrated bird in Chinese art after the phoenix. It is a symbol of long life.



Crane  
Lingyin Temple, Hangzhou  
鶴  
杭州灵隐寺

## Bronze Ware 青铜器

### **Background 背景**

The main theme of this section is to gain an appreciation for the central political power that emerged in Bronze Age China and the ceremonial artifacts that they used to symbolize that power.

Bronze is an alloy of copper and tin or copper and lead. It is the earliest metal alloy produced by humans. Bronze has a lower melting point than copper but is harder. Bronze is also a good metal for casting because it contracts little during cooling. Chinese bronze ware is impressive in its

workmanship and many pieces, such as the one below, are also impressive in their size. In ancient China, especially before the Tang dynasty, bronze artifacts were important possessions and a key indicator of social status. Bronze artifacts were used for ceremonies, as weapons, musical instruments (bells), and as other tools and utensils. Bronze ware had a central place in ceremonial rites and, in fact, most bronze ware that has been found in Xia, Shang, and Western Zhou sites was for ceremonies. Even though the Bronze Age began slightly earlier in Samaria and Egypt, China seems to have been more prolific in the quantity, diversity, and high quality of the bronze ware produced in ancient times.



### **Da Ke Ding**

A ceremonial food vessel from the reign of King Xiao of Western Zhou (late 10th century BCE)  
Excavated from Renshu, Famen Temple, Fufeng County, Shaanxi in the mid period of the reign  
of Emperor Guang Xu. Shanghai Museum.

**大克鼎**

西周孝王（公元前10世纪末）

清光绪中期陕西扶风县法门寺任树出土，上海博物馆

Many bronze ware artifacts carry inscriptions about the owners and events of the time with high historic value. The ding above is one of the prize possessions of the Shanghai Museum. It has special historic significance because of the inscription that describes the ceremony where King Zhou conferred an official post on the owner of the ding, Ke. The inscription throws considerable light on the political situation of the time.

Naturally occurring copper was the first metal used by people for tools. It is highly malleable and was used to make knives and jewellery. The earliest copper tools found in China were found in Shaanxi and dates to about 4,700 BCE. It was used by people from the Yangshao culture. Later on people learned how to smelt copper from ore and add lead and tin to it to create bronze.

Most bronze artifacts in China have been found in archeological excavations. A few were discovered in historic times and passed on since then.

Bronze began to be used later in the Longshao culture. The earliest bronze artifacts discovered in China so far are a knife and knife fragments dating to about 3,000 to 2,300 BCE. They were found in Dongxiang, Gansu. Bronze casting need a mold, also known as a die, usually made from clay. The earliest bronze ware used a single mold. As the artifacts became more sophisticated they were made with two and more molds. The decorative patterns and inscriptions were carved into the molds. Early molds could only be used once.

Bronze is an early example that demonstrates that most technologies that build on an earlier technologies. The techniques for making pottery were adapted to build the clay furnaces to generate temperatures high enough to melt copper, lead, and tin, and also to create moulds to cast bronze ware. The inspiration for many bronze artifacts also came from pottery. So, bronze ware would not have been possible without pottery. The picture below shows a clay mould from the Late Shang used to cast a bronze lei, a kind of vat. Clay was the most common mould material for making bronze ware in ancient China.



**Piece of a Mould for a Lei (a kind of vat)**

Late Shang (13th century — 1,046 BCE)

罍部范

商晚期（公元前 13 世纪—前 1046 年），首都博物馆

## Bronze Ware Decorative Patterns 青铜器花纹

Different patterns have been found and classified by archaeologists, including *fire design* 火纹, *lightening design* 雷纹, *animal mask design* 兽面纹, *bird design* 凤鸟纹, *animal design* 动物纹, and *dragon design* 龙纹.



**Animal Mask Design**  
兽面纹

*Animal mask design* 兽面纹, also known as *taotie design* 饕餮纹, is the most important design on Shang bronze ware and continued to be used in the Western Zhou. It shows a ferocious mythical animal called a *taotie* 饕餮 that has a huge head and little or no body. The design was first described in *Mr Lu's Annals of the Spring and Autumn Period* 吕氏春秋, a historical record compiled in the Warring States Period. Unfortunately, we do not know the meaning of the Taotie today



**Dragon Design**  
龙纹

The *dragon design* 龙纹 appeared in the Shang or earlier. The dragon was worshipped as the god of water in ancient China. Rain was thought by some to be caused by dragons flying in the clouds. One of the most popular designs is the *kui dragon* 窫龙, a dragon with a bowed body, horns, and large eyes, as shown above.



**Bird Design**  
凤鸟纹

The *bird design* 鸟纹 and phoenix design were popular in the Shang and Zhou dynasties. The phoenix integrates features from different birds and is an auspicious animal. Originally, bird designs were a symbol of male reproductive organs. Originally, bird designs include *phoenix design* 凤纹, *owl design* 鸱枭纹, *luan design* 鸾纹 (based on the luan, a mythical bird), and *goose design* 雁纹.



**Fire Design**  
火纹

The outlines of animal designs, like that shown below, were crafted skillfully to become handles for vessels, borders for other designs, or to fit the space available for other functions.



**Animal Design**  
**动物纹**

According to the *Classic of Rites* 礼记 the tortoise is one of the four spiritually endowed animals. The other three are the phoenix, unicorn, and dragon. The tortoise symbolizes longevity and endurance. The tortoise shown below is from a bronze ware rubbing.



**Animal Design**  
动物纹

Over time some of the patterns became more abstract and became geometric patterns. The lightening design 雷纹, shown below, is an example of this.

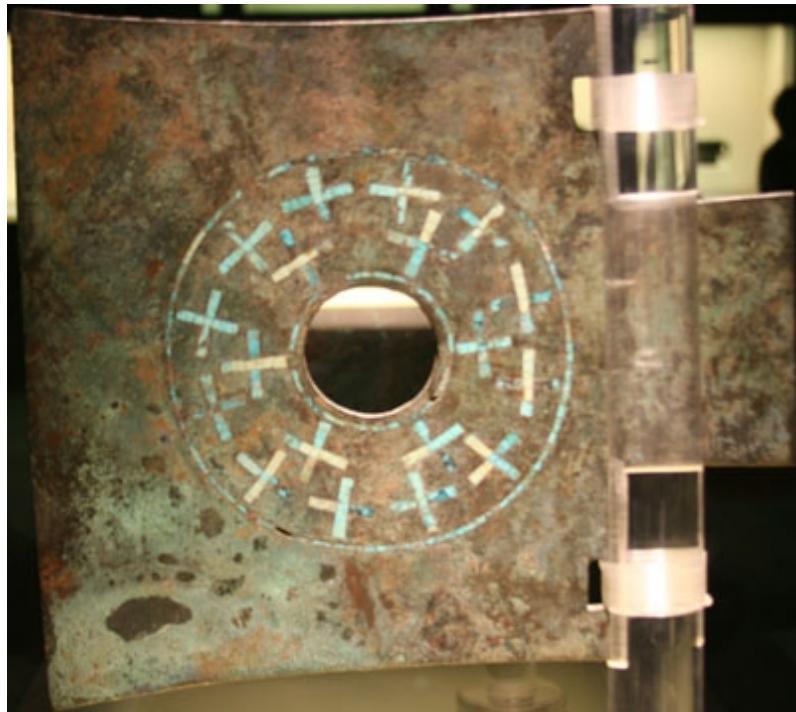


**Lightening Design**  
雷纹

## **Xia Dynasty 夏朝**

The Bronze Age in China started with the Xia Dynasty in about 2,100 BCE. Ancient Chinese literature refers to nine large bronze ding that were ordered to be cast by the founder of the Xia

dynasty, Yu. They were later passed down in the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties but were lost when a ship carrying them sank. There are relatively few historic records from the Xia dynasty and bronze ware is a key source of information about this period. Many archeological discoveries were made in Erlitou, thought to be the capital of the Xia dynasty.



**Battle Ax with Inlaid Cross Decorations**

Late Xia Dynasty (18th century — 16th century BCE), Shanghai Museum

镶嵌十字纹方钺

夏朝晚期（公元前18世纪—前16世纪），上海博物馆

Bronze ware artifacts were important possessions and indicators of social rank in the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties. One of the reasons that bronze ware is better preserved than other historic artifacts is corrosion resistant material property of bronze. In addition, bronze is tough enough to survive where pottery and other materials break. These artifacts from the Xia Dynasty, over three thousand years old, have survived well.



**Bronze Ornament with Inlaid Turquoise**

Erlitou Culture (1,750—1,530 BCE), Capital Museum, Beijing  
Excavated from the Erlitou Ruins, City of Yanshi, Henan

嵌绿松石铜牌饰

二里头文化（约公元前 1750—前 1530 年），首都博物馆  
河南省偃师市二里头遗址出土

Bronze was occasionally inlaid with gemstones, such as in the ornament above. However, most bronze ware at this stage was for vessels used in ceremonies that were central to the culture at this period. *Jue* 爵, such as the shown below, are a kind of wine vessel and are among the most commonly discovered artifacts from the early Bronze Age.



Ancient Bronze Wine Holder with Spout

Late Xia Dynasty (18th century — 16th century BCE), Shanghai Museum

管流爵

夏朝晚期（公元前 18 世纪—前 16 世纪），上海博物馆

## Shang Dynasty 商朝

The Shang dynasty was established in about 1,600 BCE when eastern tribes overthrew the Xia. After a number of early relocations of the capital it was settled in Yin, located in present day Anyang, Henan province in about 1,300 BCE. Thousands of bronze ware artifacts have been excavated from Yin and more Shang dynasty artifacts have been found in Hebei, Shaanxi, Shanxi, Shandong, Anhui, and Liaoning provinces. One of the best known Shang emperors is *Emperor Wu Ding* 武丁, who reigned around 1,250 BCE, at the peak of the Shang court. His reign divides the early and late Shang period. One of the riches archeological sites is the tomb of Wu Ding's wife *Fu Hao* 妇好 (literally, good wife). She was the emperor's favorite wife, a military hero, and important political figure but, unfortunately, died an untimely and early death. Her tomb was found in 1976 in present day Anyang stacked full with priceless bronze ware. Even before the find, she was known from numerous oracle bone divinations that the emperor ordered to monitor her safety



**Fire Designs and Animal Mask Designs on a Jia (Wine Vessel)**

Mid Shang Dynasty (15th — 13th century BCE), Shanghai Museum

斝上的火纹与兽面纹

商朝中期（公元前 15 世纪—前 13 世纪）上海博物馆

Bronze was an important material for ceremonial vessels, such as the wine and food vessels shown below. The vessels played a key role in these ceremonies used for offerings to deities and ancestors. The markings on the vessels had a connection with these ceremonies and the religious beliefs of the people at the time, especially mysterious and ferocious animals.



**Jia with Animal Mask Designs**

Mid Shang Dynasty (15th — 13th century BCE), Shanghai Museum

兽面纹斝

商朝中期（公元前 15 世纪—前 13 世纪）上海博物馆

Chinese discovered how to brew alcoholic drinks in the Neolithic Age. The jia, shown in the picture above, is a relatively large vessel for heating wine.



**Animal Mask Pattern on a Gui (Food Vessel)**

Late Shang Dynasty (13th — 11th century BCE), Shanghai Museum

簋上的兽面纹

商朝晚期（公元前 13 世纪～前 11 世纪）上海博物馆

The jia and gui above show uses of the animal mask or taotie design on food and wine vessels.



**Pou (Food Vessel) with Animal Mask Pattern**

Late Shang Dynasty (13th — 11th century BCE), Shanghai Museum

兽面纹瓿

商朝晚期（公元前 13 世纪～前 11 世纪）上海博物馆



### Pou (Detail)

A *pou* 甌 is an ancient vessel used for holding water or wine. It was in common use from the Shang to the Warring States Period. It is similar to a *zun* 尊 but shorter. Pou are usually round but sometimes square and have restricted opening with a wide shoulder, take a lid, and have a round base. Some have handles and some do not.



**Pou (Food Vessel) with Nipple and Lightening Pattern**

Late Shang Dynasty (13th — 11th century BCE), Shanghai Museum

乳打雷纹甌

商朝晚期（公元前13世纪—前11世纪）上海博物馆

Pou are frequently decorated with nipples, as shown above and below, and animal mask designs.



**Four Headed Ram Pou**

Late Shang Dynasty (13th — 11th century BCE), Shanghai Museum

四羊首瓿

商朝晚期（公元前13世纪—前11世纪）上海博物馆

The yu, shown below, is a water container with a deep belly.



**Fu Yi Bowl**

Late Shang Dynasty (13th — 11th century BCE), Shanghai Museum  
父乙孟

商朝晚期（公元前 13 世纪—前 11 世纪）上海博物馆

The *ding* 鼎, the most important bronzeware artifact, was a central artifact used in ceremonies, especially sacrifices and court banquets. Its use was strictly regulated in the Shang and Western Zhou dynasties. Only the emperor could use nine *ding* in ceremonies. Lesser nobles could use seven, five, three, or one *ding*. The *Nine Ding* 九鼎 is a symbol of state power originating with the founder of the Xia Dynasty, which were passed to successive rulers. There are many Chinese idioms with references to *ding*. There are also many names of Chinese restaurants with *ding* as part of the name, such as 鼎好 (literally, good *ding*).



**Ding with Flat Legs with Dragon Design**

Late Shang Dynasty (13th — 11th century BCE), Shanghai Museum

龙纹扁足鼎

商朝晚期（公元前 13 世纪—前 11 世纪）上海博物馆

The ding above has dragon designs on it and the ding below has an animal mask (taotie) design.



**Fen Dang Ding**

Late Shang Dynasty (13th — 11th century BCE), Capital Museum, Beijing  
**龙纹扁足鼎**

商朝晚期（公元前13世纪—前11世纪）首都博物馆

The gu, shown below, is a trumpet like wine vessel with a hoop base. The inspiration for the design of the bronze ware gu is the pottery gu.



**Gu (Wine Vessel)**

Late Shang Dynasty (13th — 11th century BCE), Shanghai Museum  
觚

商朝晚期（公元前 13 世纪—前 11 世纪）上海博物馆

The you, shown below, is a vessel for holding a valuable wine brewed from black millet and vanilla.



You (Wine Vessel)

Late Shang Dynasty (13th — 11th century BCE), Shanghai Museum

戊辰卣

商朝晚期（公元前 13 世纪—前 11 世纪）上海博物馆

## Western Zhou Dynasty 西周

The Zhou clan overthrew Emperor Wuwang of the Shang Dynasty in 1,046 BCE. The *zhi* 酒, a kind of wine cup, below belonged to an official named Shan, who was rewarded with this prize for his part in a campaign to thwart a Zhou come back. The inscription inside the *zhi* provides valuable archaeological confirmation of ancient written records and that the commander of this particular battle was the *Duke of Zhou* 周公旦.



**Zhi (wine vessel) for Official Shan**

King Chen Reign, Western Zhou (early 11th century BCE), Shanghai Museum

小臣单觯

西周成王（公元前 11 世纪上半叶） 上海博物馆

Bronze artifacts continued to be central to customs and ceremonies in the Zhou. Many of these customs and ceremonies were recorded in *The Book of Rites* 礼记, thought to have originally been compiled by Confucius himself. However, it is believed that the version that exists today was reworked in the Han. Two other classics describing ceremonies in this period are *The Rites of Zhou* 周礼 and *Yili* or *Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial* 仪礼.

The Western Zhou period ended in 771 BCE when some members of the ethnic tribe Quan Rong captured the Zhou capital and killed Emperor Youwang. The workmanship improved greatly in the Western Zhou resulting in some very high quality artifacts, even by modern standards.



**Bird Patterns on a Jia Gui (Food Vessel)**

Early Western Zhou Dynasty (11th century BCE), Shanghai Museum

甲簋的凤鸟纹

西周早期（公元前 11 世纪） 上海博物馆

The use of bronze ware artifacts in religious ceremonies of the Shang continued in the Zhou Dynasty. In addition to the vessels of the Shang, bronze musical instruments used in ceremonies have also been found. In the middle period, marked by the reigns of Emperor Muwang (976—922 BCE) and Emperor Yiwang (885—877BCE) artifact types and decorations changed. Wine and food vessels became less common and utensils and musical chimes became more dominant. Ribbon and abstract geometric patterns replaced the mythical taotie animal of the Shang Dynasty. The kuilong dragon pattern became popular.



**You (a Wine Vessel) with Animal Mask Designs**

Early Western Zhou Dynasty (11th century BCE), Shanghai Museum

兽面纹卣

西周早期（公元前 11 世纪） 上海博物馆



**You (detail)**

The zun, shown below, is a large wine vessel. It appeared in the Shang and continued to be used until the Western Zhou. The neck and bellie of the zun is decorated with taotie designs. The corners of the shoulder are decorated with elephant heads with upturned trunks and tusks. The background is covered with fine lightening patterns. There is an inscription in this artifact indicating that it was made as a vessel for a sacrificial ceremony for Gui Gu.



**Square Zun (a Wine Vessel)**

Early Western Zhou Dynasty (11th century BCE), Shanghai Museum

方尊

西周早期（公元前 11 世纪） 上海博物馆

There are many idioms associated with ding. For example, 一言九鼎 “words of enormous weight”, literally one word worth nine sacred ding, the nine ding symbolizing the rule of China; and 大名鼎鼎 “renown.”



**Jiao Ding (a Food Vessel)**

Early Western Zhou Dynasty (11th century BCE), Shanghai Museum

交鼎

西周早期（公元前 11 世纪） 上海博物馆

The jue, shown below, is a three legged vessel for drinking wine. Bronze jue evolved from pottery jue in the Xia Dynasty.



**Jue (a Wine Vessel)**

Early Western Zhou Dynasty (11th century BCE), Shanghai Museum

角

西周早期（公元前 11 世纪） 上海博物馆

The historic text Rites of Zhou mentions sacrificial rites with six zun and six yi. An yi is shown below.



**Square Yi (a Wine Vessel) belonging to Shi Ju**

King Gong Reign, Western Zhou Dynasty (mid tenth century BCE), Shanghai Museum

师遽方彝

西周恭王（公元前10世纪中叶） 上海博物馆

The gui appeared in the Shang dynasty and is a food vessel for holding broomcorn millet and other food. In the Western Zhou the gui started to be used in even numbers with the ding in odd numbers. For example, the emperor would use nine ding and eight gui and high level nobles would use seven ding with six gui.



**Shi Huan Gui (a food vessel)**

King Huan Reign, Western Zhou Dynasty (827 — 782 BCE), Shanghai Museum

师寰簋

西周宣王（公元前 827—前 782） 上海博物馆

After ceremonial vessels, weapons made up the next greatest proportion of bronze ware. For example, in the Shang concubine Fu Hao's tomb, about 30 percent of the bronze artifacts were weapons. After the end of the Warring States Period, Emperor Qin Shi Huang, confiscated all bronze weapons. Some of the bronze weapons, such as the battle ax below, were primarily for ceremonial use.



**Bronze Battle Ax**

Mid Western Zhou Dynasty (c. 950—870 BCE), Capital Museum, Beijing Excavated from Xi'an, Shaanxi

铜钺

西周中期（约公元前 950—前 870 年） 首都博物馆  
陕西省西安市出土

The *yi* 匜 is a pitcher shaped water vessel. The *yi* shown below is 48 cm long and weighs over 6 kg without water in it. The *yi* appeared in the Western Zhou. The parallel designs give the feeling of flowing water.



**Yi (a water vessel) belonging to the Duke of Qi**

Late Western Zhou Dynasty (9th century — 771 BCE), Shanghai Museum

齐侯匜

西周晚期（公元前 9 世纪—前 771 年） 上海博物馆

The xu 盍, shown in the picture below, is a kind of covered food vessel that evolved from the gui for holding millet, broomcorn millet, rice, and sorghum. The xu disappeared in the Spring and Autumn period.



**Xu (a water vessel) belonging to the Marquis of Jin**

Late Western Zhou Dynasty (9th century — 771 BCE), Shanghai Museum

晋侯盨

西周晚期（公元前9世纪—前771年） 上海博物馆

## Spring and Autumn Period 春秋

In the Spring and Autumn Period the ceremonial rites of the Shang and Western Zhou changed as the Zhou clan lost power throughout the period. Some ceremonies reserved for the emperor, including those involving nine ding, were used by other nobles. As powers other than the Zhou clan rose the use of bronze became more widespread. At the same time techniques improved even more. The *Rites of Zhou* 周礼 recorded different proportions of copper to lead or tin for different types of bronze ware. The highest being 50% copper and 50% lead for use in mirrors. The wax-loss casting process was developed and techniques were standardized. The main advantage of the wax-loss process was high precision. More bronze artifacts for practical use appeared in this period, including household use and weapons.



**Li (a Food Vessel) with Three Doves**

Early Spring and Autumn Period (771 — Early 7th century BCE), Shanghai Museum

三鳩鬲

春秋早期（公元前 771—前 7 世纪上半叶）上海博物馆

The *li* 鼎, shown in the picture above, is a cooking vessel believed to be for cooking rice porridge and meat. It was used from the early Shang to the Warring States period.



**Bo (a musical instrument) belonging to the Duke of Qin**

Early Spring and Autumn Period (771 — Early 7th century BCE), Shanghai Museum  
**秦公镈**

春秋早期（公元前 771—前 7 世纪上半叶）上海博物馆

The *fu* 簋 is a covered food vessel possibly imitating a wooden or bamboo vessel.



**Fu (a basket used in state ceremonies)**

Mid Spring and Autumn Period (Early 7th — Early 6th century BCE), Shanghai Museum

史尸簋

春秋中期（公元前7世纪上半叶—前6世纪上半叶）上海博物馆

Fu and gui are mentioned in the Confucian classic The Rites of Zhou 周礼, which says, 凡祭祀共簋簋 “food is ordinarily offered in a fu or a gui.”



**Bo You Fu Ling (a Wine Vessel)**

Mid Spring and Autumn Period (Early 7th — Early 6th century BCE), Shanghai Museum

伯游父

春秋中期（公元前7世纪上半叶—前6世纪上半叶）上海博物馆

*Pen 盆* is a term that is still in common use today to mean a shallow container for holding water. The ancient variety is shown below.



**Pen (Food Vessel) with Distorted Dragon Design**

Mid Spring and Autumn Period (Early 7th — Early 6th century BCE), Shanghai Museum  
变形龙纹盆

春秋中期（公元前 7 世纪上半叶—前 6 世纪上半叶）上海博物馆

A *zheng* 钟 is an ancient musical instrument with military use. *Zheng* of different sizes were sometimes organized into a group to allow for different tones.



**Zheng (a Musical Instrument) with Morphed Animal Mask Design**

Spring and Autumn Period (771—476 BCE), Shanghai Museum

变形兽面纹钲

春秋（公元前 771—前 476）上海博物馆

Many *zun* 尊, like the ox-shaped *zun* below, were made in the shapes of animals. The *zun* was used to heat wine. There are three holes in the back of the ox. The center leads to a contain that can be removed that was used to hold the wine. The other two holes were used to add hot water to heat the wine. Notice the fine taotie patterns within the dragon patterns in the detail picture. There are tiger and rhinoceros patterns around the neck.



**Ox-Shaped Zun (Wine Vessel)**

Late Spring and Autumn Period (Early 6th century — 476 BCE), Shanghai Museum

牺尊

春秋晚期（公元前 6 世纪上半叶—前 476 年）上海博物馆



Ox-Shaped Zun (detail)

*Dragon scale design* 龙鳞纹 or fish scale design, as shown on the ding below, first appeared in the Shang.



Ding (Food Vessel) with Interleaved Dragon and Scale Designs

Late Spring and Autumn Period (Early 6th century — 476 BCE), Shanghai Museum

交龙重鳞纹鼎

春秋晚期（公元前 6 世纪上半叶—前 476 年）上海博物馆

A *coiled dragon* 蟠龙 is one that is dormant and has not yet flown to the sky. Notice that the dragon in the picture below is coiled around the drum stand. This is the same shape as found coiled around columns in ancient architectural structures.



**Drum Stand with Coiled Dragon Open Sculpture**

Late Spring and Autumn Period (Early 6th century — 476 BCE), Shanghai Museum

透雕蟠龙鼓座

春秋晚期（公元前6世纪上半叶—前476年）上海博物馆

The jian is a large water container. The jian below is 73 cm in diameter and belonged to Fu Chai, king of Wu. It was excavated in Huxian in Henan province. There are two handles and two horned dragons climbing over the rim.



**Jian (a Water Vessel) of Fu Chai, King of Wu**  
Late Spring and Autumn Period (6th century — 476 BCE), Shanghai Museum

## Warring States Period 战国时代

In the Warring States period a greater variety of artifact styles and patterns was produced. Inlaid gold, silver, jade, and colored glaze became popular. The picture below shows an inlaid geometric pattern in a bronze ware wine vessel.



**Inlaid Geometric Pattern**  
Late Warring States Period (Mid 4th century — 221 BCE), Shanghai Museum  
**镶嵌几何纹**  
战国晚期（公元前4世纪中叶—前221年）上海博物馆

## Later Periods 后期

In later periods bronze lost its place as the centerpiece of imperial power. Bronze became more affordable to people outside sovereigns and high nobles. Also, other materials, such as iron and later steel, were developed that are lighter and stronger than bronze. However, bronze retained its place as a material of choice for certain artifacts, such as large bells and incense burners.



**Bronze mirror with the twelve animals of the Terrestrial Branches**

Five Dynasties (907—960), Suzhou Museum

铜镜（十二生肖）

五代（公元 907—960 年） 苏州博物馆

The *twelve animals of the Terrestrial Branches* 生肖, more loosely called the animals of the Chinese Zodiac, are the rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, rooster, dog, and boar. The rear of the bronze mirror above from the Five Dynasties shows twelve animals of the Terrestrial Branches around *eight divinatory trigrams* 八卦, combining multiple popular favorites in one art work.



**Yongle Bell**

Yongle Reign (1,403—1,424), Ming Dynasty. Dazhong Temple, Beijing

永乐大钟

明朝永乐（1403—1424），北京大钟寺

Some of the bells in palaces, temples, and towers are huge. The Yongle bell, shown above, is 6.75 meters high and weighs 4.6 tonnes. The bell is decorated with Buddhist *matras* 咒 in both Chinese and Sanskrit. The top of the bell is decorated with a fierce looking dragon, indicating that it is exclusively for imperial use. The circumference at the base is decorated with the traditional Chinese *eight divinatory trigrams* 八卦.



**Copper Lion**

Qianlong Reign, Qing Dynasty (1735—1796), Lama Temple, Beijing

**铜狮**

清 乾隆（1735—1796年）背景雍和宫

Statues of lions, usually placed in pairs on either side of an entrance, are a common site outside buildings in China. This is connected with their symbolism in Buddhism as being a defender of the Dharma. The statue above, in Yonghegong, Beijing, is especially impressive. Besides the main sculpture the patterns on the base are interesting.



**Ancient Astronomical Instrument**

Beijing Ancient Observatory

古天文仪器

北京古观象台

The two copper pitchers below from Xinjiang show an obvious Middle Eastern influence, including Arabic text. Uyger art has a distinctive mix of Chinese and Middle Eastern elements with the addition of something unique in itself. The pitcher immediately below has fine floral designs.



**Uygur openwork copper pitcher**  
Early 20th century, Xinjiang. Shanghai Museum  
维吾尔族刻花镂空铜壶  
20世纪上半叶 新疆 上海博物馆

The pitcher below, from Kashgar, has an interesting spiral pattern, shown in detail on the right.



**Uygur copper pitcher in lacquer inlay**  
Early 20th century. Kashgar, Xinjiang. Shanghai Museum  
**维吾尔族刻花填漆铜水壶**  
20世纪上半叶 新疆喀什 上海博物馆



**Uygur copper pitcher in lacquer inlay (detail)**

## Buddhist 佛教

*Sakyamuni Buddha* 释迦牟尼佛, also known as Siddhattha Gotama (c. 500 BCE), was the founder of Buddhism. Usually, if one simply writes the Buddha, then Sakyamuni Buddha is intended. Bronze has a history of over 1500 years for Buddhist artifacts, mostly for statues, incense burners, and bells. The statue below is an early one from the Northern Wei. The striated pattern on the *nimbus* or *halo* 背光 behind the Buddha is very effective in bronze.



**Bronze Statue of the Buddha**

Northern Wei, First year of the reign of Zheng Shi (504) Shanghai Museum

佛铜像

北魏正始元年（公元 504 年）上海博物馆

Besides Sakyamuni Buddha, other buddhas are mentioned in Buddhist sutras. According to the *Amitabha Sutra* 阿弥陀经, *Amitabha Buddha* 阿弥陀 is the founder of the *Western Pure Land* 西方极乐世界. Chanting Amitabha Buddha's name a common practice for the *Pure Land School* 净土宗 of Buddhism, which is one of the most common schools of Chinese Buddhism. In the bronze artifact below shows three Amitabha Buddha figures with hands showing *speaking the Dharma mudra* 说法印, indicating that Amitabha is expounding the teachings of the Buddha.



**Bronze statues of Amitabha**  
Sui (581–618) Shanghai Museum  
阿弥陀三尊铜像  
隋 (公元 581~618) 上海博物馆

In the picture his hands are in a *Dhyana mudra* 禅定印, symbolizing meditative concenration. This is the same hand position taught in Buddhist medication classes.



**Sakyamuni Buddha seated statue**

Foguang Shan, Taiwan

釋迦牟尼佛坐像

台灣佛光山

Mount Putuo 普陀山 is one of the *Four Sacred Buddhist Mountains of China* 四大佛教名山 and the earthly abode of *Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva* 观音菩萨. The recently cast statue shown below is one of the main attractions of Mount Putuo. The statue was created in 1997. Located on the southeast corner of Mount Putuo, at 18 meters tall on a 13 meter tall platform, it is visible from a great distance. The statue was cast with a gold colored bronze alloy and weighs over 70 tonnes.



**South China Sea Avalokitesvara Statue**

Mount Putuo

南海观音像

普陀山

Incense symbolizes purification. The incense burner below is typical for a large temple. Incense burners usually feature intricate artwork and, in some cases, can be about two stories high, reflecting the importance of burning incense in Chinese Buddhism. The incense burner below is two meters tall, cast copper and is located in front of the Great Hall of the Heros at Lingyin Temple. It was donated by Ming Palace *Eunuch Sun Long* 太监孙隆 in 1601.



**Incense Burner**  
Linyin Temple, Hangzhou  
香炉  
杭州灵隐寺

The incense burner below was constructed in the shape of a *pagoda* 佛塔, which is related to the use of pagoda's for keeping the relics of important Buddhist figures.



**Incense Burner**  
Mount Wutai, Shanxi  
香炉  
山西五台山

Many incense burners have a flame emblem on top. This one from Linyin Temple in Hangzhou was nearly as impressive as the blaze coming from the pile of incense below.



**Bronze flame**  
Lingyin Temple, Hangzhou  
**火焰纹青铜器**  
杭州灵隐寺

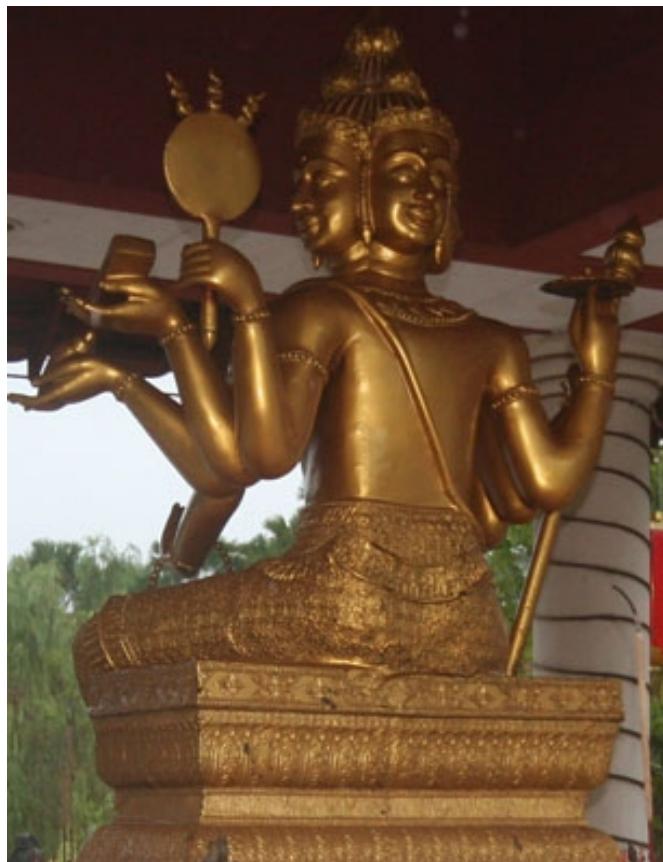
*Prayer wheels* 传经筒 contain prayers or sutras and are spun to transmit them to world, which is the literal meaning of the Chinese word. They are mainly used in Tibetan Buddhism 藏传佛教. The prayer wheel shown in the picture below is located at the *Lama Temple* 雍和宫 in Beijing.



**Prayer wheel**

The Lama Temple, Beijing  
传经筒  
北京雍和宫

**Four-faced Buddha** 四面佛 are common in *Theravada Buddhism* 南传佛教, especially Thailand. Now with the overseas Chinese population mixing more with the Mainland Chinese population it is sometimes seen in China. The photograph below is from a Buddhist temple in Malaysia.



**Four-faced Buddha**  
Malaysia  
四面佛  
马来西亚

# Jade 玉

## Background 背景

Jade artwork in China dates from about 5,000 to 3,000 BCE, before the Bronze Age. It seems incredible that people could create these jade artifacts without metal tools, especially chisels. Because of its beauty and unique qualities jade continued to be a favored medium for artwork long, especially jewelry, long after the heyday of painted pottery and bronze ware had passed. Chinese jade artwork is better known than jade artwork from any other country. The Shanghai Museum is one of the best galleries for Chinese jade and the exhibition, from which some of the photos here are taken, is stunning.

Historically, *soft jade* 软玉 was more commonly used than the much harder jadeite, which is as hard or harder than glass. Later on, tools and techniques were developed to work with jadeite and harder gemstones. *Nephrite* 和田玉 is a kind of soft jade, and the term is often used synonymously with soft jade. The color of soft jade varies with the iron content varying from *white jade* 白玉 to *green jade* 青玉. Jadeite and other gemstones sometimes called jade have a greater variety of colors. There is considerable confusion over the exact terms for jade because of the use of the Chinese term for *jade* 玉 to mean precious stones in general and other historic use of Chinese terms for varieties of jade. For example, the Chinese term for *jasper* is 碧玉, which implies that it is a kind of jade and, in fact, it sometimes refers to fine jade.

## Early Period 早期

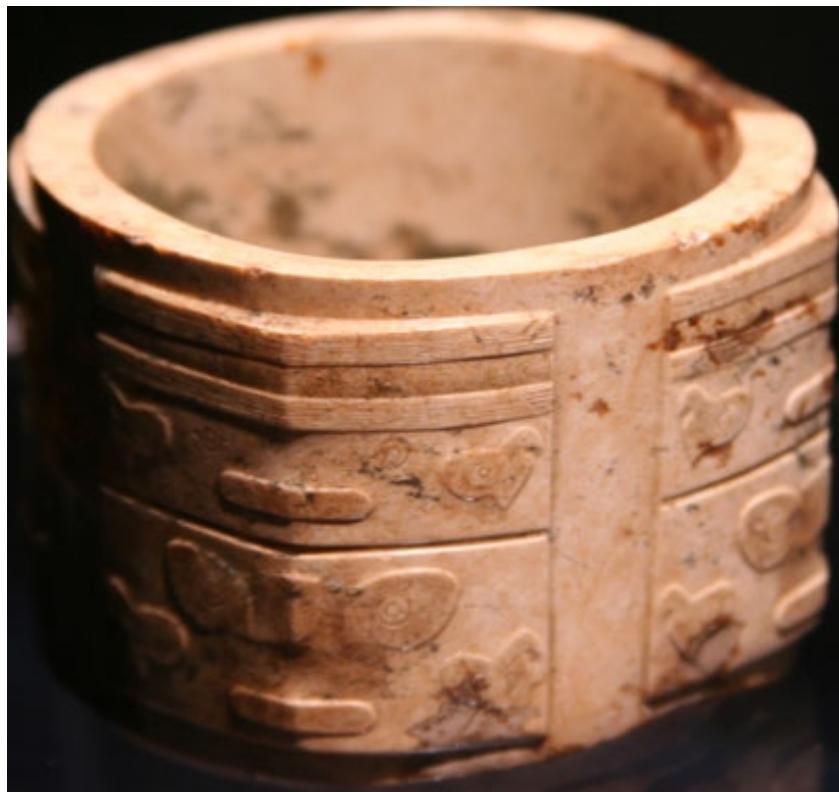
Many early jade artifacts were discovered from the *Hongshan Culture* 红山文化 that existed in Northeast China from about 4,700 to 2900 BCE. Later on the Liangzhu Culture (c. 3400 - 2250 BCE) in the Yantze Delta also produced many jade artifacts. The types of artifacts were mostly small and decorative, such as pendants, bracelets, and hair pins, as appropriate to the use of jade as a medium for art.



**Dragon**

Hongshan Culture (4,000—3,000), Shanghai Museum  
Excavated from Dawujiacun, Niugutu Village, Aohanqi, Inner Mongolia  
龙  
红山文化（公元前 4000—前 3000 年）上海博物馆  
内蒙古敖汉旗牛古吐乡大五家村西出土

The jade dragon pendant above was excavated from a Hongshan Culture site in Inner Mongolia.



**Cong with deity and flying bird design**  
Liangzhu Culture (3,200—2,200), Shanghai Museum  
**神像飞鸟纹琮**  
良渚文化（公元前3200—2200年）上海博物馆

There were a number of jade ceremonial artifacts created during the period 6,000 to 2,000 BCE, including the *cong* 琮 and *bi* 璧 (a jade disc) that there is no modern equivalent of. The *cong* above and below are from the *Liangzhu Culture* 良渚文化 (3,200—2,200).



**Cong with diety face design**

Liangzhu Culture (3,200—2,200), Shanghai Museum  
Excavated from a tomb in Tinglin, Jinshan District, Shanghai  
**神面纹琮**

良渚文化（公元前3200~2200年）上海博物馆  
上海市金山区亭林墓葬出土

### Xia Dynasty to Zhou Dynasty 夏至周

*Jade funerary masks 帷目缀玉* were relatively common for early Chinese rulers. People of the time believed that jade had special powers that protected the body. Some rulers even had entire *jade burial suits 玉衣*. The picture below shows a jade funerary mask from the Late Western Zhou.



**Jade ornaments for a funerary mask**

Late Western Zhou (Late 9th century —771 BCE), Shanghai Museum

瞑目缀玉

西周晚期（公元前9世纪—前771年）上海博物馆

Later, the designs on jade artifacts were similar to designs on other artifacts but usually smaller in size and more refined. The dragon and phoenix design on the ornament below from the Spring and Autumn Period resembles bronze ware from the same period.

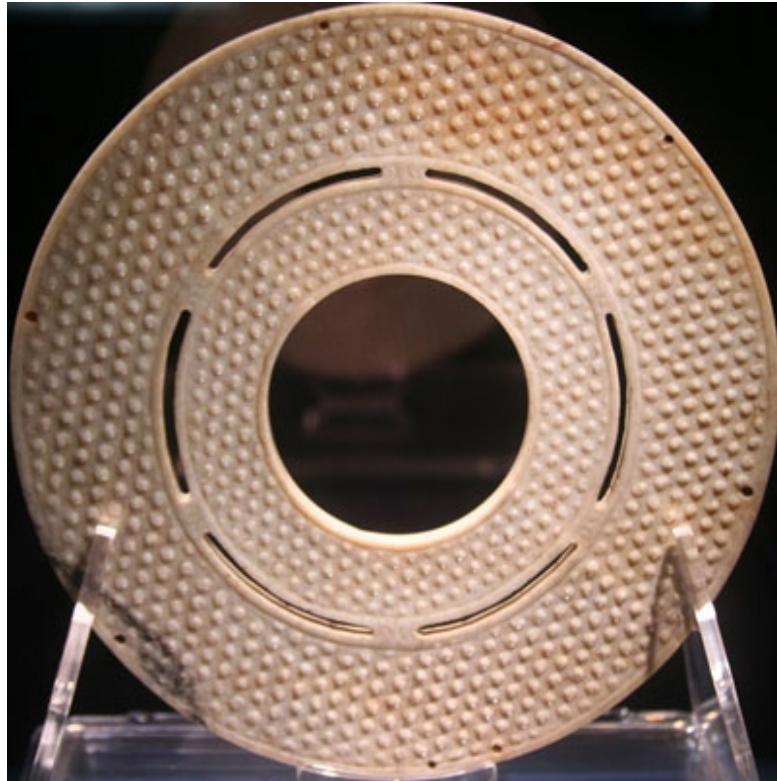


**Ornament with dragon and phoenix**

Late Spring and Autumn (Late 6th century —477 BCE), Shanghai Museum  
龙凤饰

春秋晚期（公元前 6 世纪上半叶—前 477 年）上海博物馆

In ancient times *bi* 璧 (a jade disc) had a very high value. There is a story about a very valuable *bi* in the Warring States Period described in the book *Records of the Historian* by Sima Qian 司马迁史记, written circa 100 BCE. The King of Qin offered the King of Zhao 15 cities in exchange for the *bi*. The King of Qin intended to cheat the King of Zhao but a Zhao official Lin Xiangru outsmarted the King of Qin. The *bi* shown below is from the Warring States Period.



**Bi (jade disc) with a grain pattern**  
Warring States Period (475—221 BCE), Shanghai Museum  
**谷纹璧**  
战国（公元前 475—221 年）上海博物馆

A *peck* 斗 is an old measure of grain and has a number of symbolic meanings, one of them being justice. The grain design in the jade ornaments below may related to that.



**Dragon**

Warring States Period (475—221 BCE), Shanghai Museum  
龙  
战国（公元前 475~221 年）上海博物馆

A *huang* 璜 is an arc-shaped jade pendant. The *huang* below from the Warring States Period has a grain pattern.



**Huang (arc-shaped jade pendant) with grain design**  
Warring States Period (475—221 BCE), Shanghai Museum  
谷纹璜  
战国（公元前 475~221 年）上海博物馆

The frog in the jade artifact below is an interesting choice for a belt buckle. Frogs are not common in Chinese symbolism.



**Belt buckle with animal mask and frog design**  
Warring States Period (475—221 BCE), Shanghai Museum  
**兽首蛙纹带钩**  
战国（公元前 475~221 年）上海博物馆

## Han to Song 汉至宋

Bi were used in sacrificial ceremonies. In the Neolithic bi were undecorated but later on decorations were added. Also, after the Neolithic bi symbolized heaven.



**Bi (jade disc) with bird design**  
Western Han (206 BCE — 8 CE), Shanghai Museum  
**鸟纹璧**  
西汉（公元前 206~公元 8 年）上海博物馆

Beginning in the Tang the quantity and diversity of jade artifacts increased and the goods were exported in large quantities. Before this jade items were limited to a few kinds, including cups, ornaments, and hair pins.



**Ornament with crane and cloud design**

Song (906—1279), Shanghai Museum

云鹤纹饰

宋（公元 960 年～1279 年）上海博物馆

## Late Period 晚期

In the Ming, the production of jade artifacts increased greatly along with the booming hand craft industry and related commercial trade. Accordingly, jade artifacts became more popular. Taoism was popularized. Designs with symbols of luck and prosperity were most common.



**Ornament with lotus and egret design**

Yuan (1271—1368), Shanghai Museum

莲鹭纹饰

元（公元 1271—1368 年）北京首都博物馆

Ming symbols of good luck included the *Eight Immortals* 八仙, characters for *longevity* 寿 and happiness 喜, peach, lingzhi 灵芝, deer, crane, and mandarin ducks.



**Ornament with parrot design**

Ming (1368—1644), Shanghai Museum

双鹦鹉纹饰

明（公元 1368—1644 年）上海博物馆

Deers symbolize longevity and are, supposedly, the only animals able to find *lingzhi* 灵芝, a fungus known for longevity in Chinese tradition. Horns of deer are puverized and made into medicinal pills.



Jade ornament with sheep symbolizing an auspicious new year

Ming (1368—1644), Suzhou Museum

羊开泰饰板

明（公元 1368—1644 年）苏州博物馆

The ornament below has a chi and phoenix design. A *chi* 螭 can be described as a serpent or a kind of dragon with no horns.



**Ornament with chi (serpent) and phoenix design**

Ming (1368—1644), Shanghai Museum

螭凤纹饰

明（公元 1368—1644 年）上海博物馆

The *flower and plant designs* 花卉纹 in the are popular in other mediums as well, especially porcelain. The pendant below was discovered in a Jin Dynasty tomb in the Fangshan District, Beijing.



**Jade Pendant with Dragon and Cloud Designs**

Qing Dynasty (1644—1,911), Capital Museum

玉螭龙云纹心佩

清朝（1644—1911年）首都博物馆

A *ruyi* 如意 is a curved ceremonial object similar to a sceptre that symbolizes power and good fortune. *Ruyi* may be originated in India and been transmitted to China with Buddhism. The *ruyi* below has three pieces of white jade inlaid into the wood sceptre.



Sceptre with three white jade inlays

Qing Dynasty (1,644—1,911), Suzhou Museum  
白玉三镶如意  
清朝（1644—1911年）苏州博物馆

*Snuff bottles* 鼻烟壺 with delicate carved designs are relatively common Chinese antiques. The picture below shows an agate snuff bottle.



**Agate snuff bottle**  
Qing Dynasty (1,644—1,911), Suzhou Museum  
玛瑙巧色鼻烟壺  
清朝（1644—1911年）苏州博物馆

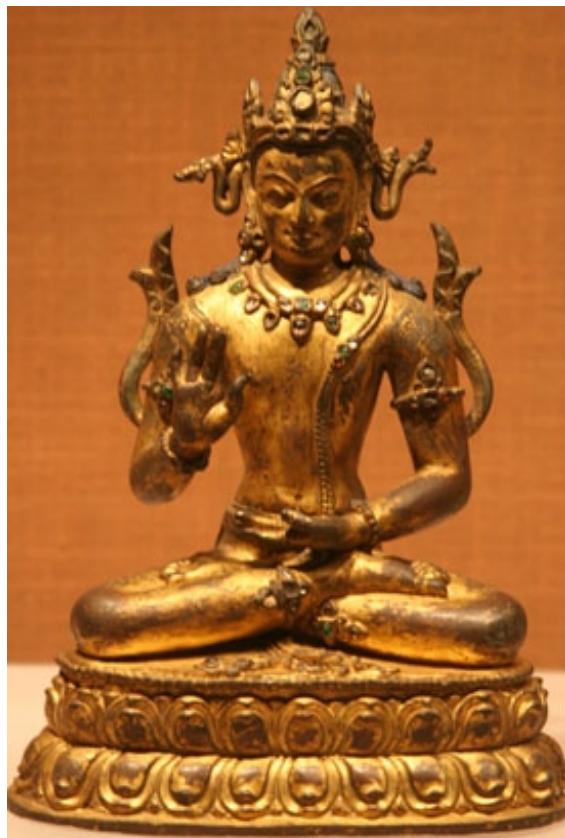
## Gold and Silver 金银文物

Gold and silver artifacts in China date back to the Shang Dynasty.



菩萨鎏金铜像  
北魏景明二年（公元 501 年）上海博物馆  
**Gilt bronze bodhisattva statue**  
Northern Wei, Second year of Jing Ming Reign (501), Shanghai Museum

*Gold leaf* 鎏金 was common with statues of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. The statues above and below are gilt bronze. The nimbus with flame pattern behind the bodhisattva above is especially effective in gold, reflecting the dazzling light that might be emitted from such a bodhisattva. In addition to being a great effect, such a huge nimbus also allows for the status to be created partly or mostly in relief.



**Bronze with Gilding Amoghasiddha Buddha Statue**  
Tubo Period (9th—13th centuries), Capital Museum, Beijing  
铜镀金不动成就佛像  
吐蕃分治时期（9—13世纪）北京首都博物馆

The statue of *Amoghasiddha Buddha* 不动成就佛 above is bronze with gold gilding, partially worn off. There is a lot of symbolism in Buddhist art and also in this statue. One of the easy symbols to recognize is the lotus, a symbol of purity, that *Amoghasiddha Buddha* is sitting on. The statue is from Tibet but the use of the lotus in Chinese art is the same, both deriving from India.

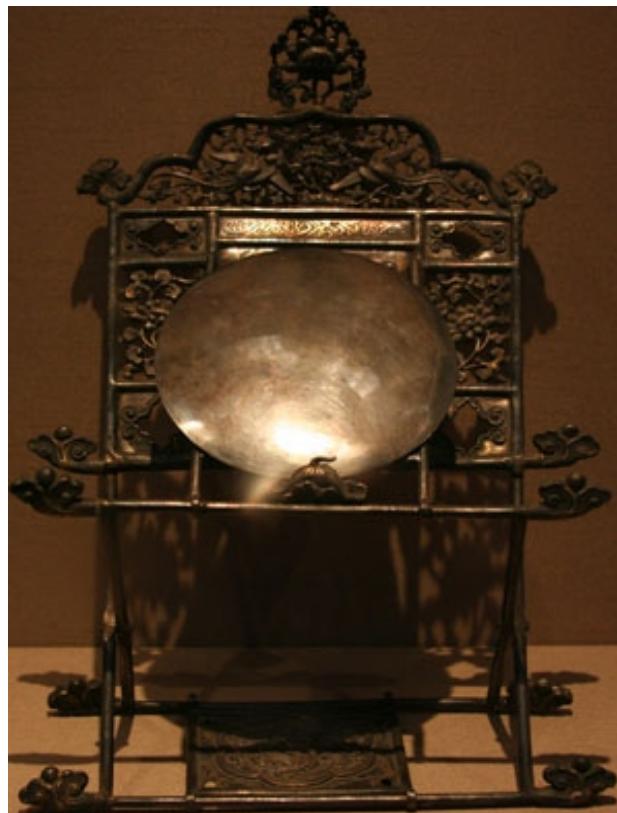


**Gilt bronze Mahavairocana statue**

Kingdom of Dali, Second year of Sheng Ming Reign (1163), Shanghai Museum  
大日遍照鎏金铜像  
大理国盛明二年（公元 1163 年）上海博物馆

The statue of *Mahavairocana Buddha* 大日遍照 above is showing a Bhumyakramana-Mudra 觸地印 touching the ground with his right hand symbolizing the Buddha defeating evil and achieving enlightenment.

The mirror stand below, excavated from the *Cao* 曹 family tomb, is made from pure silver. It is decorated with auspicious designs.



**Silver Mirror Stand**  
Yuan (1279—1368), Suzhou Museum  
**银镜架**  
元（公元 1279—1368 年）苏州博物馆

Even though gold and silver artifacts in China date back to the Shang Dynasty, they did not become popular until after the Han dynasty. During the Tang gold and silver items were imported in large quantities from Europe and Southwest Asia. Early Chinese gold artifacts followed the European designs but later on became distinctively Chinese.



**Gold Plate with Flower and Plant Design**

Capital Museum, Beijing

花卉纹金盆

北京首都博物馆

# Carved Stone 石刻

## Background 背景

The same types of decorative designs have also been applied to carved stone. The specific designs vary with the context that they appear in. Carved stone is mostly used in architectural structures like temples, palaces, other important buildings, and tombs. The different types of carving include *full form sculpture* 圆雕, *relief sculpture* 浮雕, *open work* 透雕, and *engraving* 刻花.

Before the invention of steel all carving was done by abrasion roughing out first with stone hammers. Metals developed before steel are not hard enough to carve any but the softest rocks. The use of steel chisels enabled the creation of fine stone carvings. Carving did was not well developed until about the end of the Han Dynasty (202 BCE —220 CE) and reached a peak in the Tang (618—907). Examples of well known locations of stone carvings in China are the *Longmen Caves* 龙门石窟 in Henan (Northern Wei to Northern Song), *Mount Maiji Caves* 麦积山石窟 in Gansu (Northern Wei to Qing), and *Yungang Caves* 云冈石窟 in Shanxi (fifth to sixth century).

The picture below shows a huabiao 华表 in front of Tiananmen. The decorative pattern on the column is a traditional Chinese cloud and dragon design. A huabiao is a column traditionally erected in front of palaces and tombs. A mythical creature called a denglong 蹰龙, one of the nine children of the dragon, is sitting on top of the column.



**Huabiao at Tiananmen**

15th Century, Beijing

天安门华表

15世纪，北京

Some good examples of stone carving are in large palace complexes like Yuan Ming Yuan and the Forbidden City. The picture above is from the Qing Dynasty Yuan Ming Yuan ruins in Beijing. Yuan Ming Yuan 圆明园, also known as the Old Summer Palace, located in Beijing was destroyed by British and French troops in 1860 as punishment for not buying opium. These carvings are European in style.



**Carved Stone at Yuan Ming Yuan**

Qing Dynasty (1644—1911), Yuan Ming Yuan, Beijing

圆明园石刻

清朝（1644—1911年）北京圆明园

Nine is an imperial number and dragons are a symbol of the emperor, which makes Nine Dragon Wall 九龙壁 a very imperial relief sculpture. Surprisingly, there are many Nine Dragon Walls in China but the most famous is located in the Forbidden City in Beijing.



**Nine Dragon Wall**

Fayu Temple, Mount Putuo

九龙壁

普陀山法雨寺

Homophones are common in Chinese and frequently used for symbolic meaning. A homophone

of bat 蝙蝠 is "to become rich" 变富. A picture of relief sculpture of a bat on a railing at Lingyin Temple, Hangzhou is shown below.



**Bat**

Lingyin Temple, Hangzhou

蝙蝠

杭州灵隐寺

The scene with the elephants below is an example of a relief sculpture. The relief is relatively deep.



**Elephant**

Lingyin Temple, Hangzhou

大象  
杭州灵隐寺

The scene with the monkey below is an example of open work. Open work sculpture is often used for windows in temples and gardens to let a certain amount of light in.



Monkey  
Mount Putuo  
猴子  
普陀山

Relief sculptures can also be created using shallow relief with contrasting areas emphasized using different degrees of polish. An example of this is shown below in the bamboo relief sculpture where the raised areas have been polished. The purple granite resembles the color of the purple bamboo that is the namesake of the temple.



Bamboo relief sculpture  
Zizhu Temple, Mount Putuo

竹林浮雕  
普陀山紫竹禅林

## Buddhist 佛教

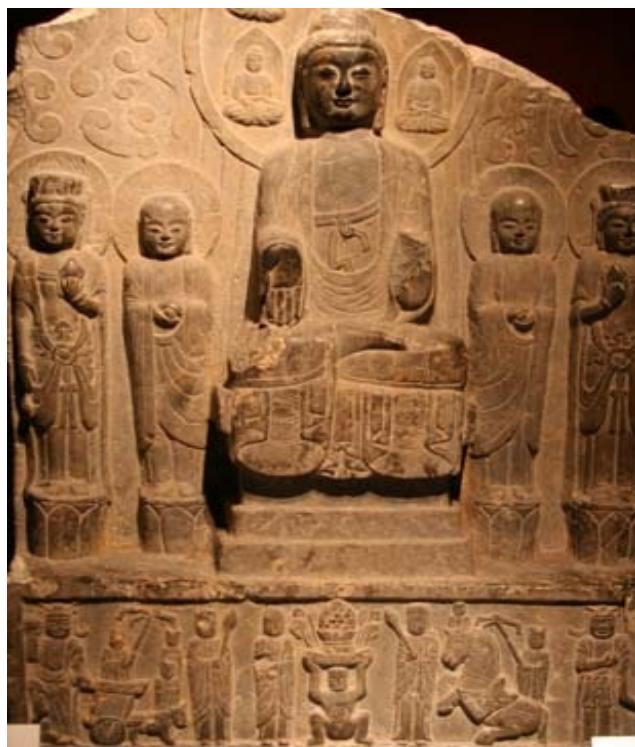
### ***Early Period 早期***

The relief statue below shows *Sakyamuni Buddha* 释迦牟尼佛, the historic Buddha. He is characteristically shown with *Ananda* 阿难 and *Mahakassapa* 摩诃迦叶, also spelled as *Kasyapa*, 大迦叶, two of his ten close disciples. The pedestal shows an incense burner and two lions. This is a scene representing the Buddha's first sermon and is repeated on a number different statues. Rocks and trees are carved in the stone on the background, representing Deer Park where the sermon took place.



**Stone Buddha statue created for Cheng Rong and others**  
Second year of Xinghe Reign, Eastern Wei (540), Shanghai Museum  
**程荣等造佛石像**  
东魏 兴和二年（公元 540 年） 上海博物馆

The statues above and below include scenes describing *jataka stories* 本生, which are stories from the life or a past life of the Buddha. They originate in Indian Buddhist art. The relief carving here is a mural style on a flat surface. This type of relief sculpture is produced by a multi-step process. In the first step a painter paints the design on the stone. In the second step a mason chisels lines around the outlines. In the third step the painter may have painted the stone.



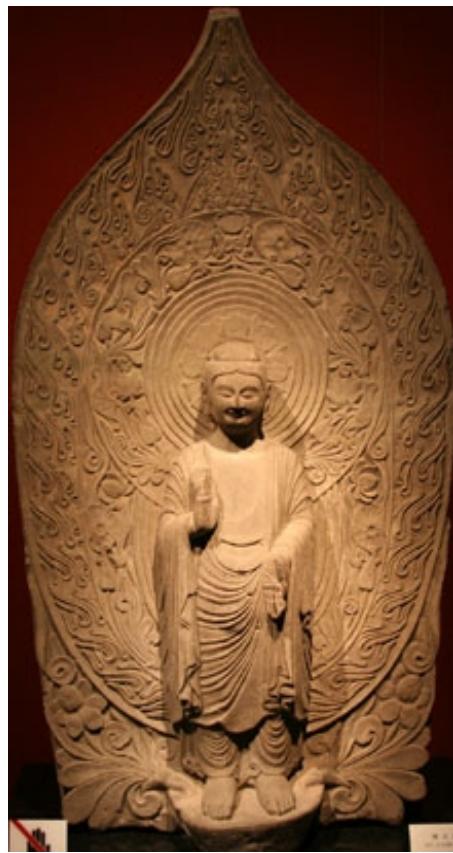
**Buddhist Statue in Stone**

Northern Qi (550—577), Shanghai Museum

佛石像

北齐（550—577年） 上海博物馆

The statue below includes a large *nimbus* 背光 behind the Buddha. There are *flame patterns* 火焰纹 and floral patterns decorating the nimbus. Hand gestures or *mudras* 手印 are important Buddhist symbols. In the statue below the Buddhas right hand, facing outwards with five fingers pointing upwards, is an *abhaya mudra* 施无畏印. This indicates protection and assurance or casting out fear. The Buddhas left has is in a *vara mudra* 愿印, with his hand facing outwards with five fingers pointing downwards, indicating upholding of vows.



**Stone Statue of the Buddha**  
Northern Qi (550—577), Shanghai Museum  
**佛石像**  
北齐（550—577年） 上海博物馆

The statue below has surrounding decoration featuring two dragons arched over the Buddha, which is a traditional Chinese design. The relief in the statue below is much deeper and was created with a different technique.



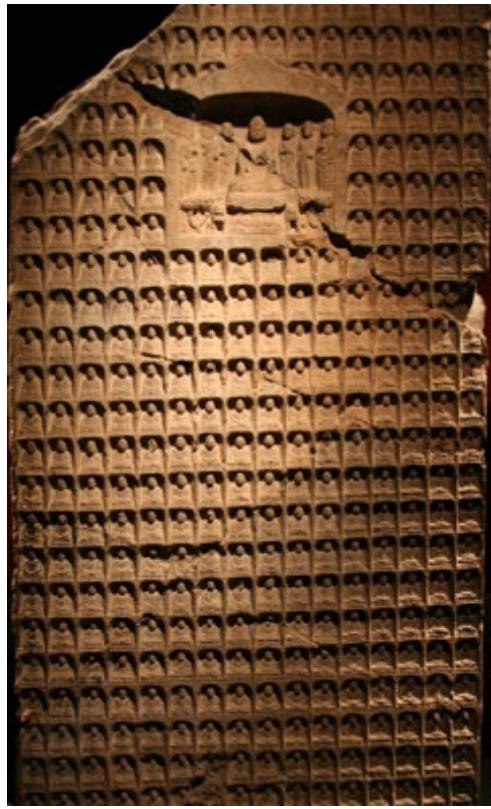
**Buddhist Steele, Stone**

Wu Ping Reign, Northern Qi (572), Shanghai Museum

佛像石碑

北齐武平三年（572年） 上海博物馆

Large numbers implying nearly infinite quantities are common and important in Buddhism. The steele below is titled Ten thousand Buddhas Steele, not meaning ten thousand literally but a meaning a very large number. In China, ten thousand traditionally represents a large number or infinity. In Buddhist sutras this concept was represented by the number of grains of sand in the Ganges, the number of dust particles created by turning a world into dust (Lotus Sutra), the amount of space in a particular direction (Diamond Sutra), or other analogies.



**Ten thousand Buddhas Steele**  
Northern Zhou (557—581), Shanghai Museum  
**万佛石碑**  
北周（公元 557～581 年） 上海博物馆

In Buddhism *Lokapalas* 天王 refer to the four heavenly kings, who are guardians of the four directions of the world. They are most frequently seen at *temple entrances* 山门. The Lokapala statue below is an Indian style figure.



**Stone Lokapala statue**  
Tang (618—917), Shanghai Museum  
天王石像  
唐（公元 618—917 年） 上海博物馆

### Late Period 晚期

*Feilai Peak* 飞来峰 near *Lingyin Temple* 灵隐寺 in Hangzhou contains many wonderful cliff and cave sculptures, starting from around the Five Dynasties period (907—960). Lingyin Temple dates back to about 328 with construction in the present area in approximately 975. It is one of the oldest temples in Southern China and the largest in the Hangzhou area.

The relief sculpture below depicts the *Meeting with the Locana Buddha* 卢舍那佛会, a scene from the *Avatamsaka Sutra* 华严经, also called *Avatamsaka Three Saints* 华严三圣. It is located at the mouth of the *Qinglin Cave* 青林洞 at Feilai Peak. Locana Buddha, also known as *Vairocana Buddha* 大日如来, is another body of *Sakyamuni Buddha* 释迦牟尼佛. Locana Buddha is in the center wearing a crown and sitting on a *high lotus throne* 莲座. The raised position of his arms and hand gestures indicate that he is speaking the Dharma. *Manjusri Bodhisattva* 文殊菩萨 is to Locana Buddha's left riding a lion. *Samantabhadra Bodhisattva* 普贤菩萨 is to Locana Buddha's right riding a white elephant with six tusks. Also, to the sides are four *lokapala* 天王 (or heavenly kings) and four bodhisattvas paying respect to Locana Buddha.



**Meeting with the Locana Buddha**

1022 CE, Feilai Peak, Zhejiang

卢舍那佛会

公元 1022 年 浙江飞来峰

Chinese *pagodas* 塔 originate from India stupas. The word in Chinese is the same in both cases. In English we use the term stupa for the original Indian style, built in the shape of an upturned alms bowl and still common in Thailand, Burma, and other South and Southeast Asian countries. Chinese pagodas tend to be taller and more slender and come in a number of different styles. The one shown below is a *stone pagoda* 石塔 in Linyin Temple, Hangzhou. The detail on the right shows a *false door* 假门 carved on the outside of the pagoda. False windows and doors were common in early Indian stupas but have become less common in more recent Chinese pagodas. Their use relates to the practice of storing relics of monks and others within or under the pagodas.



**Stone pagoda**  
960 CE, Linyin Temple, Hangzhou  
**石塔**  
公元 960 年 杭州灵隐寺



**Stone pagoda false door**  
960 CE, Linyin Temple, Hangzhou  
**石塔假门**  
公元 960 年 杭州灵隐寺

A *sutra pillar* 经幢 is a stone column placed outside of temples, most often present in temples

dating in the Tang and before. Sutras or mantras are inscribed on them along with decorative carvings. The sutra pillar shown below is the West Sutra Pillar at Lingyin Temple. There are two sutra pillars in front of Lingyin Temple: one to the east and one to the west. The pillars are octagonal. The *Usnisa Vijaya Dharani* 尊胜陀罗尼经 is inscribed at the top of one pillar and the *Great Freedom Dharani* 大自在陀罗尼神咒经 on the other. In addition, there are relief sculptures of Buddhas and dragons on the pillars.



**Sutra pillar**  
969 CE, Feilai Peak  
经幢  
公元 969 年 飞来峰



**Sutra pillar detail**

969 CE, Feilai Peak

经幢(部)

公元969年 飞来峰

*Maitreya Bodhisattva* 弥勒菩萨 is one of the most commonly seen bodhisattvas in Chinese Buddhism. He will be the next Buddha of our world. Because he is a bodhisattva bringing great happiness and contentment he is often shown with a large belly in Chinese Buddhism and statues of Maitreya are often placed in food halls and Chinese restaurants. The picture below shows the Maitreya statue at Feilai Peak, which is one of the best preserved and most often photographed in the area. In one hand he is holding the cloth bag and in the other he is holding *prayer beads* 念珠. The cloth bag represents its contents: it is a lightweight bag that can hold things of any shape. Maitreya is flanked by 18 *Arhats* 罗汉 in this statue. It is the largest statue at Feilai Peak. The niche is 9.9 meters long and 3.6 meters high.



**Maitreya statue with cloth bag**

Southern Song (1127—1280), Feilai Peak

布袋弥勒像

南宋(公元1127—1280年) 飞来峰

*Manjusri Bodhisattva* 文殊菩萨 is one of the four great Bodhisattvas of Chinese Buddhism. The others are *Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva* 观音菩萨, *Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva* 地藏菩萨, and *Samantabhadra Bodhisattva* 普贤菩萨. Since Manjusri is the Dharma Prince he is shown wearing a crown in the stone carving below.



**Manjusri Bodhisattva**  
Yuan Dynasty (1279—1368), Feilai Peak  
文殊师利  
元代（公元 1279—1368 年）飞来峰

There are many Indian style sculptures at Feilai Peak. The picture below shows the *Wealth Diety* 宝藏神 carved in Indian style.



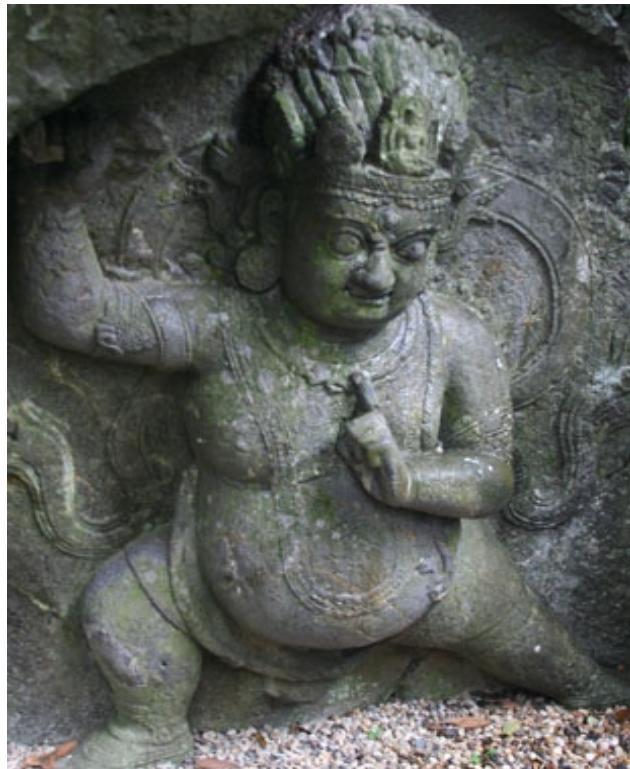
Wealth Diety

Yuan Dynasty (1279—1368), Feilai Peak

宝藏神

元代（公元 1279—1368 年）飞来峰

*Vajrapani Bodhisattva* 金刚手菩萨, literally Diamond Hand Bodhisattva, is one of the protectors of the Buddha. He is shown below in a picture of a cave stone carving at Feilai Peak. He is wearing a jewelled crown holding a small Buddha.



**Vajrapani Bodhisattva**  
Yuan Dynasty (1279—1368), Feilai Peak  
**金刚手菩萨**  
元代（公元 1279—1368 年）飞来峰

*Duobao Pagoda* 多宝塔 on Mount Putuo is 18 meters high with three levels and a square plan. Each side has a Buddha relief statue inside a niche. It was first built in 1335 during the Yuan but has been renovated since. The *Medicine Buddha* 药师佛 is usually shown in the east, as he is on Duobao Pagoda below. As per tradition, he is shown holding a jar of medicine nectar in his left hand.



**Duobao Pagoda**  
1335 Mount Putuo  
**多宝塔**  
1335 年 普陀山



**Duobao Pagoda Medicine Buddha**

1335 Mount Putuo

多宝塔药师佛

1335 年 普陀山

A *nimbus* 头光 is a light around the head while an *aureole* 身光 is a light around or behind the body. The *Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva* 观音菩萨 statue below has both a nimbus and an aureole.



**Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva statue**

Putuo Shan

观音菩萨像

普陀山

*Ksitigarbha* 地藏菩萨 is the Bodhisattva of the Great Vow to not achieve Buddhahood until all the beings in Hell are saved. He carries a staff to open the gates of Hell and a jewel to light up darkness. It is called an *alarm staff* 警杖 because it can be carried by monks to warn off animals that might be trodden on by mistake.



**Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva statue**

Putuo Shan

地藏菩薩像

普陀山

*Samantabhadra Bodhisattva* 普賢菩薩, who symbolizes truth, is one of the four great bodhisattvas. As in the statue shown below, he is often shown riding an elephant with six tusks. The image is part of a long relief sculpture around the South China Sea Avalokitesvara Statue on Mount Putuo.



**Samantabhadra Bodhisattva statue**

Putuo Shan

普贤菩萨象

普陀山

*Putuo Shan* 禅林普陀山, or Mount Putuo, began to be used as a center for Buddhism after Japanese monk Hui E 慧锷 tried to transport a *Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva* 观音菩萨 statue back to Japan from Mount Wutai in Shanxi but was shipwrecked on the island. In 916 Hui E built the temple *Buken Qu Guanyin Temple* 不肯去观音院. Since then many temples have been built on the island. Because of the story and Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva's important place in China as the bodhisattva of compassion the island has become a popular pilgrimage destination. The relief statue below tells the story in pictorial form.



**Purple Bamboo Chan Temple Memorial Tablet**

Purple Bamboo Temple, Putuo Shan

紫竹禅林记碑

紫竹禅林普陀山

An *Apsara* 飞天 is a female spirit of clouds and water in Buddhist and Hindu mythology. The Apsaras shown below are from a carved relief sculpture on a wall at Lingyin Temple.



**Apsaras**

Feilai Peak

飞天

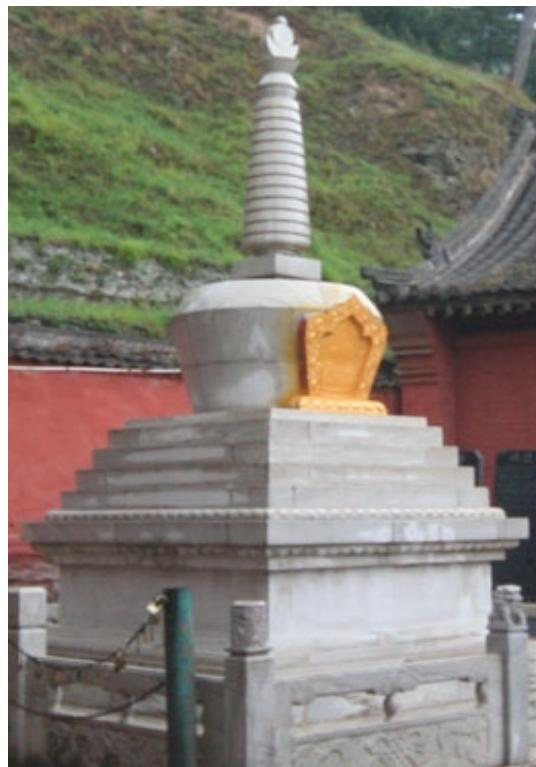
飞来峰

The pagoda shown below in *Nan Putuoshan* 南普陀山 temple in Xiamen is a small decorative model of a larger one. Decorative pagoda models like this are common. The unique Xiamen roof style is also shown in the background of this photo.



**Pagoda**  
Nan Putuoshan  
**佛塔**  
**南普陀山**

The photo below shows a Tibetan style stupa at Mount Wutai. This style is closer to the original Indian style stupa.



**Tibetan Style Stupa**

Mount Wutai

藏传佛教佛塔

五台山

## Porcelain 瓷器

### Background 背景

The term *ceramics* 陶瓷器 includes *pottery* 陶器, *terracotta* 赤陶, and *porcelain* 瓷器. Porcelain differs from the pottery that it evolved from in the firing temperatures and vitrification (transformation into glass) of the clay. Porcelain needs to be fired at a temperature of at least 1,200°C, use clay with at least 2% iron, and have an even application of glaze.

Porcelain originated in China and is one of China's great contributions to the world. Porcelain artifacts from China have been highly prized around the world for the last two thousand years. Chinese porcelain is immediately impressive to look at but most people probably would not guess the depth and breadth of the technology and artistic talent behind it.

Porcelain was produced at centers, actually factories, where expertise and facilities were

concentrated. The term *kiln* 窑 expanded in meaning from an oven for firing pottery to include the entire porcelain factory. A type of kiln called the *dragon kiln* 龙窑 appeared in the Warring States period that could reach high temperatures. The first kiln of this type was in the city of Zeng in Guangdong. Later, another kiln was built at Shanglu in Zhejiang in the Eastern Han. The kiln type is long compared to its width and uses rising heat from a heating chamber at its base. There is a smoke vent at the top, which can be blocked to obtain a reducing atmosphere. By the Eastern Han it could achieve the temperature of 1,200 degrees Celsius needed for firing porcelain. Other types of kilns were developed later. A replica of the egg-shaped kiln used at Jingdezhen in the Qing is shown below.



Jingdezhen egg-shaped kiln (replica)

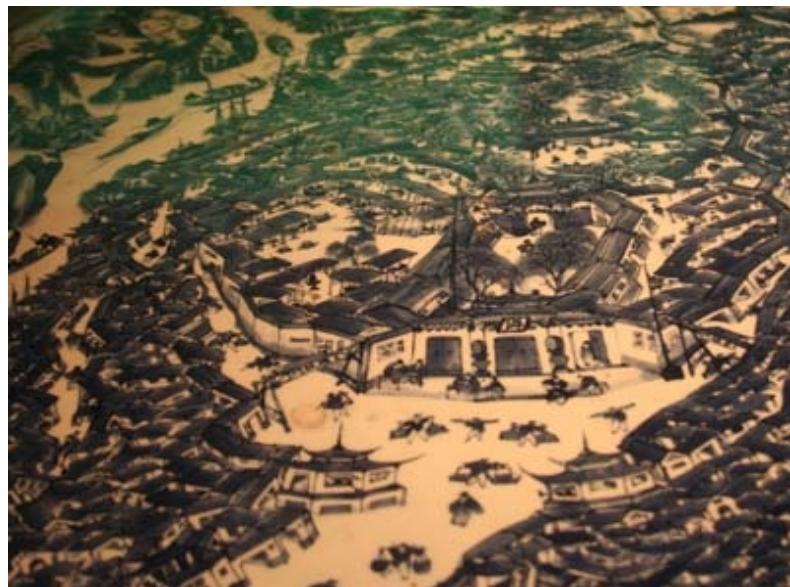
Shanghai Museum

景德镇蛋形窑

清道光（1821—1850年） 上海博物馆

Well known early kilns in the Tang included the *Yue Kiln* 越窑 near present day Shaoxing in Zhejiang province and the *Wuzhou Kiln* 婺州窑 near Jinhua, also in Zhejiang. The Yue Kiln well-known for producing celadon 青瓷, a green colored variety of porcelain. In the Song Dynasty porcelain reached a peak with kilns being set up all over China, each one having its own unique style.

Perhaps the most famous is the imperial *Jingdezhen Kiln* 景德镇窑 in present day Jiangxi province, which is still a major center for porcelain today. A picture of the Jingdezhen Kiln imperial porcelain factory is shown above. The well known *blue and white porcelain* 青花 was developed at Jingdezhen in the Yuan Dynasty. The clay used at Jingdezhen is taken from a nearby hill called *Gaoling* 高岭, which is the origin of the English word Kaolin, a common type of clay with a white color. One of the best known kilns in Northern China is the civilian *Cizhou Kiln* 磁州窑, located in present day Hebei province.



**Tabletop with a Picture of the Jingdezhen Kiln Imperial Porcelain Factory**

Daoguang Reign, Qing Dynasty (1821—1850), Capital Museum, Beijing

景德镇窑御窑厂图桌面

清道光（1821—1850年）北京首都博物馆

In the Yuan Dynasty, during the period 1214 to 1234, author *Jiang Qi* 蒋祈 wrote the historic book *The Records of Ceramics* 陶记 documenting the production of ceramics at the Jingdezhen Kiln. The book is of great historic value, including all the types of craftspeople involved, the sales, marketing, tax, and government regulation of the items. Later, in the Ming, Song Yingxing wrote the book called *Heavenly Creations* 天工开物 on agriculture and crafts, which included a chapter on ceramics.

*Seals* 款 were printed on the base of porcelain works starting in the Yuan Dynasty. A seal from the Kangxi reign, Qing Dynasty is shown below. The seal reads made during the reign of Emperor Kangxi, Qing Dynasty 大清康熙年制. Some seals omit *Qing Dynasty* 大清, consisting of the remaining four characters.

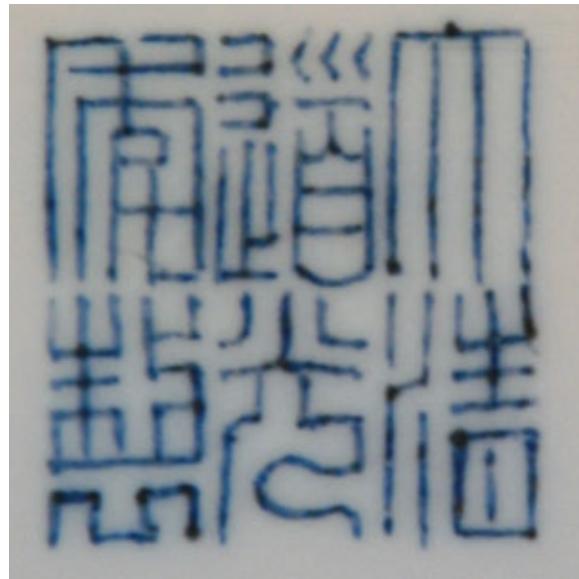


**Qing Dynasty, Kangxi reign seal in regular script**  
Kangxi Reign, Qing Dynasty (1661—1722), Suzhou Museum  
“大清康熙年制” 六字二行楷书款  
清 康熙（公元 1661—1722 年） 苏州博物馆

A seal from the Jiaqing reign, Qing Dynasty is shown below. It is much more stylized and less legible than the earlier Kangxi seal but contains the comparable six characters.



**Qing Dynasty, Jiaqing reign seal in regular script**  
Jiaqing Reign, Qing Dynasty (1796—1820), Suzhou Museum  
“大清嘉庆年制” 六字三行楷书款  
清 嘉庆（公元 1796—1820 年） 苏州博物馆



**Qing Dynasty, Daoguang reign seal in regular script**

Daoguang Reign, Qing Dynasty (1821—1850), Suzhou Museum

“大清道光年制” 六字三行楷书款

清 道光 (1821~1850 年) 苏州博物馆

## Early Period 早期

References differ on the exact time of origin. [Li Li, 2004] provides a range from the Shang (c. 1700 to 1045 BCE) to the Zhou (1045—221 BCE). [Fang 2010] gives the Han Dynasty. The Shanghai Museum has several artifacts from the Spring and Autumn Period (770—476 BCE) and the Warring States Period (445—221 BCE) that it labels as Celadon. Two of those are shown below.



**Celadon Tripod Ding with Ripple Patterns**

Spring and Autumn Period (771—445 BCE).

Excavated from Qingpu County, Shanghai. Shanghai Museum

青釉水波纹三系鼎

春秋（公元前 770—前 475 年）

上海青浦县出土 上海博物馆

There are several distinguishing characteristics of porcelain compared with other pottery:

1. Lower iron oxide and increase content aluminum oxide so that the body can be white
2. Firing temperature of at least 1,200 degrees Celsius
3. Use of glaze

Glaze was usually made from quartz, feldspar, and clay. It first appeared in the Shang but did not become widespread until later. The artifacts above and below, produced in the Spring and Autumn Period, probably meet these criteria. Most early porcelain, like these items, has been discovered along the lower reaches of the Yantze and the Southern Chinese coast.



Celadon Cup with String Patterns

Warring States Period (445—221 BCE), Shanghai Museum

青釉弦纹把杯

战国（公元前 475—前 221 年） 上海博物馆

*Celadon* 青釉 is a term that refers to pottery with a green glaze. It originated in Zhejiang province in China. The celadon jar below is a celadon artifact from the Three Kingdoms period (222—280 CE).



**Celadon jar with piled figurines**

Three Kingdoms Period (Wu) (222—280 CE). Shanghai Museum  
青釉堆塑人物罐  
三国（吴）公元 222—280 年 上海博物馆

## Western Jin Dynasty 西晋

The *lian* 盂 shown below was an ancient cosmetic box.



**Celadon lian with Buddhist figurines**

Western Jin (265—317), Shanghai Museum

青釉贴花佛像壶

西晋（公元 265—317 年）上海博物馆

The bixie 辟邪 shown below was an evil spirit exorcisor.



Celadon lion-shaped bixie

Western Jin (265—317), Shanghai Museum

青釉狮形辟邪

西晋（公元 265—317 年）上海博物馆

Designs in celadon were created by carving the clay. The variation in light with the undulating surface and thickness of translucent glaze is beautiful.



**Celadon jar with watchtower and figures**  
Western Jin (265—317), Shanghai Museum

青釉堆塑楼阙人物罐  
西晋（公元 265—317 年）上海博物馆

## Southern Dynasties 南朝

The lotus is a symbol of purity and perfection in Buddhism because it grows out of the mud but is not defiled. The flower is also esteemed by Daoists, being the symbol of *He Xianggu* 何仙姑, one of the eight immortals. Many parts of the lotus are used for eating, medicine, and herbal tea, including the seeds, stamen, petals, kernel, and root.



**Celadon jar with lotus petal designs**

Southern Dynasties (420—589), Shanghai Museum

青釉刻花莲瓣纹罐

南朝（公元 420—589 年） 上海博物馆

## Tang Dynasty 唐

During the Tang (618—907) a technique called underglaze painting was developed. With this technique designs were painted on the roughcast and then glaze was applied over the top. White porcelain was developed in the Northern Qi (550—577) using pure white roughcasts and glaze from reducing the iron content in the roughcast. The roughcasts and glaze is opal in color and the glaze of some is slightly blue. Pure white porcelain was developed in the Tang. The *Yue Kiln* 越窑 in Zhejiang was designated as an imperial kiln and people outside of the imperial family were forbidden to use porcelain made there



**Multi-colored glazed porcelain plat with engraved flying bird and cloud design**

Tang (618—907), Shanghai Museum

彩色釉陶印花飞鸟云纹盘

唐（618—907年） 上海博物馆

An important development in the Tang was the use of multi-colored glaze, also known as *tri-colored glaze* or *sancai* 三彩. This was quite different to the green celedon that preceded it. The glaze was a low temperature glaze mixed with iron, copper, manganese, cobolt, and other metals for coloring and then fired to about 750 to 800 degrees Celsius. The artifacts above and below are Tang sancai porcelain.



**Multi-colored glazed porcelain plate with wild goose and cloud design**

Tang (618—907), Shanghai Museum

彩色釉陶云雁纹盘

唐（618—907年） 上海博物馆

The wild goose is supposedly the bird of the *yang* 阳 (male) principle. It is also sometimes used in reference to a story of *Su Wu* 苏武 (140—60 BCE), a Han envoy to the Xiongnu who was kept captive for 20 years and informed emperor Han Wu Di of his location by attaching a letter to the leg of a wild goose.



**Multi-colored glazed porcelain tomb guardian beast**

Tang (618—907), Shanghai Museum

彩色釉陶镇墓兽

唐（618—907年） 上海博物馆

A *tomb guardian beast* 镇墓兽 are placed outside tombs to scare away spirits. They are usually strange or terrifying in appearance. The porcelain statue above is a Tang multi-colored tomb guardian beast, which is different in form from early tomb guardian beast from the Warring States period that resemble gruesome fairy tale figures.



**Marbled pottery pillow**  
Tang (618—907), Shanghai Museum  
**绞胎陶枕**  
唐（618—907年） 上海博物馆

Marbled or *jiaotai* 绞胎 pottery was developed in the Tang. In this technique alternating layers of brown and white clay are sandwiched together. Then slices are cut from the sandwich and used to create the utensil. The utensil is then glazed and fired. A number of variations are possible using this technique. A marbled pottery pot is shown below.



**Marbled pottery bowl**  
Tang (618—907), Shanghai Museum  
**绞胎陶碗**  
唐（618—907年） 上海博物馆

Mandarin ducks 鸳鸯 shown below usually come in a pair, one male and one female. The flask below has two Mandarin ducks.



**Sancai porcelain Mandarin duck flask**

Tang (618—907), Suzhou Museum

三彩鸳鸯扁壶

唐（618—907年）苏州博物馆

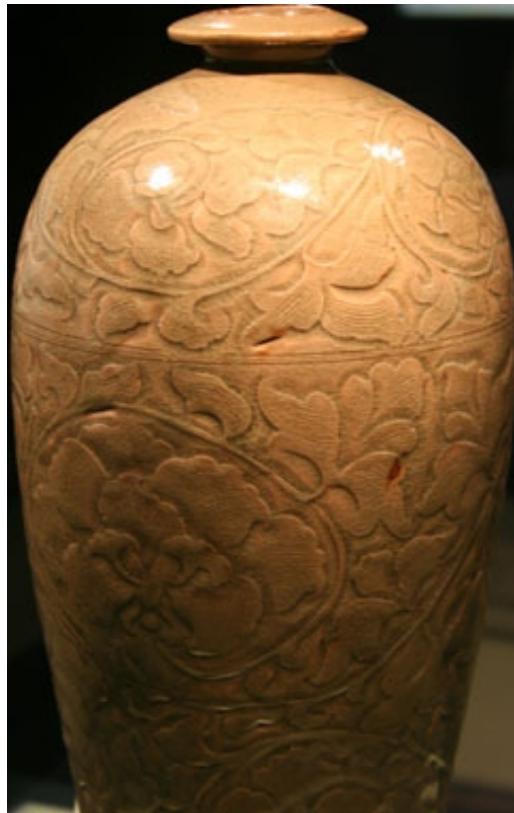
## Song Dynasty 宋

The Song Dynasty (960—1279) was a prosperous period in China during which cities flourished, many inventions were made, such as gunpowder and movable type printing, and porcelain became more widespread. There were many developments in form, glaze techniques, and artistic content. Of the many porcelain factories in China at this time, and the best known were the *Five Famous Kilns of the Song Dynasty* 宋代五大名窑, which were: *Ru Kiln* 汝窑 in present day Linru, Henan; *Guan Kiln* 官窑; *Ge Kiln* 哥窑; *Jun Kiln* 钧窑 in present day Yuxian County, Henan; and *Ding Kiln* 定窑 in present day Quyuan County, Hebei.



**Celadon Covered Jar with a Lotus Petal Design**  
Longquan Kiln, Song (960—1279), Shanghai Museum  
**青釉刻花莲瓣盖罐**  
龙泉窑 宋（960—1279年） 上海博物馆

*Longquan Kiln* 龙泉窑 located in present day Longquan, Zhejiang and founded in the Five Dynasties period, is one of the most famous porcelain kilns in China. The kiln is known for the powder-green and plum-green colors obtained by applying multiple layers of glaze. The jar below was produced at Longquan Kiln. Longquan kiln was well known for producing soft colors and forms in a subtle variety of greens and blues. A special alkaline-calcarous glaze was used rather than the standard lime glaze to allow thicker and more even application.



**Celadon meiping vase with carved peony design**  
Song (960—1279), Yaozhou Kiln, Shanghai Museum  
**青釉刻花牡丹纹梅瓶**  
宋（960—1279年）耀州窑 上海博物馆

*Yaozhou Kiln* 耀州窑 was established in Shaanxi in the Tang. It produced black, white, and celadon porcelain. A *meiping* 梅瓶, such as the one shown above from Yaozhou, is a kind of flower vase with a narrow mouth.



**Celadon vase with carved interlaced floral design**  
Northern Song (960—1127 BCE), Yaozhou Kiln, Shanghai Museum  
**青釉刻花缠枝花卉纹瓶**  
北宋（960~1127年）耀州窑 上海博物馆

Natural themes, especially flowers, in porcelain were popular during the Song, such as the lotus petal, peony, lotus bouquet items on this page show.



**Porcelain pillow with dark lotus bouquet design on light background**

Cizhou Kiln, Northern Song (960—1127), Shanghai Museum

白地黑花把莲纹枕

磁州窑 北宋（960—1127） 上海博物馆

The *lotus bouquet design* 把莲纹, shown above, is a traditional design that combines lotus flowers, stem, and leaves.



**White glazed vase with incised fish and lotus design**

Song (960—1279), Shanghai Museum

白釉划花莲鱼纹瓶

宋（960—1279年） 上海博物馆

The *Jizhou Kiln* 吉州窑 was located in Jiangnan (south of the Yangtze) area. The kiln was well known for producing porcelain with a folk art flavor. The covered jar below is from Jizhou Kiln.



**Covered jar with a brown leaf design on white background**  
Southern Song — Yuan (1127—1368), Jizhou Kiln, Shanghai Museum  
白地褐花叶纹盖罐  
南宋—元（1127—1368）吉州窑 上海博物馆

## Liao Dynasty 辽

The plum blossom vase shown below is a form that emerged in the Song and became popular in subsequent dynasties. It was used both for holding wine and for holding flowers. The piece below was produced at the *Gangwa Kiln* 缸瓦窑, an important kiln during the Liao Dynasty (907—1125) in present day Inner Mongolia.



**Plum Blossom Vase**

White Glazed with black painted flowers, from the Gang Wa Kiln

Liao Dynasty (907—1125), Capital Museum, Beijing

梅瓶

缸瓦窑白釉剔花填黑梅瓶

辽朝（907—1125）首都博物馆

The *Dangxiang* 党项 were a people of the Tangut branch of the Qiang ethnic group and founders of the Xi Xia Dynasty. The artistic style of their pottery had earthy feel reflecting their nomadic roots. The vase below was made at the *Lingwu Kiln* 灵武窑, located in present day Ningxia.



**Porcelain vase with inscribed blooming peony design**  
Lingwu Kiln, Xi Xia (1032—1227), Beijing Capital Museum  
刻花开光牡丹纹瓶  
灵武窑 西夏（1032—1227）北京首都博物馆

## Later Jin Dynasty 金

The porcelain pillow was created with a *black painted on white base* 白地黑花 technique, which was one of the specialties of the *Cizhou Kiln* 磁州窑, where it was produced. The decoration features a *story scene* 人物故事.



**Black painted porcelain pillow with white base**

Cizhou Kiln, Jin Dynasty (1115—1234), Capital Museum, Beijing

白地黑花瓷枕

磁州窑 金（1115—1234）北京首都博物馆

The *Jun Kilns* 钧窑 were well known in the Song and early Yuan. There were Jun Kilns all over Henan province. The kilns at Juntai and Baguadong produced porcelain for the Imperial Palace. The Jun Kilns used a translucent glaze colored with copper or iron to give a moon-white, sky-blue, rose-purple, or crab apple-red colors. Careful control of firing temperature, atmosphere, and glaze ingredients was needed to create these colors. The Jun kilns also used very thick glaze. A jar from the Jun Kilns is shown below.



**Moon-white glazed jar with a lotus leaf shaped lid**

Jun Kiln, Jin — Early Yuan Dynasty (1115—1300), Shanghai Museum

月白釉荷叶盖罐

金—元初（1115—1300）钧窑 上海博物馆

In the peony design below a dark glaze was applied and then the background for the design picked out to leave the peony raised above the background.



**Dark glazed jar with incised peony design**

Jin — Early Yuan Dynasty (1115—1300), Shanghai Museum

黑釉剔刻牡丹纹罐

金（1115—1234年） 上海博物馆

## **Yuan Dynasty 元**

The well known *blue and white porcelain* 青花 was developed at Jingdezhen Kiln in the Yuan Dynasty (1279—1368). The blue color comes from use of an oxide with a high proportion of cobalt.

The pot below was created with a *greenish-glazed white* 青白釉 technique, developed at the Jingdezhen Kiln, where the piece is from. The characteristic of this technique is the intermediate color of the glaze between green and white. The design is a *string bead design* 串珠纹.



**Greenish-Glazed White Pot with String Bead Design**  
Jingdezhen Kiln, Yuan Dynasty (1279—1368), Capital Museum, Beijing  
**青白釉串珠纹壶**  
景德镇窑 元（1279—1368） 首都博物馆

The flat pot below uses a *dragon and phoenix design* 龙凤纹.



**Black painted white base flat pot with dragon and phoenix design**  
Cizhou Kiln, Yuan Dynasty (1279—1368), Capital Museum, Beijing

白地黑花龙凤纹扁壶  
磁州窑 元（1279—1368）首都博物馆

The lotus design on the yellow-glazed plate below is abstract, reflecting a minimalistic taste among a certain class of people of the time.



**Ginger-yellow glazed porcelain bowl with lotus design**  
Yazhou Kiln, Yuan Dynasty (1279—1368), Shanghai Museum  
**姜黄釉刻花莲花纹碗**  
耀州窑 元（1279～1368） 上海博物馆

To allow a colored design, the phoenix on the celadon plate below were attached after glazing.



**Celadon plate with attached cloud and phoenix design**  
Longquan Kiln, Yuan Dynasty (1279—1368), Shanghai Museum  
**青釉露胎贴花卉凤纹盘**  
龙泉窑 元（1279～1368） 上海博物馆

## Ming Dynasty 明

*Blue and white porcelain 青花* is the most characteristically Chinese of all porcelain. It was first developed at Jingdezhen Kiln in the Tang and later mastered during the Yuan Dynasty. During the Yuan blue and white porcelain was made in limited quantities, mostly for export. The cobalt blue color was initially imported but later on mined within China from Leping in Jiangxi. However, during the Ming and Qing dynasties it became the most popular kind of porcelain. The Jingdezhen Kiln produced the highest quality and greatest volume of this kind of porcelain.

The vase below with a cloud and dragon design has the characters “spring longevity” 春寿 inscribed. The characters are written in *Jiudie Script* 九叠篆, literally, nine folded script, developed in the Sui and Tang for official seals.



**Blue and white porcelain vase with cloud and dragon design**

Jingdezhen Kiln, Hongwu Reign, Ming Dynasty (1403—1424), Shanghai Museum

青花云龙纹“春寿”瓶

景德镇窑 明洪武（公元1368—1398年） 上海博物馆

During the Yuan Dynasty there was a great deal of cultural exchange with the Middle East. The shape of the oblate flask below is inspired by Islamic silverware.



**Blue and white oblate flask with camellia design**

Jingdezhen Kiln, Yongle Reign, Ming Dynasty (1403—1424), Shanghai Museum

青花山茶纹扁壶

景德镇窑 明永乐（公元 1403—1424 年） 上海博物馆

The plate below shows a design with two phoenixes.



**Blue and white porcelain dish with two phoenixes**

Jingdezhen Kiln, Xuan De Reign, Ming Dynasty (1426—1435), Shanghai Museum

青花双凤纹盘

景德镇窑 明宣德（1426～1435） 上海博物馆

The *qilin* sometimes called a *Chinese unicorn* 麒麟 is a mythical animal associated with good luck. The *qilin* below decorates a blue and white porcelain plate.



**Porcelain plate with unicorn gazing at the moon**  
Zhengtong Reign, Ming Dynasty (1403—1424), Suzhou Museum  
**青花麒麟望月纹盘**  
明永乐（公元 1403—1424 年）苏州博物馆

The blue color was obtained from adding cobalt to the glaze. The blue underglaze was applied first and then a clear glaze applied over the top. It was fired in a single time at a high temperature. The plate shown below, also from Jingdezhen Kiln, has two lions playing with a ball, a symbol of power.



**Blue and white porcelain plate with two lions playing with a ball**

Jingdezhen, mid-fifteenth century, Shanghai Museum

青花双狮戏球纹盘

景德镇 十五世纪中期，上海博物馆

The plate below was created with a *brown on white glazed* 白釉酱色 technique, which was developed during the Xuan De reign (1426—1435) of the Ming. A floral design 花果纹 decorates the plate.



**Plate with Brown on White Glazed Floral Design**  
Xuan De Reign, Ming Dynasty (1426—1435), Capital Museum, Beijing  
**白釉酱色彩花果纹盘**  
明宣德（1426—1435）北京首都博物馆

The sea has symbolized beauty, hope, and wisdom in Chinese thought. For example, the *Eighty Eight Buddhas Repentance Text* 八十八佛忏悔文 contains the words “wisdom like an ocean” 智慧如海.



**Blue and white porcelain plate with sea wave and lucky animal design**

Chenghua Reign, Ming Dynasty (1465–1487), Suzhou Museum

青花海水瑞兽纹盘

明 成化（公元 1465—1487 年） 苏州博物馆

During the Yuan Dynasty the ruling Mongols had an empire that stretched from China to Europe and trade expanded greatly. During this period most of the highest quality porcelain ended up outside of China. The Topkapi Palace in Turkey houses the largest collection of Yuan Dynasty blue and white porcelain in the world. Interestingly, most of the blue cobalt coloring was imported from West Asia. Export of porcelain on a large scale continued in the Ming and Qing dynasties. The plate below with Arabic text was probably intended for export to the West Asia.



**Dish with red Arabic text on a white background**

Jingdezhen Kiln, Zhengde Reign, Ming Dynasty (1506—1521), Shanghai Museum  
白釉红彩阿拉伯文盘  
景德镇窑 明正德（公元 1506—1521） 上海博物馆

The plate shown below has a tree with trunk and branches in the shape of a very stylized longevity character shou 寿.



**Wucai plate with shou character design**  
Jiajing Reign, Ming Dynasty (1521—1566), Suzhou Museum  
**五彩寿字纹盘**  
明 嘉靖（1521—1566） 苏州博物馆

The porcelain censer below was glazed with a *doucai* 斗彩 process, which is a overglaze technique (see below) used in the Ming. The *eight trigrams* 八卦 design has roots deep in Chinese mythology.



**Doucai censer with eight trigrams design**

Jiajing Reign, Ming Dynasty (1521—1566), Capital Museum, Beijing

斗彩八卦纹三足炉

明嘉靖（1521—1566）北京首都博物馆

The plate below shows a wucai (five colored) design, which refers to a method for applying the glaze. This was an overglaze technique, meaning that the artwork was applied over the top of the glaze in addition to outlines created with underglaze outlines. In blue and white porcelain, where the artwork is painted below the glaze with only underglaze. Overglaze porcelain uses a lower firing temperature, from 750 to 900 degrees Celsius. Wucai porcelain began to become popular in the mid to late Ming.



**Porcelain plate with wucai butterfly design and chrysanthemum petals**  
Jingdezhen Kiln, Wanli Reign, Ming Dynasty (1573—1620), Shanghai Museum  
**五彩花蝶纹菊瓣形盘**  
景德镇窑 明万历（公元1573—1620年） 上海博物馆

The butterfly is a beautiful insect and a symbol of felicity. The chrysanthemum is a popular flower in China and used in tea and Chinese medicine. It is an emblem of mid-Autumn and a symbol of joviality.



**Blue and white porcelain plate with lotus petal design and Sanskrit text**  
Jingdezhen Kiln, Wanli Reign, Ming Dynasty (1573—1620), Shanghai Museum  
**青花莲瓣形梵文盘**  
景德镇窑 明万历（公元 1573—1620 年）上海博物馆

## **Qing Dynasty 清**

In the Qing greater control of the shades of blue was developed in Blue and white porcelain. This is apparent in the bottle below from the Kangxi reign.



**Porcelain bottle with blue background and reserved panel design**  
Jingdezhen Kiln, Kangxi Reign, Qing Dynasty (1662—1722), Shanghai Museum  
**酒蓝地开光青花瓶**  
景德镇窑 清康熙（公元 1662~1722） 上海博物馆

The flower vase below has a beautiful praying mantis design.



**Blue and white porcelain flower container with a praying mantis design**

Kangxi Reign, Qing Dynasty (1662—1722), Suzhou Museum

青花螳纹花觚

清 康熙（公元 1661—1722 年）苏州博物馆

A dragon design is shown on the blue and white porcelain below.



**Blue and white porcelain zun with a cloud and dragon design**

Jingdezhen Kiln, Yongzheng Reign, Qing Dynasty (1723—1735), Capital Museum, Beijing

青花云龙纹尊

景德镇窑 清 雍正（1723—1735 年）北京首都博物馆

The *cloud and dragon design* 云龙纹 is also used on the porcelain plate below. It is a very popular design, appropriate because dragons spend most of their time flying around in clouds.



**Cloud and Dragon Design on a Blue and White Porcelain Plate**

Jingdezhen Kiln, Yongzheng Reign, Qing Dynasty, (1723—1735), Capital Museum, Beijing  
青花云龙纹盘

景德镇窑 清 雍正（1723—1735年）北京首都博物馆

*Bodhidharma* 达摩 was an Indian monk who travelled to China, settled in Luoyang and founded the Chan (Zen) school of Buddhism. He is a popular figure to display in temples and other locations. A porcelain figure of Bodhidharma is shown below.



**Bodhidharma**

Yongzheng Reign, Qing Dynasty, (1723—1735), Suzhou Museum  
达摩

清 雍正（1723—1735年） 苏州博物馆

The photograph below shows a Mongol style Duomu 多穆壺 pitcher from the Jingdezhen Kiln.



**Duomu pitcher with Granadilla Floral Design**

Jingdezhen Kiln, Qianlong Reign, Qing Dynasty (1736—1795), Capital Museum, Beijing

番莲纹多穆壶

景德镇窑 清乾隆（1736—1795年）北京首都博物馆

Duomu are tubular shaped pitchers that were used in the Yuan, especially by Mongolians and Tibetans ethnic groups to store milk and utensils. They are often decorated with a *corolla* 花冠 (a band of flowers) and other floral decorations.



Doucai plate with shou character design

Qianlong Reign, Qing Dynasty (1736—1795), Suzhou Museum

斗彩寿字纹盘

清乾隆（1736—1795年）苏州博物馆

The blue and white porcelain *flat sided vase* 抱月瓶 from the Qian Long reign below uses an *eight Buddhist emblems* 八吉祥, also called *eight auspicious treasures* 佛教八宝, design. Emperor Qian Long was a devout Buddhist. The treasures are (1) *Wheel* 轮, (2) *conch shell* 螺, (3) *umbrella* 伞, (4) *canopy / flag* 盖, (5) *lotus* 花, (6) *jar* 罐, (7) *fish* 鱼, and (8) *mystic knot* 长. It imitates a similar vase from the Yong Le reign in the Ming.



Flat Sided Vase with Eight Buddhist Emblems Design  
Qianlong Reign, Qing Dynasty (1736—1795), Capital Museum, Beijing  
八吉祥纹抱月瓶  
清乾隆（1736—1795年）北京首都博物馆

The gold color for the dragon in the artifact below was produced using *gold overglaze* 金彩. Gold overglaze is believed to have originated in the Song. The *Ding Kiln* 定窑 was best known for the technique.



**Vase with a golden dragon and cloud design on a green background**

Qianlong Reign, Qing Dynasty (1736—1795), Shanghai Museum

绿地金彩云龙纹瓶

清乾隆（1736—1795年）上海博物馆

*Fencai* 粉彩 is a style that emerged at the end of the Kangxi reign, succeeding the wucai style. In comparison, Fencai uses softer colors, which are based on enamel coloring. The *hanging vase* 壁瓶 below from the Jia Qing reign uses a Fencai style.



**Fencai hanging vase with floral design**

Jia Qing Reign, Qing Dynasty (1796-1820), Capital Museum, Beijing

粉彩花卉纹壁瓶

清嘉庆（1796—1820年）北京首都博物馆

Chen Guozhi 陈国治 was a well-known artist at Jingdezhen Kiln. The brush holder below has Chen Guozhi's stamp underneath.



**Yellow glazed porcelain brush holder with Chen Guozhi Stamp**

Daoguang Reign, Qing Dynasty (1821-1850), Shanghai Museum

陈国治款黄釉笔筒

景德镇窑 清道光（1821—1850年） 上海博物馆

The vase below also uses gold overglaze. This is a type of example of the *generic overglaze* 素上彩 technique, where the gold or other coloring is applied over the top of a previously fired base glaze layer. Glazes, gold, or enamel can be used as the overglaze color material. After application of the overglaze the artifact is fired again at a temperature of between 600 and 900 degrees Celcius.



**Vase with blue background and gold medallion design**  
Guangxu Reign, Qing Dynasty (1875-1908), Shanghai Museum  
**蓝地金彩团花纹瓶**  
景德镇窑 清光绪（公元 1875—1908 年） 上海博物馆



**Vase with blue background and gold medallion design (detail)**  
**蓝地金彩团花纹瓶（部分）**

In the Qing Dynasty, especially during the Kangxi reign, there were innovations from introduction of foreign techniques and new developments of traditional techniques. Jingdezhen Kiln experimented with different techniques using gold leaf and mixing gold powder with lead oxide. They created some great porcelain items, like the piece above.



**Fencai zun with deer design**  
Guangxu Reign, Qing Dynasty (1875-1908), Suzhou Museum  
**粉彩百鹿纹尊**  
清光绪（公元 1875~1908 年）苏州博物馆

Porcelain jewelry is less common. The picture below shows a porcelain thumb ring.



**Green porcelain thumb right with carved pattern**

Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), Suzhou Museum

绿釉雕瓷扳指

清（公元 1644—1911 年）苏州博物馆

## Lacquer Ware 漆器

Lacquer ware artifacts are made from wood or silk skeletons with several to dozens of coats of lacquer. In some cases, up to two hundred layers have been applied. Lacquer ware dates back to pre-historic times in China. The oldest piece is a bowl from the *Hemudu Culture* 河姆渡文化 in present day Zhejiang province and dates to about 5,000 BCE. Lacquer ware utensils were popular with the noble classes in the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties. The lacquer used is resistant to acid deterioration and has enabled the artifacts to survive relatively well. Many lacquer artifacts have survived from the Warring States period in tombs in excellent condition. The Kingdom of Chu during the Warring States period was one of the most prolific producers of lacquer artifacts.



**Round carved lacquer box with floral and crane decoration**

Jiājīng Reign, Qing Dynasty (1521—1567), Capital Museum, Beijing

红雕漆填花卉云鹤圆盒

清 嘉靖（1521—1567年在位）北京首都博物馆

The lacquer was derived from *lac trees* 漆树 that are common in Hubei and Hunan. The basic background colors are red and black with decorations painted done in more diverse colors. Lacquer ware art reached its peak during the reign of Qianlong during the Qing. The plate below is a plate from the Qianlong reign.



**Red lacquer ware plate with brocade design and copper edging**

Qianlong Reign, Qing Dynasty (1736—1795), Capital Museum, Beijing

剔红锦纹镶铜边盘

清 乾隆（1736—1795年）北京首都博物馆

The picture below shows a landscape scene on a carved lacquer screen.



**Carved lacquer ware screen**

Republic of China (1911—1949), Suzhou Museum

雕漆台屏

民国（公元1911—1949年）苏州博物馆

Because of the many layers and the need to dry each layer before applying the next, the best lacquer ware can take up to ten years to produce.



**Square red carved lacquer ware peony plate**

Capital Museum, Beijing

红雕漆牡丹方盘

北京首都博物馆

Lacquer ware is frequently inlaid with gold, silver, mother-of-pearl, ivory, and other materials. The artifact below is decorated with inlaid gold.



**Tibetan lacquer ware basket with gold leaf and floral design**

Late 20th century, Yunnan. Shanghai Museum.

藏族描金彩漆花卉纹提篮

20世纪下半叶 云南 上海博物馆

Tibetan art is unique in combining elements of Indian and Chinese art with an emphasis on strange and sometimes scary Tantric Buddhism and drawing on roots in Tibetan folk religion. The Yamantaka 牛头明王, a Tantric Buddhist deity and Tibetan favorite, is typically intimidating.



**Tibetan lacquer Yamantaka mask used in Cham dance**

Late 20th century. Guide, Qinghai; Shanghai Museum

藏族彩漆牛头明王跳神面具

20世纪上半叶 青海贵德 上海博物馆

## Textiles 织物

Textiles are a unique medium for decorative art. Decorations on clothes, in particular, have a close connection with the person wearing them and tell us a lot about the culture of the period.

Embroidery was the favored way to add decorations to traditional clothes. Needlework as compulsory for women in China for over 2,000 years, as mandated by Confucian ethics. In fact, embroidered silk articles were a major source of export revenue for China. The lady's jacket below shows a design with a 'hundred sons.' Combined with the dragons on this lady's jacket, the meaning is to hope that the person wearing it would be a very productive concubine for the emperor.



**Red Cotton Lined Lady's Jacket with Gold Embroidered Hundred Sons Design**

Capital Museum, Beijing

红纱罗金色绣百子女夹衣

北京首都博物馆

## Silk 丝绸

Silk is a beautiful material with a highly desirable glossy, soft, light, breathable, strong, and durable properties. In ancient China the silk *bols* 匹 was a standardized monetary unit and used for large transactions. China maintained a monopoly over silk production for most of ancient history. In ancient times it was highly sought after and a major export from China to the Southwest Asia and Europe. China kept the highly developed process for manufacturing silk secret and Europeans thought that it grew on trees. Silk has been discovered in Egypt tombs dating to circa 1070 BCE. At one point in time, the Roman Empire was China's biggest single silk customer. Even after the Byzantines obtained silkworm eggs in 522, China still maintained dominance of the silk market. Today, it is still the most highly desired fabric for making clothes, superior in most respects to cheaper synthetic fabrics. Probably the best place to see silk clothes and embroidery in China is at the Suzhou Silk Museum.

Silk was first developed in the Neolithic Age in China. Fragments of silk cocoons cut with a knife were discovered in Yangshao Culture Sites in Xia County, Shanxi, dating to between 4,000 and 3,000 BCE. Silk fragments have been discovered in Zhejiang dating to about 2,700 BCE. The silk fragments below, dating to the Neolithic, were found in the *Yangshao Culture* 仰韶文化 village of Qingtai in Henan.



**Fragment of silk fabric**

Neolithic, Suzhou Silk Museum

纹紗丝织物残片

新石器时代 苏州丝绸博物馆

The bone needles below are reproductions of needles, from originals also from the Neolithic

found in the *Hemudu Ruins* 河姆渡遗址 in Zhejiang.



**Bone needles**

Neolithic (reproduction), Suzhou Silk Museum

**骨针**

新石器时代（复制品）苏州丝绸博物馆

Based on the discovery of related tools, like the weaving implement below, it appears that silk weaving was developed around 4,000 BCE.



**Weaving implement**

Neolithic (reproduction), Suzhou Silk Museum

**分经器**

新石器时代（复制品）苏州丝绸博物馆

Silk comes from the cocoons of silk moths, like the one shown below. Silk worms were strictly guarded until several foreign missions from Japan and Italy smuggled some silk worms out of China.



**Silk moth**  
Suzhou Silk Museum  
**蚕蛾**  
苏州丝绸博物馆

After raising in stands with mulberry leaves, as shown below, the cocoons 茧 are steamed.



**Rearing stand**  
Suzhou Silk Museum

蚕架  
苏州丝绸博物馆

Machinery for silk production was developed beginning around the eleventh century. The Fundamentals of Agriculture and Sericulture, compiled about 1210, has many pictures and descriptions of silk looms and related machinery. The picture below, created in silk, shows part of the process for creating silk by beating it. The picture is one of the series Procedure for Silk Production 捣练图.



**One of the pictures on silk pounding**  
Tang (618—907), Suzhou Silk Museum  
**捣练图之一**  
唐（公元 618—907 年） 苏州丝绸博物馆

Decorative designs can be embroidered to fit clothes or can be applied to plain fabric. The picture below shows a dragon and cloud design on *plan woven silk* 绢.



**Dyed Silk with Dragon and Cloud Design**

Qing (1644—1911), Capital Museum, Beijing

云龙纹色绢

清（1736—1795年）北京首都博物馆

Satin 缎 is a textile with a particular weave that results in a very glossy surface and a dull back. Satin originated in China and the English word comes from the Arabic name Zayton of Quanzhou 泉州 in Fujian where the material was exported from in historic times. The picture below shows a floral design on a satin brocade.



**Satin with floral design on gold background**

Suzhou Silk Museum

百花纹金宝地缎  
苏州丝绸博物馆

*Warp* 经 is a set of lengthwise threads held in tension on a loom. *Weft* 纬 are the horizontal threads. There are many varieties of satin. Satin is a relatively thick weave compared to other silk fabrics, many of which are very light. The thickness results from the use of glossy warp surface layer floating over a weft fill underneath or, vice-versa, the glossy weft surface layer floating over a warp fill.



Brocade with flower and cloud design

Suzhou Silk Museum

宝相云纹库锦

苏州丝绸博物馆

Brocade 锦 is a richly decorated shuttle-woven fabric, often with added gold or silver thread. The picture above shows a brocade with gold thread and a flower and cloud pattern.



Silk moth design  
Suzhou Silk Museum  
蚕蛾纹  
苏州丝绸博物馆

The robe below features the eight divinatory trigrams 八卦 and Yin and Yang 阴阳 design. It was used in traditional opera.



**Robe with eight divinatory trigrams**

Suzhou

八卦衣

苏州

## Embroidery 绣

Embroidery is a method using thread to sew a decorative design on silk or cotton cloth. Because of the history of silk in China, Chinese embroidery is done on silk. It dates back to the Neolithic, when silk was developed. There are *four main regional styles of Chinese embroidery* 四大名绣, which include *Suzhou Embroidery* 苏绣, *Hunan Embroidery* 湘绣, *Guangdong Embroidery* 粤绣, and *Sichuan Embroidery* 蜀绣. Apart from these, there are also other regional styles. Sichuan Embroidery has the longest history. A piece of silk embroidery dating circa 1,000 BCE was found in a tomb in Egypt and has been confirmed as sewn in a style from Sichuan. Artifacts found in the *Three Stars Mound* 三星堆 in Sichuan and also other sites in China confirm silk production in the Neolithic. Other ethnic groups, including the Bai, Miao, Zhuang and Tibetan people have their own styles of embroidery. The four main regional styles of Chinese embroidery emerged in the 19th century.

The dragon below was embroidered with *flat gold* 平金, a technique developed in Suzhou, that uses gold thread to create a slightly protruding flat design. The needle work method used is *petit-point* 纳纱.



**Dragon robe with flat gold petit-point embroidery**

Qing (1644—1911), Suzhou Silk Museum

平金纳纱绣龙袍

清朝（公元 1644—1911 年）北京首都博物馆

## Batik 蜡染花

*Batik* 蜡染花 is a wax-resist dyeing technique that is popular in China and other Asian countries. It is an ancient technique that has been discovered in Egypt dating back to the 4th century BCE. In China, it is known to have been practiced as early as the Tang. In China today it is used by *Miao* 苗族, *Bouyei* 布依族, and *Bai* 白族 minorities for their traditional clothes.



**Bouyi batik sleeve attachments**

Zhenning, Guizhou. Shanghai Museum

布依族蜡染花袖片

贵州镇宁 上海博物馆

The **Bouyei** 布依族 ethnic group numbers about 2.5 million and lives in southern mainland China and Vietnam, mostly in Guizhou province and also in Yunnan and Sichuan provinces. Their language belongs to the Tai language family.



**Bai batik headscarf**  
Dali, Yunnan. Shanghai Museum  
白族扎染头巾  
云南大理 上海博物馆

The *Bai* 白族 ethnic group number about 1.9 million and live mostly in Yunan but also in Guizhou and Hunan. The *Bai* language belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family.

## Early Period 早期

From jade artifacts in the shape of silkworms and a wide vocabulary relating to silk production and clothing, it is clear that silk was popular in the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties. Production was standardized, labor specialized, and work was supervised by government officials. In the Spring and Autumn and the Warring States periods a wider variety of silk artifacts were produced. Suzhou was established as the main center of silk production. A reproduction of a brocade from the Warring States Period is shown below.



**Brocade with dancers and animals**

Warring States Period (475—221 BCE), Suzhou Silk Museum

舞人动物纹锦

战国（公元前 475—221 年）复制品 苏州丝绸博物馆

In 1972 a Han dynasty tomb was discovered in the No. 1 **Mawang Pit** 马王堆. Included in the discoveries were silk artifacts with fine color printed designs. The designs included plants with vines, flower buds, and bunches of leaves arranged in intricate patterns. More than 20 different designs were found in total. The designs were most likely created with openwork printing blocks or from carved relief printing plates. The picture below shows printed silk fabric from the Western Han (206 BCE — 25 CE).



**Color printed brocade**

Western Han (206 BCE — 25 CE), Suzhou Silk Museum

印花敷彩纱工艺步骤图

西汉（公元前 206—25 年）苏州丝绸博物馆

The brocade below, discovered in Minfeng, Xinjiang, from the Eastern Han, has a longevity design.



**Longevity suitable for everybody brocade**

Eastern Han (25—220 CE), Suzhou Silk Museum (reproduction)

延年益寿大宜子孙锦

东汉（公元 25—220 年）苏州丝绸博物馆（复制品）

The brocade below, excavated from Astana, Xinjiang in the Northern Dynasties, has a *Kui dragon* 麒 龙 design.



**Brocade with Kui dragon design**

Northern Dynasties (386—581 CE), Suzhou Silk Museum

夔纹锦

北朝（公元 386—581 年） 苏州丝绸博物馆

The brocade below, also excavated from Astana, Xinjiang in the Northern Dynasties, has a tree lamp design.



**Brocade with tree lamp design**

Northern Dynasties (386—581 CE), Suzhou Silk Museum

灯树纹锦

北朝（公元 386—581 年） 苏州丝绸博物馆

## Tang and Song Dynasties 唐宋

The brocade below with phoenix patterns was discovered in *Dulan*, *Qinghai* 青海都兰, where a large amount of ancient textiles have been found.



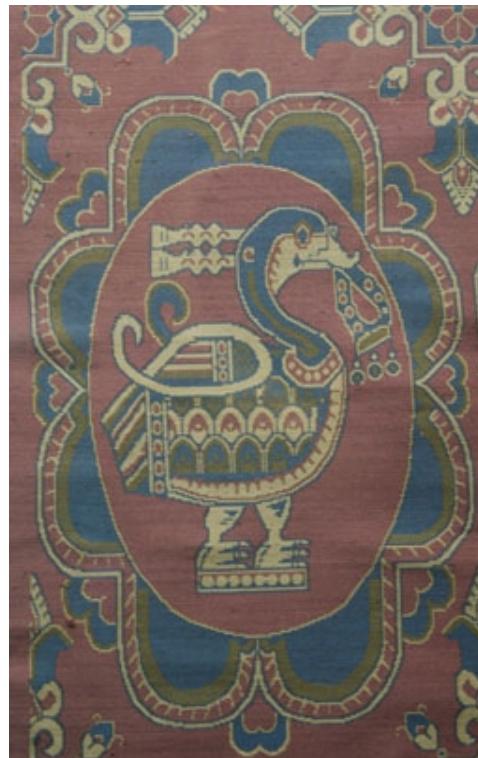
**Silk brocade with phoenixes in pearls**

Tang (618—907) reproduction, Suzhou Silk Museum

簇四联珠对凤锦

唐（公元 618—907 年）复制件 苏州丝绸博物馆

The brocade with lucky bird design below was also discovered in Dulan.



**Brocade with a lucky bird holding a ribbon and nest of petals**

Tang (618—907) reproduction, Suzhou Silk Museum

花瓣团窠瑞鸟衔绶锦

唐（公元 618—907 年）复制件 苏州丝绸博物馆

The brocade below was discovered in *Astana*, *Xinjiang* 新疆阿斯塔那 an important archeological site. *Astana* is located near the historic *Silk Road* 丝绸之路 city of *Turpan* 吐鲁番, close to the *Mountain of Flames* 火焰山. The site was the cemetery for the city during the peak of its prosperity.



**Brocade with bird and flower design**  
Tang (618—907) reproduction, Suzhou Silk Museum  
**花鸟纹锦**  
唐（公元 618—907 年）复制件 苏州丝绸博物馆

Chinese *silk tapestry* 缂丝 appeared in the Tang and continued to be popular to the end of the Qing. The picture below shows a Chinese silk tapestry artifact from the Song.



**Silk tapestry with flowers and birds on purple background**

Song (960—1279) reproduction, Suzhou Silk Museum

缂丝禁鸾鹊谱

宋（公元 960—1279 年）复制件 苏州丝绸博物馆

## **Qing Dynasty 清**

We know a lot about clothing in the Qing Dynasty because much of it was preserved and there is an abundant amount of written information and pictures. Some of the most interesting items of clothing during the Qing are those worn by the members of the Qing court. Because of its location, the Capital Museum in Beijing has a number of excellent items used by Qing emperors and others closely connected with him. The picture below shows an imperial table cover from the Qianlong reign (1736—1795).



**Yellow satin embroidered table cover with golden dragon design**

Qianlong Reign, Qing (1736—1795), Capital Museum, Beijing

黄缎绣金龙桌围

清 乾隆（1736—1795年）北京首都博物馆

The picture below shows a *dragon robe* 龙袍, which was the emperor's court dress. Golden dragons are embroidered on, as shown in the detail, right. Also, notice the *longevity character* 寿 to the left of the dragon. The pattern is a traditional *dragon playing with a pearl* 龙戏珠 design. A common related design is *two dragons playing with a pearl* 二龙戏珠. These designs refer to a early Chinese literature and legend in *Zhuang Zi* 庄子 (369-286 BCE), an influential Chinese philosopher who lived during the Warring States Period, and others.



**Dragon robe with flat gold petit-point embroidery**

Qing (1644—1911), Suzhou Silk Museum

平金纳纱绣龙袍

清朝（公元 1644—1911 年）北京首都博物馆

A rank badge 官补 or mandarin square is a large embroidered badge sewn onto an official robe in Imperial China. They were first used in the Ming and continued to be used in the Qing but with different designs. The picture below shows a rank badge with an embroidered crane design, indicating that the person who wore it was a top ranking civilian official.



**Official badge with crane design**

Qing (1644—1911), Suzhou Silk Museum

仙鹤官补

清朝（公元 1644—1911 年）北京首都博物馆

The picture below shows a lady's jacket with a round crane design.



**Lady's jacket with round crane design**

Qing (1644—1911), Suzhou Silk Museum

远地彩绣团鹤女礼服

清朝（公元 1644—1911 年）北京首都博物馆

The emperor wore a *dragon robe* 龙袍 in court, a *mian robe* 冕服 at certain ceremonies, and *tongtian ceremonial costume* 通天冠服 for the highest ceremonies. *Yuanyou ceremonial costume* 远游冠服 was the full custume worn by princes at ceremonies. *Court dress* 朝服 was worn by high officials during important events and ceremonies.



**Brocade with butterfly design on a yellow background**

Qing (1644—1911), Suzhou Silk Museum

黃地蝶錦

清朝（公元 1644—1911 年）北京首都博物馆

The robe below shows an embroidered good luck symbol.



Ceremonial robe with gold coiled cloud embroidery

Qing (1644—1911), Suzhou Museum

刺绣蟠金云神袍

清朝（公元 1644—1911 年）苏州博物馆

*Huiyi* 禩衣 was the full female ceremonial costume worn at the most important ceremonies.

*Yudi* costumes 裕翟 were worn by Imperial concubines at important ceremonies. A *qingyi* costume 青衣 was worn by the empress when meeting the emperor. A *zhuyi* 朱衣 was worn by the empress at banquets when meeting receiving visitors.



**Female robe with Embroidered coiled gold pattern**

Qing (1644—1911), Suzhou Museum

刺绣蟠金女套

清朝（公元 1644—1911 年） 苏州博物馆

## Miao 苗族

The *Miao people* 苗族 number about 10 million and live in Southern China, mostly in Guizhou, Hunan, Yunnan, Sichuan, Guangxi, Hainan, Guangdong, and Hubei provinces. Some Miao also live in Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and Myanmar. The Miao were among the first people to settle in the area that is now present-day China. Their origins can be traced back as least as far as the Shang Dynasty (1700—1045 BCE).



**Miao sleeve attachments with embroidered animal designs**  
Early 20th century. Shidong, Taijiang, Guizhou, Shanghai Museum  
苗族剖绣动物纹袖片  
20世纪上半叶 贵州台江施洞 上海博物馆

*Miao costume* 苗服 is very diverse, including over 200 kinds. It is decorated with woven patterns, embroidery, and dyed designs. They are characteristically rich in color, as can be seen from the pictures on this page. Many of the designs are intended to identify different groups or have other symbolic meaning. Miao clothing includes both formal attire and casual dress.



**Miao sleeve with embroidered braiding and ancestral soul motif**  
Late 20th century. Taijiang, Guizhou, Shanghai Museum  
苗族辫绣祖灵纹袖片  
20世纪下半叶 贵州台江 上海博物馆

Decorative patterns on Miao clothing includes dragons, phoenix, birds, fish, flowers, plants, and geometric designs. There are many regional differences.



**Miao batik quilt with bird design**

Late 20th century. Taijiang, Guizhou, Shanghai Museum

苗族蜡染花鸟纹被面

20世纪下半叶 贵州丹寨 上海博物馆

## Carved Wood 木雕

### Background 背景

Wooden furniture was an important medium for decorative designs, mostly carved right into the timber. In ancient China people sat, squatted, and slept on the floor or on a *kang* 炕 (a heatable brick bed) in Northern China. In fact, most Chinese feel comfortable squatting on flat feet today while Europeans cannot squat on flat feet at all. Ancient furniture was designed from this perspective. Furniture with high legs, such as the chairs and tables that we are familiar with today, was introduced during the Tang. Modern furniture with exquisite art work became widespread in the Ming with the appearance of fine timber from Southeast Asia import via ocean going ships and the development of modern carpentry tools to make the furniture in efficiently.

Architecture was also an important use of wood and often had decorations carved into the wood. This includes items such as doors, window frames, columns, timber roofs, and wall panels. Two great places to see traditional Chinese furniture and timber architecture are the UNESCO World Heritage Sites the *Humble Administrator's Garden* 拙政园 and the *Lion Forest Garden* 狮子林, both in Suzhou.

Nails and metal fittings were not used during the Ming in furniture or in buildings. All elements were connected with mortise and tenon joints.

Bamboo furniture and carving is an art that is very distinctly Chinese. However, bamboo rots quickly. *Carved bamboo with light color relief* 留青竹刻 is a style of relief carving on bamboo where the raised portion is shown in the lighter color of the remaining bamboo skin. The picture below shows a landscape scene on a carved bamboo wrist rest.



**Carved bamboo wrist rest**  
Qing (1644—1911), Suzhou Museum  
**留青竹刻山水人物搁臂**  
清（公元 1644—1911 年）苏州博物馆

Wooden items can also be elaborately painted. The City God 城隍 statue is from Yu Gardens in Shanghai. Temples for such statues originate in Chinese folk religion They were very common in the past and there are still many around in Southern China.



**City God**  
City God Temple, Yu Gardens, Shanghai  
**城隍**  
上海豫园老城隍庙

## Furniture 家具

Ancient Chinese people *sat on mats on the floor* 席地而坐, according to an old saying. The earliest furniture was made with reeds and bamboo and was short to be in keeping with this mode of resting. It was only later in the Tang that people *sat with legs hanging down* 垂足而坐 on higher seats. The styles now thought of as classical Chinese emerged in the Tang, including beds, tables, seats, closets, and clothes racks. Every effort was made to add decorative patterns and fine carvings, giving the artifacts distinctively Chinese characteristics. The three main styles of classical Chinese furniture are *Suzhou style* 苏式, *Guangzhou style* 广式, and *Beijing style* 京式, in addition to some other regional styles.



**Cedar Zen chair**

Qing (1644—1911), Humble Administrator's Garden, Suzhou

楠木禅椅

清（公元 1644—1911 年） 拙政园

The gardens of Suzhou are beautiful and some of the best places to see classical Chinese furniture. Perhaps the best known is the *Humble Administrator's Garden* 拙政园. In the Ming and Qing there were over two hundred gardens in Suzhou. Four have now been listed as part of the Suzhou Gardens UNESCO World Heritage Site. These gardens had a big influence on the styles of furniture produced in Suzhou.



**Decorations on rosewood table**

Qing (1644—1911), Humble Administrator's Garden, Suzhou

黄花梨四仙桌的修饰

清（公元 1644—1911 年） 拙政园

Yellow rosewood was the first choice of timber for furniture because of its hardness, color, and grain. Other preferred varieties of wood for furniture were red sandalwood and mahogany, followed by beech. Furniture made from softer wood has not survived. Table shown above and many of the others on this page are rosewood.

*Rectangular spiral patterns* 回纹 as used on the table below are one of the most commonly used patterns in Qing furniture.



**Rectangular spiral decorations**  
Humble Administrator's Garden, Suzhou  
回纹装饰  
苏州拙政园

The Jiangsu area and nearby was an early center of furniture production in the Ming, especially Suzhou, Yangzhou, and Songjiang. In particular, Suzhou, was an economic center at this time, with manufacturing of woven silk, embroidery, printing, lacquer ware, and furniture. Furniture was produced for the Imperial Court, regional government, and for private residences.



**Armchair with ruyi designs**

Hall of Elegance, Humble Administrator's Garden, Suzhou  
**如意纹扶手椅**  
苏州拙政园玲珑馆

Suzhou style furniture is simple and elegant. Furniture was often made out of a single piece of wood, which allowed the furniture to have smooth and flowing lines.



**Furniture with ruyi design (detail)**  
Humble Administrator's Garden, Suzhou  
**如意纹陈设（部分）**

苏州拙政园

*Mahogany* 红木 began to be used in Suzhou style in the Qing. The picture below shows the detail of a mahogany chessboard.



**Bamboo designs on a mahogany chessboard**

Qing (1644—1911), Humble Administrator's Garden, Suzhou

**老红木棋桌的竹纹**

清（公元 1644—1911 年） 苏州拙政园

The chairs in the table set below from the *Hall of Distant Fragrance* 远香堂 are interesting that they are imitating a popular bamboo design in a more expensive type of wood (mahogany).

The dragon design on the rim of the table can be seen on the detail to the right. *Stools* 凳子 are a characteristic item of Chinese furniture. Even in the very elegant table set above, stools are used by choice instead of chairs.



**Table Set**  
Hall of Distant Fragrance, Humble Administrator's Garden, Suzhou  
**桌子**  
苏州拙政园远香堂



**Table Set (Detail)**  
**桌子 (部分)**

The circle is considered to be the origin or all creation. The ring is used as a symbol of eternity.



**Table with ring decorations**  
Humble Administrator's Garden, Suzhou  
**陈设环装饰**

苏州拙政园

Fujian and Zhejiang were the two areas best known for wood carving in the Ming and Qing. Even when used in palaces and the estates of high ranking officials, wood carving has a folk flavor to it. Designs usually fit into one of three categories: (1) *auspicious patterns* 吉祥图案, such as *cranes under a pine tree* 松鹤延年; (2) figures in Chinese operas, traditional stories, and so on; (3) popular customers, such as weaving, grazing, entertaining, and so on.



**Furniture with floral design**  
Humble Administrator's Garden, Suzhou  
**陈设花卉纹**  
苏州拙政园

The mirror stand below has a pattern that imitates a design made with vines.



**Mirror stand**  
Humble Administrator's Garden, Suzhou  
**镜架**  
苏州拙政园

Next to the Suzhou Museum is the *Taiping Heavenly Kingdom* 太平天国 *Prince Zhong Mansion* 忠王府. This was the residence of *Liu Xiucheng* 李秀成 (1823—1864) military leader of the Taiping Rebellion. The throne-like chair below is a replica of the one used by *Liu Xiucheng*.



**Chair used by Liu Xiucheng**  
Prince Zhong Mansion, Suzhou  
**李秀成的椅子**  
苏州忠王府

Suzhou style furniture began to be eclipsed by Guangzhou style during the Qing. The focus of the articles produced changed from the imperial court and homes of high officials to more popular use.

## Architecture 建筑

Garden architecture 园林建筑 refers to the various architectural structures used in parks and gardens, such as pavilions 亭 (covered structures without walls), xie (pavilions on terraces) 檐, corridors 廊, ge (two story pavilions) 阁, xuan (pavilions with a view) 轩, storied buildings 楼, terraces 台, and fang (buildings on water) 舫. Chinese garden architecture was highly developed in classical times and, as you can see from this list, there are no good English terms to translate to for the many different kinds of pavilions.



Pavilion  
Lion Forest Garden, Suzhou  
亭  
苏州狮子林

The *Humble Administrator's Gardens* 拙政园 are one of the finest gardens in China and one of the best places to see traditional Chinese architecture, especially wooden structures. In 1997, along with other classical Chinese gardens in Suzhou, Humble Administrator's Garden, was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Humble Administrator's Gardens are the largest of the classical gardens in Suzhou. The site of the gardens was originally the residence of Tang scholar Lu Guimeng. In 1513 Ming Imperial Envoy and poet Wang Xiancheng appropriated the property and began work on the gardens. Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹, author of *A Dream of Red Mansions* 红楼梦 (c. 1791), lived at the gardens in his teen years and is believed to be an influence on the novel. The most enchanting thing about the gardens is the aesthetic ideal of harmony between nature and people.

The roofs are the most important feature of most structures in Chinese architecture. They often come with some interesting decorations under the eaves, as shown below.



**Yi Yu Pavilion**  
Humble Administrator's Garden, Suzhou  
**倚玉轩**  
苏州拙政园

The gardens today mostly resemble their appearance in the late Qing. The numerous pavilions and halls are most interesting for their wooden architecture. There are many decorative elements in the architectural structure and they are fantastic amongst the background of the gardens. I particularly like the windows, which look out into the brilliant sunlight in the gardens.

Traditional Chinese architecture often uses an *open screen window* 漏窗 with the screen made using a decorative design. Open screen windows are a common feature in classical Chinese garden architecture. They separate distinct areas with making them feel inaccessible. An example of this from the Humble Administrator's Garden is shown below.



**Open screen window**  
Humble Administrator's Garden, Suzhou  
**漏窗**  
苏州拙政园

The different designs of the windows of the screens themselves add a lot of interest to the gardens and the building structures. There are many different kinds of designs for the open screen window, the most popular being geometric patterns, flower and plant designs, landscape pictures, and animals. One of the most popular designs, especially in the Suzhou area, is the cracked ice pattern 冰裂 shown below.



**Open screen window with cracked ice**  
Humble Administrator's Garden, Suzhou  
**冰裂漏窗**  
苏州拙政园

One of the characteristics of the Humble Administrator's Garden is the large amount of water area, which gives the garden a natural and peaceful quality. The pavilions and other structures are arranged around these ponds and streams. The open windows, corridors, flower beds, stone gardens, old trees, green bamboo create tranquility and seclusion, while still being connected and interesting. This arrangement is characteristic of Ming garden style.



**Open screen window**  
Humble Administrator's Garden, Suzhou  
**漏窗**  
苏州拙政园

Relief carvings on wood panels like the one below are common on door and wall panels in historic Chinese buildings. In fact, the name for *door panel* 花板 literally means decorated panel, reflecting the fact that they are nearly always decorated. In homes of important officials no two door or wall panels would be identical.



**Landscape wood carving**  
Suzhou  
**山水木雕**  
苏州

## Buddhist 佛教

Buddhist temples are filled with decorative designs, both on the architectural structures and on wooden artifacts inside the halls. If these artifacts are used in ceremonies they are usually referred to as *Dharma instruments* 法器. The *Dharma Wheel* 法轮 from the Sanskrit word *Dharmacakra* represents the teachings of the Buddha. There are usually eight spokes representing the *Noble Eightfold Path* 八正道.



**Dharma Wheel**  
Dacheng Temple, Mount Putuo  
**法轮**  
普陀山大乘禅寺

A *Reclining Buddha* 卧佛, as shown below, symbolizes the Buddha entering *Nirvana* 涅槃.



**Reclining Buddha**  
Malaysia  
**卧佛**  
马来西亚

A *wooden fish* 木鱼 is a percussion instrument used in Buddhism. A fish, with eyes always open, symbolizes wakefulness. The wooden fish outside the food hall at Fayu Temple, Mount Putuo, shown below, is the largest one that I ever seen. This type of wooden fish is struck to let people know that it is dinner time.



**Wooden fish**

Fayuy Temple, Mount Putuo

木鱼

普陀山法雨寺

## Cloisonne 景泰蓝

Cloisonne enamel techniques were brought to China from Persia during the Yuan Dynasty. The techniques were developed further in the Ming Dynasty and became widespread during the reign of seventh Ming Emperor *Jingtai* 景泰 (reigned 1449 - 1457). This is the origin of the Chinese name for cloisonne *Jingtai lan* 景泰蓝, with lan 蓝 (blue) being the most common background color. The cloisonne items in the pictures below show this blue background color. To produce a cloisonne utensil, the artist first produces a copper roughcast, attaches some copper wires forming decorative patterns, adds enamel between the spaces in the wires, and then fires the item in a kiln.



**Cloisonne enamel incense burner with gilded bronze body**

Qing (1644–1911), Capital Museum, Beijing

铜胎鎏金插丝珐琅香炉

清 (1644~1911年) 北京首都博物馆

The design shown above is the *luck character 吉 auspicious pattern* 吉祥图案.



**Cloisonne incense burner with granadilla design**

Qianlong Reign, Qing (1735–1796), Capital Museum, Beijing

景泰蓝番莲纹香炉

清 乾隆 (1735~1796年) 北京首都博物馆

The design on the cup shown below is the long life character *寿 auspicious pattern*.



**Enamel cup with long life and sunflower designs**  
Qianlong Reign, Qing (1735–1796), Capital Museum, Beijing  
珐琅寿葵花式杯  
清 乾隆 (1735~1796年) 北京首都博物馆

## Ivory 象牙

In historic times ivory was an important medium for art. Today, because of the endangered status of elephants and other animals killed for ivory, trade is restricted by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). This page discusses historic artifacts in museums only.



**Carved ivory dragon**

Qing, Qianlong reign (1735—1796), Suzhou Museum

象牙雕龙

清 乾隆（1735—1796年）苏州博物馆

Grapes, as on the ivory box below, are symbolic of seeking happiness.



**Carved rectangular ivory box with grape design**

Qing (1644—1911), Capital Museum, Beijing

象牙雕葡萄长方盒

清（1644—1911年）北京首都博物馆

The carving below shows a part of an entire elephant tusk with a carving of a crowd of people.



**Ivory tusk with a carving of a crowd of people**

Suzhou Museum

象牙人物群雕  
苏州博物馆

## Pictorial Seals 图形印

Seal art is a large subject in itself and beyond the scope of this article. However, I want to include a few seals that are based on purely graphical designs. A *xi* 壶 is a special seal used by a ruler or immediate family of either the Shang or Zhou dynasty. Other people's seals were called *yin* 印. The seals below are from the best seal collection that I have seen at the Shanghai Museum. The *xi* below, from the Western Zhou, is a curly grain design, which looks very similar to the fire design or could represent running water.



Ruler's seal with a curly grain design  
Western Zhou (1045—771), Shanghai Museum  
涡纹玺  
西周（公元前1045—前771年） 上海博物馆

After Emperor Qin Shihuang 秦始皇 unified China in 221 BCE he ordered the *Imperial Seal of China* 传国玺 created. It was handed down to subsequent sovereigns as the *seal of state* 印玺. The seal was carved from the *He Shi Bi* 和氏璧, a famous piece of jade belonging to the Zhao State during the Warring States Period. The seal was lost, probably in the Five Dynasties period.



Pictorial seal for good wishes  
Han (221 BCE —220 CE), Shanghai Museum  
祝辞图形印  
汉（公元前 221—公元 220 年） 上海博物馆

The seal below is a kind of script called *bird and insect script* 鸟虫书体. It is often used for inscriptions on ancient weapons.



Seal with bird and insect script  
Western Zhou (1045—771), Shanghai Museum  
鸟虫书体印  
西周（公元前 1045—前 771 年） 上海博物馆

## Digitization 数字化

Digitization can be useful in modern decorations, posters, and other decorative items created with historic themes. A basic technique is to take photographs with my digital camera, a digital SLD, upload to a computer, and vectorize using Inkscape. Inkspace is a freely available open source program that I described in the article on the [www.chinesenotes.com](http://www.chinesenotes.com) web site, [Chinese Fonts 汉字字体](#). This will result in a scalable vector graphics (SVG) file that can be conveniently manipulated to change color, size, etc without loosing fidelity and then exported to PNG file for display in web pages or elsewhere. The links to the SVG files are beneath the PNG images below.

The originals are well out of copyright but there is some technique involved in creating images that are useful in web pages. For any items with any added artistic value, all may be reused with the Common Creative with Attribution (CCA) license. Please link back to chinesenotes.com with the HTML code <a href='http://chinesenotes.com'>chinesenotes.com</a>.



**Fire Design**

火纹

SVG file: [firadesign\\_black.svg](#)

Some of the images were vectorized from bitmaps using the Inkscape path generation tool (e.g., animal mask design) and others were created by tracing and other manual tools (e.g., fire design).



**Animal Mask Design**

兽面纹

SVG file: [animal\\_mask.svg](#)

## Appendices and Reference Materials

### Table of Decorative Designs 纹饰表

[http://chinesenotes.com/decorative\\_designs\\_designs.php](http://chinesenotes.com/decorative_designs_designs.php)

| Design 纹饰                     | Period  | Artifact 文物                                       |
|-------------------------------|---|---|
| String Pattern 弦纹             | Banpo style from Yangshao Culture 仰韶文化半坡类型 (4,800—3,600 BCE)              | <a href="#">Painted Pottery Pot 彩陶壺</a>           |
| Lattice Pattern 网格纹           | Majiayao Culture 马家窑文化 (c. 3,100—2,900 BCE)                               | <a href="#">Painted Pottery Pot 彩陶壺</a>           |
| Zigzag Pattern 曲折纹            | Banshan Phase of Majiayao Culture 马家窑文化半山类型 (c. 2,600—2,300 BCE)          | <a href="#">Painted Pottery Pot 彩陶壺</a>           |
| Ring Pattern 圆圈纹              | Machang Phase of Majiayao Culture 马家窑文化半山类型 (c. 2,200—2,000 BCE)          | <a href="#">Painted Pottery Jar 彩陶罐</a>           |
| Declining curtain pattern 重幛纹 | Miaodigou Style from the Yangshao Culture 仰韶文化庙底沟类型盆 (c. 3,600—3,000 BCE) | <a href="#">Painted Pottery Pot 彩陶壺</a>           |
| Ripple pattern 水波纹            | Spring and Autumn Period 春秋 (771—445 BCE)                                 | <a href="#">Celadon Tripod Ding 三系鼎</a>           |
| Geometric Design 几何纹          | Late Warring States Period 战国晚期 (Mid 4th century — 221 BCE)               | <a href="#">Bronze Ware 青铜器</a>                   |
| Grain design 谷纹               | Warring States Period 战国 (475—221 BCE)                                    | <a href="#">Bi (jade disc) 璧</a>                  |
|                               | Warring States Period 战国 (475—221 BCE)                                    | <a href="#">Huang (arc-shaped jade pendant) 璜</a> |

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| Spiral pattern 螺纹                         | Early 20th century<br>半叶  | <a href="#">Uygur copper pitcher in lacquer inlay</a><br><a href="#">维吾尔族刻花填漆铜水壶</a> |
| Rectangular spiral decorations 回纹         |   | <a href="#">Furniture 家具</a>   |
| Wave pattern 海水                           | Chenghua Reign, Ming 明成化 (1465—1487)                                  | <a href="#">Blue and white porcelain plate 青花盘</a>                                   |
|   | Hongshan Culture 红山文化 (4,000—3,000)                                   | <a href="#">Jade dragon 玉龙</a>   |
|   | Longshan Culture 龙山文化 (c. 2,300—2,100 BCE)                            | <a href="#">Painted Pottery Plate 彩绘陶盆</a>   |
|   | Late Shang Dynasty 商朝晚期 (13th — 11th century BCE)                     | <a href="#">Ding with Flat Legs 扁足鼎</a>  |
| Dragon Design 龙纹                          | Wu Ping Reign, Northern Qi 北齐武平三年 (572)                               | <a href="#">Bronze Ware 青铜器</a>  |
|   | Qianlong Reign, Qing 清乾隆 (1736—1795)                                  | <a href="#">Buddhist Steele, Stone 佛像石碑</a>  |
|   | Qianlong Reign, Qing 清乾隆 (1736—1795)                                  | <a href="#">Yellow Satin Embroidered Table Cover 黄缎绣桌围</a>                           |
|   | Qing 清 (1644—1911)  | <a href="#">Carved ivory dragon 象牙雕龙</a>   |
| Distorted Dragon Design 变形龙纹              | Mid Spring and Autumn Period 春秋中期 (Early 7th — Early 6th century BCE) | <a href="#">Dragon robe 龙袍</a>   |
| Interleaved Dragon and Scale Design 交龙重鳞纹 | Late Spring and Autumn Period 春秋晚期 (Early 6th century — 476 BCE)      | <a href="#">Pen 盆</a>  |
| Coiled Dragon 蟠龙                          | Late Spring and Autumn Period 春秋晚期 (Early 6th century — 476 BCE)      | <a href="#">Ding 鼎</a>   |
| Dragon and Cloud Design 龙云纹               | Qing Dynasty 清 (1,644—1,911)  | <a href="#">Drum Stand 鼓座</a>  |
|   | Yongzheng Reign, Qing Dynasty 清 雍正 (1723—1735)                        | <a href="#">Jade Pendant 玉佩</a>  |
|   | Yongzheng Reign, Qing Dynasty 清 雍正 (1723—1735)                        | <a href="#">Blue and White Porcelain Zun 青花瓷器尊</a>                                   |
|   | Qing 清 (1644—1911)  | <a href="#">Blue and White Porcelain Plate 青花瓷器盘</a>                                 |
|   | Qianlong Reign, Qing Dynasty 清乾隆 (1736—                               | <a href="#">Dyed Silk 色绢</a>   |
|   |   | <a href="#">Vase 瓶</a>   |

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|--|--|---|
|  | 1795)  |   |
| Denglong 蹤龙                                | 15th Century 十五世纪                                    | <a href="#">Huabiao at Tiananmen 天安门华表</a>  |
| Kui dragon design 窫纹                       | Northern Dynasties 北朝<br>(386—581 CE)                | <a href="#">Brocade 锦</a>   |
| Cross Design 十字纹                           | Late Xia Dynasty 夏朝晚期<br>(18th — 16th century BCE)   | <a href="#">Battle Ax 方钺</a>  |
|  | Mid Shang Dynasty 商朝中期<br>(15th — 13th century BCE)  | <a href="#">Jia 玖</a>   |
|  | Late Shang Dynasty 商朝晚期<br>(13th — 11th century BCE) | <a href="#">Gui 益</a>   |
| Animal Mask Design 兽面纹 (Taotie Design 饕餮纹) | Late Shang Dynasty 商朝晚期<br>(13th — 11th century BCE) | <a href="#">Pou 颂</a>   |
|  | Early Western Zhou Dynasty 西周早期 (11th century BCE)   | <a href="#">You 直</a>   |
| Morphed Animal Mask Design 变形兽面纹           | Spring and Autumn Period 春秋 (771—476 BCE)            | <a href="#">Bronze Ware 青铜器</a>   |
|  | Early Western Zhou Dynasty 西周早期 (11th century BCE)   | <a href="#">Zheng (a Musical Instrument) 钟</a>  |
|  | Western Han 西汉 (206 BCE — 8 CE)                      | <a href="#">Jia Gui 甲簋</a>  |
| Bird Design 凤鸟纹                            | Tang 唐 (618—907)                                     | <a href="#">Bi (jade disc) 璧</a>  |
|  | Song 宋 (960—1279)                                    | <a href="#">Bronze Ware 青铜器</a>   |
| Flying bird and cloud design 飞鸟云纹          | Late 20th century 20 世纪下半叶                           | <a href="#">Brocade with a lucky bird holding a ribbon and nest of petals 花瓣团窠瑞鸟衔绶锦</a> |
| wild goose and cloud design 云雁纹            | Tang 唐 (618—907)                                     | <a href="#">Silk tapestry 缯丝</a>  |
| Mandarin Ducks 鸳鸯                          | Tang 唐 (618—907)                                     | <a href="#">Miao batik quilt 苗族蜡染花被面</a>  |
| Crane 鹤                                    | Song 宋 (960—1279)                                    | <a href="#">Multi-colored glazed porcelain plate 彩色釉陶盘</a>                              |
|  |  | <a href="#">Multi-colored glazed porcelain plate 彩色釉陶盘</a>                              |
|  |  | <a href="#">Sancai porcelain Mandarin duck flask 三彩鸳鸯扁壶</a>                             |
|  |  | <a href="#">Ornament with crane and cloud design</a>                                    |

|                                    |   |  |
|------------------------------------|---|--|
| Parrot 鹦鹉                          | Qing 清 (1644—1911)<br>Ming 明 (1368—1644)                          | <a href="#">云鹤纹饰</a><br><a href="#">Official badge 官补</a>  |
| Egret 鹭                            | Yuan 元 (1271—1368)  | <a href="#">Jade ornament 玉饰</a><br><a href="#">Ornament with lotus and egret design</a><br><a href="#">莲鹭纹饰</a> |
| Fire Design 火纹                     | Mid Shang Dynasty 商朝中期 (15th — 13th century BCE)                  | <a href="#">Jia 爭</a>  |
| Animal Design 动物纹                  | Early 20th century 20 世纪上半叶                                       | <a href="#">Bronze Ware 青铜器</a><br><a href="#">Bronze Ware 青铜器</a>   |
| Lightening Design 雷纹               | Late Shang Dynasty 商朝晚期 (13th — 11th century BCE)                 | <a href="#">Miao sleeve attachments with embroidery 苗族剖绣动物纹袖片</a>  |
| Ram 羊首                             | Late Shang Dynasty 商朝晚期 (13th — 11th century BCE)                 | <a href="#">Pou 颂</a>  |
| Doves 鸾                            | Ming 明 (1368—1644)  | <a href="#">Bronze Ware 青铜器</a>  |
| Ox 牛                               | Early Spring and Autumn Period 春秋早期 (771 — Early 7th century BCE) | <a href="#">Four Headed Ram Pou 四羊首瓿</a>   |
| Eight trigrams design 八卦纹          | Late Spring and Autumn Period 春秋晚期 (Early 6th century — 476 BCE)  | <a href="#">Jade ornament with sheep symbolizing an auspicious new year 羊开泰饰板</a>                                |
| Yin and Yang 阴阳                    | Jiajing Reign, Ming Dynasty (1521—1566)                           | <a href="#">Li with Three Doves 三鳩鬲</a>  |
| Eight Buddhist Emblems Design 八吉祥纹 | Qianlong Reign, Qing 乾隆 (1736—1795)                               | <a href="#">Zun (Wine Vessel) 牺尊</a>   |
| Rolling Cloud Design 卷云纹           | Western Han 西汉 (202 BCE — 8 CE)                                   | <a href="#">Doucai Censer 斗彩香炉</a>   |
| Lotus Design 莲花纹                   | Northern Wei 北魏 (386—584)   | <a href="#">Robe with eight divinatory trigrams 八卦衣</a>  |
| Lotus 莲花                           | Song 宋 (960—1279)   | <a href="#">Flat Sided Vase 抱月瓶</a>  |
|                                    | Tubo Period 吐蕃分治时期  | <a href="#">Eaves Tile 瓦当</a>  |
|                                    |   | <a href="#">Eaves Tile 瓦当</a>  |
|                                    |   | <a href="#">White glazed vase with incised fish and lotus design 白釉划花莲鱼纹瓶</a>                                    |
|                                    |   | <a href="#">Bronze with Gilding Amoghasiddha</a>   |

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|--------------------------------|---|--|
|                                | (9th—13th centuries)                        | <a href="#">Buddha Statue 铜镀金不动成就佛像</a>                                      |
|                                | Yuan Dynasty 元 (1279—1368)                  | <a href="#">Ginger-yellow glazed porcelain bowl 姜黄釉碗</a>                     |
| Lotus bouquet design 把莲纹       | Northern Song 北宋 (960—1127)                 | <a href="#">Porcelain pillow 枕</a>   |
|                                | Eastern Han 东汉 (25—220 CE)                  | <a href="#">Brown glazed pottery lian 褐绿釉陶奁</a>                              |
| Lotus petal design 莲瓣          | Southern Dynasties 南朝 (420—589)             | <a href="#">Celadon jar 青釉罐</a>  |
|                                | Song 宋 (960—1279)                           | <a href="#">Celadon Covered Jar 青釉盖罐</a>                                     |
| Lotus leaf 荷叶                  | Jin — Early Yuan Dynasty 金—元初 (1115—1300)   | <a href="#">Moon white glazed jar 月白釉盖罐</a>                                  |
| Leaf pattern 花叶纹               | Southern Song — Yuan 南宋—元 (1127—1368)       | <a href="#">Covered jar 盖罐</a>   |
|                                | Tang 唐 (618—907)                            | <a href="#">Brocade with bird and flower design 花鸟纹锦</a>                     |
| Floral Design 花卉纹              | Jiājing Reign, Qing 清嘉靖 (1521—1567)         | <a href="#">Round carved lacquer box 红雕漆圆盒</a>                               |
|                                | Jia Qing Reign, Qing Dynasty (1796-1820)    | <a href="#">Hanging Vase 壁瓶</a>  |
| Flower and Fruit Design 花果纹    | Xuan De Reign, Ming Dynasty 明宣德 (1426—1435) | <a href="#">Gold Plate 金盆</a>  |
| Bamboo 竹子                      |   | <a href="#">Furniture 陈设</a>   |
| Grapes 葡萄                      | Qing 清 (1644—1911)                          | <a href="#">Plate with Brown on White Glaze Background 白釉酱色彩盘</a>            |
| Granadilla Floral Design 番莲纹   | Qianlong Reign, Qing 清乾隆 (1736—1795)        | <a href="#">Bamboo relief sculpture 竹林浮雕</a>                                 |
|                                | Qianlong Reign, Qing 清乾隆 (1735—1796)        | <a href="#">Carved rectangular ivory box 象牙雕长方盒</a>                          |
| Interlaced floral design 缠枝花卉纹 | Northern Song 北宋 (960—1279)                 | <a href="#">Duomu Pitcher 多穆壶</a>  |
|                                | Song 宋 (960—1279)                           | <a href="#">Cloisonne Incense Burner 景泰蓝香炉</a>                               |
| Peony 牡丹                       | Xi Xia 西夏 (1032—1227)                       | <a href="#">Celadon vase 青釉瓶</a>   |
|                                |   | <a href="#">Celadon meiping vase 青釉梅瓶</a>                                    |
|                                |   | <a href="#">Porcelain vase with inscribed blooming peony design 刻花开光牡丹纹瓶</a> |
|                                |   | <a href="#">Square Red Carved Lacquer Ware Plate 红雕漆方盘</a>                   |

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|---|--|--|
| Chrysanthemum petals 菊瓣                         | Wanli Reign, Ming Dynasty 明万历 (1573—1620)                | <a href="#">Porcelain plate with wucai butterfly desgin 五彩花蝶纹盘</a>         |
| Camellia Design 山茶纹                             | Yongle Reign, Ming Dynasty 明永乐 (1403—1424)               | <a href="#">Blue and white oblate porcelain flask 青花扁壶</a>                 |
| Bamboo Design 竹纹                                | Qing 清 (1644—1911)                                       | <a href="#">Mahogany chessboard 老红木棋桌</a>                                  |
| Dragon and phoenix design 龙凤纹                   | Late Spring and Autumn 春秋晚期 (Late 6th century — 477 BCE) | <a href="#">Jade Ornament 玉饰</a>   |
| phoenix design 凤纹                               | Yuan Dynasty 元 (1279—1368)                               | <a href="#">Black Painted White Base Flat Pot 白地黑花扁壶</a>                   |
| String Bead Design 串珠纹                          | Yuan Dynasty 元 (1279—1368)                               | <a href="#">Celadon plate 青釉盘</a>  |
| Brocade design 锦纹                               | Xuan De Reign, Ming Dynasty 明宣德 (1426—1435)              | <a href="#">Blue and white porcelain dish 青花盘</a>                          |
| Figurines 人物                                    | Yuan Dynasty 元 (1279—1368)                               | <a href="#">Greenish-Glazed White Pot 青白釉壶</a>                             |
| Bixie 辟耶  | Qianlong Reign, Qing Dynasty 清 乾隆 (1736—1795)            | <a href="#">Red Lacquer Ware Plate 剔红盘</a>                                 |
| Tomb Guardian Beast 镇墓兽                         | Three Kingdoms Period (Wu) 三国 (吴) 222—280 CE             | <a href="#">Celadon jar with piled figurines 青釉堆塑人物罐</a>                   |
| Lions 狮子  | Western Jin 西晋 (265—317)                                 | <a href="#">Celadon jar with watchtower and figures 青釉堆塑楼阙人物罐</a>          |
| Deer 鹿  | Western Jin 西晋 (265—317)                                 | <a href="#">Celadon lion-shaped bixie 青釉狮形辟耶</a>                           |
| Bat 蝙蝠  | Tang 唐 (618—907)   | <a href="#">Multi-colored glazed porcelain tomb guardian beast 彩色釉陶镇墓兽</a> |
| Elephant 大象                                     | Mid-fifteenth century 十五世纪中期                             | <a href="#">Blue and white porcelain plate 青花盘</a>                         |
| Monkey 猴子                                       | Guangxu Reign, Qing 清 (1875-1908)                        | <a href="#">Statue of a Lion at Yonghegong 雍和宫狮子石像</a>                     |
| Twelve animals of the Terrestrial Branches 十二生肖 | Five Dynasties 五代 (907—960)                              | <a href="#">Fencai zun 粉彩尊</a>   |
|   |  | <a href="#">Bat 蝙蝠</a>   |
|   |  | <a href="#">Elephant 大象</a>  |
|   |  | <a href="#">Monkey 猴子</a>  |
|   |  | <a href="#">Bronze mirror 铜镜</a>   |

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|-------------------------------|--|--|
| Rat 鼠                         | Tang 唐 (618—907)                                     | <a href="#">Animal figurine 陶生肖俑</a>   |
| Qilin (Chinese unicorn)<br>麒麟 | Zhengtong Reign, Ming<br>Dynasty 明永乐 (1403—<br>1424) | <a href="#">Porcelain plate with unicorn gazing at<br/>the moon 青花麒麟望月纹盘</a>           |
| Frog 蛙                        | Warring States Period 战国<br>(475—221 BCE)            | <a href="#">Belt buckle with animal mask and frog<br/>design 兽首蛙纹带钩</a>                |
| Silk moth design 蚕蛾纹          |  | <a href="#">Silk moth design 蚕蛾纹</a>   |
| Cicada 蝉                      | Qing 清 (1644—1911)                                   | <a href="#">Zisha brush rest with a cicada on a<br/>branch 紫砂桂枝歇蝉笔架</a>                |
| Praying mantis 螳              | Kangxi Reign, Qing 清 康熙<br>(1662—1722)               | <a href="#">Blue and white porcelain flower<br/>container 青花花觚</a>                     |
| Goody luck 吉                  | Qing 清 (1644—1911)                                   | <a href="#">Cloisonne Enamel Incense Burner 琥珀<br/>香炉</a>                              |
|                               | Qing 清 (1644—1911)                                   | <a href="#">Ceremonial robe with gold coiled cloud<br/>embroidery 刺绣蟠金云神袍</a>          |
| Longevity 寿                   | Jiajing Reign, Ming 明 嘉靖<br>(1521—1566)              | <a href="#">Wucai plate 五彩</a>   |
|                               | Qianlong Reign, Qing 清 乾<br>隆 (1735—1796)            | <a href="#">Enamel Cup 琥珀杯</a>   |
|                               | Qianlong Reign, Qing 清 乾<br>隆 (1735—1796)            | <a href="#">Doucai plate 斗彩盘</a>   |
| Xi (happiness) character<br>喜 |  | <a href="#">Carved brick 砖雕</a>  |
| Ruyi design 如意纹               |  | <a href="#">Eaves tile 瓦当</a>  |
| Cracked ice 冰裂                |  | <a href="#">Furniture with ruyi design (detail) 如意<br/>纹陈设 (部分)</a>                    |
| Reserved panel design<br>开光   | Kangxi Reign, Qing Dynasty<br>清康熙 (1662—1722)        | <a href="#">Open screen window 漏窗</a>  |
|                               | Guangxu Reign, Qing                                  | <a href="#">Porcelain bottle with blue background<br/>酒蓝地青花瓶</a>                       |
| Medallion design 团花纹          | Dynasty 清光绪 (1875—<br>1908)                          | <a href="#">Vase with blue background 蓝地瓶</a>  |
| Landscape 山水                  |  | <a href="#">Wood carving 木雕</a>  |
| Hundred sons 百子               |  | <a href="#">Red Cotton Lined Lady's Jacket with<br/>Gold Embroidery 红纱罗金色绣女夹<br/>衣</a> |
| Ancestral soul motif 祖<br>灵纹  | Late 20th century 20 世纪下<br>半叶                       | <a href="#">Miao sleeve with embroidered braiding<br/>苗族辫绣</a>                         |
| Tree lamp design 灯树纹          | Northern Dynasties 北朝<br>(386—581 CE)                | <a href="#">Brocade 锦</a>  |

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|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|--|---|
| Nimbus 背光                            |                              | Northern Wei, First year of the reign of Zheng Shi 北魏 正始元年 (504) | <a href="#">Bronze Statue of the Buddha 佛铜像</a>           |
|                                      |                              | Northern Wei, Second year of Jing Ming Reign 北魏景明二年 (501)        | <a href="#">Gilt bronze bodhisattva statue 菩萨鎏金铜像</a>     |
| Aureole 身光                           |                              |  | <a href="#">Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva statue 观音菩萨像</a>   |
| Speaking the Dharma mudra 说法印        | Sui 隋 (581—618)              |  | <a href="#">Bronze statues of Amitabha 阿弥陀三尊铜像</a>        |
| Dhyana mudra 禅定印                     |                              |  | <a href="#">Sakyamuni Buddha seated statue 释迦牟尼佛坐像</a>    |
| Pagoda 佛塔                            |                              |  | <a href="#">Incense Burner 香炉</a>                         |
| Bhumyakramana Mudra 触地印              |                              | Kingdom of Dali, Second year of Sheng Ming Reign 大理国盛明二年 (1163)  | <a href="#">Gilt bronze Mahavairocana statue 大日遍照鎏金铜像</a> |
| Abhaya mudra 施无畏印                    |                              | Northern Qi 北齐 (550—577)   | <a href="#">Stone Statue of the Buddha 佛石像</a>            |
| Vara mudra 愿印                        |                              | Northern Qi 北齐 (550—577)   | <a href="#">Stone Statue of the Buddha 佛石像</a>            |
| Jataka stories 本生                    |                              | Second year of Xinghe Reign, Eastern Wei 东魏 兴和二年 (540)           | <a href="#">Stone Buddha statue 佛石像</a>                   |
| Reclining Buddha 卧佛                  |                              |  | <a href="#">Reclining Buddha 卧佛</a>                       |
| Medicine Buddha 药师佛                  | 1335                         |  | <a href="#">Duobao Pagoda 多宝塔</a>                         |
| Meeting with the Locana Buddha 卢舍那佛会 | 1022 CE                      |  | <a href="#">Meeting with the Locana Buddha 卢舍那佛会</a>      |
| Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva 观音菩萨      |                              |  | <a href="#">Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva statue 南海观音像</a>   |
| Manjusri Bodhisattva 文殊师利            | Yuan 元 (1279—1368)           |  | <a href="#">Manjusri Bodhisattva 文殊师利</a>                 |
| Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva 地藏菩萨         |                              |  | <a href="#">Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva statue 地藏菩萨像</a>      |
| Samantabhadra Bodhisattva 普贤菩萨       |                              |  | <a href="#">Samantabhadra Bodhisattva statue 普贤菩萨像</a>    |
| Maitreya Bodhisattva 弥勒菩萨            | Southern Song 南宋 (1127—1280) |  | <a href="#">Maitreya Bodhisattva 弥勒菩萨</a>                 |
| Vajrapani Bodhisattva 金刚手菩萨          | Yuan 元 (1279—1368)           |  | <a href="#">Vajrapani Bodhisattva 金刚手菩萨</a>               |

刚手菩萨

Lokapala 天王

Apsaras 飞天

Wooden fish 木鱼

Dharma Wheel 法轮

Ruyi 如意

Tang 唐 (618—917)

Qing 清 (1,644—1,911)

[Stone Lokapala statue 天王石像](#)

[Apsaras 飞天](#)

[Wooden fish 木鱼](#)

[Dharma Wheel 法轮](#)

[Sceptre with three white jade inlays 白玉三镶如意](#)

## Glossary 词汇

<http://chinesenotes.com/topic.php?english=Art>

# Further Reading

## Background 背景

I have been lucky enough to have lived in China for the last two years and had the opportunity to visit many museums and historic sites. I note the locations in the titles of the photographs. If you are not so fortunate and want to do more research there are a bunch of good books on related subjects. With the National Museum in Beijing under construction, the Shanghai Museum is probably the best museum in China at present. Of its various collections, the bronze ware collection is the most awe-inspiring. You can read about the collections in the Shanghai Museum in the book *Shanghai Museum* [Chen, 2007]. For more on cultural relics see *China's Cultural Relics* [Li, 2004]. See *Chinese-English Glossary of Cultural Relics and Archaeology* [Wang, 2005] for a list and brief explanation of many different artifact types and terms. For more on the origin of Chinese characters see the book *Chinese Characters* [Han Jianting 2008].

For more information on the Inkscape vector graphics program see *Inkscape* [Kirsanov 2009].

## Symbolism 象征

*Chinese Symbolism and Art Motifs* [Williams 1974] gives explanations of many symbols used in Chinese art.

## Ceramics 陶瓷器

Many of the photos of pottery and porcelain here are from the Shanghai Museum and the Capital Museum in Beijing. The book *Shanghai Museum* [Chen Xiejun 2007] includes a section on the ceramic artifacts in the museum. *Chinese Ceramics: A History of Elegance* [Fang Lili 2010] is a short and useful introduction to Chinese ceramics, including pottery and porcelain.

## Bronze Ware 青铜器

For more on bronze ware see *Chinese Bronze Ware* [Li Song, 2009].

## Buddhist Art 佛教美术

Many of the photos of Buddhist art were taken at Lingyin Temple and Feilai Peak in Hangzhou and Mount Putuo in Zhejiang. [Lin Zhengqiu 2003] describes Lingyin Temple and Feilai Peak in Hangzhou very well. The book *A Sea Paradise Buddha Land — Mount Putuo* [Fang Lunxin and Wang Daoxing 1998] describes Mount Putuo. The book *Yonghe Lamasery* [Bao Hongfei and Hu

Xuefeng 2008] contains some good information in both Chinese and English and some great photographs of the Lama Temple in Beijing. *Signs of the Dharma* [Shi Ci Zhuang 1997] (in Chinese) gives a detailed explanation of many symbols in Buddhism but is not limited to art.

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