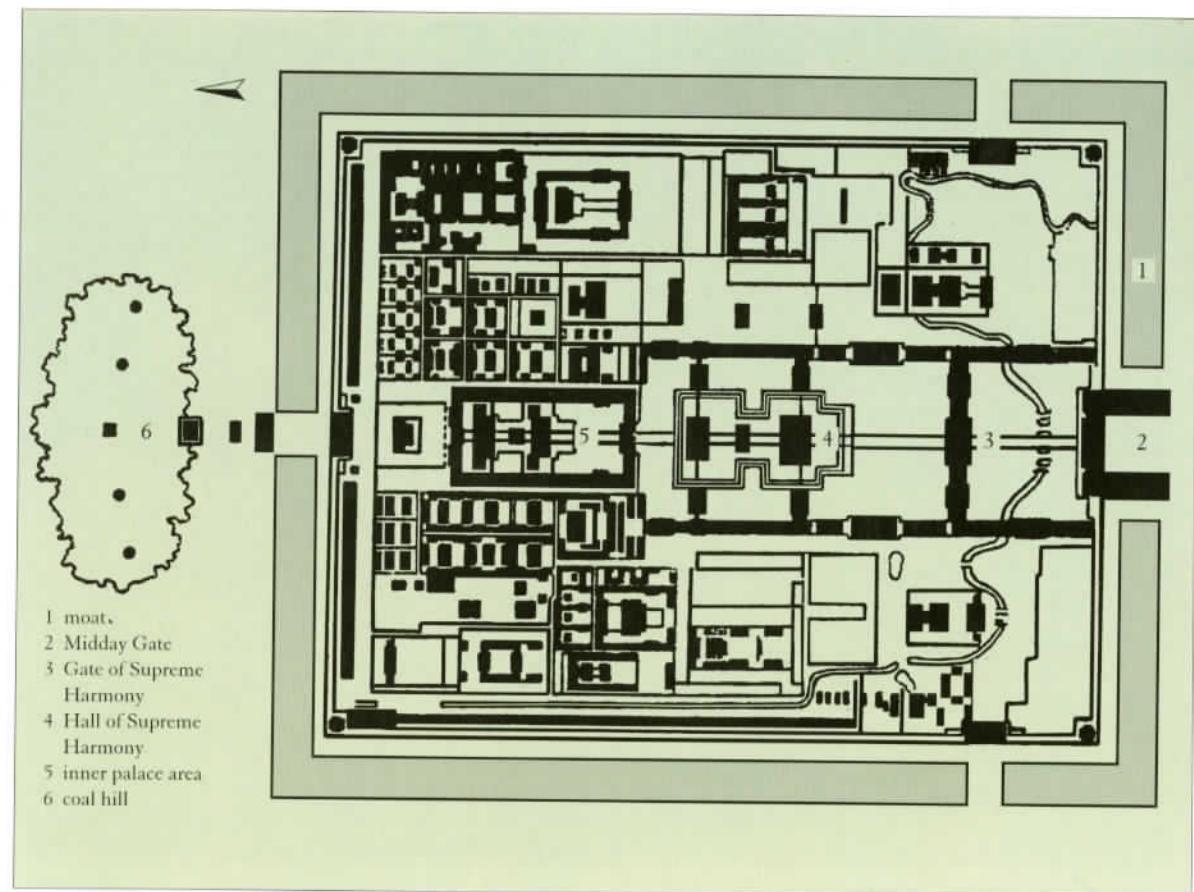


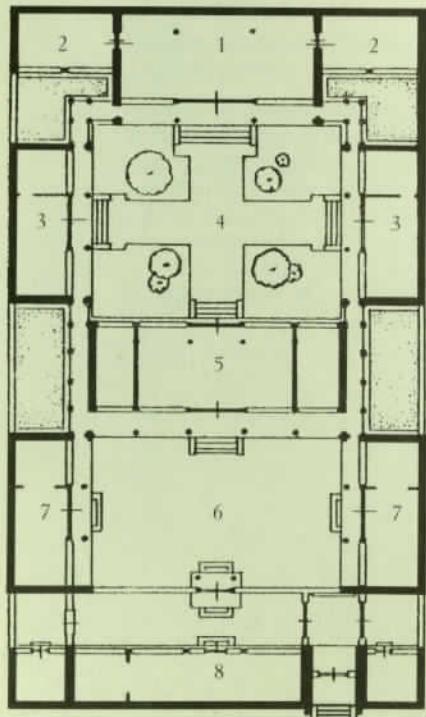
Ground plan of the Imperial Palace,
The Forbidden City *zijincheng*

Rectangular, about 1000 x 786 meters,
constructed after the Ming period.
Forbidden City, *zijincheng*, Beijing

In comparison, the ground plan of a north
Chinese enclosed estate *siheyuan* (below)



Ground plan of house with courtyard
enclosed on four sides *siheyuan*, North China



- 1 main building
- 2 adjacent building
- 3 side building
- 4 inner courtyard
- 5 reception hall
- 6 outside courtyard with gate
- 7 side building
- 8 front-facing building

1573–1620) – are not inferior to those of this life with regard to their huge size, and yet they are different in character.

Our knowledge of architectural sites is made wider by written descriptions by Chinese contemporaries and by the first Europeans, who praised these gleaming, colorfully decorated constructions. The Europeans of the 17th and 18th centuries were moved and fascinated by the strangeness of Chinese architecture, an architecture which they discovered secondhand through illustrated texts. They saw everything embodied in Chinese architecture (as an expression of a philosophy and a way of life) from the legendary rich country of Cathay to idyllic Arcadia. Even the German poet Goethe, inspired by such texts, wrote a poem which contrasted Chinese architecture with that of classical antiquity and the Renaissance.

*In Rome I met a Chinese; all of its buildings,
The old and the new, seemed to him heavy and drear.
"Poor people!" he sighed, "I hope they can come to see,
It's only pillars of wood which hold up the roof,
Only battens and board, bright gilding and carvings
Are charming the finer sense of a cultured eye..."*

"The Chinaman in Rome," Johann Wolfgang Goethe²

The general idea of the last four lines of the poem (not quoted here) is, however, that Goethe

considers the Chinaman blind, sick even, since he prefers the transitory light construction. Apart from that almost every famous oriental museum in the Western world possesses parts of buildings from Chinese architecture, especially bronze fittings or porcelain roof tiles and turrets.

What the museum visitor does not see is that beneath the roof stands a framework of pillars, on a raised and multitiered terrace.

In comparison with the conventions formulated in the building manual of the Song period, *Yingzao fashi*, there was no basic change at the time of the Ming dynasty.

On rectangular platforms of compressed earth, which are covered with stone slabs, wooden constructions rise up whose walls are only infilling and have no structural function (this is provided by the frame). One approaches the visible side up steps and this side lets the light into the inside through wide doors and slatted windows.

Palaces and temples

A strict convention was also adhered to in the construction of complexes built on a rigid rectangular, axially symmetrical ground plan. In fact symmetry is visible not only in the ground plan but also in the elevation of a building complex. The size of the individual buildings, their height, the shape of their roofs, and the height of the roof ridge all fit in with each other. Thus the central axis can clearly be seen to be the center, the backbone of the construction. The higher the building towers up beyond the basic level, the greater

its standing within the complex. This three-dimensional interaction of height and distance produces the greatest effect in the case of the Imperial Palace (see below).

That was always the aim of this dominating architecture. Through its wide-open spaces it makes people appear small in front of the high buildings or at the foot of the terraces, and so makes them conscious of their lower status. The buildings symbolize superiority both by their height and by the fact that they are situated on terraces. The only building which reaches the same height on the longitudinal section of the whole precinct – but which does not stand out when on the spot – like the audience chamber, the Hall of Supreme Harmony (Taihedian), is the main gate, the Midday Gate (Wumen). It prepared the subject who had been admitted for an audience for what was to come: he stands like a little worm before this high three-winged gateway. When he had passed the Midday Gate, he would approach, across a winding moat and called Gold Water, the next transit gateway, the Gate for the Worship of Heaven (Fengtianmen, today the Gate of Supreme Harmony, Taihemen).

Every morning civil and military mandarins in the Ming period had to gather before the gate. The officials of the imperial secretariat, representing the Son of Heaven, stood on the marble terrace in front of the gate which was almost 24 meters (79 feet) high. The offices were also here on the "outside." The civil and military mandarins of the following dynasty were allowed to go somewhat further into the palace. Three passages, under a double hipped

roof (the middle one, however, was reserved solely for the emperor), led the way to the audience square. The white marble from the balustrades and the radiant red from the columns and walls streamed towards the official, the roofs rose up brightly in their imperial yellow, as if the emperor was looking directly down onto his little subject below. The path for the normal mortal ended on the huge square, roughly 30,000 square meters (36,000 square yards) in size, in front of the Hall for the Worship of Heaven, which was renamed the Hall of Supreme Harmony under the Qing dynasty (Taihedian). Up above, the emperor sat enthroned in the Hall on the three-tiered terrace. The subject stood in front of a powerful building with a double-hipped roof. It has remained until today classical architecture's greatest preserved wooden building, first built in 1420 and, after several fires, reconstructed in the same form faithful to an existing model. In total, the Hall is constructed to a width of eleven "column distances" (eleven *jian*) and so is approximately 60 meters (197 feet) wide, and nearly 27 meters (89 feet) high; it is 37.17 meters (122 feet) deep. The impression of height is further strengthened by the three-tiered terrace, which rises up by 8.1 meters (26 feet) from the courtyard. The whole Hall is a wonderful technical achievement that provides some amazing statistics. The roof covered in colored ceramic tiles, together with its intricate wooden balcony construction, a variety of the *dougong* system, weighs around 2,000 tons. In addition, the roof bears on its main ridge two ceramic decorations each over 3 meters (10 feet) high – *dawen*, dragon-fish creatures with wide-open



Top
Midday Gate of the Imperial Palace
Woodcut, 15.2 x 10.6 cm, Sinologisches
Institut der Universität, Frankfurt

This woodcut appeared in the 1886 edition of the book *Hongxue yinyuan tu ji* (first edition 1847).

Above
Hall of Supreme Harmony
Imperial Palace, Beijing



Left and above
View over the roofs of the
Imperial Palace, Beijing

Decoration of the ridges of two lower-ranking buildings of the palace, Beijing

Imperial Palace, Beijing

At the front the dragon is missing between the badly damaged Immortal and the chiwei.



Gargoyle

Marble, Temple of Heaven, Beijing

This gargoyle in the form of a dragon stems from a later period of reconstruction, but is identical to the classical pieces in the Imperial Palace and at the Temple of Heaven.



Immortal

Light ceramic, yellow and black glaze,
H 27 cm, Staatliches Museum für
Völkerkunde, Munich

mouths and glaring eyes – that weigh over 4 tons. On the same terrace, but invisible to the normal mortal because of the mighty throne room, are also the square Hall of Central Harmony and a rectangular hall designed, like the Hall of Supreme Harmony, for the preservation of universal harmony. Behind this complex the inner palace began, home of the emperor and his extensive entourage: this included the walled-in residential palaces of the crown princes, concubines and empresses; libraries and gardens; and halls the royal family used for holding religious ceremonies.

Everything was predetermined, from the color of the bricks to the number of decorative roof turrets, the decoration of the beams, and the ornamentation of the decorative bricks on the subdividing walls. The interior of most important buildings was painted in the *hexi-style*: gold-colored dragons on a green or blue background, and their roofs bore the greatest number of roof turrets (a maximum of twelve), and curved tiles, *tongwa* (one of two types of bricks used for the buildings of the palace). The columns of the balustrades surrounding them displayed the richest decoration, and the gargoyles of their terraces were in the shape of dragons.

Some decorative forms were both ornamental and functional, for example the decorative figures on the ridge, which were to protect the halls from evil influences. One could imagine the dragon creatures consuming fire and helping the building to beat the bad weather. On the main ridge were *dawen* or *chiwei* (dragon creatures with bushy tails) in various sizes, the ridges running downwards (hips) bore on the end, in a firmly fixed sequence from bottom to top, an immortal riding on a hen-like bird, a dragon, a phoenix, a lion, a unicorn or heavenly steed, a sea horse, a walrus,

suanni, a *yayu* (a creature who was one third fish, lion, and tortoise), a *xiezhai* (a fire-eating mythical creature in the shape of cow), a bull with scales, *douniu*, a winged ape-like creature, *xingshen*, and a dragon creature with a bushy tail, *chiwei*.

The size of a building corresponded to its importance, and so did the numbers of the figures. The ridges of a well, for example, carry only the immortal on his hen, the dragon, and the final figure on top, the *chiwei*. The emperor's residential palace has ten figures; on every corner of the roofs of the empress's living chambers sat a row of eight figures. Only the Hall of Supreme Harmony has all the figures on its ridges. The program is hierarchical, which also applies to the use of roof tiles: important buildings had curved tiles, which meant that when seen from below they look even higher, while less important buildings had only flat tiles. The decorative panels of the end tiles, too, which in the period of the Han dynasty already displayed complex decorative designs, reflected the status of the building. The importance of a building can be seen inside as well as out: the splendid construction of the ceilings and the paintings inside, and the elaborate carving outside.

The painted decoration on the beams was also there for a more mundane purpose: it helped to prevent woodworm and other infestation. Three styles of decoration were used during the Ming and Qing periods, the *hexi* decorative painting being regarded as the most valuable. In the middle of the beams there was also a rectangular picture area with dragons or phoenixes, and nearby at the side of each a zigzag area (with either a pictorial decoration or a single color) and on both edges of the beam another area of pictures with spaces. Everything was separated by lines. The "simpler

variety" of decoration was the *xuanzi* style, in which floral ornaments and depictions of flowers in the border and zigzag areas made a great show, but the middle was an undecorated colored area. Deriving from this type was the Suzhou style, in which the empty colored areas or even the borders at the edge were filled in with landscape or flower paintings. This kind of decoration was to become particularly widespread in the imperial garden buildings of the Qing period.

Walls within the Forbidden City made the separation and hierarchy of the various court areas clearly perceptible. The whole palace complex is separated into compartments: the surrounding walls of walled-in courts, protective walls and the so-called "shadow walls" which were to make it impossible for evil spirits to enter bore decorative ornamentation: either a merely decorative design or even auspicious symbols to underline the protective power of the walls. For that, colorfully glazed ceramic tiles were used. The ceramics either line the walls completely as some sort of camouflage, or they imitate carvings and decorated beams, in some cases even false roofs (mostly half ceramic roofs without a wooden substructure, which are set into the walls) are to be seen. Such decoration of brightly coloured ceramic flower relief appears mostly on walls and terrace

coverings of less important court complexes.

At this point one would expect a mention of the famous Wall of the Nine Dragons. But it was not there in those days, not being constructed until 1771 during the Qing period. Incidentally it was not the only one, another one actually dating from the Ming period is to be found in Datong, and yet another, also from the Qianlong period, in Beihai Park. However the wall in the Imperial Palace may serve as an illustration of the above-mentioned abstract notes, since it shows the imitation of the beams (see page 198, bottom).

These treasures, however, were invisible to the subjects. The rich, colorful ceramic decorations mark the private domain; the emperor wandered past to his gardens or to his concubines.

The subject only saw the marble balustrades with the dragon and phoenix decoration in front of the Hall of Supreme Harmony, the red walls and pillars, and the gold painting of the beams and coffered ceilings – insofar as he dared to raise his eyes. During the audience ceremony, highly ritualized in the period of the Qing dynasty, one has to imagine the Hall being fanned by the scent of incense, and enshrouded in its haze. The fragrant mists rose from the throats of bronze tortoises, the beaks of cranes, and from round incense burners. This display went to further strengthen the effect of

Phoenix

Ceramic, turquoise blue glaze, H 19.5 cm, L 17.5 cm, Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde, Munich



Left

Two dragons and fiery pearl

Gilded carving on the lower part of a folding door (exterior side), Imperial Palace, Beijing

Relief in the corner of a wall

Glazed ceramic, yellow lotus flower, two peony blooms and buds in a branch, W 40 cm, Imperial Palace, Beijing

The relief has a strong sculptural effect.

Temple of Heaven

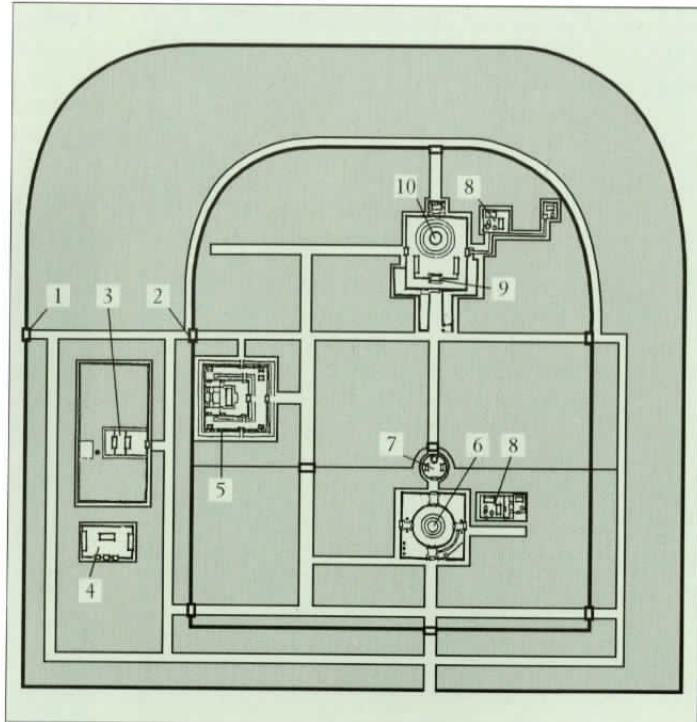
Early-15th century

1. Gate west of the altar
2. Gate of the Western Heaven
3. Office of Heavenly Joy
4. Pen for the sacrificial animals
5. Palace of Fasting
6. Altar of Heaven
7. Hall of the Vault of Heaven with echo wall
8. Heavenly Kitchen/Heavenly Storeroom

Below

Wall of the Nine Dragons

(Detail), central dragon relief, constructed 1771, colored glazed ceramic and relief tiles, total length of the wall 29.4 m, Imperial Palace, Beijing



the enormity of the architecture; it charmed and impressed equally. Even the mandarin standing halfway up the social scale was conscious of his lack of worth. He came and went through little doors of the mighty gateway building. The emperor himself, the center of the Empire, took the largest passageway in the middle. He walked, for example, in solemn procession through the Midday Gate to perform the grand, middling, or minor sacrificial ceremonies in the places appointed for them.

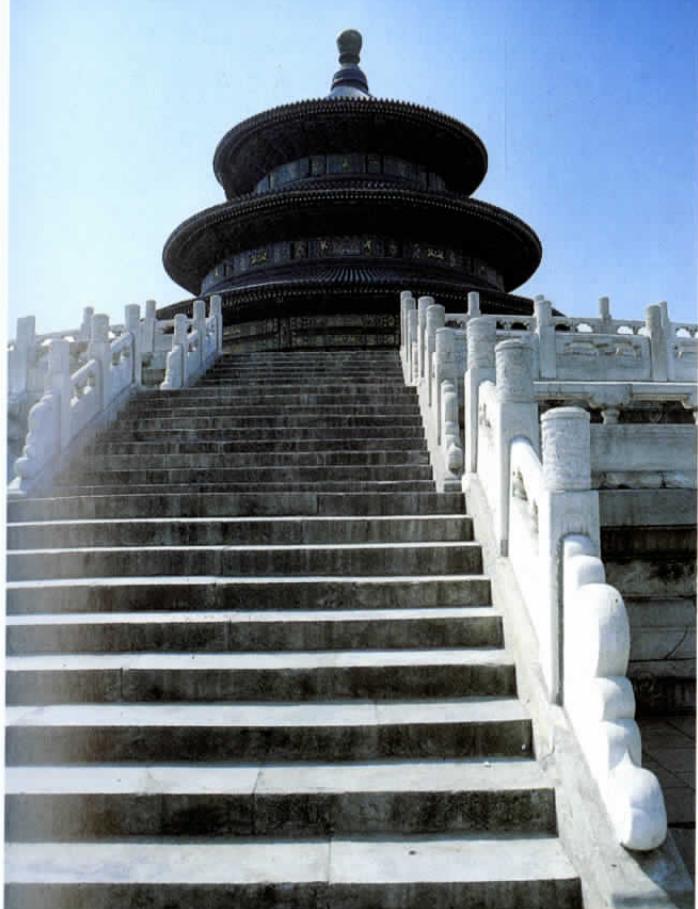
The unapproachable emperor, the Son of Heaven, was father of the people. He had countless rituals to perform for the good of the kingdom and its subjects. Especially important were the Sacrifice to Heaven and the Harvest Prayer, two of the grandest sacrificial ceremonies. The emperor as spokesman for his subjects addressed his plea for protection directly to heaven. The solemnities took place at the winter solstice. Before the emperor could carry out the sacrificial ceremony, he had to purify both body and soul, and this was executed by several days of solitary preparation and fasting.

The whole of the Temple of Heaven precinct (as with imperial temples in general) consists not only of places for sacrifice and temple halls, but also of a small palace and numerous warehouses, kitchens, and stables. The grounds surrounded by a wall were never accessible to the people, not even at the ceremony. Even the emperor's processional path from the palace to the altar was covered over. Only the closest relations of the emperor (princes) and officials performing the rites were present, when incense, jade, silk, bullocks (slaughtered as burnt offerings), and sacrificial drinks were brought, and the emperor threw himself to the ground before Heaven.

A second great sacrifice, performed in the same palace at the beginning of spring, was the intercessory prayer for a plentiful harvest, and the driving away of any evil relating to this. In a somewhat less splendid manner the royal household came with a plea for rain in the fourth month of the traditional calendar (May); here the slaughtering was done with less ritual. The consecrated building complex also played a fundamental role following the enthronement of a new emperor.

The iconographic program of the building complex fits in with its use as a place of sacrifice. Heaven is considered to be yang power, hence the temple lies to the south of the town (in those days outside the town); people traditionally imagined heaven to be round, hence the sacrificial altar was round like the halls. Its cobalt-blue roofs have curved tiles, like the other important buildings of the Forbidden City.

The Hall of the Harvest Prayer, which stands on a three-tiered circular terrace can, with regard to its arrangement of pillars, be interpreted as symbolic (see opposite). In China they imagined the earth as a square plate and heaven as a round bell above it; so the main supports of the hall form a square, above which is a clear view into the round conical roof. The exterior of the Hall of the Harvest Prayer has changed somewhat over the centuries. During



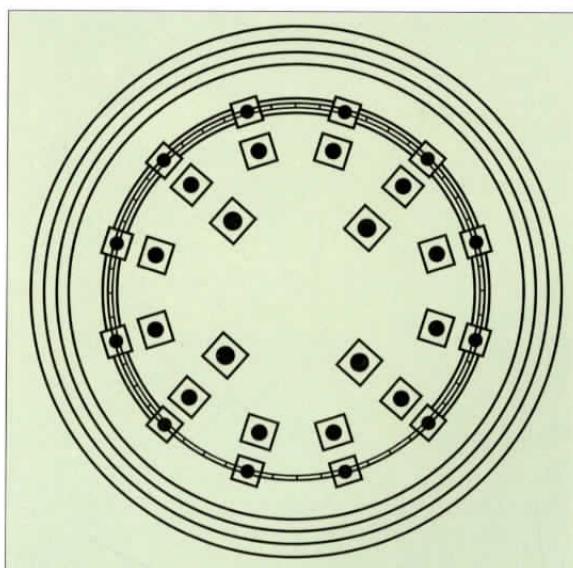
the Ming period only the upper roof must have been blue, the one under it yellow, and the lowest one green. Thus the roof would have symbolized, by its colors, water, earth, and sky. The colors of the roof tiles of the temples (there was not only the Temple of Heaven) were predetermined: the Earth temple had a yellow ceramic covering, the Moon temple white, and the Sun temple red.

What, in view of these guidelines, was permitted for the roofs of residential and Buddhist monastery architecture? The subject had to take simple, unglazed tiles, gray or gray-black, and was not allowed any decoration. It was the same with the monasteries; they were prescribed green tiles. Yellow coloured tiles of monastery roofs meant that the building or temple in question was granted certain imperial privileges. Therefore the tiles, seen from right beyond the city's boundaries, were indicative of imperial favor, and of the status of a building and its occupant.

In the Jiangnan region, far away from the capital city, patrons discovered the best ways of getting round the imperial ban. The shape of the roofs was their decoration: the complex construction made possible a wide projection over the pillars and a steep curve at the corners of the roof. These bore decorations in the form of dragons with gaping mouths or "simply" steeply climbing roof ridges.

Tombs

The tombs of the emperors were planned during their lifetime; that was the custom and was laid down by the Book of Rites. The basic concept of imperial tombs is identical; the fittings and size,



Above left
Hall of the Harvest Prayer
(Qiniandian)

Built in 1420, newly roofed in 1751, destroyed by lightning in 1889 and rebuilt, circular wooden frame building with three-tiered conical roof. H 37 m, surface area 26 sq m, Temple of Heaven, Beijing

Above right
Hall of the Harvest Prayer
View into the decorated roof beams,
Temple of Heaven, Beijing

The painting is executed in the *hexi*-style, reserved for important buildings. The arrangement of the 19.2 m-high main pillars in a square can be clearly seen, and above them the dome of the roof.

Left
Ground plan of the Hall of the
Harvest Prayer

The ground plan shows the four central pillars arranged in a square and the twelve outer pillars in a circle.

however, vary according to convention and taste, and to the fame and importance of the emperor.

In its construction, the tomb of the first Ming emperor in Nanjing, Xiaoling, corresponds to the 13 tombs near to Beijing. Taizu's tomb structure consists of a "Way of Souls" lined with figures, which runs up to a construction of staggered buildings on a symmetrical axis, and halls placed one behind the other. Behind the last multistoried hall lies a large circular burial mound. The 13 emperors' tombs near Beijing, however, share a Way of Souls that does not lead to the holy place in a straight line, as, for example, the Tang-period paths did, but in numerous curves and bends. One



Above left
Way of Souls to the Ming tombs
Constructed 1435

The Way of Souls is lined by pairs of huge sculptures.

Above right
Military mandarin
Early Ming period, early-15th century
larger-than-life sculpture in stone, on the
Way of Souls to the imperial tomb
Xiaoling of the first Ming emperor,
Nanjing *in situ*

Below
Plan of the imperial tomb,
Dingling
*Grave of the Wanli emperor (died 1620),
Beijing*

presumes that here, according to geomantic points of view, the changes of direction, just like the breaking away from the north-south axis, appeared necessary.

The beginning of the path is marked by a gate of honor, *pailou* or *paifang*, then two interconnected buildings, the so-called Great Red Gate, which could shut off the entrance to the valley of tombs, and a Hall of Stele, the alleyway of stone figures in which there are twelve pairs of animals and six pairs of people (civil and military mandarins) and one further gate. The figures still display the stiff robustness of those of the Tang period, yet the design of the garments and weapons shows an attempt at realism, the various types being depicted in contemporary clothing. At this point the paths fork off to the individual tombs. Each tomb of the



necropolis consists of a site with several courtyards in front of a raised tumulus within which there is a walled tomb. People say that the Wanli emperor, after the completion of his mausoleum called Dingling, held a sumptuous feast inside.

The underground vaults of the Dingling site are placed along an axis with five rooms; three form the central axis, two the adjoining rooms. Twenty-seven meters (88 feet) under the surface of the mound of earth lies a palace of the dead with a surface area of more than 1,000 square meters (10,760 square feet). The vaults are fitted out as an anteroom, a "throne room," and a "ruler's chamber" – over 250 square meters (2,690 square feet) in area and nine meters (30 feet) high – in which are situated the coffins of the emperor, his main wife, and a concubine.

The burial gifts were discovered preserved in wooden chests; the discovery involved about 3,000 pieces ranging from the emperor's crown to porcelain, gold and silver ingots, and finally some garments. The pieces of porcelain taken out of the emperor's grave are being used to help to establish the date of Ming porcelain.

Amongst the decorations on the Wanli porcelain, flower patterns are the most prevalent, and densely woven branches and blossoms in extremely stylized forms, just as if a garden were spread out over the porcelain.

Gardens

The Ming period was the second great era of gardens, the gardens of the literati taking first place. The literati garden was presented visually as an

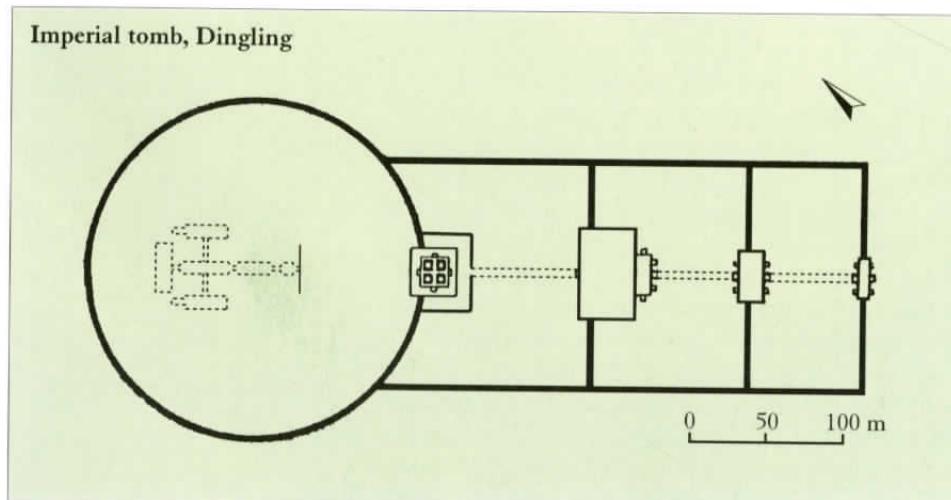
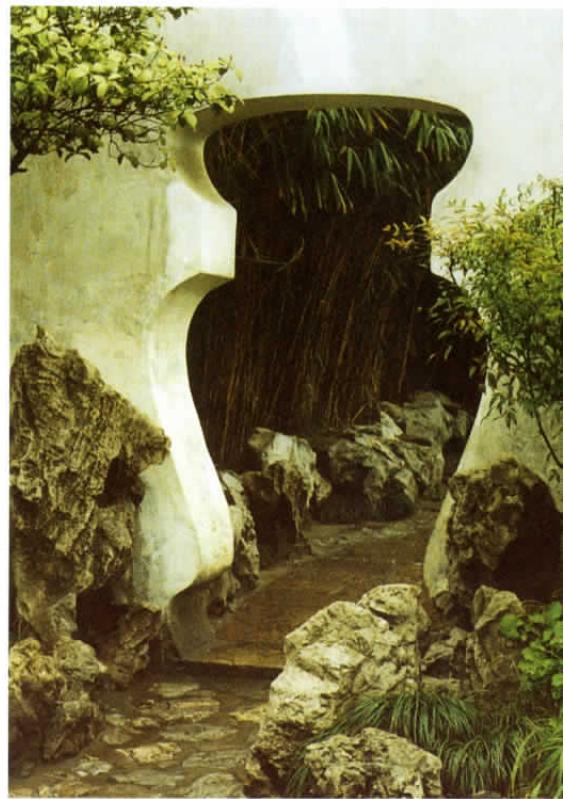


illustration of nature, but technically was a meticulously planned series of apparent coincidences. Literary depictions of gardens experienced a sort of boom, which lasted on into the Qing dynasty. For this period one can almost describe the art form of garden portrayal as obligatory in the legacy of an educated scholar. In addition, the garden became one of the great motifs of Ming painting, whereby the visionary ideal of gardening, which the painter Qiu Ying magically put onto the pictorial scroll, virtually became a dream of the owner of a private garden. Alongside the descriptions of gardens which actually existed there also arose around 1634 the first theoretical work about the concept of gardens, the *Yuan Ye* of Ji Cheng (1582–?). This three-volume essay about making gardens treats all the important areas of building a garden: construction, choice of site, artificial hills (with grottoes), *jiashan*; artificially built lakes and water channels (if not available naturally); decorative forms such as trelliswork, windows, gates, passages through walls, balustrades, and paving; the selection of stones as single pieces, and the wise choice of outlook (*jie jing*, the “borrowed landscapes”). The most important rule of construction was to create a copy of nature containing even more than the “original.” Nothing,

in fact, was left to nature. In addition it was important to have variety in the construction (an example set by nature) and in the range of living and inanimate elements. That explains the wide variety of buildings in the garden, which ranged from the simple triangular open kiosk to the little two-storey tower, *lou*. The symmetry that architectural ensembles displayed was frowned upon in the garden. With the unruliness of nature as a model, it was necessary to spread out the buildings every bit as irregularly, and to present a surprise. The construction was not complete until the scenes within the arrangement had a name. Ji Cheng’s work was regarded as inspirational and not as a collection of rigid rules which had to be adhered to.

For Ji Cheng, garden art is based on the creation of the total illusion of a natural landscape; the spirit (*qi*) of nature is to be captured in the garden by artificial means; the garden must in effect be an improvement on nature. The garden owner lives in the town but his garden creates a refuge. The literati gardens of the Jiangnan region, because of their situation either close to the town or in it, were of extremely different sizes, yet they were all places of peace. Even in the smallest space an appearance of chance and naturalness was planned. One gem



Above
Doorway in the shape
of a vase
Yu-garden, Shanghai

The 16th-century owner, Pan En, tended this garden for over 20 years. The vase (*ping* in Chinese) was chosen because *ping* is a homophone for the word meaning “peace.”

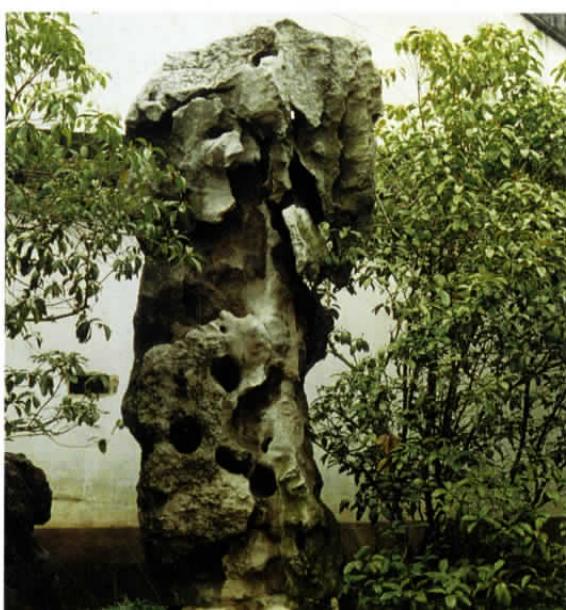
Left
Water pavilion *xie*
Lake Tai

The islands of Taihu held a great power of attraction for the traveling literati, and this pavilion was meant to provide them with a place for viewing and contemplation.

Bottom, far left
Pavement decoration
*Ming period, plum blossom pattern,
Zhan-Garden of Xu Da, Nanjing*

The garden belonged to an official residence and was reconstructed several times over the centuries. It is particularly important that the Qianlong emperor of the Qing era saw this garden on his inspection trip south and had a copy of it laid out in Beijing as a “Garden of Eternal Spring.”

Left
A solitary Taihu stone
Zhan Garden, Nanjing



of a garden for example is the roughly 5,000 square meter (53,820 square foot) garden of the Master of Nets in Suzhou, where there was a pond, artificial cliffs, *jiashan*, the widest variety of pavilions, dry-gardens with single stones, and bamboo thickets – and so a rich variety of different views (see below).

If we look at the ground plan of the site, we can recognize three buildings lined up behind each other in the eastern section of the garden; the two frontmost ones previously formed the public room of the estate; all the other buildings were kept just for the family or the closest literati friends. The names indicate the private aspect of these halls and pavilions. One room for playing the zither, one for contemplation before an ancient tree, one room for the study of books... these will have been the favorite for the scholar.

Beautiful, superfluous things

Zhang wu zhi ("Treatise on Superfluous Things"), the title of an expert's manual from 1615–1620 by Wen Zhenheng (1585–1645), great-great uncle of the painter Wen Zhengming, served as source of inspiration to sum up the role of crafts' products in the Ming period.

The craft trade experienced a marked upturn as a reaction to two different developments at the end of the Ming period. It had always been the Cinderella of the art family but from time to time the craft trade moved into the foreground somewhat when scholars gave themselves over to a preoccupation with and contemplation of classical *objets d'art*, such as bronzes or celadons, or one had a literary portrait painted of himself which portrayed his exquisitely fitted-out studio or art collection. In both cases, the articles made by a craftsman of low social status

were also classified alongside painting and calligraphy. The material world of the upper echelons in the Ming period is shown by the connoisseurs' manuals. The end of the Ming period saw countless collections of texts come into circulation, which were seen as instructions in collecting; they also provided, into the bargain, lists of the criteria of good taste and ways of recognizing forgeries.

Good taste could be seen everywhere. The twelve chapters of the *Zhang wu zhi*, for example, explained such diverse things as scholars' studios, garden stones and plants, vases, clothes, interior furnishings, and food. Interiors in the Ming period did not remain the same; a lasting décor was not desired other than for the actual structural parts of the building. Thus Wen Zhenheng also wrote a calendar for the hanging of pictures that gives suggestions for a seasonal change of decoration. The choice of pictures had to vary according to the feast and time of year. At New Year he recommended hanging up representations of gods who brought luck; at the Qingming (spring) festival, peony blooms; on the fifth day of the fifth month (mid-June), representations of the dragon boat race; in summer (July) architectural pictures of summer residences and mountains; in fall, fall plants; in the eleventh month (December), snow scenes and winter plums... and for birthdays he recommended decorating the house with paintings of the gods of longevity and other lucky objects. From this change of wall decoration one can also deduce how decorative articles would be brought out in the course of the year and put away again. In winter Wen recommended bronze vases, in summer porcelain. The elite could suit the wall paintings and decorative objects to these conventions; the middle classes possibly treated themselves to colored woodcuts and

Opposite, top left
God of riches

Late Ming period, bronze with remains of colored paint, Völkerkundemuseum, SMBPK, Berlin

This figure of folk religion from the Daoist pantheon of gods wears the clothes and head covering of a Chinese official, and is holding a gold bar to his chest.

Opposite, top right
Writing set: paintbrush stand, little vase, stand for the ink stone, and water jug with the stamp of the manufacturer, Shi sou.

Ming period, bronze with inlaid decoration of silver threads, Victoria and Albert Museum, London

The fine decorative technique derives from the Song bronzes.

Below left
Inner courtyard between the library and the Chamber of the Ascent to the Clouds

Dry garden with various trees (color effects), bamboo, and a "sprig of bamboo" stone, garden of Master of the Nets, Wang shi yuan, Suzhou

The first construction dates from the Song period, the present view follows the shape after the reconstruction around 1700.

Below right
View across the pond towards the open hexagonal Pavilion of the Moonrise and Evening Breeze

Garden of the Master of the Nets, Wang shi yuan, Suzhou





porcelain and for solemn occasions maybe even a little statue as well (see above). On the whole there was an increasing demand for ceramics, bronzes, and lacquers for both functional and decorative purposes.

As the elite turned to crafts, so these became increasingly popular and more valuable. On the late bronzes, for example, inscriptions of the manufacturer can be seen, lacquer artists left their names behind and ceramics, too, do not bear the imperial motto but the artist's name.

A room given special attention with regard to furnishings was the completely private workroom and library of the scholar, a gentleman's room in which the scholar (art expert, amateur painter, or calligrapher) kept his treasures, and to which he retired to study. It was an equally important part of his property as his garden in the town: a refuge. It was here that he kept his pictures and writings, his old books, his writing tools. Amongst them were fine paper, pressed, decorated pieces of ink, grinding stones for grinding the ink, water

containers, paintbrush holders, table screens and brushes, whose holders were artistically decorated. Except for the paper and ink, these objects were made of bronze, porcelain, lacquer, or carved stone.

Paintbrush, ink, grinding stone, and paper were described as four treasures of the study. As such they were used in a stylized way as decorations on porcelain and lacquer (see page 231, bottom left). The small table screen not only served as decoration, it was necessary to protect the scholar's desk from being splattered with ink. And besides the actual implements, lacquered boxes, dishes, and tins which were of less use to the scholar's life also adorned the study. Bronzes, for which the age had no real use, decorative vases or dishes, ceramics, preferably celadons of the Song period, were collected here if a person was wealthy enough to buy them (see page 204).

To name an example, bronze incense burners decorated with flecks of gold were regarded as valuable furnishings for the scholar's studio, marking out the real connoisseur.



Ink stone, slate, and slab of ink

20th century with gold-colored inlaid inscription, China



Right

Fish-shaped vessel of the zun type

16th century grooved glaze (French champlevé) in bronze, H 19.3 cm, Museum für Völkerkunde, Dresden

Cloisonné-products primarily served as decoration for government buildings and temple halls. A pair of fish is considered to be a symbol of married happiness.

Far right

Plate decorated with blossoming twigs

Xuande period (1426–1435), underglaze cobalt blue with yellow overglaze, dia 29.4 cm, by kind permission of the Percival David Foundation, London

In the center of the plate is a twig with the blossom of an unknown type of plant; in each border section a twig bearing the fruit of a peach, lychee, cherry, and crab apple is illustrated.

Opposite, clockwise

Paintbrush with porcelain handle

Wanli period (1573–1619), L 30.5 cm, by kind permission of the Percival David Foundation, London

In each of the two fields, the paintbrush shows the picture of a five-clawed dragon in clouds. Covering the surface, the thinner part of the holder bears a stem of a plant and flowers; the end shows a continuous pattern of lancet-shaped leaves.

Incense burner

16th/17th century bronze with gold spots, H 10.1 cm, J. de Lopes Bequest, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, M. 268–1929

Octagonal jar

Jiajing period (1522–1566), red and green carved lacquer on yellow ochre background, H 21.4 cm, dia 27.7 cm, Linden-Museum, Stuttgart

The decorated surface is divided into 33 pictorial fields, each one showing a scene from literature. On the lid the illustration of the tower of Yueyang at the lake of Dongting is displayed.

Table screen with a motif of scholars and servants in a garden

Xuande period (1426–1435), red carved lacquer (tihong), picture area 32 x 31.7 cm, Linden-Museum, Stuttgart

The composition shows a few elements typical of scenic carved lacquer decoration: earth patterns (little stars or stylized blossoms in a diagonally set square), water pattern (waves) and sky pattern (parallel rectangles), depiction of architecture comparable to the *jiheua* painting, and in the garden scene numerous Taihu rocks, varied vegetation, a miniature garden in the flowerpot (*penjing*) and the preparations for a social gathering.



Like the private gentleman's room, the ladies' rooms were also exquisitely decorated. It can be deduced from the decoration whether the lady or the man of the house had been the recipient of a gift: phoenix, flower decorations, and figure scenes from popular literature for the lady, dragons, tigers, bamboo, and landscapes for the men.

For the manufacturers and craft guilds the imperial court was every bit as good a purchaser as the rich tradesmen and scholars. And once again we have to correct some ideas about Chinese porcelain. The Ming vase, which is constantly mentioned in the West, was not unreservedly blue and white, least of all the plate. Underglaze decoration with the cobalt blue pigment of course made up the lion's share of Ming porcelain, but other techniques were also widespread (see above, right). Porcelain alone can fill volumes, therefore shown here are some representative pieces, especially of the decorative techniques, which have brought color into everyday life. The primary aids to dating porcelain are pieces from a known time of origin, with which all further ones are compared in their colors, pattern, strength, and quality of glaze.

Monochrome pieces were often more lavish in their production than for example the porcelain with underglaze color. All, however, fulfilled the same practical purpose. The shape, even if it were based on thousand-year old shapes, was suited to its purpose: *guan*, with a little opening, was useful for storing wine; *lei*, with a sweeping broad opening and round body, had established itself as a spittoon; high round containers were used for keeping toy fish, and their decorative design of water plants, fish, and ducks was appropriate (see page 207, bottom); little round boxes with a grooved top served as containers for crickets; what in Europe serves today as a typical shape for a tea

caddy (the bulbous tall container with a little semi-circular lid) was already being used in the Ming period; and along with these were plates, cups, little bowls and pots with a partly fragile or even compact-looking outline (see page 207).

The picture of the elite interior concludes with the decoration of lavishly made miniature porcelain pieces placed in bird-cages as food bowls: they often kept little song birds, and large parrots, too.

Flower vases were already very important in the interiors in the Ming period, since the pleasure of having flowers in the house was seen as a substitute for the pleasure of seeing them in nature. Flower arrangement was regarded as an occupation of the spiritual person who carries out this task peacefully and takes pleasure in it. A small volume entitled *Ping shi* (History of Vases) by Yuan Hongdao gave some suggestions for flower-arrangement: not too many types of flower, fine stems, different vases for summer and winter, large or small ones according to the space (see page 208). The arrangement was to be composed like a fine picture. And Yuan suggested placing a precious flower alongside a simple one, to complement one another. According to Yuan, flowers were to be enjoyed most of all when taking tea, then during conversation, and with wine, in other words in appropriate circumstances; for flowers are sensitive and idle gossip offends them. The book became a classic in Japan.

How far one should investigate the various individual motifs of a piece for their meaning is just as problematic as in the Dutch still lifes. If, for example, one interprets every motif on a plate for its symbolic content, the result can be overwhelming or possibly contradictory. In the 1930s (the heyday of iconography) Ferdinand Lessing, for example, compiled whole lists of congratulatory messages from the individual motifs. Such

Left

Wine jar of the *guan* type

15th century turquoise glaze, strengthened by copper at the opening, probably glazed color on unglazed fired pieces (*émail sur biscuit*). H 33.5 cm, by kind permission of the Percival David Foundation, London

The relief inscription on the shoulder reads as *nei fu gong yong*, "for use in the inner palace."

Far right

Wine jar of the *guan* type

About 1500, *fahua* decoration, H 34.5 cm, by kind permission of the Percival David Foundation, London

The jar shows the typical cobalt-blue background color for *fahua* decoration; the motifs are in yellow, white, and turquoise. At the neck, two-tone stylized clouds can be seen, and on the shoulder is a narrow band of *ruyi* decoration. Around the whole jug runs a border with twigs in blossom and jewels. The main motifs are garden stones, peacocks, and peonies, and underneath stylized lotus leaves.



Stemcup

Xuande period (1426–1435), cobalt blue underglaze, H 8.3 cm, dia 15 cm, from a Ming tomb, discovered in 1993, Archaeological Institute, Beijing

The bowl shows the so-called eight Buddhist emblems: wheel, umbrella, fish, mussel, knot, vase, lotus, and canopy.

readings are easy enough to make, but they should be employed with caution.

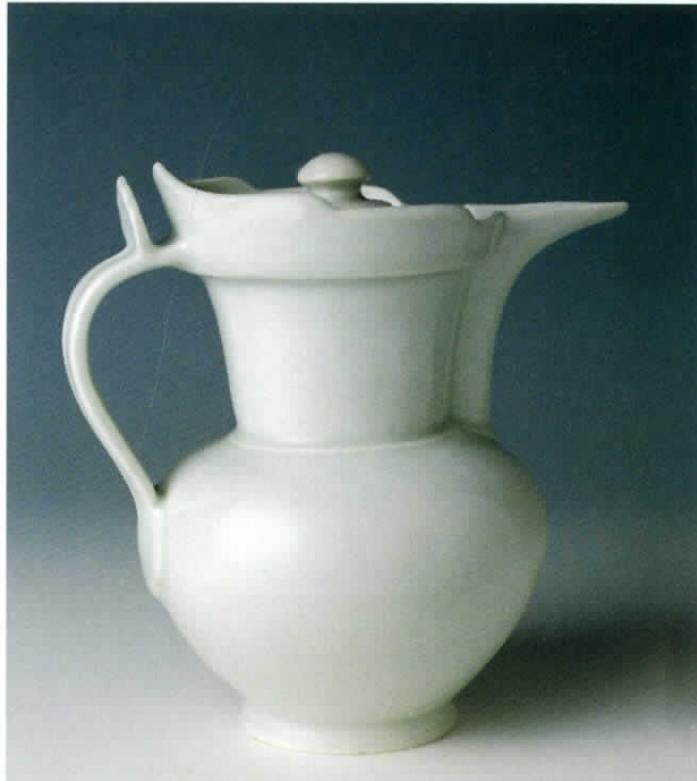
Nevertheless, in some cases the decoration can point to the user or commissioner, or even reveal its purpose, as for example certain wedding or birthday presents. In general it seems that the Chinese surrounded themselves with decorative motifs which brought happiness and were lucky. Among these are flowers, ornaments, animals, figure scenes, and symbols. Alongside Daoist symbols, traditional decoration (pictures of proverbial idioms) found its way onto porcelain, especially onto that not ordered by the emperor. The drawings were comparable to ink painting, in other words different shades of blue were used. The decorations of the Wanli period were ornaments that afforded the eye no free space.

Commercial art

During the Ming period, and also in the transitional period up until the firm establishment of the Qing emperor of the Kangxi era, porcelain products were the works of art which were manufactured specifically for trade. Previous luxury goods of Chinese provenance had been the silk materials and celadons that made their way into the outside world overland; the things the scholars most valued seldom found their way over the borders of the empire. The "beautiful superfluous things" that were inherent in the long tradition of culture, and which one treasured because one was a connoisseur, were not of any commercial value. For those not acquainted with such things, everyday objects such as household porcelain became luxury goods. China was an important sea power, a trading partner for Southwest Asia,

Japan, and the Middle East, and Europe also joined the queue of willing traders bringing back the "white gold" from Cathay piece by piece. European trade companies sent ships into China to buy the expensive luxury items which could not be manufactured in Europe. At that time China was producing various types of ceramic in different centers, amongst them the pure-white figured porcelain from Dehua; superficially and carelessly produced thick porcelain items for export to Southeast Asia from Shantou (Swatow); and the famous porcelain with the blue underglaze decoration, for which the town of Jingdezhen was considered to be a hallmark of quality, as it is today. The porcelain pieces from Shantou, after their southern Chinese shipping port, come from private kilns and hardly measure up to the products of the imperial factories in Jingdezhen.

Jingdezhen stood under imperial supervision, which meant that the raw materials as well as the finished goods were quality controlled. Anything other than porcelain with underglaze decorative techniques such as the *fahua* technique, or the *doucai* porcelain, which produced very colorful pieces, raised very little interest in Europe.



Monkscap pot

Yongle period (1403–1424), tianbai-glaze with concealed decoration (anhua), H 17.8 cm, by kind permission of the Percival David Foundation, London

The decoration on this container is appropriate for Buddhist liturgical use: a band of lotus leaves is almost invisibly carved in the piece, together with the eight Buddhist emblems.

Fish container

Longqing trademark (1567–1572), wucai-decoration, dia 55.2 cm, by kind permission of the Percival David Foundation, London

The motifs of the container – ducks, herons, and water plants – are partly as underglaze painting and partly in the overglaze colors of green, red, yellow, and brown, with fine black outlines.





If one examines the paintings of Rembrandt van Rijn or Dutch still life artists, the familiar blue-and-white decoration of the dishes is striking if one looks closely. One might think it was Delft faïence, but the style is too original – they were real Chinese pieces. The cargoes from sunken ships which were recovered in the 1980s and 1990s allow us to gauge the huge amounts of porcelain which sailed across the South China Sea in all directions during the Ming period.

The manufacturers at the various firing centers knew how to adapt to the buyers' taste. And they also matched the quality of production to the purse of the respective recipient. For example, containers with Daoist symbols and a Japanese-style of painting went predominantly to Japan and pieces decorated with floral patterns to the Middle East. But not all the porcelain with inscriptions from the Koran were made for abroad. Particularly during the Zhengde era in Jingdezhen countless pieces of porcelain with Arabic and Persian inscriptions were produced for Moslem eunuchs at the court (see page 210). Even in the middle of the 16th century, porcelain with gold-leaf plating on a multicolored pattern went to Japan.

Towards the end of the Ming dynasty under the Wanli emperor, the amount of porcelain exported escalated, and Europe also began to be a trading partner. The Europeans preferred blue-and-white patterned porcelain, which virtually became the quintessential Chinese porcelain. And for these clients, the Chinese ceramic workers relinquished some of their skills where artistic decoration was

concerned. In many cases it could not be spoken of as art: it was mass production.

A class of blue-and-white porcelain made for export makes up the so-called Karaken, Kraak porcelain. The name is derived from the Portuguese cargo ships which transported these goods and the Dutch translation of their name, Kraak; they spoke of "*Kraak porselein*." Kraak porcelain was produced in Jingdezhen from the early Wanli period to the fourth decade of the 17th century.

The shapes mainly cover plates, wine jars, bottles, bowls, and Kendis (strangely shaped oriental drinking bottles) which are decorated with cobalt-blue underglaze (see opposite).

The porcelain is fine, the glaze transparent and thin and tends to flake off at the curved edges; this is often described as "insect nibbled." The curved areas were shaped in molds. Kraak porcelain can be recognized by a special division of the decorated areas and a fixed use of decorative motifs. Eight large areas are arranged on the border round a central motif on the flat part of the plate; in plates and dishes, the central motif is framed by an eight-part pattern. Even on late pieces of Kraak the decorative division has remained unchanged but the pattern has been far more carelessly executed. This could be the result of mass production, or the lack of imperial control through the chaos of war.

The decoration of the visible side may be rich but the underside of Kraak plates looks bare: the different fields are quite spartan-looking and are only sketchily painted with a few strokes in light cobalt-blue.

Tea caddies with the decoration known as "Treasures of the Scholar"

*Transitional period, 2nd quarter
17th century cobalt-blue underglaze in combination with anhua-technique,
H 21 and 22 cm, Landesmuseum, Kassel*

These discreetly decorated caddies illustrate the values of the literati: various flower vases, along with the four treasures, decorate the writing desk of the scholar, and every vase holds a different flower arrangement. Many texts of Ming period connoisseurship have been turned into pictures with that kind of decoration.



Kraak porcelain can be divided into four main groups of motifs: birds amongst flowers; cups and vases arranged as a “still life”; water birds in a river landscape; deer. Alongside these there were a large number of individual motifs or of motifs that appeared only occasionally. In the border areas every emblem imaginable can appear, often resulting in symbols from different sources being combined (see above, right).

The extent to which the Chinese potters were able to gear themselves to European demands can be seen from the completely non-Chinese shapes which paved the way for the development of the *Chine de commande* (commissioned porcelain) of the 18th century. The *Chine de commande* in its purest form portrays decorative motifs such as coats of arms or Christian iconography. The Kraak plates had an average size of 50 centimeters (20 inches), a size not used in China. The beer mugs or cups with handles must also have seemed exotic to the Chinese producers. The desired shapes and decoration were brought to China as patterns; the first dispatch of wooden models from Europe to Jingdezhen has been verified as being in 1635. Agreement was reached on the eating and drinking habits of the Europeans, which the mugs made in China clearly indicate. This export porcelain with the blue-and-white decoration dating from the transitional period shows pictures of Chinese literati on un-Chinese shaped containers, which were also pictured on items for the home market or carved lacquer work: a scholar and his servant in a landscape. Alongside European

shapes, whose patterns had been sent over, European motifs such as houses or even tulips slowly find their way into the range of motifs for goods destined for Europe, which was to further confuse the European image of China.

Commercial art extends from the Ming into the Qing dynasty, since during the first 50 years under new rulers the decorative style which we now call the traditional style continued to be produced in Jingdezhen. After 1655, however, there were no more deliveries from China since the chaos of war connected with the change of dynasty had brought production in Jingdezhen almost completely to a standstill. Japan filled the breach for the European market and imitated Kraak ware in order to deliver it to the United Dutch East India Company. From 1657 European shapes and motifs disappeared from Chinese manufacture. These two dates mark the middle of the transitional period, the time from the end of the Wanli period up until the installation of a new chief supervisor of the imperial factories in Jingdezhen in the year 1683, in the era of the Kangxi emperor (reigned 1662–1722).

During the first half of the transitional period the Japanese and Dutch, as the new commissioners, had partly offset the loss of the emperor’s orders. In the middle of the 17th century the imperial factories in Jingdezhen had neither commissioners nor purchasers and certainly only poor quality raw materials. What was also important was that for over 30 years no imperial supervisor established a norm for Jingdezhen. Because of the lack of imperial guidelines, potters now had more freedom.

Above left
Plate with dragon

1590–1610, cobalt-blue underglaze, Kraak porcelain, dia 51 cm, Landesmuseum, Kassel

The piece shows the division into decorative fields on the border and the center typical of Kraak porcelain. In the center, framed by an octofoil pattern, a four-clawed dragon can be seen in front of a background of stylized flames. On the border is an arrangement of eight wide and eight narrow decorated fields. Four of the broad fields show the peach branch rather like a sunflower; the others are four lucky symbols.

Above right
Plate with birds and peonies

2nd quarter of 17th century, cobalt-blue underglaze, dia 47 cm, Landesmuseum, Kassel

The center of this Kraak plate is decorated with magpies and peonies. The typical eight broad and narrow fields are arranged around the border, with identical decorative motifs standing opposite one another. Peach (symbol of longevity), chrysanthemums (symbol of the simple life), pomegranates and lychees (symbol of fertility) decorate the border.



Table screen

Zhengde period (1506–1521), underglaze decoration, H 45.8 cm, by kind permission of the Percival David Foundation, London

This piece bears an inscription in Arabic, a sura from the Koran (from LXXII 18–20) in a square border, surrounded by stylized branches in blossom. These pieces are usually still stubbornly interpreted as articles for export. It is known for certain, however, that Muslim eunuchs, for whom such pieces could have been meant, were active at the imperial court. Such an interpretation is supported by the type of ceramic, the table screen being so clearly of native Chinese origin.

Opposite
Shoulder vase of the *guan* type

Mid-17th century, decorated with figures, *wucai*-painting with cobalt-blue underglaze and overglaze colors of green, yellow, aubergine and rust, H 39 cm, Landesmuseum, Kassel

The scene shows Chang'e, the Moon goddess, with numerous servants and visitors, who are approaching her palace. Two men with a servant hover on a cloud.

New forms of decoration emerged. The world of literature was discovered, and the ink painting of the literati appears to have been used more and more often as patterns for the composition of designs. The typical porcelain from the transitional period is still of the familiar blue-and-white variety. The decorations are now generally figure scenes in landscapes with cliffs, clouds, and specific vegetation: the “V-shaped”³ pattern, as Jenyns says, borders with leaves, foliage designs and formal plant decoration, possibly a tulip, characterize the transitional goods as well. It was not the Dutch who introduced the portrayal of tulips but the oriental trade partners, for the tulip is an oriental decorative motif. However it fitted in very well with the Dutch in the age of the tulip craze that such a motif belonged to the repertory of decorations used by Chinese porcelain manufacturers. The potters, no longer restricted, took great pleasure in experimentation and this brought, amongst other things, a combination of the blue-and-white decoration and the so-called *anhua* decoration (secret or hidden decoration). The containers made in this way look elegant and fragile, most suitable for adorning the studio of the reserved scholar, since they were not ostentatious. The observer has to take a close look in order to be able to enjoy the various aspects of the representation. The glazed surface is brought to life by the relief and the light breaks onto it in various

ways (see page 208). The world of literature, of myths and legends was colorfully portrayed on the pieces from the transitional age. An example of the decoration from this source may be a version of the story of Chang'e, the wife of the legendary archer Houyi, who possessed the elixir of eternal life, a story which had been going around since the time of the Warring Kingdoms in numerous extremely different versions. While her husband was away, Chang'e drank the elixir, which made her so light that she rose up in the air and floated up to the Moon palace, where she ruled as Moon goddess from then on.

The motif was later told in various forms by writers; it was put on stage, then artists adopted it, and also the craft industry. A change in the type of client may have been a decisive factor in this. The former imperial workshops manufactured for the free market on a larger scale (see opposite).

The customers could have found pleasure in the patterns which were familiar to them: the wife of a scholar perhaps thought highly of the motif borrowed from folklore about the Moon goddess, while the merchant's family simply took pleasure in the fresh colors.

That brings us back to the officials, scholars, and the moneyed elite. What became of them and the arts in their lives when the Manchurians first came to power?

