THE ARTS OF ANCIENT CHINA

James C. Y. Watt
COVERS

Front: Standing court lady, T'ang dynasty, figure 77.
Inside: Details of rubbing of an Eastern Han stone carving, figure 48
### CHRONOLOGY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neolithic</td>
<td>ca. 5000-ca. 2100 B.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hsia Dynasty</td>
<td>ca. 2100-ca. 1600 B.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shang Dynasty</td>
<td>ca. 1600-ca. 1100 B.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chou Dynasty</td>
<td>ca. 1100-256 B.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Chou</td>
<td>ca. 1100-771 B.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring and Autumn Period</td>
<td>770-476 B.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warring States Period</td>
<td>475-221 B.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ch'in Dynasty</td>
<td>221-207 B.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Han Dynasty</td>
<td>206 B.C.-A.D. 120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Han</td>
<td>206 B.C.-A.D. 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wang Mang Interregnum</td>
<td>9-23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Hsin Dynasty]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Han</td>
<td>25-220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six Dynasties Period</td>
<td>220-389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Kingdoms Period</td>
<td>220-280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western and Eastern Ch'in Dynasty</td>
<td>265-420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern and Southern Dynasties</td>
<td>386-581</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Wei</td>
<td>386-534</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Ch'i</td>
<td>550-577</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sui Dynasty</td>
<td>581-618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T'ang Dynasty</td>
<td>618-906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five Dynasties</td>
<td>907-960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sung Dynasty</td>
<td>960-1279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yuan Dynasty</td>
<td>1271-1368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ming Dynasty</td>
<td>1368-1644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ch'ing Dynasty</td>
<td>1644-1911</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Many elements of Chinese civilization had their origins far back in the earliest stages of its development. Social customs and institutions established during the Bronze Age have survived intact or are reflected in thought and artistic expression in all periods of Chinese history. Most of the Chinese words now in use can be traced, in meaning and form, to the oracle-bone script of the Bronze Age (fig. 1). The same principles of graphic design that underlie decorative patterns on Neolithic pottery (see figs. 2, 3) apply to the art of calligraphy as practiced to this day, and the polished, lustrous artifacts cut from jade during the Neolithic period remain fascinating to the Chinese mind.

While one should be wary of simple explanations of cultural phenomena, it is tempting to view the extraordinary continuity of Chinese civilization largely as a consequence of the regenerative power based on a dynamic balance of opposing and complementing forces. Analytical studies of the art and social institutions of the Shang dynasty, one of the most creative in Chinese civilization, have revealed dualistic phenomena in these key aspects of culture. And if one applies the same analysis to the art of later periods, it is not difficult to arrive at similar conclusions. This dualism has internal and external aspects: the former is manifested in a single object, as in the case of the mask (see fig. 11, p. 15); and the latter by the dialectic between opposing philosophical and political systems, exemplified by the progressive and conservative factions of the ruling houses of the Shang dynasty as postulated by scholars of oracle-bone inscriptions from An-yang. Life-sustaining changes and innovations were also brought about by the continuing revival of cultural traditions and by the introduction of foreign influences.

No civilization ever existed in total isolation, and it is often difficult, especially during the early periods, to define geographical boundaries of a civilization at any particular time. In China, from the beginning of its recorded history, there were contacts with foreigners beyond the areas that shared cultural characteristics emanating from the center of Chinese civilization in northern China, along the lower course of the Yellow River. The most important and stimulating connection was that with central Asia, which served as the conduit for the flow of ideas between East and West.

This Bulletin text presents a commentary on objects on permanent display in the Charlotte C. and John C. Weber Galleries for the Arts of Ancient China. The exhibits span thousands of years, from Neolithic times to the end of the T’ang dynasty in the tenth century A.D. This discussion is divided into historical periods, each of which is represented by a section in the Weber Galleries. An attempt will be made to highlight particular traits in each phase of the development of Chinese culture, especially those traits that contribute most to the character of Chinese civilization and artistic expression. From the Han period onward, greater attention will be paid to influences coming from outside the boundaries of the Chinese empire.
In China, as in other areas of the world, Neolithic settlements grew up along the main river systems. Those that dominate the geography of China are the Yellow and the Yangtze (usually called the Long River by the Chinese). These great rivers nurtured the growth of cultures that would contribute to the main elements of Chinese civilization.

The Yellow River, which drains the country's central plain on its course to the Yellow Sea, has long been accorded the position of paramount importance in the history of China. Most remarkable among the archaeological remains from Neolithic sites along the river is pottery with painted decoration. Although this pottery shares some forms and ornamental patterns with Western Neolithic cultures, it also possesses traits peculiar to Chinese civilization. The first of these is fluency of the brush-drawn line, and the second is an interplay of the positive and negative elements (or pattern and ground) of the decorative designs. Both qualities are well illustrated in a pottery basin dating to 3000 B.C. (figs. 2, 3). On the outside wall "hand" motifs are painted in a natural, fluid brush line, and on the inside wall an ambiguity between figure and ground is created by the prominent role of unpainted areas within the overall design. These characteristics are found in the art of Chinese calligraphy throughout its history.

All of the Neolithic painted pottery in the Museum's collection comes from Kansu Province in northwestern China, along the middle course of the Yellow River, and it represents a local tradition derived from the Yang-shao culture, which originated downstream in the provinces of Shensi, Shansi, and Honan on the central plain, known as Chung-yuan. However, the development of the later Neolithic phases in Kansu did not follow that of the cultures of the central plain. While the Yang-shao evolved into the Chung-yuan Lung-shan culture, whose pottery foreshadowed the complex forms of Bronze Age vessels, the later Neolithic phases in Kansu continued to produce painted pottery in simple shapes such as basins and high-shouldered jars (figs. 3, 4) until well after the advent of bronze technology in central China. Late Neolithic Kansu pottery is interesting for the

The most common ornamentation found on pottery of the final phase (Ma-ch'ang) of the Neolithic culture in Kansu Province was the so-called frog motif, which also possesses anthropomorphic elements. This motif was gradually transformed into purely geometric patterns.
increasingly abstract or geometric character of its decoration but there was a gradual deterioration in form and finish (fig. 4).

The Neolithic culture of the lower Yangtze Valley and the coastal areas of eastern China originated about 5000 B.C., around the same time as the Yang-shao, and showed distinctive characteristics in its material culture from the very beginning. While Yang-shao painted pottery is known for relatively simple shapes and sophisticated decorative patterns, the finer Neolithic pottery of eastern China displayed a greater variety of forms (figs. 5, 6). Moreover, most of the decoration on eastern Neolithic pottery was incised, and it employed a vocabulary of motifs and grammar of ornament shared by crafts such as jade and ivory carving. Yang-shao pottery makers tended to conform to standard shapes that could be made simply by the basic methods of ring building and the use of half-molds, whereas the Neolithic potters of eastern China were more sensitive to the plasticity of clay and more inventive. Some pottery vessels imitated those made from other materials such as wood and bamboo in the form of baskets.

From the available evidence, it seems that the earliest use of the potter’s wheel in Neolithic China occurred in the eastern provinces. During the Bronze Age, the wheel was abandoned in favor of the “paddle-and-anvil” method, whereby rings of clay were luted together with an anvil (a pebble) held against

![5-COVERED EWER](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

**5-COVERED EWER**

Black pottery. Liang-chu culture, ca. 2400 B.C. Excavated at Fu-ch’uan shan, Ch’ing-p’u, Shanghai. H. 7 3/4 in. (19.7 cm). Lent by Shanghai Museum

![6-TRIPOD (Ting)](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

**6-TRIPOD (Ting)**

Coarse pottery. Sung-tze culture, ca. 3000 B.C. Excavated at Fu-ch’uan shan, Ch’ing-p’u, Shanghai. H. 13 3/4 in. (35 cm). Lent by Shanghai Museum
signs of wear. They are generally found in burials of privileged persons carefully arranged around the body. Jade axes and other tools transcended their original functions and became objects of great social and aesthetic significance (figs. 8, 9).

Neolithic jade objects can be classified generally into two categories according to use: ritual and ornamental. They can also be divided into categories according to form: those derived from stone implements and those with “invented” forms that do not relate to any obvious practical function. There is no strict correlation between the two sets of categories, although most of the amulets and personal ornaments are small objects, such as bracelets or earrings, made to fit certain parts of the body. Some amulets, however, were carved to look like miniature stone tools.

Many ritual objects were made in the shapes of stone implements, such as axes and adzes, but the most important of all ritual jades, the *pi*, a flat annular disk (fig. 7), and the *ts’ung*, a square tube with a circular bore (fig. 10), were not. The *pi* and the *ts’ung* were
very highly regarded among jades. The richest burials contained astonishing numbers of them—sometimes as many as twenty to thirty of each type.

The *pi* and the *ts'ung* represent the earliest known Chinese artifacts that were given forms entirely divorced from any use, ornamental or utilitarian. Their “function” was related to ritual. Whether religious in the broadest sense or social, neither the nature of the ritual nor the manner of performance can be ascertained; nor is it possible to determine whether there was any symbolic meaning attached to their forms. Classical texts surviving from the late Warring States period (fourth–third century B.C.) tell us that the *pi* was the symbol of heaven and the *ts'ung* the symbol of earth, corresponding to the concept in the early Chinese cosmology that heaven is round and earth square. It should be pointed out here, however, that by the fourth century B.C. the *ts'ung* had all but disappeared and survived in name only in records that might have had their origins in oral traditions going back to remote antiquity. Thus the interpretation given in classical texts of the symbolism of the *pi* and the *ts'ung* should be acknowledged, but with a certain degree of skepticism.

The *pi*, however, survived not only into the Warring States but down to the very last dynastic period, which ended in 1911. For over two thousand years the *pi* was used, *inter alia*, in the ceremony of sacrifices to heaven, providing another instance of the extraordinary continuity of Chinese cultural institutions.

Another major tradition of jade working is associated with the Neolithic culture that developed along the Liao River in northeastern China. The carvings from this area are mostly in the forms of birds and animals — both real and imaginary. The latter category includes the earliest dragon images found in China.

From the Bronze Age onward jade was imported from Khotan (in present-day Sinkiang Uighur Autonomous Region) in Chinese central Asia, some thousand miles west of the center of early Chinese civilization. Apparently, once jade was deemed the most precious and prestigious substance, no effort was spared to acquire it, and for the entire duration of Chinese history jade has maintained its preeminent position in Chinese material culture.

Love of jade has had a profound effect on Chinese attitudes toward all stones and on lapidary practices. Jade, hard, intractable, and of fibrous structure, is worked by sawing, grinding with abrasives, and polishing. Up to the present century all precious stones were deemed less valuable, and all—even those with crystalline structures—were worked by methods more appropriate to jade, by grinding and polishing rather than by cutting. Visitors to shops selling old Chinese jewelry will find stones like tourmaline and aquamarine, which easily fracture along crystalline faces, “carved” into pendants and cabochons in the manner of jade articles.

The tactile qualities of jade, combining hardness of body with softness to the touch, created an aesthetic appreciation that the Chinese still extend to precious organic substances such as ivory and rhinoceros horn and also to porcelain.
The Bronze Age began in China about 2000 B.C. The exact location of the earliest occurrence of bronze and the history of the spread of the technology remain to be determined, but chances are that the first steps in the beginning of bronze metallurgy were taken somewhat in the area of present-day Honan Province. It has been established that the social changes associated with this major advance occurred in this area. However, toward the end of the Neolithic period most regions had begun to experience these changes, which included developments such as larger and more complex units of society beyond the primary family and the use of ritual for social unification as well as to modify behavior. Similarly, the creation of a system of writing, which was such a crucial aspect of Chinese civilization during the Bronze Age, had its origins in the Neolithic period as pictograms carved on pottery and on jade objects of the late Neolithic cultures in the eastern coastal provinces of Shantung, Kiangsu, and Chekiang. From these tentative beginnings Bronze Age culture and technology grew in scope and sophistication at an astonishing speed.

Bronze is an alloy of copper and tin. Although there is as yet no clear knowledge of the origin of bronze casting in China, there is no doubt that it was an independent invention. This can be deduced from the fact that the earliest known Chinese bronzes were cast by the piece-mold method, while examples from Bronze Age cultures in other parts of the ancient world were made by the lost-wax process. In piece-mold casting, a model is made of the object to be cast, and a clay mold taken of the model. The mold is then cut in sections to release the model, and the sections are reassembled after firing to form the mold for casting. If the object to be cast is a vessel, a core has to be placed inside the mold to provide the vessel's cavity. The piece-mold method was most likely the only one used in China until at least the end of the Shang dynasty. An advantage of this rather cumbersome way of casting bronze was that the decorative patterns could be carved or stamped directly on the inner surface of the mold before it was fired. This technique enabled the bronze worker to achieve a high degree of sharpness and definition in even the most intricate designs.

The mastery of bronze casting, which was employed for weapons and parts of chariots...
as well as ritual vessels, gave the Shang a great military advantage over peoples in neighboring areas—at least until bronze technology infiltrated these areas.

The idea of the state began to be developed during the early Bronze Age, together with the differentiation of people into social classes according to status and specialization of skills and functions. The legendary Hsia dynasty, the first named in traditional Chinese histories, was founded at this time. Some archaeologists associate the earliest Bronze Age sites with this dynasty, although there is as yet insufficient proof for doing so.

Written history describing the next dynasty, the Shang (about 1600—about 1100 B.C.), is amply confirmed by archaeology. Two major sites, at Cheng-chou and An-yang, in Honan Province, can be securely identified as the centers of the Shang state. Both give evidence of massive city walls and large ceremonial and burial structures. Hsiao-t’un, in An-yang, confirmed by archaeologists to be Yin, the last capital of the Shang dynasty, has yielded oracle bones with detailed records of the divinations that have enabled historians to refine the chronology of the last three centuries or so of this era. From the inscriptions carved on the bones and tortoise shells used
for divination, historians have also been able to study other important aspects of the culture of the Shang people, such as their calendar and their ceremonial practices.

Although the Shang state was confined mainly to the area of Honan Province, its cultural influence was felt in much of central and southeastern China. A city constructed along the lines of the Shang capitals has been found as far south as Ch'ing-Chiang in Kiangsi Province, and artifacts exhibiting the forms and decorative styles characteristic of Shang culture have been found in most areas of southern China and in provinces adjacent to Honan in the north.

Bronze and jade artifacts, which have survived in large quantities, represent the highest achievement of Shang material culture. They also played central roles in the social and religious rituals of the Shang people. Bronze vessels with rich surface decoration held food and wine for sacrifices to the ancestor gods, and jade objects were used in ceremonies and offered as the most prestigious of gifts to gods and men.

As early as the end of the Bronze Age in the third century B.C., various theories were offered as to the function of the decoration on ritual bronze vessels and the meaning of the different motifs—in particular the animal mask that dominated the decoration of Shang bronzes (fig. 11). Writers of the Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu, an encyclopedic work from the closing years of the Chinese Bronze Age, called the mask motif the t'ao-t'ieh, which can be taken to mean "glutton" or "greedy beast." This interpretation was perhaps derived from the image found on a number of Shang wine vessels of an animal holding a human in its arms and opening its mouth as if to devour him (fig. 12). Although this rudimentary hypothesis has been long discredited, the name t'ao-t'ieh remains to this day.

Twentieth-century archaeologists like Kuo Pao-chun and anthropologists like Claude Lévi-Strauss offer other views of the significance of the animal mask in Shang art. Beginning with the observation that the "mask" is made up of two confronting profiles of a dragonlike creature, it is possible to interpret the image as an animal that has been split open and spread out on the surface of the vessel. Kuo Pao-chun points out that this is the way whole animals are presented at ancestral or religious altars to the present day, and therefore the t'ao-t'ieh is a representation of the sacrificial animal. Lévi-Strauss adds to the interpretation of the t'ao-t'ieh the concept of "split representation" formulated by earlier anthropologists in the study of primitive art, especially that of the Northwest Coast Indians. This idea rests on the hypothesis that split representation is a means of applying a three-dimensional object to a two-dimensional surface. Thus the surface does not simply serve as the ground on which an image of the beast is drawn but the ground takes on the split, or violated, form of the beast. Therefore the vessel and the animal are conjoined, and by assuming some of the powers of the beast, the vessel is transformed for ritual use.

Similarly, in Lévi-Strauss's words, "the chests of North-west Coast art are not merely containers embellished with a painted or carved animal. They are the animal itself, keeping an active watch over the ceremonial ornaments which have been entrusted to its care."

According to this interpretation, both the Shang and the Northwest Coast Indians called into play the apotropaic power of the fierce-looking animal. Regarded as protective, the image of the ferocious beast holding a human to its bosom takes on a meaning different from that given by the writers of the Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu, and the beast, far from being greedy for human flesh, is in fact the ancient equivalent of the "nuclear deterrent." Among the Northwest Coast Indians the image of the beast is incorporated into houses decorated so that the door appears to be the wide-open mouth of a large animal.

If we accept the premise that power, in the form of the forces of nature, plays a role in the decorative motifs of Shang bronzes, we may be able to discern the meaning of some of the geometric motifs that constitute the ground on which the animal masks are portrayed. For example, during the Chou dynasty, the square spiral, traditionally called the thunder pattern (lei-wen), became one of the variants of the ideogram for thunder. Thus the entire surface of the bronze vessel was covered by the most powerful forces known to ancient people (figs. 13, 14).
15. RITUAL WINE BEAKER (Ka)

Bronze inlaid with black pigment. Shang dynasty, early An-yang period, 13th century B.C. H. 10¼ in. (26 cm). Bequest of Addie W. Kahn, 1949 (49.135.11)

SPOUTED RITUAL WINE CUP (Chüeh)

Bronze. Shang dynasty, middle An-yang period, 12th century B.C. H. 7¾ in. (19.7 cm). Bequest of Addie W. Kahn, 1949 (49.135.15)

The cup is inscribed with a single character (clan sign) cast on the body of the vessel beneath the handle.

16. COVERED RITUAL WINE CONTAINER (Fang-yi)


The interpretation of the art of the Shang dynasty cited above does not meet with universal approval. There are scholars who prefer to think of the animal mask as having developed from fortuitous arrangements of abstract signs or meaningless primary doodling. This author, however, believes that the cultural interpretation, apart from its intellectual beauty, stands, especially when it is considered in the total context of early Chinese civilization. The inherent ambiguity of the t'ao-t'ieh, seen simultaneously as a mask and as a pair of confronting animals, can be regarded as one of the manifestations of dualism, which is perceived by archaeologists and anthropologists as characteristic of early Chinese culture. Moreover, the use of the split representation in Chinese art can be traced back to the painted decoration on pottery of the Yang-shao culture, which developed along the middle course of the Yellow River during the fourth millennium B.C.

The appeal of ancient Chinese bronzes lies not only in the decoration. The form of the ritual vessels, combining a primitive directness with an elegant sophistication of design, is no less striking. The primitive quality of the bronze vessels originates in prototypes made in other materials such as wood and pottery before the advent of metallurgy. The forms of these prototypes were constrained by their functions, by the level of technology, and by the physical properties of the materials. Some of the vessels were very beautiful indeed, but they lacked the precision and refinement, not to say the suggestion of free creation, which were attained only with the invention of bronze casting. One senses, in the fiercely exact lines and proportions of the shapes and of the surfaces, the supreme effort made by the creators of these bronzes, as they grappled with the task of adapting and refining primitive forms at the same time as they worked toward a new vision inspired by the more powerful means of expression afforded by bronze casting. Seen in this light, the curvature of the ku (beaker, fig. 15), the balance between various component parts of the chüeh (cup, fig. 15), and the projections and configurations of the quadrilinear surfaces of the fang-yi (wine container, fig. 16) take on an added poignancy. It is perhaps this moving aspect of the bronzes, even more than the sublimely terrifying decoration, that makes them so captivating to the modern viewer.

We know from inscriptions on oracle bones and bronze vessels that the Shang people performed various social and religious
This elaborate set of thirteen ritual wine vessels accompanied by a platform gives us some idea of the rich splendor of Shang and early Chou ceremonies. The pieces of the set vary in style and execution. Although eleven of the vessels are inscribed, only two groups share identical inscriptions: the two yu (nos. 2 and 3) and the large tsun (no. 4); and the small trumpet-shaped ku (no. 10) and one chih (no. 6). The arrangement of the set in the tomb may be partially reconstructed from corrosion outlines of the five principal vessels—the two yu, the two chih, and the central tsun—which were etched onto the surface of the platform. See p. 72 for numbered diagram.

Ceremonies and made offerings to gods and ancestors, but little has been learned about the rubric and form of the rites in which the vessels were used. There is, however, in the Metropolitan a unique set of bronze ritual wine vessels, which have been grouped on a rectangular platform, known as the chin, to give an idea of their positions on the ceremonial altar (fig. 17). The vessels were discovered at an eleventh-century site in Shensi Province in 1901, before the advent of scientific excavations in China, making it difficult to be absolutely certain as to the actual arrangement of the pieces or to their association with each other. However, of the thirteen
vessels reputedly found together, five have left corrosion marks on the large platform, providing evidence that they had been standing on it for a long time. This placement of the five pieces is preserved in the Museum’s display.

This set has an interesting history. Soon after their discovery the bronzes came into the possession of the powerful Manchu official Tuan Fang, one of the leading collectors of antiquities in the late Ch’ing dynasty (late nineteenth—early twentieth century). After Tuan Fang lost his life during the revolution of 1911, his large collection was dispersed, and most of the pieces eventually found their way to North American museums. It was perhaps due to the intercession of John C. Ferguson, an American missionary who had developed an intense interest in Chinese art and had befriended Tuan Fang, that this set, the most famous item of his bronze collection, came to the Metropolitan. Ferguson later became an important figure in the educational and cultural life of China and a leading expert in the Western world on Chinese art.

While ritual vessels took center stage in the material culture of the Shang, jades still played an extremely important role in both social ceremonies and sacrifices to the ancestor gods. Shang ceremonial jades
18 · DAGGER-AXE
Jade (nephrite). Shang dynasty, An-yang period, 13th–11th century B.C. L. 8\(\frac{1}{4}\) in. (21 cm). Fletcher Fund, 1924 (24.170.13)

19 · BIRD-FISH ORNAMENT
Jade (nephrite). Early Western Chou period, 11th–10th century B.C. H. 2\(\frac{1}{2}\) in. (7.3 cm). Rogers Fund, 1924 (24.51.7)

Retained nearly all the shapes of Neolithic ones, with the addition of some obviously derived from bronze weapons (fig. 18). Animal and bird forms were used increasingly as amulets and pendants toward the end of the dynasty and into Western Chou (fig. 21).

In many respects the Shang dynasty can be regarded as the culmination of two thousand years of the art of jade carving. Shang craftsmen had full command of the artistic and technical language developed in the diverse late Neolithic cultures that had a jade-working tradition. The Shang ts’ung and pi were derived from those made by the Liang-chu at the estuary of the Yangtze River; the coiled dragon originated early in the Hung-shan cultures of the Liao River Valley; and the use of the double-cut line (cutting in from both sides to give the impression that the line is raised in relief), so characteristic of Shang jade carving, is an adaptation from the raised line on the Lung-shan carved jades from Shantung Province. On the other hand, some developments in Shang jade carving can be regarded as evidence of a decline. For example, the Shang ts’ung, while retaining the basic Liang-chu form, is no longer decorated on the surface. While Shang jade workers no doubt had better tools—if only the advantages of metal ones—the great patience and skill of the earlier period seem to be lacking.

One innovative aspect of jade and stone carving during the Shang dynasty is the sculpting of figures of animals in the round. The Museum is fortunate to have in its collection two excellent examples of this work (fig. 20).

An element of the art of jade carving, found also in other artistic expressions during the late Shang dynasty, is the metamorphosing animal image, in which animals take on attributes of different species. The most commonly encountered are a bird, usually a cormorant, that takes on the tail of a fish and a fish with the claws of a bird (fig. 19). One is tempted to interpret these images as combining the identities of predator and prey. However, there is often no obvious connection between parts of the metamorphosing animal. In the Museum’s collection is a semicircular jade pendant of a tiger fitted with the horns of
20 · Buffalo


Tiger


21 · Pair of Stags

Jade (nephrite). Western Chou period, 10th–9th century B.C. H (left stag). 2 7/8 in. (7.3 cm); H (right stag). 3 1/2 in. (8.9 cm). Rogers Fund, 1924 (24.51.11,14)
22. ANIMAL PENDANT WITH FISH TAIL

Jade (nephrite). Late Shang dynasty—early Western Chou period, 11th–10th century B.C. Approx. W. 3 3/4 in. (8.3 cm). Fletcher Fund, 1924 (24.170.15)

23. SPOUTED RITUAL WINE VESSEL (Kuang)

Bronze. Shang dynasty, early An-yang period, 13th century B.C. Reportedly from An-yang, Honan Province. W. 13 in. (33 cm). Rogers Fund, 1943 (43.25.4)

A dragon and the tail of a fish (fig. 22). In bronze ritual vessels the metamorphosing activity becomes quite complex (fig. 23).

Pao-chi County in Shensi Province, west of present-day Sian, where the Tuan Fang bronzes were found, was the heartland of the Chou people. The Chou, who had settled in the Wei River Basin, developed a civilization parallel to that of the Shang, whom they conquered about 1100 B.C., claiming a mandate from heaven. (This claim would be used by all subsequent victors in contests for control of the empire.) For the first three hundred or so years of the Chou dynasty, the capital, Hao, remained in the west near the present city of Sian, and this period is called Western Chou. The Tuan Fang bronzes, made about the time of the conquest, display the first signs of changes in style and motif away from Shang tradition. One of these changes is the replacement of the t'ao-t'ieh as the dominant motif by a pair of confronting birds, but the paired birds, unlike the paired animals in the t'ao-t'ieh, do not join to make a mask. Thus a certain formal quality of Shang art is passed on, that of symmetrically balanced images on either side of a central vertical axis, while the basic principle of split representation is abandoned.

Another change is a matter of design. Chou vessels were often provided with square or rectangular bases, such as on the Tuan Fang group. While it can be said that there is no element of Shang art not associated with a function, whether practical or ritual, even where there is considerable formal sophistication, the same cannot be said of Chou art. The addition of square bases to Chou vessels can be regarded only as an aesthetic consideration. This intervention of human will marks the beginning of a new style and spirit in Chinese art and reflects a change in the world view of the Chinese people.
24. Rubbing of inscription on the Té ting

25. Ritual tripod cauldron (Té ting)

Bronze. Early Western Chou period, 11th century B.C. Probably from Shensi Province. H. 30 3/4 in. (78.1 cm). Lent by Shanghai Museum

Ritual vessels of the early Western Chou period, especially the ting tripods, are often of majestic design and proportions, reflecting the power and confidence of the house of Chou. The inscriptions are usually long and written in rhyming prose of a declamatory style. This particular ting tripod, made for the aristocrat Té, carries an unusually short inscription: “The king gave twenty strings of shell [cowrie shells, a form of currency at the time] to Té, and [he] used them for casting this precious ritual vessel.”
The royal house of Chou, confident conquerors of the house of Shang, who ruled by divine right conferred by the ancestor gods, could easily feel themselves the equal of the gods. An anecdote recorded in the Shu-ch'ing ("Book of Records") during the reign of Wu-wang, the second Chou king and conqueror of the Shang kingdom, makes a telling point. When the king became ill, his half brother, the duke of Chou, made a sacrifice to the ancestor gods, offering his own life for that of the king. Then, "after he had planted the [jade] pi [on the altar] and holding a [jade] kui [scepter] in his hands," he said to the gods, "If you grant me my wish, I shall make an offering of these jades to you. But if you do not, I shall take them away from you." No king or priest of the Shang dynasty would have presumed to address ancestor gods in this manner.

There is nothing that quite expresses this spirit of imperial confidence as well as the class of large ting tripods, of which the Tè ting (so called because it was made for a nobleman by the name of Tè) from the Shanghai Museum is an excellent example (fig. 25). This stately sacrificial vessel was cast during the reign of Ch'eng-wang, the son of Wu-wang. The vessel is imposing by virtue of its sheer size; its form is relaxed and graceful. The t'ao-t'ieh, the only pattern on the body of the cauldron, stands out clearly in gentle relief on the smooth surface. Mystery is gone from the image; the vessel and content need no identification with or protection from unearthly powers, and the ferocious beast has become tame in the court of the king of Chou. It is most likely that the association of the ting tripod with legitimate rule or imperial power
began at this time, although later writers would extrapolate the association backward in time and attribute the invention of bronze in China to the emperor Yu of the legendary Hsia dynasty, who ordered a set of nine ting tripods to be cast as symbols of his rule.

Two centuries after the Chou conquest the change in bronze style was complete. A pair of wine containers (hu) from the late ninth century are typical of the period (fig. 26). The form has lost all the tautness and tension of the Shang bronzes, and the decoration is a playful transformation of Shang dragon images into an ornamental pattern consisting of two sets of hooked lines enclosing an “eye” motif. Like the ting tripods of the early Chou dynasty, these vessels are impressive for their large size and graceful proportions. The decoration on a contemporary offering dish (fig. 27) is a wavy band, an invention of the Chou artist, which is visually pleasant, emotionally neutral, and devoid of any hint of the animal world.

The same trend toward an ornamental style can be detected in jade carving. The bird motif appears frequently, and its fluid and graceful lines reinterpret earlier images with less than total reverence (fig. 28).
In 770 B.C., as the result of a series of natural disasters and increasing pressure from nomadic peoples to the north and west, the capital was moved eastward to Lo-yang in central Honan Province. The subsequent period, lasting until 256 B.C., is known as the Eastern Chou. From the beginning of the Eastern Chou, the empire began to fragment into a number of feudal states, whose lords paid nominal allegiance to the Chou king. This fragmentation was a reflection of weakening central political and cultural power in the face of the rapid changes in social structure and development of material culture throughout large areas of the country.

The bronzes of the Eastern Chou are pure design, harmoniously mixing old motifs, shorn of all magic, and new ones introduced mostly from the art of nomadic peoples to the north and west. The ting tripods of the sixth century were fitted with covers, so that the handles had to be attached to the sides instead
of to the mouth rim. The cover could also be used as a large dish, with its three ring lugs serving as feet. The overall form is somewhat mechanical and gives the impression of practicality. On the large ting in the Museum’s collection (fig. 29) the finely detailed decoration was achieved by use of pattern blocks. The mold was lined with thin slabs of clay on which the pattern unit was impressed repeatedly by means of a block, forming a continuous band of design. This advance in casting technique made it possible to decorate bronzes with complex designs through a relatively simple process. At this time potters in the southeastern provinces of China were also using pattern blocks to decorate their vessels. Called geometric stamped pottery by archaeologists, these vessels were fired at high temperatures and represented a vital step in the development of Chinese porcelain.

Another sixth-century bronze in the Museum’s collection, a covered offering dish (tou), is decorated on the surface by the same stamped-pattern process (fig. 30). This piece is said to have been excavated in 1923 at Li-yü, Hun-yuan hsien, Shansi Province, along with other vessels, including a somewhat smaller but virtually identical tou now in the Shanghai Museum. Hun-yuan hsien at that time was in the state of Chin, the first of the Chinese states to come into close contact with nomadic cultures in the Ordos area. It is not surprising that the influence of the “animal style” of the migratory peoples should manifest itself in Li-yü bronzes such as the Museum’s tou. The clinging felines that form the handles of this vessel are animals observed rather than animals transformed, as seen in Shang art. The introduction of the animal style brought a new vitality to the art of China just as the old tradition began to show signs of age and stagnation.

A bronze bell in the Museum’s collection also reflects influences from the Ordos animal style, but it belongs to a slightly earlier period with possible connections to the state of Ch’i, a northern state to the east of Chin (fig. 31). Bells and other musical instruments were as essential to the conduct of rituals as the vessels holding offerings of food and wine. During the Eastern Chou, as music became more elaborate, sets of bells in graduated sizes, with a tonal range of two octaves or more, became the chief instruments in the Chinese orchestra. The lentoid shape of the bell gives it a singular acoustical property: when struck at different points, it produces two notes at an interval of a major or minor third.
31. *BELL (Chung)*


32. *PENDANT IN THE FORM OF A KNOTTED DRAGON*

The Eastern Chou is historically divided into the Spring and Autumn period (770–476 B.C.)—so-called after the annals covering these years supposedly edited by Confucius (551–479 B.C.)—and the Warring States period (475–221 B.C.), when the most powerful states vied for each other’s territory.

The Warring States was a time of artistic, intellectual, and technical brilliance. With the exception of Confucianism, which had its beginning at the end of the Spring and Autumn period, all the schools of thought that were to remain influential throughout Chinese history, including Taoism, were formulated during this period. Works of art created then still astonish us with their imaginative conception and virtuosity of execution (fig. 32).

There was, of course, no such single entity as the art of the Warring States. There were probably as many regional styles as there were independent political states, in the same way as each region of China retained its own idiosyncrasies of speech and writing. (A major step toward the standardization of script was achieved under the Ch’in.) However, it is possible to make out two basic artistic styles, those dominating northern and southern China respectively. Both traditions played significant parts in the development of the arts of the succeeding Han dynasty.

In the north the ancient tradition of central China, with its roots going back to the Neolithic period, was temporarily obscured by the overwhelming influx of nomadic art (fig. 33). The Museum owns a number of exquisite ornaments of jade and metal reflecting migratory styles, the result of the gift of Ernest Erickson in 1985. Most of these ornaments originated in the Ordos region (inhabited in the time of the Warring States by the Hsiung-nu, later known to the Roman world as the Huns) or in other areas of China where art was influenced by the Ordos style (fig. 34).

In the south art was dominated by the state of Ch’u. This state grew up around a great body of water in central southern China called by the Ch’u the Great Lake of Clouds and Dreams (Yün-meng tat-tze). It has survived, much reduced in size although still one of the largest in China, as Tung-t’ing Lake, situated in the northern part of Hunan (“South of the Lake”) Province and the southern part of Hupeh (“North of the Lake”) Province. The Ch’u state, which had its political beginnings in the early Chou dynasty, always retained native cultural traditions, with the addition of some elements adopted
from the Shang before the Ch’u organized themselves on the model of the feudal states of northern China. By the time of the Warring States, Ch’u was the prevailing military and cultural force in southern China.

The art and culture of Ch’u can be characterized generally as shamanistic. In support of this view, students of Ch’u literature point to the frequent imagery in poetry of ascension to the sky on heavenly steeds. And in the plastic arts, there are representations of fairylike creatures riding on ascending dragons. However, rather than turning this discussion to a more precise definition of shamanistic art and to the relevance of the term to Ch’u art, it may be easier simply to use “clouds and dreams” to describe the art of Ch’u. A cloud that changes imperceptibly into a dragon as it meanders through the sky and changes back into a cloud is perhaps the most common motif in Ch’u art. The rest are fantastic creatures disporting themselves in various pastimes and activities in unreal space—fairies and spirits such as inhabit our strangest dreams. The Museum’s lacquer cup, with its decorative pattern made up of spindly, playful lines, is a later version of the cloud-dragon motif (fig. 35); and the bizarre creatures holding on to each others’ tails on the Erickson mirror are examples of the dream animals of Ch’u (fig. 36).

Throughout the eight hundred years of the Chou dynasty, Chinese thought and social institutions grew away from a religious outlook toward a humanistic system, a trend also reflected in artistic expression of the period. Having spurned the support of the gods, man sought on his own a social order and a personal ethic. The most attractive solution was offered by K’ung Ch’iu, known in the West as Confucius. The system that he founded was based on a unified view of the individual and society. Man, having put himself in a good moral order, could apply this order to progressively larger units, such as the family, the state, and ultimately the whole (Chinese) world united in one empire. His
utopian dream was to be spectacularly realized, but only in the political and military realm, by Ying Cheng of the state of Ch'in in the west, who unified China in 221 B.C., the twenty-sixth year of his reign, and declared himself First Emperor. With the founding of this empire, the “Bronze Age” of China came to an end.

It should be pointed out that by this time iron had been in common use for several centuries, but we do not speak of an “Iron Age” in China. The appearance of the metal was not accompanied by other revolutionary changes, and it never challenged the supremacy of bronze as a valued metal except for the practical purpose of making tools and weapons.
Moralists would say that the short-lived Ch’in empire collapsed because it lacked moral fiber. Economists, while marveling at the extraordinary productivity of the country, would say that Ying Cheng through his massive construction projects—he mobilized a labor force of half a million to work on projects such as the Great Wall and his fabulous palace and burial complex—overextended the economy. Whatever the cause, the empire began to disintegrate after ten years, but not before the groundwork had been laid for a bureaucratic system to administer it. This system would serve as the model for Chinese state government for centuries to come.

After a relatively brief period of civil war following the death of the Ch’in emperor in 207 B.C., Liu Pang, a minor district official of humble origins, emerged as the founder of the Han dynasty and ruler of a vast and exhausted empire. He ascended the throne in 206 B.C. and spent the rest of his life wondering how an emperor should behave and what his most able military commanders were plotting.

The Han emperors pursued no active governmental policy for the first sixty years of the dynasty, practicing, in effect, the doctrines of Taoism that advocated “the rule of inaction.” During this time, while the rest of the country recuperated from the ravages of war, the economy of the south, in the former state of Ch’u, particularly in the province of Shu (present-day Szechuan), continued to grow on a well-established base; the south was relatively unaffected by the devastation wrought by the upheavals of the late Warring States period. Factories in Szechuan supplied the rest of the country with luxury products such as lacquer and metalwork, and many of these products, particularly those excavated from the early Han tombs in Ch’ang-sha, an old Ch’u city, bear the imprint of the art of the south. Thus Ch’u, which lost in the struggle for political supremacy in the Warring States period, spread its artistic heritage to the rest of the country.

The animal art of the north, which vividly captured the spirit of the animal in the wild, became tamer during the Han period, taking on a playful and domesticated air (fig. 37).

The painted pots of the Western Han period (the first half of the dynasty) display versions of the typical Ch’u cloud-dragon motif, but, as time went on, the cloud scrolls became increasingly stiff and formalized, losing the life and vigor so characteristic of Ch’u art (fig. 38).

However, within this formalized art breathed a renewed spirit: for in the peace and comparative security of the new empire the old tradition of balance and movement, as seen in the painted decoration of the Neolithic pots of the Yellow River, reasserted itself (see fig. 2). The balance is not a static, geometric symmetry but a dynamic equilibrium of solid and space; the movement derives not from wild and expressive lines, as in Ch’u art, but is generated by the spirit that inhabits the form.
38 JAR WITH COVER

(Hou)

Gray earthenware with painted decoration. Western Han period, 2nd–1st century B.C. Probably from area near Lo-yang, Honan Province. H. 22 ¾ in. (56 cm). Purchase, Mr. and Mrs. Oscar Tang Gift, 1986 (1986.170a,b)
In Chinese art balance is best expressed in seal design. The seal, usually cast in bronze and sometimes cut from a precious, hard stone such as jade, was important to everyday life in Han China. For the official, it was part of his insignia and carried with it his rank and authority. For the individual, the seal represented a personal signature and consent. (Even today official documents can be endorsed and “signed” with one’s seal.) The composition of the seal characters is the purest form of expression of the Han artistic spirit and became the standard for all Chinese design for centuries (figs. 39–41). To the untutored observer, seal impressions are, if anything, dull. To those who have grappled with the difficult task of balancing a composition, they are remarkable for the casual ease by which perfect balance is achieved. This is an art that comes with constant and unself-conscious practice.

The quality of Han art that distinguishes its vitality from the fantasies of Ch’u art and the animal energy of the steppes objects is movement that intimates life. This elusive standard is mentioned in the Huainan Tzu, a compendium attributed to Liu An (179–122 B.C.), who lived in southern China:

The form is the house of the spirit; breath is the intake of the spirit, the spirit is the governance of life.

This attitude, whether conscious or not, is the principle underlying Han figurative art: form is the form of the spirit. Realization of this principle is seen in several pottery sculptures and painted pots of the Han dynasty in the Museum’s collection.

The Han artist employed various means of representing life in the human form. One was to capture a moment of animation, as recorded in the expressions and gestures of pottery figures playing liu-po, in which a man calls out his throw of the dice as the other awaits his turn (fig. 42). Another is the portrayal of actual movement. The performer of the Dance of the Seven Dishes bends to its rhythms, her sleeves echoing the graceful sway of her body (fig. 43). The movement of sleeves has been an essential element of Chinese dance from the beginning of recorded history. Long sleeves extend the body beyond its natural limits and project the life of the limbs into pure motion. Thus, the costume, far from

Liu-po, which originated during the Han dynasty, is a game for two players, who use dice, counters, gaming pieces, and a board with the markings of a Chinese sundial. The game is conducted in ritualized gestures.
being an impediment, is part of the means of the artistic expression of a dancer.

Pottery figures and painted pots were made for burial with the dead. Until this century they were ignored by Chinese antiquarians because they were produced exclusively for funerary purposes. The figures represented servants and retainers who would go on serving their masters in the next world. More lavish burials included models of farm structures (the country estates of the deceased) and figures of tenant farmers and domestic animals (figs. 52–54). The forms and decorations of pottery vessels imitated those of expensive bronze and lacquer objects. However, their brush-drawn ornamentation often displays greater fluidity and spontaneity than that on the originals. Occasionally, the decorators of funerary pottery departed from convention in painting subjects not found on bronzes and lacquers, and their work affords a glimpse of Han brush painting, which would otherwise be lost to us. A jar with a rampant bear (or possibly a representation of the “heavenly wolf” star) and other animals exemplifies this work (fig. 46). In its movement the bear shares the same artistic sen-
Possibility as the pottery figures of the liu-po players and the dancer. The stretched-out lines of the drawing embody motion and change, and one could say that they are not unlike those in today’s animation drawings, except on the jar they are static and only in our mind’s eye seem to move.

But is it possible to convey a feeling of life in a form that is perfectly still? The pottery dancer in the Weber Collection is perhaps such an artistic achievement (fig. 45). The sculptor chose the moment in the performance when one sleeve is thrown back as the dancer gently stoops and flexes her knees, lifting one heel from the floor; she is motionless for that split second before she advances on her toes, her pendant arm remaining supremely still. The dancer’s stance was a familiar one to Chinese audiences for centuries and can be seen today on the stage of the Peking Opera. Perhaps it is this familiarity with the whole sequence of movements that conveys the sense of motion in stillness to the discerning viewer.

The Chinese approach to representation of the human form in art is in marked contrast to that of the Greeks. Greek idealism, which inspired the search for exact expression in art as Pythagoras sought it in mathematics, led to the celebration of the perfect form of the nude. Associated with Greek idealism is a vision of the absolute and the eternal. In Chinese philosophy there is no absolute; there are extremes, which in the end only turn into their opposites. Nor is there any concept of eternity, at least not an eternity outside time as happens in Western thought. Eternity, if such a thought occurred to the early Chinese, would be what Plotinus called “the ever which is in time.” Whereas ideal and absolute beauty transcends time and hence also human life,
Chinese art accommodates time and takes on life as it passes away. The Greek discus thrower may be in action, but the moment is captured and taken out of time; the Chinese dancer has no existence outside the flow of time, which is part of the artistic essence of the sculpture. To make an analogy in pottery: the Attic vase is nude; it is exact in its proportions and precise in its outline; the Chinese pot is clothed in glaze, and the spread of the molten glass on the surface, forever flowing down the walls of the vessel, is an inherent aspect of the art of Chinese pottery. Even if unglazed, the pot would retain the wheel's turning marks, registering the growth of the pot in the hands of the potter. T. S. Eliot observed well:

Only by the form, the pattern,  
Can words or music reach  
The stillness, as a Chinese jar still  
Moves perpetually in its stillness.

The acceptance of time on human terms does not necessarily imply resignation. To be sure, in Han poetry there are laments on the brevity of life, sometimes combined with an appeal to make the best of it by indulgence in earthly pleasures or, much more rarely, in an existentialist affirmation of life itself. Another possible reaction would have been to seek to avoid the end of life by ascending to another state or realm where there is no aging with the passage of time—in other words, to achieve immortality in time. This response accounted for the recurrent theme of yu-hsien (“immortal travel”) in literature of the late Han and immediately thereafter. This urge to ascend inspired many foolish deeds and not a few exercises of the imagination that sought to achieve immortality in time. This response accounted for the recurrent theme of yu-hsien (“immortal travel”) in literature of the late Han and immediately thereafter. This urge to ascend inspired many foolish deeds and not a few exercises of the imagination that sought to reach the realm of the impossible. These works of art and literature were often comic, and sometimes poignant, as they reflected the striving of the human spirit.

As we have seen, the wish to grow wings and ascend originated in the shamanistic culture of an earlier era. In the art of the Han period wings as symbols of immortality, rather than of the act of flying, are the important aspect of the image of the winged man, the immortal. The winged being hovering over the roof of the grand building in the stone funerary relief is a typical Han immortal (fig. 47). The central figure, presiding over a reception on the upper story, is Hsi-wang-mu, queen mother of the West, a cult figure who gained immense popularity during the Han dynasty as the reigning spirit of the land of the immortals in the West. Hsi-wang-mu first appeared in the apocryphal tale of the fortunate King Mu of the Chou dynasty, who drove a chariot drawn by eight heavenly horses to meet with her on the Jade Pond. A scene of the Hsi-wang-mu reception is an appropriate funerary carving because it is an expression of the filially pious wish that the deceased join the company of immortals.

The association of the heavenly horse with the story of King Mu could not have much
This is a rubbing of a stone carving on a wall in the Wu family shrines in Chia-hsiang County, Shantung Province, that dates from the Eastern Han period (A.D. 147–168). It illustrates the story of the attempt by the first emperor of Ch’in to raise from the Ssu River one of the nine ting tripods supposed to have been cast by the emperor Yu, founder of the Hsia dynasty, and regarded as symbols of state. As soon as the ting emerged, a dragon came out of the water and snapped off the rope. The tripod disappeared back into the river forever. The moral is that because the Ch’in emperor had no authority to rule, he had no claim to the ting.

preceded the reign of Han Wu-ti (“Military Emperor of Han”). In 141 B.C. he inherited a stable and a prosperous empire that had enjoyed six decades of peace and growth. There is no consensus among historians on whether Wu-ti’s expansionist policy and military exploits were due to quirks in his personality or were forced upon him by increased pressure from invading nomads, in particular the Hsiung-nu tribe, who could no longer be ignored as a military force. There is general agreement that he need not have advanced as far as Ferghana (now in Soviet central Asia) except to secure the heavenly, or “blood-sweating,” horse, the steppe horse that was a superior mount for the cavalry. This was a crucial military consideration if the Chinese army was to meet the Hsiung-nu on equal terms. In any case, the expansion of the Han empire into central Asia assured relatively safe passage for merchants on the eastern part of the Silk Road, and the emperor did get his horses.

The heavenly horse from Ferghana proved to be more than a military boon to the Chinese. These noble animals seemed to have come out of the very imagination of the artist who sought to give them the “form that is the house of the spirit.” The heavenly horse was paid the ultimate compliment: it was turned into a dragon (fig. 49). Of all the different manifestations of the dragon in China’s long history, the horse-dragon of the later Han period is the most expressive of one of the
essential attributes of the dragon—the embodiment of “breath.”

Wu-ti, the active ruler, not only expanded the Han empire but also put it in order. He made institutional changes that reflected the proper position of his empire in the space-time structure of the universe according to the prevailing theories of history and cosmology. All systems of thought in the Han period were based on the Yin-Yang and Five-Elements theories. Yin and Yang represented all dichotomies, such as male and female, heaven and earth, day and night, which were extended to pairs of relative opposites, such as high and low, active and passive, hard and soft. Every system in the world, in which humans and nature existed together and interacted in a unified realm, was governed by the Five Elements (metal, wood, water, fire, and earth) and partook of their properties, or “virtues.” The Five-Elements theory was applied to dynastic succession, the calendar, directions (descriptions of physical space), colors, music, food, odors, numbers, and moral codes. Thus Wu-ti ordered that the calendar be changed so that the month corresponded to the lunar cycle (the moon was full on the fifteenth day), and the year began with spring. The official color for court ceremonies was yellow because, according to the Five-Elements theory, the “virtue” of his dynasty was that of the element earth, and the color of earth was yellow. Similarly, five was the number for earth, and thus the number of characters on official seals was increased from four to five. Wu-ti established a correct relationship with heaven and earth by regular performance of sacrifices to deities in propitious locations at prescribed times. In the realm of human affairs, he made Confucianism the basis of official and private conduct and the annotation of the classics the core curriculum in institutions of learning.

So much order had to have a deadening effect on individual thought and creativity. In
This is a fine example of formal calligraphy of the late Han dynasty. The inscription commemorates the restoration of the Confucius Temple at Ch'iu-fu, Shantung Province, and the offering of the ritual vessels to the temple by Han Lai in the year 156. The original stone is still preserved at the Confucius Temple.

Any period art that serves the doctrine of the state is seldom known to inspire, although during the later Han the very purpose of official art was to "inspire" correct attitudes and behavior and to demonstrate the triumph of goodness over evil or, rather, the morally and politically legitimate over the morally and politically illegitimate (fig. 48). And yet this greater, all-encompassing order was to generate its own art form. In this ordered universe, all individual thought and aspiration were channeled into pre-ordained paths and expressed only by following established conventions. Thus, a certain uniformity, a "secondary style," if you like, is superimposed on all artistic expression, a style that reflects the grand scheme of things and stifles to a great extent individual expression. To demonstrate this point one need only observe the extraordinary homogeneity of pottery forms of the Han empire, from the center of political power in areas near the capital to distant outposts in the south, as seen in the green-glazed vase from Lo-yang and the bottle from Kuang-tung (fig. 50), each modeled after a standard shape common to both bronze and pottery vessels of the period.

If there was a saving grace in this state of affairs, it was that the Han world order (as well as the art it engendered) was a vision born of a humanistic spirit, whose chief characteristics as described in the Confucian vocabulary were wen ("warmth and kindness") and hou ("naïveté, tolerance, and loyalty"). The art of restrained expression continued through Chinese history and was called by the great twentieth-century scholar Wang Kuo-wei (1877–1927) ku-ya—ku, pertaining to antiquity, and ya, meaning "cultivated" or "refined." He defined the quality of ku-ya as "the beauty of form of the beauty of form." According to Wang Kuo-wei, this quality in a work of art is independent of the intrinsic artistic value of the work. Even relatively poor works of art may have this quality. While only a minor consideration in the evaluation of a work, it is not without worth—if only because it is an expression of commonly shared values and can be achieved by all those who try. In his essay on this subject Wang cites examples mainly from literature, but he does cite one from painting: "Take the case of Wang Hui [1632–1717] of our [Ch'ing] dynasty. Of course he lacks artistic talent, but he worked very hard at it, so he was good at imitating the ancients and poor in his own creations. Would he then abandon his strength, which is ku-ya, and seek to match other [painters] in the beautiful and sublime?"

The art of the later Han does not correspond exactly to classicism in Western art. However, one can speak loosely of the establishment at this time of a classical norm for Chinese art until the modern era. This classical norm has two chief aspects. The first, which is found mainly in the art of the Western Han, is the representation of life in form, whether it is a human figure or a simple calligraphic line; the second, which became prominent in Eastern (or later) Han, is a combination of balance and restraint. In the finest examples of Han sculpture and calligraphy, both are present (figs. 45, 51). These characteristics were, of course, already in evidence in the painted pots of the Neolithic period.
The collapse of the Han empire at the beginning of the third century A.D. had several causes. Commonly noted are the pressure of nomadic peoples on the northern border and internal corruption and decadence. An important but less frequently mentioned cause of the break-up of the empire is the emergence of pseudo-feudalism. Although only members of the royal family were granted fiefdoms, and these were watched over carefully by ministers appointed by the emperor, nobles and rich landlords built their own vast territories into nearly independent states with armies and economic infrastructures. Toward the end of the Eastern Han powerful local potentates became an increasing threat to the weakened imperial court. The importance of land ownership and control of the farming population during the Eastern Han period is reflected in the burial furniture of the rich and noble. Together with articles for luxurious living, there were pottery models of every type of village structure, from houses, granaries, kitchens, and wells to pigsties and goat pens, complete with farmers to tend them. There were also models of watchtowers, with armed soldiers guarding the local population as well as against invaders. In the Weber Galleries there is a large display case containing a group of these models, which give us a good idea of everyday life in the rural areas of Han China (figs. 52–54).

Civil war broke out among powerful clans in A.D. 220, and China entered a period known as the Three Kingdoms. There followed a brief unification achieved during the Western Chin dynasty (A.D. 265–316). The government of the Western Chin was no improvement on that of the late Han, and a series of rebellions by troops of nomadic origin, which had made inroads into Chinese territory during the Eastern Han period, resulted in the execution of the last emperors of the Western Chin and the dissolution of native Chinese rule in northern China. The Ssu-ma family, rulers of the Chin dynasty, reestablished itself south of the Yangtze River with the city of Chien-k’ang (present-day Nanking) as its capital. The later Chin dynasty, known as Eastern Chin, lasted from 317 to 420. Thereafter in southern China followed four short dynasties, which together with the Wei (of the Three Kingdoms) and the Chin are known as the Six Dynasties (A.D. 220–589).

During the third and fourth centuries, in the midst of the political and social chaos and against a background of constant war and deprivation, there arose, for the first time in China, an aristocratic culture, that is to say, a culture created by the aristocrats for themselves and not by those who served them. Musical compositions and poetry were written by the same people who had formerly only enjoyed them. The Ts’ao family, rulers of the Wei state in northern China during the Three Kingdoms, were all talented writers. The brilliance of the men of letters who assembled at the Wei court was legendary. Art and literature of this period were highly individual and self-aware. Out of this awareness grew the beginnings of literary and art criticism and the first serious reflections on the process of creativity. Painting, calligraphy, and music, as played on the ch’in, the Chinese zither, flourished and from this time on would predominate among the fine arts of China.

Enough of the creative and critical writing of this period has been preserved for detailed study, but there remains little visual art and even less music. Nevertheless, through the process of collective recollection, faint reflec-
ARCHITECTURAL MODELS

Earthenware with green lead glaze. Eastern Han period, A.D. 1st–2nd century. H (watchtower). 31 11/6 in. (80.5 cm); H (pen with goats, mother, and child). 9 4/6 in. (23.5 cm). Lent by Charlotte C. and John C. Weber

Animal pens surrounded the four essential elements of a Han settlement: the house with an interior courtyard, the granary, the stove, and the well. Multi-storied buildings served as watchtowers protecting the larger estates.
The quality of the original calligraphy that first captured the imaginations of its admirers was its casual elegance—a reflection of the cultivated refinement of the artist, here caught in an unguarded moment. This moment, never to be repeated, occurred on a fine spring day in the year 353, when a company of forty-one literati and officials was gathered at Lan-t’ing (“Orchid Pavilion”) to indulge in a game of drinking and poetry composition. It may seem contradictory that a work of art born of such a moment of pure spontaneity should become the copybook model for countless generations of persevering calligraphy students; but then the spontaneous artist was Wang Hsi-chih, who spent his whole life developing his skill.

To understand the critical acclaim for Wang Hsi-chih during his lifetime, we should know that contemporary literary and art criticism was directed at the creator rather than the creation, a practice that continued to a certain extent in all subsequent periods. The vocabulary of art criticism was derived from the art of people criticism, called pure conversation or pure criticism, a pastime among intellectuals that began toward the end of the Han dynasty and turned into a serious pursuit during the third century. Pure conversation included elements of psychological analysis, moral evaluation, aesthetic appreciation of the physical appearance of the man, his deportment, and his spirit. In the Chin and Wei periods it was the official process for selecting men for government office. According to the social, intellectual, and aesthetic standards of his time, Wang Hsi-chih would have been very highly ranked in pure criticism, and this ranking would have considerably enhanced his artistic reputation.
Our connection to painting of the Chin and Wei periods is even more tenuous. For any clue at all, we have to turn to archaeological finds from the Six Dynasties that include pictorial decoration, such as lacquer screens and brick walls with molded relief. These possess something of the style and composition of figural painting during the third and fourth centuries, but the important element, the life of the brush stroke, is missing. Occasionally, some of the standard compositions survived into the sixth century and were incorporated into Buddhist narrative illustration for sutras. The most popular sutra for illustration in the late Six Dynasties was the *Vimalakirti-nirdesa*, of which the climax is the disputation between Manjusri, the bodhisattva of wisdom, and Vimalakirti, a wealthy man endowed with magical powers and supreme wisdom. There was no earthly possession or pleasure beyond his means, and yet Vimalakirti preferred to go among the people and expose the shallowness and fallacies in the teaching of Buddhist preachers. His contest with Manjusri centered on such ideas as being and nothingness, appearance and reality, and whether reality was related to being or nothingness. In the end Manjusri asked Vimalakirti to define the “nondual,” or only, path (to enlightenment). Vimalakirti remained silent, the ultimate answer. This story, in fact, reflects one of the long-existing preoccupations of the Chinese mind that found metaphysical expression in the language of Buddhism. Indeed, by the fourth century, the subject of pure conversation among the sophisticated elite had changed from people criticism to the urgent question of whether or not the world existed.

It is easy to understand why the idea of a man like Vimalakirti, who wielded untold wealth and power with infinite wisdom and forbearance and could lead others to salvation, was extremely attractive to the rich and aristocratic patrons of Buddhism during the Six Dynasties. Among the many representations of the disputation that have survived, one of the best is found on a sixth-century stone stele at the Museum (fig. 56). Vimalakirti, in a relaxed pose on the canopied seat at the right, is the archetypal image of the ideal man of the Six Dynasties, whose appearance is the outward manifestation of the
beauty of spirit. Carved on stone after copies of copies made over nearly three centuries, the figure still calls up, in both form and feeling, the artistic temper of an age.

The social elite of the Six Dynasties in southern China did not indulge in sumptuous burials. Even the recently excavated graves of members of the exalted Wang family (the family of the calligrapher Wang Hsi-chih) contained few elaborate furnishings. Whether this was a reflection of otherworldliness, the lack of skilled labor to produce burial furniture, or the result of sumptuary laws cannot be clearly determined. However, one item of funerary ware commonly found in burials in southern China that deserves our attention is a jarlike object of high-fired porcelain laden on top with models of pavilions, gateways, watchtowers, steles, and all manner of exotic...
centuries into central China from a region in northernmost China. The T'o-pa dynasty of northern China was known as Wei, or Northern Wei to historians who wish to distinguish it from the Wei of the Three Kingdoms. After some initial skepticism, the rulers of the Wei empire accepted the Buddhist faith, which had found many converts among the people. The monumental Buddhist art of the Northern Wei and succeeding dynasties in the north is well represented in the Museum (figs. 58, 59). Among the Metropolitan's great treasures of early Buddhist art is a gilt-bronze altarpiece depicting Maitreya, the Buddha of the future, attended by lesser deities and T'o-pa faithful (fig. 60). Maitreya, the messianic figure of Buddhism, was immensely popular in the Northern Wei kingdom of the fifth and sixth centuries as the clergy disputed eschatological problems and people sought deliverance from a world torn by strife.

animals and birds (fig. 57). The practical function of these jars is unknown as they seem to have no obvious opening. It has been suggested that they were intended to house the soul of the dead so that it could one day be transported back to northern China, the homeland of the Chin dynasty. The decoration no doubt originated in popular beliefs regarding the netherworld, or the land of immortals. These “soul” jars, and other articles of the same ceramic material, are also important as examples of the earliest known porcelain, which was invented in southern China, was developed there over centuries, and became the precursor of the refined Sung porcelain known to the West as celadon.

The north, even after the retreat of the native Chin dynasty to the south, remained in total chaos until a semblance of order was established in 386 by the T'o-pa, one of the barbaric tribes that had migrated over several

57. FUNERARY URN
Porcelain with olive-green glaze (Yüeh ware). Western Chin dynasty, ca. A.D. 275–300. From southern Kiangsu or Chekiang Province. H. 177/8 in. (45.4 cm). Charlotte C. and John C. Weber Collection, Promised Gift of Charlotte C. and John C. Weber
58. SEATED BODHISATTVA
Sandstone. Northern Wei dynasty, ca. 480. From Yin-kang, Cave XV, Shansi Province. H. 57 1/2 in. (146 cm). Rogers Fund, 1922 (22.134)

59. RELIEF OF THE EMPEROR AND HIS COURT IN PROCESSION
Limestone with traces of polychrome pigments. Northern Wei dynasty, ca. 522. From the Pin-yang cave, Lung-men, Lo-yang. 82 x 133 in. (208.3 x 337.7 cm). Fletcher Fund, 1935 (35.146)
61. MONK HOLDING A LOTUS

Water-base paint on mud plaster. Ca. 400. Kizil, Sinkiang Uighur Autonomous Region. 32 x 14 3/4 in. (81.3 x 37.5 cm). Fletcher Fund, 1942 (42.49)

This monk was among the images painted on the walls of a Buddhist cave temple at Kizil.

62. STANDING BUDDHA


60. MAITREYA ALTPARCE

Gilt bronze. Northern Wei dynasty, dated (on base) 524. Cheng-ting hsien, Hopei Province. H. 30 1/4 in. (76.9 cm). Rogers Fund, 1938 (38.158.1a–n)

Among extant Buddhist artifacts of the Northern Wei dynasty, this altarpiece is one of the most striking. Maitreya, the Buddha of the future, stands in front of the mandorla with flying angels (apsaras) on the rim. With his hand gestures, he reassures the worshipers and promises to grant their wishes. Two attendant bodhisattvas stand at his sides and two others at his feet. Four offerers in T'o-pa dress are portrayed holding bowls in their hands. Two thunderbolt bearers are placed as guardians at each corner of the altarpiece. In front, below the main platform, are two seated lions on either side of the incense burner.
Buddhism and its art were introduced into China from India during the early Eastern Han period. This process accelerated during the third and fourth centuries. By the fifth century secondary centers of Buddhism and Buddhist art had been firmly established in central Asia, particularly in Kucha in Sinkiang Uighur Autonomous Region. Some of the cave temples constructed during this period in Kizil, the main Kuchean site, have survived, a few with paintings on their walls.

The Kuchean monk Kumarajiva (344–431), who had traveled to northern India in his youth, was the first translator of a significant body of Buddhist writings into intelligible Chinese, a translation that provided the basis for the propagation of the faith in China. The transmission of Buddhist art to northern China took a similar route (via Kucha), and by the time the Northern Wei began to construct large cave temples in the fifth century, Buddhist art was a highly eclectic affair, in
which could be discerned Greco-Roman influences acquired in northwest India (present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan) and central Asian modifications (fig. 62). Within a century, in an atmosphere of religious fervor, the strangely uncomfortable icon of the Buddha was transformed into a coherent image with features more closely resembling those of a Chinese (fig. 63). It was the Sinicized Buddha image from northern China that was transmitted to Korea and then to Japan during the time of the Northern Wei and the succeeding short-lived dynasties of the sixth century.

The robust and energetic art of northern China during the Six Dynasties contrasted sharply to the effete aestheticism of the south. This is apparent not only in Buddhist art but also in the pottery figures used in burials (figs. 64, 65). The conquering nomadic lords, unlike the ruling class of the south, were not opposed to luxurious living (or dying, for that matter). The tombs of the northern nobility are rich in contents, and the northerners created a fearsome monster to guard their tombs against evil spirits (fig. 66). The terror of this vision, as much as the serenity of the Buddha, testifies to the heightened spirituality of the age.
It is interesting to note that although during the Warring States period the nomads easily transported the animal style across the great walls erected along the northern Chinese border, by the time of the Six Dynasties the nomadic peoples inside China retained relatively little of their former culture, with the exception of a few minor customs and their dress. The soldier in figure 65 wears a standard T'o-pa costume, which consisted of a loose, double-breasted jacket tied at the waist and trousers with flaring bottoms. The trouser legs would have been tied by tabs below the knee on formal occasions and in action but worn loose in domestic situations. Another survival among former customs is the leather belt with metal buckles and plaques decorated with tigers or dragons (figs. 67–70). Belts of this kind were used in the third and fourth centuries by all residents of China, irrespective of their ethnic origin, and by peoples beyond the walls who had retained a nomadic way of life. The same type of belt, with different animal decorations, was carried across the Eurasian steppes and was worn by the barbarians who overran Europe in late Roman times. Examples of the belt plaques used by migratory peoples in Europe can be seen in the Museum’s Byzantine collections.

The Six Dynasties was a time of mutual acculturation between native Chinese and newcomers to the land. After several centuries of this process, the stage was set for another grand unification, this one under the leadership of the Yang family, who founded the Sui dynasty in 581. By this time a Chinese surname like Yang was not necessarily an indication of Chinese ethnic origin, as many Sinicized foreigners took Chinese names.
The Sui dynasty did not last long. A series of peasant uprisings followed by civil war threw the country into chaos again until it was reunited by the founder of the T’ang dynasty, Li Shih-min, who installed his father as the first T’ang emperor in 618.

Li Shih-min, who succeeded in 627 as Emperor T’ai-tsung, was no believer in Buddhism. His skepticism was made clear by his statement that “those who seek the way [of Buddha] can never have proof of their happiness in the future, while those who practice the religion [know that they] are damned by their past.” Nevertheless he was a pragmatist and fully aware of the powerful attraction of the Buddhist church, its immense wealth, and its potential military strength. The emperor decided to make an ally of the church, and so began the last great period of Buddhist activity in China, which lasted for about a century. Under the patronage of one of the most able and powerful emperors in Chinese history, Buddhist monks, lodged in the secure comfort of lavishly built and well-endowed monasteries, commenced the work of collating and studying the voluminous scriptures that had been translated or were being translated. Several schools of theology emerged, including the Fa-hsiang sect, founded by the learned Hsuan Chuang (about 600–664), the most famous of all Chinese pilgrim monks to India, whose records of travels through central Asia remain one of the most important sources on the history of this region.

Buddhist art reached its maturity in the first hundred years of the T’ang dynasty. The divine image of Buddha was tempered with human compassion, and the Buddha became more immediate, more approachable (fig. 72). Representations of bodhisattvas, influenced by Indian art of the Gupta school, were endowed with a high degree of feminine beauty, enhanced by a gentle swaying of the body (fig. 71). As a result, subsequent generations have expressed considerable confusion over the sexual identity of bodhisattvas in this tradition, most particularly Avalokitesvara, the bodhisattva of compassion, who in later periods was frequently portrayed as a female, Kuan-yin, the goddess of mercy.

Perhaps the most important Buddhist development during the T’ang dynasty was the reformation of the meditation sect, Chan (or Zen in Japanese). The sixth patriarch of this sect, Hui-neng (638–713), advocated “sudden” enlightenment without the aid of intensive study of doctrines or prescribed spiritual exercises. This change may be interpreted as
72. SEATED BUDDHA

73·SEATED LOHAN

Earthenware with three-color glaze (san-ts'ai). T'ang dynasty, 9th century.
Yi hsien, Hopei Province.
H (figure). 50 in. (127 cm).
Fletcher Fund, 1920 (20.114)

74·SEATED LOHAN

Earthenware with three-color glaze (san-ts'ai). T'ang dynasty, 9th century.
Yi hsien, Hopei Province.
H (figure). 41¼ in. (104.7 cm). Frederick C. Hewitt Fund, 1921 (21.76)

During the T'ang dynasty images of lohans were usually made in sets of sixteen. These two are from the same set.
turning away from the search for salvation through the grace of Buddha, or through the intercession of bodhisattvas, and toward finding enlightenment within oneself. This new attitude was reflected in religious art of the T'ang. As the images of Buddha and bodhisattvas began to take on a secular look, the images of monks and lohans (beings who through their own effort had freed themselves from all worldly cares) were given a greater air of spirituality. This enhanced spirituality was to find its strongest expression in the tenth century, at the beginning of the Sung dynasty, but the change was already perceptible during the late T'ang, as can be seen in the Museum's two glazed-pottery figures of lohans (figs. 73, 74). Just as the change in religious attitude was well suited to the Chinese temperament, the new expression of the religious nature of man was particularly compatible with the genius of Chinese art and its aim to capture form as the “house of the spirit.”

The secular culture of the T'ang dynasty was cosmopolitan. People of all races and creeds came to the great capital of Ch'ang-an (present-day Sian), whether traders from every part of the world known to China, Persians fleeing in the wake of Arab conquest, or Nestorian Christians escaping from persecution for their heresy. Zoroastrianism was an officially recognized religion, and Manichaeism found many converts among the Uighurs in Lo-yang and was to remain a vital religion in central Asia and in some areas of China for centuries to come.

The confident and brilliant T'ang empire was built on military might, and a large part of the army was made up of central Asians, who to some extent had become Sinicized during the Six Dynasties. Through the exertion of military power and on the strength of his extraordinary reputation, T'ai-tsung, within a short time, was able to annex the oases cities in the Tarim Basin and gain control of the Silk Road as far as the Pamirs. All manner of exotic goods and luxury articles from central Asia and farther afield came to the court. For example, belts worn by the nobility and senior officials were decorated with plaques carved from the finest Khotan jade rather than with the metal plaques of an earlier age (fig. 75). The conquest of the Tarim oases was also important to Chinese cultural history, as the oases states were rich repositories of Indo-European culture, which was overlaid with Iranian influence transmitted from the fourth century on through the
76. WOMAN ON HORSEBACK

Unfired clay with polychrome pigments. T'ang dynasty, 7th century. Astana, Turfan, Sinkiang Uighur Autonomous Region. H. 14 1/4 in. (36.2 cm). Fletcher Fund, 1951 (51.93)

77. STANDING COURT LADY

Kushan empire in Afghanistan. Today, the rich artistic heritage of the oases states can only be glimpsed from the wall paintings of the cave temples (fig. 61), but other aspects of the Tarim oases culture, particularly that of Kucha, left an indelible mark on the arts and fashions of the T’ang empire.

The most obvious influence from the Western Regions (Sinkiang Uighur Autonomous Region) was on dress, and on women’s makeup and hairstyles. In women’s costumes the change was quite dramatic and seemed to go beyond the mere adaptation of foreign and exotic forms; there is a distinct impression of haute couture in this new style (fig. 77). For women of this period, the most common outfit consisted of a tight-fitting upper garment, with scooped or V-neck, narrow sleeves, and a long flaring skirt, usually of printed or brocaded silk. Sometimes a “bolero” jacket was worn, but more often a long stole was draped over the shoulders. The unfired clay figure of a woman rider from Astana, Turfan, wears this basic ensemble (fig. 76). Her hat would have been fitted with a veil for traveling in the desert. During the early days of the T’ang dynasty, in the capital, Ch’ang-an, fashionable women wore such hats—perched precariously on their high hairdos—complete with veil, which might have served to keep off city dust as well.

Another common form of dress for both men and women was a long, close-fitting jacket, tied at the waist with a leather belt, and worn with trousers and high boots. The jacket had no collar but could be opened to form lapels (figs. 78, 80). If one’s rank was high enough, the belt would be decorated with jade plaques.
Kucha was the source not only of sartorial fashion but also of music and dance (fig. 8i). Kuchean music, which had already been introduced into China during the Northern Wei period, enjoyed great popularity in the Sui and early T'ang dynasties, and was performed on its own or incorporated into large-scale orchestral works presented at court. Most percussion instruments used in Chinese music today, such as the small drum beaten with wooden sticks, as well as cymbals and clappers, were adopted during the T'ang dynasty along with the music of Kucha and other oases in the Western Regions. The small harp played by one of the musicians in figure 8i is also an instrument associated with music from these regions.

One of the most popular T'ang dances was the hu-hsuan (“whirling”) dance, which was performed on a small mat or carpet, and the representation of it was a favorite decoration on all kinds of works of art from the late sixth century to the late eighth century. Eighth-century writers often mention this dance; the great poet Pai Chü-ying (772–846) immortalized it in verse. Most scholars agree that this dance was introduced into China from Sogdia, but there has been little speculation as to its ultimate origin. A hu-hsuan dancer appears on the end plaque of the Weber jade belt set (fig. 79). This plaque was sewn on the belt end, which was tucked inside the belt at the middle of the back, where it hung down (fig. 80). The musicians on the other plaques are most likely accompanists for the hu-hsuan, as most of the instruments are the same as those seen in a wall painting in a mid-eighth-century tomb at Sian that illustrates.
82. HORSE AND RIDER

Pottery with three-color glaze (san-ts'ai) and painted decoration. T'ang dynasty, early 8th century. H. 15 in. (38.1 cm). Rogers Fund, 1954 (54.169)

83. NIGHT-SHINING WHITE


the dance and a full company of musicians.

At Kizil the palette of the wall paintings, consisting mainly of blues and greens (usually azurite and malachite), gave rise to the blue-green style of Chinese landscape. Kizil figure paintings might also have contributed to the grotesque images of lohans in the paintings of the late T'ang dynasty. The horses from Ferghana, so hard-sought by the Han emperor Wu-ti, were now comparatively easy to obtain. Apart from their military use, large numbers of these animals were acquired by the imperial court in Ch'ang-an for hunting, polo, and performing dance and circus acts (fig. 82). Horse painting became an important genre in Chinese art. The only scroll known to have any legitimate claim as an original work by Han Kan, the great eighth-century horse painter, is in the Museum's collection (fig. 83).
The splendor of the imperial court of the first half of the T'ang is exemplified in the bronze mirrors of the dynasty (fig. 86). Mirrors such as the one illustrated were cast on the birthday of the emperor Hsuan-chung (reigned 712–755) and presented to senior officials, and they were also used as gifts for special occasions such as weddings.

The art of the silversmith in China reached its peak during the T'ang dynasty. Early T'ang works display distinct signs of foreign influence in both forms and motifs (fig. 85). Manufacturing techniques also show a marked change from traditional Chinese methods of casting to hammering and chasing. It has often been asserted by scholars of T'ang silver that the paramount influence was the Sassanid Persians, and some of them did come to Ch'ang-an directly from Iran. However, in light of more recent study and numerous archaeological finds, we should perhaps redirect our search to central Asia. Some of the shapes and motifs seem to derive from Greco-Roman prototypes rather than Iranian ones. It will be some time before a detailed study can be made of the history of silver in China, as we are still comparatively ignorant of the arts of central Asia during the late antique period and early Middle Ages. In the meantime, on the strength of internal evidence and recent archaeological data, we can conclude that the progression was from an international style toward one more reflective of native taste. A characteristic of T'ang silver is the use of parcel gilding to highlight the decoration (fig. 84). This bowl, dating from
T'ANG DYNASTY

86·MIRROR

Bronze. T'ang dynasty, 8th—9th century. Diam. 8½ in. (21.6 cm). Rogers Fund, 1925 (25.20.3)
87·LOBED STEM CUP

Silver with parcel gilding. T’ang dynasty, 9th century. H. 3 in. (7.5 cm). Rogers Fund, 1921 (21.46)

88·OCTAGONAL CUP WITH RING HANDLE


89·JAR

Earthenware with cream and green glaze. T’ang dynasty, first half of 8th century. H. 6 7/8 in. (17.5 cm). Lent by Charlotte C. and John C. Weber

the second half of the eighth century, still bears the central Asian motifs of the recumbent deer (with the characteristic “growing” horn) and border of half-rosettes. By this time the forms of Chinese silver and ceramic vessels were beginning to influence each other. The octagonal silver cup generated many imitations in white porcelain; and, conversely, silver dishes took on forms common to porcelain dishes (fig. 88). Toward the end of the dynasty genuinely native motifs and forms began to reappear in Chinese silver. The form of the lobed cup on a high stem is a Sassanian-Chinese hybrid, but the scenes of people in a landscape chased on the inside are purely Chinese (fig. 87).

The T’ang dynasty saw the beginning of aesthetic appreciation of ceramics as an art form. And although we have no means of knowing whether these potters regarded themselves as creative artists, it is evident to anyone who looks closely at the Museum’s cream-colored glazed jar with green splashes that it is a consciously created work of art (fig. 89). In its abstract simplicity, the jar summarizes the art and cultural milieu of the High T’ang period (first half of the eighth century). The form is strong and robust, like the T’ang empire in its heyday (and unlike the wilting elegance of vases of the later Sung
The form is also full, reflecting the aesthetic bias of the age, when plumpness was appreciated in the human physique (figs. 78, 90). There is also a hint of influence from the blown-glass shapes imported in some quantity from the West. (Chinese glass up to this time was usually molded and hardly ever, if at all, blown.) The expressionistic splashing of the green glaze is an assertion of native sensibility, creating life and suggesting a freedom of spirit against the background of a highly stable and solid form.

The unabashed preference for all things foreign and exotic at the imperial court caused disruptions to the continued growth of native culture. For example, Chinese music was entirely subsumed into the new music of the T’ang court, which was dominated by imported music and instruments. The native cultural tradition was not actively revived until the tenth century during the early Sung period. Nevertheless, without the massive influx of foreign culture, Chinese civilization would have been less rich, and the internationalism of the T’ang period did generate a revitalization, which has been necessary from time to time to sustain a continuity of Chinese art and culture.
NOTES

Photography by Lynton Gardiner unless otherwise noted. Metropolitan Museum of Art Photograph Studio: pp. 5, 14, 17, 22(bottom), 25(top), 33, 38, 39, 44, 47, 49, 51, 52, 54, 56, 62(left), 65, 66(bottom). Seth Joel: pp. 37, 68(left)

Map and drawing of altar set by Wilhelmina Reining-Amrhein

P. 15, line 43: "... significance of the animal mask in Shang art." The similarity between the art of Shang China and that of the Northwest Coast has been remarked upon by a number of scholars who began their research in America or among the artifacts of ancient China. Some of these views are quoted by Claude Lévi-Strauss in his paper "Split Representation in the Art of Asia and America," in Structural Anthropology, New York, 1967, pp. 239-268.

P. 37, line 37: "... what Plotinus called 'the ever which is in time.'" Plotinus, Enneads, vol. 3 (iv), in Thomas Taylor (trans.), Selected Works of Plotinus, London, 1929


P. 48, line 3: "It has been suggested that they were intended to house the soul of the dead...." Wai-kam Ho, "Hun-p'ing: the Urn of the Soul," in The Bulletin of The Cleveland Museum of Art, 48, no. 2 (Feb. 1961), pp. 26-34


P. 63, line 26: "Most scholars agree that this dance was introduced into China from Sogdia...." Xiang Da, T'ang-tai Ch'ang-an yü hsi-yü Wen-ming (Ch'ang-an in the T'ang Period and the Civilization of the Western Regions). Peking, 1957 p. 101

P. 63, line 34: "... in a wall painting in a mid-eighth-century tomb at Sian that illustrates the dance...." Kaogu, 1960, no. 1, pl. 4

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ALTAR SET (FIGURE 17)

Altar Set (fig. 17). 1) Platform (chin); 2) wine container (yu) with cover and pedestal; 3) wine container (yu) with cover; 4) wine container (tsun); 5) spouted wine vessel (ho) with attached cover; 6, 7, 8, 9) wine cup (chih); 10) wine container (chia); 11) ladle (shao); 12) wine vessel (chueh); 13) wine beaker (ku); 14) wine vessel (chiao)

Rubbing of inscription (yi) on inner face of handle of the ritual lobed tripod cauldron, figure 11

Rubbing of inscription (wu) with mien on either side) on floor and inside of lid of the covered ritual wine container, figure 13

Rubbing of inscription (wei) on top of lid of one of the covered ritual wine containers in figure 26 (.4a,b)