Malcolm MacDonald

Gallery: China

Large print

Complete gallery guide

China

This gallery explores the arts and culture of China.

China has arguably the oldest continuous artistic tradition in the world. Distinctive art such as jade carving, ceramics, lacquer, textiles, calligraphy and ink painting developed early in Chinese history. These have continued to be central elements of Chinese art to the modern day.

In China, there is a proud tradition of celebrating the past. Chinese collectors have long cherished and preserved historic works of art, and successive generations of artists have sought to honour and emulate their predecessors. These themes can be seen throughout this gallery.

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The name 'China' was created by outsiders. It is based on Qin, pronounced Chin, the family name of the First Emperor. The Chinese refer to their country as 中国 (Zhōngguó) which translates as the 'Middle Kingdom'.

In many ways 'China' was created by the First Emperor. In 221 BCE King Zheng of Qin defeated the last of his rivals and united the patchwork of states that had existed on the north China plain and in the Yellow River basin. He took the name Qin Shihuangdi, First Emperor of Qin.

The written evidence for the region's earlier states stretches back more than 1,500 years before the First Emperor. The archaeological evidence from the region extends back much further.

In its long history China's frontiers have not been stable. When the Empire was strong, it expanded. In times of weakness it retreated, pushed back by more powerful states along the borders.

In some ways early China lacked natural unity, with its population being drawn from a mixture of nationalities and ethnicities. Even today, the country is still home to around 55 ethnic minority groups, many of which speak their own language. The country's vast area is broken up by some of the world's highest mountains and longest rivers. These have created barriers to trade and transport for much of China's history. The climate varies from cold and dry in the north to tropical in the south.

What has held China together for more than 2,000 years is shared cultural heritage. A common culture and intellectual approach spread through the use of a single script which ensured effective communication regardless of dialect or language. The script remained relatively unchanged over the millennia, allowing documents to be read and understood centuries after they were first written. Beliefs and customs, standards of social behaviour and organisation of government were based on ancient teachings that remained accessible through this unified writing system.

In 1911 CE the last Emperor was overthrown and the Republic of China was formed. This was more than 2,000 years after Qin Shihuangdi first united China. This gallery provides a glimpse into the incredibly rich artistic tradition that has helped to form the distinctive culture of modern day China.

Using this guide

This booklet contains all of the information from the wall panels and individual object labels in this gallery.

The guide begins with the gallery introduction and Neolithic ceramic displays located in the corner of the gallery closest to the lift.
It continues along the back wall of the gallery, following the development of Chinese ceramics from their beginnings to the modern day.

At this point, the guide continues back down the centre of the gallery detailing the contents of the freestanding cases in the middle of the space. This section begins with the terracotta warrior replica statues close to the spiral stair case and moves down the gallery back towards the lift and straight stairs.

The final section of the guide details the contents of the cases located along the inner wall of the gallery. This section begins at the lift end of the gallery and takes you along the wall towards the spiral stairs.

When you have finished with this guide, please leave it in the gallery for other visitors to use.

Neolithic period

Pot

半山式涡纹壶

Earthenware painted in red and dark-brown
China, Gansu province
Majiayao Culture, Banshan phase, 2800-2500 BCE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.4071

This jar is a distinctive example of the pottery of the Majiayao Culture, Banshan phase. The upper body of the jar is painted with deep brown stripes spaced with narrow red stripes. There are black saw-tooth shapes between the stripes.

The key Majiayao Culture site was first excavated by Swedish archaeologist and palaeontologist JG Andersson in 1924 but it was not until the 1940s that the name Majiayao Culture was coined by Chinese archaeologist Xia Nai.

Jar

半山式石叠纹罐

Earthenware painted in red and dark-brown
China, Gansu province
Majiayao Culture, Banshan phase, 2800-2500 BCE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.251

Neolithic Chinese probably discovered the making of pottery by accident - they found out that the soil under their bonfire had become solid after firing. Soon they started making pots and jars by shaping and firing mixtures of water and clay. The function of these early pots was simple: they were used for storing and heating water or food.

Jar
Earthenware painted in red and dark-brown
China, Gansu province
Majiayao Culture, Banshan phase, 2800-2500 BCE

Gift of Dr GH Manley
DUROM.2013.119

Compared to the large size of the body, the loop handles of this pot are very small. Neolithic people wanted large pots to store the maximum amount of water and food when natural resources were limited. Eventually pottery containers became too heavy for manual carrying. This kind of loop handle was designed to allow cords to be tied through to make it easier to carry. The elegant whorl patterns show that the Neolithic potters were interested in artistic beauty as well as the practical function of their creations.

Pot
辛店期三角网纹壶
Earthenware painted in red and dark-brown
China, Gansu province
Xindian Culture, 1300-1000 BCE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.1

This pot is dated to late Neolithic period, Xindian Culture.

Xindian pottery has distinctive object types and designs, such as the goat horn pattern, the sun pattern and various animal patterns. These designs reflect the importance of livestock husbandry in this area.

Shang dynasty and Zhou dynasty

Jue vessel

兽面纹爵

Cast bronze
China
Shang dynasty,
1600-1046 BCE

De Laszlo Collection
DUROM.1992.2

The Shang and Zhou dynasties (about 1600-221 BCE) are regarded as the Bronze Age in the development of Chinese material culture. They are particularly notable for the production and use of bronze ritual vessels. These were used to make offerings of food and wine to ancestors in ritual ceremonies.

The vessels were cast from piece moulds, and the process of casting was expensive. Therefore the number of bronze vessels that a man owned and used became a symbol of his noble status.

This form of vessel is known as a Jue. This tripod vessel was used to warm and serve wine. The three legs made it stable when it was standing in the fire. It is thought that the two knobs at the top were used to lift the vessel out of the heat.

This vessel bears an inscription beneath the handle. Experts have not yet been able to translate it. This may indicate that it is a family name.

Gui vessel

目纹簋

Cast bronze
China
Shang dynasty, 1600-1046 BCE

De Laszlo Collection
DUROM.1992.3

There are numerous forms of bronze ritual vessels, and one of the most important forms is the Gui.

As this example shows, the Gui is a deep, circular, food vessel with a foot ring and handles surmounted by animal heads. This Gui vessel is ornamented with a decorative band centred with an animal, probably an ox. Either side of the animal is a design known as eye pattern which resembles the compelling eyes of the animal mask motif or taotie.

In between the eye patterns, there is the cloud pattern which appears as circular, spiral lines. The cloud pattern has been linked to the worship of rain and the hope for a good harvest.

Gu vessel

兽面纹觚

Cast Bronze with carved decoration
China
Shang dynasty, 1600-1046 BCE

De Laszlo Collection
DUROM.1992.1

The Gu vessel is a wine beaker with a tall, slender body and a trumpet mouth. It is one of the oldest forms of ritual bronze vessel. The simple thread-relief pattern dates the object to early in the Shang dynasty.
The rulers of the Zhou dynasty (1046-221 CE) declared that the collapse of the Shang dynasty had been due to an obsession with wine. They therefore restricted wine-drinking. Under this policy, wine-drinking became a ritual practice rather than a leisure activity, and the use of bronze wine vessels was systemized.

Set of bells

编钟

Cast bronze with carved decoration
China
Date unknown

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.3966

The bell is an ancient form of musical instrument. Its history dates back to Western Zhou dynasty (1046-771 BCE). The bells are made in various sizes and shapes, and are arranged in sets of 9, 13 or more to be played during ceremonies. The small scale of this set suggests that it was made as a tomb model.

Li vessel
陶鬲
Pottery with impressed decoration
China
Zhou dynasty, 1046-221 BCE

MacDonald Collection
DUROM.1969.271

The Li vessel was used for cooking rice; its hollow, tripod legs allow heat to be transmitted to the food. The shape emerged as early as the Neolithic Period and variations of this shape continued to be used in later periods.

Han dynasty

Figure of a woman

塑衣式彩绘侍女俑

Earthenware painted in red and white
China
Han dynasty, 206 BCE-220 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.3

In ancient China, human sacrifice played an important role in burial practice. During the Spring and Autumn period (770-476 BCE) wooden or terracotta figures began to be placed in tombs as a replacement for sacrificial victims. The most famous terracotta models are those of the First Emperor of the Qin dynasty (reigned 221-210 BCE).

During the Han dynasty, this tradition was continued but the size of the figures became much smaller. This figure of a lady is an example of this custom. Bearing a soft, peaceful expression on her face, the lady's hands are held low in front of her belly, indicating her identity as an attendant awaiting her master's orders. Her white dress falls onto the ground and the collar and sleeves are decorated with red stripes. Models identical in design to this one have been unearthed in the tomb of Emperor Jingdi (reigned 156-139 BCE) of the Han dynasty. A sense of tenderness and humility is essential in the style of these figures, as it mirrors the influence of Daoist philosophy which started to become widespread at this time.

Model of a grain mill

绿釉仓

Earthenware
China
Han Dynasty, 206 BC--220 CE

Gift from Mrs Juliane Von Hessert from the De Laszlo Collection

Like the ancient Egyptians, the ancient Chinese believed in an afterlife and a great deal of effort was put into the preparation of burials. In early periods, people buried expensive materials such as jade, bronze, food, animal and even human sacrifices. During the Eastern Han dynasty (25-220 CE), the quantities of precious materials included in burials declined. Rather than burying their treasures, wealthy landowners realized that it was more practical to bring all their property and goods to their afterlife in the form of models. Pottery models of genuine items - animals, sheepfolds, granaries, barns, mills and even houses - were made to take the place of real items. The example shown here is a model grain mill.

Dog Figure
陶犬
Earthenware carving
China
Han dynasty, 206 BCE-220 CE

Gift from Mr. Julian Gardner
DUROM.1999.119

Cockerel Figure
陶鸡
Earthenware carving with incision
China
Han dynasty, 206 BCE-220 CE

Gift from Mr. Julian Gardner
DUROM.1999.334

In tombs of the Western Han dynasty (206 BCE-8 CE), pottery figures of animals are often found among real animal bones. Chickens, pigs, oxen, sheep and horses appear to have been the most common animal sacrifices.

This figure of a dog could have been buried as a replacement for a real dog, or buried along with a sacrificial animal. The fierce expression is designed to show that he had been a faithful companion to his master.

The cockerel is a fighting cock with its wings slightly raised and tail dropped. The feathers of the wings and tail have been outlined using grooves.

Rhinoceros Figure

红陶犀

Earthenware carving
China
Southern and Northern dynasties, 420-581 CE

De Laszlo Collection
DUROM.1992.90

This highly stylised rhinoceros figure is distinguished by a row of spines along the back of its head. The figure could have been buried in a tomb as a guardian. However, by this time rhinos were extinct in China and it obvious that the creator of this model had never seen an actual rhino.
Rhinos were considered as auspicious in ancient China. This is probably one of the reasons why rhino horns were used as medicine.

Pig sty model

灰陶猪舍

Earthenware with incised decoration and white pigment
China, Han dynasty, 206 BCE-220 CE
Macdonald Collection

DUROM.1969.333

The modelling of this pigsty is very detailed. The roofed shed has two large doors leading outside and one mushroom-shaped feeding hole at floor level. The wall is decorated with an incised design to imitate the wooden walls and the ridged roof is carved to simulate lines of roof tiles. Ancient Chinese believed that the more realistic tomb models were, the better they would serve in the afterlife. For this reason, even small models were made with great attention to detail. Human figures, as the most important tomb models, were sometimes made with movable joints, different facial expressions, and even dressed in textiles.

Hill Jar (Lian)

黃釉博山奩

Earthenware with yellow glaze and relief decoration

China

Han dynasty, 206 BCE-220 CE

Ronald Bullock Bequest
DUROM.1998.18

The cover of this jar is modelled as a mountain range. Its central peak is enclosed by four further peaks and valleys, each decorated with an additional animal, including a boar, tiger, goat and peacock. The distinctive design gives the name to this type of container — Boshan (mountain range), or hill jar in English.

The hill jar reflects the preoccupation in Daosim with a belief in Paradise. The mountains, believed to be a bridge between the earth and heaven, leading people to immortality, have continued to be a popular motif in Chinese art since this time.

Ding incense burner

绿釉鼎

Earthenware with green glaze
China
Han dynasty, 206 BCE-220 CE

De Laszlo Collection
DUROM.1992.107

The shape of this incense burner is derived from the ancient bronze Ding ritual vessel: a deep, circular vessel standing on three legs, used for cooking meat and making food offerings to ancestors. Instead of cooking, this pottery Ding was used for burning incense sticks.

Incense burning, dating back as early as the Zhou dynasty (1046-221 BCE), remains a very common practice in Chinese ritual and religious traditions. It is practiced in the worship of heaven, ancestors, gods, immortals, ghosts and nature.

Vase

绿釉壶

Earthenware with green glaze
China
Han dynasty, 206 BCE-220 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.5

This vase is decorated with parallel lines and covered with a crackled green glaze. The pale green colour is achieved by applying a lead-based glaze.

Archaeological finds indicate that the use of lead glaze can be dated back to Shang and Zhou dynasties (1600-221 BCE). The technique

developed rapidly during the Han dynasty, particularly during the Emperor Xuandi's reign (73-49 BCE). However, most lead glazed pottery objects dating to the Han dynasty are burial items, probably because they were not suitable for practical use.

Relief brick

建宁飞马画像砖

Fired clay with relief decoration
China
Han dynasty, Jianning reign, 168-171 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.39

The inscription on this brick dates to the first year of the Jianning reign during the Han dynasty. The identity of the figure on the brick is not revealed, the two characters above him read Feima (flying horse).

Mural and brick reliefs were used to decorate tombs at this time. They usually depict immortals, Confucian ideals or celebrate the moral life of the deceased.

Horse's Head Figure

陶马首

Earthenware with white pigment
China
Han dynasty, 206 BCE-220 CE

Ronald Bullock Bequest
DUROM.1998.20

This earthenware horse's head was probably once part of a complete figure of a horse. Its vivid eyes and nostrils are prominent. White paint lines over the head indicate a bridle harness.

Cocoon shaped jar
Earthenware with painted polychrome decoration
China
Han dynasty, 206 BCE-220 CE

Gift of Dr GH Manley
DUROM.2013.121

The distinctive shape of this jar mimics a silkworm's cocoon. The silk industry was a major source of wealth in China during the Han dynasty.

It is thought that the black and red decoration seen on jars of this type mimics lacquerware of the period and that jars like this were made in earthenware as tomb goods to substitute for the more expensive lacquer objects used in life.

Period of Disunity

Relief brick

凤纹砖

Earthenware with painted and relief decoration
China
Southern dynasties,
420-589 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1967.38

This tomb tile is decorated with a phoenix design in relief, and painted in unfired colour. There is a large phoenix in the centre, standing with its wings and tail feathers extended to the frame of the tile. On the sides, there are small birds including a small phoenix, a crane, a pheasant and four other unnamed birds. Tomb tiles of similar form were found in Henan province.

Jar

越窑青釉蒲纹四系罐

Stoneware with olive-green glaze, Yue ware
China, Zhejiang province
Three Kingdoms period, 220-280 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.10

The Yue kilns are located in northeast Zhejiang province. Their history can be traced back to the Eastern Han dynasty (25-220 CE). This jar is a typical Yue celadon of the Three Kingdoms period. It is covered with a thin, decomposed olive-green glaze. The shoulder is decorated with a band of impressed decoration known as the pu (straw-mat) pattern.

Yue wares represented the highest quality of celadon ceramics in ancient China until the Song dynasty (960-1279 CE) when the ceramic industry flourished. During the Song, Longquan celadon and Yaozhou wares (often referred to as Northern Celadon) rose to prominence and replaced Yue wares.

Huzi Bedpan
越窑青釉虎子
Stoneware with blue-green glaze, Yue ware
China, Zhejiang province
Three Kingdoms period, 220-280 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.9

This ceramic container is modelled as a tiger or a lion. The shape gives the name Huzi (tiger) to this type of object.

The function of Huzi is said to be either as a water container or a bedpan. The latter theory is becoming more popular because existing examples of Huzi have only been found in the tombs of men. In addition, the object type is mentioned as a bedpan in some Han dynasty texts.

Spittoon

越窑系青釉唾壶

Stoneware with yellow-green glaze, Yue-type ware
China, Hunan province
Tang dynasty to Five dynasties period, circa 700-900 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.311

The Yue kilns were located in northeast Zhejiang province. Many kilns in the neighbouring area adopted the Yue ware style, forming a Yue-type system. This spittoon was produced at a kiln in Hunan province that adopted the Yue style.

The spittoon became a common burial item in the Period of Disunity (420-581 CE). Its shape evolved over time. The early form had an elegant trumpet mouth which is shown on this Tang dynasty example.

Bo Bowl

越窑系青釉钵

Stoneware with yellow-green glaze, Yue-type ware
China, Hunan province
Five dynasties period, 907-960 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.15

This large Bo bowl has a globular body which is slightly compressed. Its shape is derived from a monk's food bowl although large examples like this one were probably used for storage. Bo bowls

were made in several Neolithic cultures located in Shandong, Hebei, Henan and Shannxi provinces. The shape was exceptionally popular during the period from the Han dynasty to the Southern dynasties period (206 BCE-581 CE).

There are five spur marks inside this bowl, suggesting that it was fired with another object stacked inside.

Dish
越窑系青釉花口碟
Stoneware with crackled blue-green glaze, Yue-type ware
China, Zhejiang province
Tang dynasty, about 600-700 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.13

The petal-shape design on the rim of this dish emerged during the Tang dynasty and has traditionally been considered as an imported design inspired by silverware made in Central Asia. However, latest scholarship suggests that the primary purpose for the adoption of this design was to increase productivity, as minor distortions can be concealed by the shape of the lobbed rim.

Sui and Tang dynasties

Vase
白釉龙耳瓶
Stoneware with white glaze
China
Tang dynasty, 618-907 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.14

This earthenware vase is covered with a thin and crackled cream glaze. The vase handles are shaped as dragon heads which clamp the rim of the vase in their gaping jaws. The shape of this vase is derived from an earlier type—Fengshou ping (Phoenix-head vase), which is introduced from the Sassanid Empire of Persia.

Bowl
越窑系青釉花式碗
Stoneware with yellow-green glaze, Yue-type ware
China, Hunan province
Five dynasties, 907-960 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.310

In the Tang dynasty (618-907 CE), the development of the Yue kilns reached a peak. Many of the best products were offered as tribute to the imperial court.

What made the Yue wares so prestigious was their blue-green glaze colour. The colour found favour among the Chinese because it

resembles the colour of jade - the revered hardstone that represented the highest moral and Confucian ethics. The late Tang poets even described the best Yue wares as Mise ci — ceramics of the secret colour.

Bowl
刑窑系白釉花式碗
Stoneware with white glaze, Xing-type ware
China, Hebei province
Tang dynasty, 618-907 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.37.B

While the Yue celadon dominated southern China, the Xing white-glazed ceramics gained equal fame in the north. Unlike the luxurious three-colours ware or the mysterious ’secret colour’ ware, Xing wares were widely used in ordinary households across China, and were exported to other oriental countries.

This bowl shows an example of the whiteness of Xing wares, which is said to be ‘as white as snow’. The bowl is hardly decorated apart from its foliated rims.

Bowl
邢窑系白釉唇口碗
Stoneware with white glaze,
Xing-type ware.
China, Hebei province
Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms, 907-960 CE

Macdonald Collection
Durom.1969.37.A

The making of white-glazed ware was a significant innovation in the history of ceramic production. The method involves coating a white core with a clear glaze. To achieve the purest white colour, the iron content in the body and glaze must be minimized.

White-glazed wares unearthed in a tomb dating to the Northern dynasties, Northern Qi state (575 CE) provide material evidence of early success in making white-glazed wares. Nonetheless, the maturity of this technique is marked by the Xing kilns at Hebei province, Neiqiu, in the Tang dynasty.

Bowl
花瓷碗
Stoneware with suffused blue-black glaze, flower ware
China
Tang dynasty, 618-907 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.36

The colour of the thick glaze on this bowl ranges from olive brown to black with opalescent streaky splashes. The patterns are formed by splashes of extra colours on top of the black glaze, and the colours flow and suffuse with the black glaze during firing. Ceramics produced with this technique are called Huaci (flower ware).

Cup

绞胎杯

Earthenware, kneaded-biscuit ware
China, Tang dynasty, 618-907 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.29.A

This cup is decorated with a unique, marblised pattern which is called Jiaotai (kneaded-biscuit) style. Craftsman mixed various type of clays, cut them into pieces, and moulded objects with these mixtures. The clays reveal different colours after firing, creating a natural layered effect.

The earliest kneaded-biscuit ware appeared in the Tang dynasty, and the technique gradually disappeared during the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368 CE). There is a theory that the invention of this technique was associated with the import of marblised glass from West Asia.

Warrior Figure

彩绘武官俑

Earthenware with painted and gilt decoration
China
Tang dynasty, 618-906 CE

De Laszlo Collection
DUROM.2001.190

This figure depicts a general. He is wearing a helmet and armour, and has a compelling expression with his eyes wide open and eyebrows raised. The material and construction of his armour is represented by painted lines and gold inlay.

A figure of this kind would have been placed in a tomb as a guardian.

Candle holder

三彩烛台

Earthenware with green and amber decoration, three-colours style
China, north
Early to mid Tang dynasty, about 650-800 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.252

This magnificent candle holder is decorated with green and amber splashes on a buff-cream body. This style of decoration is best known as the Sancai (three-colours) style, an innovation that occurred in early Tang dynasty (650-683 CE).

Three-colours ware was primarily made for tombs. This candle holder was once buried with utensils and terracotta models for the use of their owner in the afterlife.

Tomb figure of a horse

三彩马

Earthenware covered with cream slip and lead glaze
China, Tang dynasty, 618-906 CE

Bequest of Prof H Proctor-Gregg
DUROM.1980.14

This model of a standing horse is decked in harness ornaments. It is decorated in the distinctive three-colours style.

This kind of model would have been placed in a tomb to ensure that the owner had such a horse at their disposal in the afterlife.

Dish
三彩碟
Earthenware with blue and
amber decoration, three-colours style
China, north
Early to mid Tang dynasty,
about 650-800 CE

De Laszlo Collection
DUROM.1992.110.A-B

Three-colours ware is famous for being the first polychrome glaze in the history of Chinese ceramic production. The bright colours - amber, green and blue - are created using different metal-oxide colorants in the lead glaze.

While the amber and green glazes were invented by earlier Chinese potters, the cobalt blue colour was imported from Persia. For this reason three-colours wares with blue colour were particularly valued.

Dish with lid
三彩盖盒
Earthenware, with green and amber decoration, three-colours style
China, north
Early to mid Tang dynasty, about 650-800 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.21.A-B

The popularity of three-colours ware (Sancai) during the Tang dynasty resulted from the lavish burial customs of the time, when prosperity and foreign interaction boosted diversity in all forms of art.

Most three-colours burial pottery has been discovered in Xi'an and in Luoyang, which were the two most important cities of the Tang dynasty. Three-colour ware was so loved by the nobility that the Tang court attempted to restrict the use of the items. However, many members of the nobility and even ordinary people attempted to break the rule.

At the same time, three-colour wares were exported via the Silk Road and along the coastline. They are found in Indonesia, Korea, Japan, Iraq, and Egypt. Inspired by the Tang three-colours wares, local potters in these countries created three-colours wares of their own style.

Interestingly, despite the beauty of these objects, the collecting of Tang three-colours didn't happen in China until the beginning of twentieth century. Before that, Tang Three-colours objects were seen as inauspicious because of their association with death and burial.

Dish

三彩宝相花纹三足碟

Earthenware, with green and amber decoration, three-colours style
China, north
Early to mid Tang dynasty, about 650-800 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.273

The central decoration on this dish is called the Baoxiang flower motif. The shape is derived from an eight-petal lotus. The design often appears on gold and silverware, stone-carving, embroidery and ceramics during the Tang dynasty.

The use of floral patterns became popular from the Period of Disunity (220-581 CE) as from this point onwards Buddhism dominated the spiritual world in China. The lotus, as a significant piece of Buddhist iconography, became a major motif in many forms of art.

Song Dynasty

Bowl

定窑牙白釉铜扣刻花

鸳鸯戏水纹大碗

Porcelain with ivory-white glaze and carved decoration, Ding ware
China, Hebei province, Quyang
Song dynasty, about 900-1000 CE.

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.40

Dish

定窑白釉铜扣刻花莲花纹碟

Porcelain with ivory-white glaze and carved decoration, bound with copper, Ding ware
China, Hebei province, Quyang
Song dynasty, about 1000-1200 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.46.A

This bowl and dish are both covered with a transparent, ivory-toned glaze. The rims are bound with copper. These are the typical features of high-fired white-glazed ceramics made in the Ding kilns.

Located in Quyang, Hebei province, the Ding kilns began operating in mid to late Tang dynasty (900-1000 CE). In the Northern Song dynasty (960-1127 CE), Ding wares were used in the Imperial court. Production at Ding kilns continued into the Jin and the Yuan dynasties, and had a great influence on some other kiln sites such as the Jingdezhen kilns.

After 1000 CE a new technique was invented in the Ding kilns — bowls and dishes were fired upside down in stepped saggers (containers) to prevent the thin porcelain from warping during firing. Because of this the rim of the objects was left unglazed. They were often bound with a metal band after firing.

Among the more than 400 Chinese ceramics that the Rt Hon Malcolm MacDonald gave to the Oriental Museum his favourite piece was the Ding ware bowl displayed here.

The bowl is carved with a pair of mandarin ducks which symbolise happy marriage. Its pure, ivory-toned glaze and simple, elegant shape represent the highest quality and beauty of Chinese ceramics. Of this piece Macdonald wrote that sometimes:

'…the wisest way to spend money is on some object of irresistible beauty which is so commercially valuable that you cannot possibly afford to buy it, but also so aesthetically priceless that you cannot afford not to buy it. If you fail to get it, its ghost haunts you for ever afterwards… if I owned no other piece of Chinese porcelain, I should still be a proud and satisfied collector.'

MacDonald purchased this bowl during a trip to Hong Kong. He obtained many pieces in Hong Kong from art dealers who had moved from the communist People's Republic of China to the capitalist British colony. This amused MacDonald's friend and China's Foreign Minister, Chen Yi. Chen Yi shared the same birthday as MacDonald. They met many times and became firm friends, referring to each other as their 'twin'.

Chen Yi once joked that Malcolm must be a very big capitalist to own such a collection of Chinese ceramics, including pieces such as this bowl. Malcolm replied that it was communism which had made his collection possible by causing so many art dealers to seek relocate to

Hong Kong. As a symbol of their friendship, Malcolm gave Chen Yi a cheque for the funds to buy a similarly beautiful piece for the National Museum in Beijing.

Dish

钧窑月白釉紫斑碟

Stoneware with sky blue glaze and lavender splashes, Jun ware
China, Henan province, Yuxian
Northern Song dynasty, 960-1127 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.91

Potters at the Jun kilns decorated their heavy stoneware with a thick, opalescent glaze containing copper or iron based colourants. After firing, this glaze reveals a luminescent, light blue appearance, while the colorants create flamboyant markings ranging from lavender to copper red.

These vessels were made in large quantities at many kiln sites. Production started in the late Northern Song dynasty and continued into the Ming (1368-1644 CE).

Vase
仿官釉青釉八方瓶
Stoneware with greyish
blue-green glaze
Date unknown

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.123

This small vase features a smooth, pale, greyish blue-green glaze that shows the dark biscuit at the rim and ridges. It is probably a later reproduction of a Song dynasty Guan ware.

The Guan kiln (imperial kiln) was set up in Henan province by the Song dynasty Emperor Huizong (reigned 1101-1119 CE) to produce the best ceramics for his palace. The kilns made a range of writing tools and decorative objects based on traditional shapes.

Incursions by northern nomadic tribes, forced the Song imperial court to flee to the south in 1127 CE. This marks the beginning of the Southern Song dynasty, whose capital was at Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. The imperial kiln was also moved to Hangzhou, and the name Guanyao (imperial kiln) was carried on by this new kiln.

Dish
龙泉窑梅子青釉开片
贴花双鱼纹洗
Stoneware with crackled, pale blue-green glaze and applied-relief decoration, Longquan ware
China, Zhejiang province, Longquan
Southern Song dynasty, 1127-1279 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.103

Dish

龙泉窑粉青釉贴花牡丹筒炉

Stoneware with blue-green glaze and applied-relief decoration, Longquan ware
China, Zhejiang province, Longquan
Late Song to early Yuan dynasty, about 1250-1300 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.106

Longquan wares reflect the persistent love for jade among the Chinese. During the Northern Song dynasty (960-1127 CE), the Longquan potters experimented with different clays, glaze recipes and firing conditions in the hope of making ceramics in a perfect likeness of jade.

This shallow dish is decorated with a pair of fish in applied relief at the centre. It is called the Shuangyu xi (double-fish washer) and is a characteristic type among Longquan ceramics. The incense burner is decorated with a similar applied-relief technique.

During the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279 CE), production at the Longquan kilns reached a very high quality. A range of celadon colours, such as the Meizi qing (plum blue-green) and Fen qing (pale blue-green), were invented. However, the thickness of these glazes limited the use of decorative techniques such as carving or incision and so most Longquan wares made around this time are decorated with applied-relief.

Bowl

青白印花穿花双凤纹碗

Porcelain with pale blue-white glaze and impressed decoration, Qingbai style
China, south
Song to Yuan dynasty, 960-1368 CE

Dorothy Crawford Pape Bequest
DUROM.1995.52

Qingbai wares have a distinctive white glaze with a blue-green tint. Produced at several kilns in the south-east of China, it has been argued that it was the first type of porcelain to be produced on a very large scale. It was not a high prestige ware. It was purchased by middle-ranking Chinese, mostly for burial wares, and also made for export. The blue-green tinge is produced by firing in a wood-fired kiln. It contrasts with the creamy finish of Ding wares produced in hotter coal fired kilns.

The decoration on this bowl is applied using a mould impression. This technique matured around the Song dynasty (about 1000-1100 CE) at the Ding kilns and went on to influence many contemporary kilns. This technique utilises decorative moulds made in ceramic or other materials. The mould is pressed into the unfired ceramic leaving behind the pattern. The technique freed the potters from highly demanding free-hand decorative work, thus greatly increasing productivity.

Dish
哥窑粉青釉葵口碟
Stoneware with crackled blue-green glaze, Ge ware
China, Zhejiang province
Song-Yuan dynasty, about 1200-1400 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.121

This dish bears no decoration other than the smooth, even glaze featuring gold and iron-coloured crackles. It was produced at the Ge kiln, which is perhaps the most mysterious kiln site in the history of Chinese ceramics. The name Ge kiln literally means 'the kiln of the elder brother'. Two historic documents dated to the middle of the Ming dynasty (1561-1566 CE) record the origin of the Ge kiln.

They suggest that during the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279 CE), there were two brothers who lived in the Longquan region of Zhejiang province. The elder brother established his own kiln and named it the Ge kiln after himself, while the younger brother established his kiln and named it the Longquan kiln after the name of the place.

Later ceramic lovers said that the characteristic gold-and iron-coloured crackles on Ge wares came about because the younger brother was jealous of his older brother's achievement. He added cold water into the kiln during firing, hoping to ruin the ceramics. The sudden drop of temperature caused by the cold water brought out glaze crackles, yet the crackles were so beautiful that they became a distinctive style.

As vivid as the story is, the actual location of the Ge kiln remains unknown. Apart from the two Ming dynasty books, no other reference to the Ge kiln and its relationship with the Longquan kiln

has been found. The failure of modern archaeologists to find the actual kiln site further adds to the difficulty in clearly identifying the origins of the Ge wares.

Meiping Vase
磁州窑黑釉剔花填白彩
牡丹纹梅瓶
Stoneware with black and white slip and sgraffito decoration, Cizhou ware
China, Hebei province, Cixian
Song dynasty, 960-1127CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.253

The Cizhou kilns in Hebei province feature a style of decoration executed chiefly in black or white slip under a transparent glaze.

A characteristic style of Cizhou ware is the sgraffito technique shown on this Meiping vase. The pot is covered with a white slip and a black glaze is applied on top. Part of the black glaze is then cut off to create a design in contrasting colours.

Meiping means plum-blossom vase. The term comes from the neck which is so narrow that only a single plum branch can fit in.

Cockscomb Flask

绿釉刻花花草纹鸡冠壶

Stoneware with green glaze and incised decoration
China, Liaoning province
Liao dynasty, 916-1125 CE

De Laszlo Collection
DUROM.1992.113

This flask is called Jiguan hu (Cockscomb Flask) because of the shape of its raised handle.
The shape is an imitation of the leather bottle which was used by the Tatar people of the north east Gobi desert. The cockscomb flask is a characteristic shape of the Liao dynasty.

Bowl

吉州窑剪纸贴花凤凰纹碗

Stoneware with black glaze and brown decoration, Jizhou ware
China, Jiangxi province, Yonghe
Song dynasty, 960-1279 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.64

Bowl

吉州窑黑釉褐彩兰草纹碗

Stoneware with black glaze and brown decoration, Jizhou ware
China, Jiangxi province, Yonghe
Song dynasty, 960-1279 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.308

Made for ordinary people rather than the imperial court, Jizhou wares borrowed design elements and decorative techniques from folk art.

The first bowl shown here is a good example of this style. The inside is decorated with three phoenix. They are created by adhering pieces of cut paper onto the brown glaze, then applying another layer of buff-yellow glaze over the top. When the paper-cuts are removed, the brown glaze shows. Paper-cutting is a typical form of folk art, practiced by female villagers who use it to decorate houses for weddings and other occasions. The Jizhou potters adhered paper-cuts either on top of or underneath glazes to create diverse effects.

The second bowl is an example of Jizhou ware without the paper-cut decoration.

Tea bowl

建窑黑釉兔毫盏

Stoneware with black glaze and brown decoration, Jian ware
China, Fujian province, Jianyang
Song dynasty, 960-1279 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.77.B

Jar

黑釉银彩莲纹罐

Stoneware with black glaze and silver decoration
China, north
Jin dynasty, 1115-1234 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.85

The brown streaks on this bowl are called the Tuhao (hare's fur) effect. It is the most famous style of the black-glazed tea-ware produced at the Jian kilns, Fujian province.

The rise of the black-glazed Jian tea-ware in the Song dynasty was a result of a fashion for tea drinking and the 'tea game'. Every spring, tea farmers and tea masters competed to see who had the finest quality tea in the tea game, called Doucha.

The Song tea masters used powdered tea leaves to make tea, using a method which produces bubbles in the tea. The colour of these bubbles was one of the crucial tests used for evaluating the quality of tea: the whiter, the better. For this reason black-glazed tea-ware became popular as it enhanced the whiteness of the bubbles.

The tea game was so popular that even Emperor Huizong (reigned 1101-1119 CE) became involved. In a book he wrote: ‘the tea-ware should better be green-black, and Hare’s Fur is the finest.’

The jar shown here demonstrates that black-glazed wares were also used for other purposes as well as for objects relating to tea-making.

Dish

耀州窑青釉刻花牡丹纹碟

Stoneware with olive-green glaze and carved decoration, Yaozhou ware
China, Shannxi province, Tongchuan
Song dynasty, 960-1279 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.117

This dish, carved with patterns of peonies - a symbol of prosperity - is an example of Yaozhou ware, which was favoured by the Song imperial court.

Yaozhou wares were made to a very high standard. The shapes were considered neat and refined, the patterns favoured for being sharp and compact, and the evenness of the olive-celadon glaze was greatly admired. They are often referred to as ’Northern Celadon’ as the Yaozhou kilns were the largest production base of celadon ceramics in northern China.

Yuan Dynasty

Ding Incense burner

龙泉窑青釉鱼耳鼎式炉

Stoneware with blue-green glaze, Longquan ware

China, Zhejiang province, Longquan

Yuan dynasty, 1271-1368 CE

Macdonald Collection

DUROM.1969.264

This Ding-shaped incense burner has only minimal decoration apart from its handles which are shaped into a pair of fish.

Incense burners played an important part in many ritual ceremonies. Following the teaching of Confucius, Chinese respect the past and worship their ancestors. In many households, an incense burner and a pair of vases, sometimes along with other offerings, are placed in front of the ancestor's portrait or a tablet with his/her name inscribed on it. Incense burners are also used in temples, and these are usually much larger.

The burner, whether big or small, is half filled with sand and incense sticks (usually as a set of three) are burned in it.

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.108

Jar with lid

龙泉窑青釉点褐彩小罐

Stoneware with blue-green glaze and iron brown splashes, Longqun ware
China, Zhejiang province, Longqun
Yuan dynasty, 1271-1368 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.258

Vase

龙泉窑青釉划花草纹长颈瓶

Stoneware with olive-green glaze and incised decoration,
Longquan ware
China, Zhejiang province, Longquan
Yuan dynasty,
1271-1368 CE

During the Yuan dynasty, the Longquan kilns introduced new decorative techniques. One example is shown in this small jar which is covered with in a distinctive blue-green glaze and decorated with splashes of an iron overglaze.

Another innovation was the creation of incised decoration on a thick celadon glaze –a technique which potters in the earlier Song dynasty (907-1279 CE) had found difficult to achieve. Once it had been perfected, the Longquan potters enthusiastically adopted the technique. Many items made at this time, such as the vase shown here, are heavily decorated with incised patterns.

Despite advances in decorative techniques, the overall quality of Longquan wares started to decline during this period due to a lack of good raw materials. For example, the celadon glaze on this vase is thin and dull, and has an olive-green tone rather than a more jade-like finish.

Bowl

青白篦划花草纹花口碗

Porcelain with pale blue–white glaze and incised decoration, Qingbai style
China, south
Late Song dynasty to Yuan dynasty, about 1250-1350 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.54

This pale blue-white glazed bowl is called Qingbai ware. It was invented at the Jingdezhen kilns during the Southern Song period. Qingbai ware is often referred to as Yingqing which means ‘shadow of blue-green’.

The invention of Qingbai ware is believed to have been the result of attempts to create something to substitute for white jade. At the centre of this bowl, the glaze runs thick between the incised decoration and the blue tint is especially evident.

Stem cup

枢府式卵白釉暗花戏珠龙纹高足杯

Porcelain with egg-white glaze on carved decoration, Shufu ware
China, Jiangxi province
Yuan dynasty, 1271-1368 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.141

This stem cup is covered with a fine egg-white glaze. The sides are decorated with a pair of dragons chasing a flaming pearl. The

porcelain and the glaze are so thin and delicate that the patterns can be seen through the sides under strong light.

Using Qingbai glaze as a starting point, the egg-white glaze was first created at the Jingdezhen kilns during the Yuan dynasty. Some objects of this type are marked with the characters ‘Shufu’ which refers to an imperial agency of the military. For this reason the egg-white glazed wares have become known as Shufu ware. The Shufu mark also appears on some Qingbai wares.

The Yuan imperial family were of Mongolian origin. They greatly valued the colour white as a symbol of majesty, morality and purity. That is why the Qingbai ware and Shufu ware were selected for use by an imperial agency.

Jar

钧窑月白釉紫斑双系罐

Stoneware with moon-white glaze and lavender splash, Jun ware
China, Henan province, Yuxian
Yuan dynasty, 1271-1368 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.89

This jar is covered with a thick moon-white glaze and decorated with a large splash of violet which shades off into greenish grey.

During the Yuan dynasty, potters at the Jun kiln became very adept at controlling the appearance of the flamboyant glaze which gives the brilliant violet colour on this jar. However, many Chinese connoisseurs still regard Yuan style Jun wares as being too stiff.

Jar

磁州窑白地黑彩山水高士图罐

Stoneware with white slip and black decoration, Cizhou ware
China, Hebei province, Cixian
Yuan dynasty, 1271-1368 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.72

The painted decoration on this jar shows two men gazing towards pine-forested mountains. The mountains are surrounded by cloud scrolls, suggesting that they are not ordinary landscapes but immortal dwellings. The men are longing for a life in the distant tranquil mountains where they can explore the Dao (pathway of truth) through the nature.

The design of ceramic decoration has often been influenced by other forms of art, especially traditional painting. This picture reflects a transition in the artistic philosophy of Chinese scholarly arts.

In the earlier Song dynasty (960-1279 CE), so-called 'literati arts' had become the fashion, with a focus on the expression of emotions through landscape painting. During the Yuan dynasty, Chinese Intellectuals were denied access to the imperial court under the Mongolian monarch. Many of them found comfort in nature, especially in the mountains. For this reason, the tradition of landscape painting continued and began to dominate the Chinese artistic tradition world with its emphasis on seclusion and solitude.

Ming Dynasty

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.341

Dou vessel

宣德款青花缠枝百合纹豆

Porcelain with underglaze blue decoration, Blue-and-white style
China, Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen
Ming dynasty, Xuande reign, 1425-1435CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.221

Bowl

宣德款青花四季花卉纹合碗

Porcelain with underglaze blue decoration, Blue-and-white style
China, Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen
Ming dynasty, Xuande reign, 1425-1435 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.275

Plate

青花把莲纹盘

Porcelain with underglaze blue decoration, Blue-and-white style
China, Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen
Ming dynasty, Xuande reign, 1425-1435 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.220

Bowl

青花花果纹卧足碗

Porcelain with underglaze blue decoration, Blue-and-white style
China, Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen
Ming dynasty, Yongle reign, 1402-1424 CE

Blue-and-white porcelain (Qinghua ci) is perhaps the best-known Chinese porcelain. The principle of its production is straightforward: the porcelain is painted with cobalt blue colour and covered with a clear glaze, then high-fired at about 1300°C. While the theory is simple, the actual execution is much more difficult and it took 400 years to perfect the technique.

The earliest blue-and-white ceramics emerged in the Tang dynasty (during 9-10th centuries CE) at Gongxian kilns, Henan province. The blue colour was created using Persian cobalt blue which also gave the blue for Tang three-colours (sancai) ware. Tang dynasty blue-and-white ceramics were exported to the Middle East and exerted a great influence on local potters. However, the technique declined in China itself and although samples of Song dynasty (10-13th century CE) blue-and-white ceramics do exist, their quality is not comparable to the Tang examples.

Around 1320, the manufacture of Chinese blue-and-white porcelain was restarted at the Jingdezhen kilns, Jiangxi province. In the next 70 years, Jingdezhen blue-and-white porcelain had come to dominate the production of Chinese porcelain. Contact with the Middle East during the Ming dynasty boosted demand for blue-and-white porcelain for export and the corresponding need to increase imports of cobalt to China.

During the Yongle to Xuande reigns (1402-1424 CE), blue-and-white porcelains reached a very high level of quality and aesthetic value. Of the four pieces shown here the plate is considered to be of particularly high quality. It is decorated in cobalt blue colour with a twisted flower design. The clear, blue-tinted glaze brings out the whiteness of the porcelain, which in turn enhances the brilliant blue colour of the decoration. The patterns bear iron spots in places where the blue colour runs thick, and the outlines of patterns slightly disperse.

Stem cup

雍正款青花杂八宝纹高足杯

Porcelain with underglaze blue decoration
China, Jiangxi province,
Jingdezhen
Qing dynasty, Yongzheng reign, 1723-1735 CE

MacDonald Collection
DUROM.1969.226.c

This thinly-potted porcelain stem cup is decorated on the exterior with the 'eight precious things' motif. This motif consists of 8 symbols; the jewel; the coin (a circle enclosing a square); the fangsheng panchang, (a lozenge with ribbons); the solid lozenge; the qing musical stone; the pair of books; the pair of horns, and the artemisia leaf.

Each of these symbols has a different meaning. For example, the jewel represents beauty, the coin is said to be used for removing evil spirits, the fangsheng panchang lozenge for marital harmony and the qing musical stone symbolises celebration.

Emerging in the Song dynasty (960-1279 CE), the eight precious things motif has had various combinations of auspicious symbols

over time so that the total number of symbols involved is far more than eight.

Chinese art also uses the eight Buddhist emblems and the eight Daoist emblems, which are combinations of religious symbols. The three ‘Eight Emblems’ motifs are popular decorative patterns on traditional Chinese artefacts.

Bulb bowl

钧窑天蓝釉鼓钉盆托
Stoneware with lavender and blue glaze, Jun ware
China, Henan province, Yuxian
Late Yuan—early Ming dynasty, around 1200-1400 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.86

This bowl is part of a group of Jun ware pieces which are thought to have been made for the imperial court in the late Yuan or early Ming dynasty. They are distinguished by being numbered on the base with a number from 1 to 10 which relates to the size of the piece, with 1 being the largest and 10 the smallest.

It is believed that these bowls were used to display bulbs or other flowers, with the number helping to indicate the type of plant that it would be suitable to hold. This piece bears the number 5.

These bulb bowls were held in high esteem in the Qing dynasty. The Qianlong Emperor (reigned 1736-95) was an admirer, and used them to decorate domestic areas in his palaces.

Plate

弘治款黄釉地青花栀子花纹盘

Porcelain, with yellow glaze and underglaze blue decoration
China, Jiangxi province,
Jingdezhen
Ming dynasty, Hongzhi reign, 1488-1505 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.142

The re-emergence of the blue-and-white technique during this period inspired various new styles as exemplified by this 'yellow-glaze grounded blue-and-white plate'. The plate is painted with underglaze blue-and-white decoration, covered with clear glaze and fired at about 1300°C.

The yellow glaze is then added on the surface with part of the glaze carved to reveal the patterns underneath. Finally, the plate is fired at a lower temperature.

Box

万历款五彩八宝戏珠龙纹盖盒

Porcelain with underglaze blue and overglaze polychrome decoration, five-colours style
China, Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen
Ming dynasty, Wanli reign, 1572-1620 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.149

This box is decorated with underglaze cobalt blue colour and overglaze red, yellow, green and sepia colours. This type of ware is

named the Wucai (five-colours). It was invented in the Xuande reign (1425-1435 CE) and flourished in the Wanli reign (1572-1620 CE).

The Wanli wucai wares are famous for their heavy, brilliant colour, even though the drawings are usually quite rough as shown on this box. These ceramics were extremely popular amongst foreign collectors, especially the Japanese who consider the Wanli wucai wares to be national treasures. Many imitations have been made by Japanese potters.

Lion figure

三彩狻猊型烛台

Stoneware with green and yellow glazes, three-colours style
China
Ming dynasty, about 1550-1650 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.277

This magnificent figure portrays the Buddhist mythical lion, Suanni. Decorated in three-colours style, this lion carries a large candle holder on its back and was probably created for use in a Buddhist temple. Stories about Suanni reached China with the introduction of Buddhism during the Eastern Han dynasty (25-220 CE). Believed to be one of the sons of the dragon, Suanni symbolises guardianship and power. He is thought to enjoy smoke and fire and so images of him are often found on Buddhist altars and incense burners.

Dish

正德款白釉地绿彩戏珠龙纹盘

Porcelain
China, Jiangxi province
Ming dynasty, Zhengde reign, 1505-1521 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.182

The dragon motif on this dish is called the Xizhulong motif, meaning ‘dragon chases the pearl’. The motif is most popular on ceramics dated to the Ming and the Qing dynasties (1368-1911 CE). The style of the dragon varied in different periods, often reflecting the cultural and political background of the time, but the general design remained the same.

Dish

宣德款冬青釉划花葵口洗

Porcelain with blue-green glaze and incised decoration
China, Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen
Ming dynasty, Xuande reign, 1425-1435 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.147

During the Ming dynasty, the imperial kilns at Jingdezhen began making imitations of Longquan ware. This tiny, shallow dish is called the xi (washer), which is used for brush-washing. It adopts the pale blue-green colour of Longquan ware, and is incised with the Lingzhi fungus motif which represents longevity. The reign mark on the surface says ‘Made in the great Ming dynasty, Xuande reign (1425-1435 CE)’.

Dish
正德款黄釉碟
Porcelain with yellow glaze
China, Jiangxi province
Date unknown

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.197

In Chinese tradition, yellow is a ritual colour dedicated to the Earth, agriculture and Sericulture (silk farming). In the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1911 CE), yellow was considered a symbol of majesty and was specifically used on objects made for the emperor. For example, the emperor's dragon robe was yellow, while those made for the princes could only be deep blue or red.

This yellow dish was used for ritual ceremonies in the imperial palace. Yellow monochrome porcelains are often referred to as the Imperial Yellow ware by Western collectors.

Dish
宣德款红釉碟
Porcelain
China, Jiangxi province
Qing dynasty, Kangxi reign, 1662-1722 CE

Dorothy Crawford Pape Bequest
DUROM.1995.33

Ceramics decorated with copper red glaze emerged in the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368 CE), and the technique matured in the Ming dynasty, Yongle reign (1402-1424 CE). The Ming imperial court advocated the colour red because the family name of the imperial family was Zhu, meaning red. For this reason red monochrome ceramics became the most important ritual wares in this period.

In the Xuande reign, potters managed to develop diverse shades of red, such as the ‘ruby red’, ‘ox-blood red’ and ‘sacrifice red’. This dish was made in the Qing dynasty, Kangxi reign - but it is marked as if it was made in the Xuande reign (1425-1435 CE) - as an imitation of the famous Xuande red monochrome ware.

Cup

白釉暗花莲瓣口杯

Porcelain with incised decoration
China
Ming dynasty, 1368-1644 CE

gift from the National Art Collections Fund from the bequest of F.W. Pierce
DUROM.1978.74

The very thin walls of this finely made cup allow light to travel through making the cup almost translucent. Incised into the sides of the cup is a floral motif in repeating spiralling panels. This type of incised decoration is called a hua 暗花, meaning ‘secret’ or ‘veiled’ decoration. Much used during the Song dynasty, this very subtle use of the technique became popular during the reign of the Yongle Emperor (1360-1424 CE) in the Ming dynasty and continued later.

Guanyin Figure

德化象牙白釉观音坐像

Porcelain with ivory-white glaze, Dehua ware
China, Fujian province, Dehua
Qing dynasty, circa 1700-1800

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.126

Lamp

德化象牙白釉灯盏

Porcelain with ivory-white glaze, Dehua ware
China, Fujian province, Dehua
Qing dynasty, circa 1700-1800

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.136.A-B

The Dehua kiln began operation in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644 CE). It is renowned for its pink-tinted or ivory-white, pure, and slightly light-transmitted glaze. Dehua ware appealed to European customers and it was named Blanc de Chine (Chinese white) by the French.

Another reason for the popularity of Dehua porcelain was its use for representations of Guanyin. Guanyin is a Buddhist bodhisattva (enlightened being) who found favour amongst Chinese believers for her merciful, gentle image, as is shown here: her eyes closed, crescent-shaped, the lips slightly raised, smiling. In fact, this image of Guanyin did not develop until the Ming dynasty. Early Chinese iconography of Guanyin had more in common with images of noble ladies in court paintings. During the Ming dynasty, the style of painting of beautiful women created a fashion that affected

representation of female images in other art forms leading to the development of what has become the characteristic way to represent Guanyin.

Apart from figurines, the Dehua kilns also produced utensils and household objects such as this lamp. While Jingdezhen ceramics are usually decorated with underglaze or overglaze colours on the blue-tinted, white body to create a strong contrast, the Dehua porcelain is usually plain, enhancing the pure ivory tone of the white glaze.

Qing Dynasty

Jue vessel

珐蓝釉爵

Porcelain with turquoise glaze
China, Jiangxi province
Qing dynasty, Kangxi reign, 1662-1722 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.174

This vessel is shaped to imitate an archaic bronze Jue cup. Ceramics made in ancient shapes and decorated with monochrome glazes were often used in ritual ceremonies during the Ming and Qing dynasties. This was because at the beginning of the Ming dynasty (about 1369 CE), the Ming emperor instructed that all ritual vessels should be ceramic rather than metal. This instruction began a tradition which was later systemized during the Qing dynasty, Yongzheng reign (1723-1735).

Ritual ceremonies were held very frequently in the Ming and the Qing dynasties. The subject of these ceremonies ranged from imperial affairs to ancestors, gods, spirits, agriculture, fortune and all aspects of nature. Ceramic vessels were used in sets for all of these ceremonies. The subject and location of a particular ceremony determined the types and colours of vessels used.

Stem bowl

雍正款霁蓝釉高足碗

Porcelain with blue glaze
China, Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen
Qing dynasty, Yongzheng reign, 1723-1735 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.180

The brilliant blue colour on this stem cup is made with cobalt fired under a high temperature between 1280°C-1300°C. This technique emerged in the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368CE), and blue wares made using this technique became a major type of imperial ware in the Ming and Qing dynasties. Their elegant colour has been compared to the gem stone sapphire.

Dish

雍正款黄釉锥花缠枝菊纹碟

Porcelain with yellow glaze on incised decoration
China, Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen
Qing dynasty, Yongzheng reign, 1723-1735 CE

MacDonald Collection
DUROM.1969.190.b

The ancient Chinese believed that the world was made from the interaction of the five elements: metal, wood, water, fire and earth. Yellow represents earth, which is central to food and silk production. Chinese people thought themselves to be the offspring of the 'yellow earth', therefore the colour became a symbol of kingship and power. In the Ming dynasty, the use of yellow was restricted by the imperial court. This continued into the Qing dynasty. This piece bears the mark of the Yongzheng Emperor. A subtle entwining chrysanthemum decoration is incised beneath the yellow glaze.

Incense burner

郎窑红釉簋式炉

Porcelain with red glaze
China, Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen
Qing dynasty, Kangxi reign, 1662-1722 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.209

During the Qing dynasty (1644-1911 CE), new ritual ceramics were commissioned for almost every ritual occasion. The high demand resulted in the production of a large quantity of monochrome wares.

Red monochromes were one of the most important types of ritual vessels. They were used for sacrificial ceremonies in the Temple of Sun, leading to the name 'Sacrifice Red' ware.

Between 1705 and 1712, Emperor Kangxi appointed Lang Tingji, the Jiangxi provincial governor, to supervise porcelain production at the Jingdezhen imperial kilns. Under Lang's supervision, the imperial kilns achieved very high quality in their production and some new types were invented, many recreating or imitating types from the Ming dynasty, Xuande reign (1425-1435 CE).

The Langyao hong (Lang kiln red monochrome) is the best example of these recreations. Known as sang de boeuf (bull's blood) by Western collectors, the Langyao hong wares bear the most brilliant, bright copper red glaze of all red monochromes.

Water pot

康熙款豇豆红釉水盛

Porcelain with red glaze
China, Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen
Qing dynasty, Kangxi reign, 1662-1722 CE

Dorothy Crawford Pape Bequest
DUROM.1995.28

This compressed-form water pot was probably made for a scholar's desk, storing water for use in writing and painting. It could also be used as a brush washer.

The pot is covered with pale, pinkish copper-red glaze with greyish-green spots. This is called the Jiangdou hong (cow pea-red) style in Chinese, but is more often referred to as the 'peach-bloom' glaze by Western collectors.

The Jiangdou hong glaze was introduced late in the Kangxi reign. It is renowned for its pale, tender tone. The appearance of the red glaze and the green spots are determined by the firing condition.

Vase

乾隆款胭脂水釉观音尊

Porcelain with pink enamel and gold
China, Jiangxi province
Qing dynasty, 1850-1912 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.371

This vase is called the Guanyin zun; it is covered with rose-pink glaze and gilt around the mouth. Creating an evenly-sprayed pink enamel (yanzhi shui you, literally 'rouge enamel') is very difficult.

This vase bears a Qianlong imperial mark (1736-1795 CE) but it is believed that the imperial kiln only used this glaze on small scale objects such as bowls or plates at that time, not on vases of this size. It is therefore thought that this piece actually dates to the latter half of the 19th century.

The shape resembles the bottle of the Bodhisattva (enlightened being) Guanyin. In Buddhist legend, the merciful Guanyin used a ceramic bottle to transfer water from the East China Sea, and saved the people from a severe drought. For this reason, Guanyin is often depicted with a bottle in her hand.

Vase

青花纏枝四季花卉纹

象首衔环耳瓶

Porcelain with underglaze blue decoration, blue-and-white style
China, Jiangxi province,
Jingdezhen
Qing dynasty, Qianlong reign, 1736-1795 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.230

The development of blue-and-white porcelain reached a second peak during the Qing dynasty, Kangxi reign (1662-1722 CE); the first having been during the Ming dynasty.

Jingdezhen potters perfected their skills in manipulating the appearance of cobalt pigment to produce different shades of blue. This development was then combined with techniques of traditional landscape painting. With a single type of cobalt blue pigment, the

potters managed to present a wide range of shades allowing them to depict diverse landscapes or scenes.

With improvements in production the emphasis moved towards recreating perfect examples of classic designs. For example, the twining flower design on the handled vase was designed in imitation of Ming dynasty, Yongle-Xuande period style (about 1400-1450 CE).

Bowl

雍正款釉里红五蝠纹撇口碗

Porcelain with underglaze red decoration, underglaze-red style
China, Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen
Qing dynasty, Yongzheng reign, 1723-1735 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.186.A

Pilgrim flask

乾隆款釉里红扁瓶

Porcelain with underglaze red decoration, underglaze-red style
China, Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen
Qing dynasty, Qianlong reign, 1736-1795 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.250

This bowl is an example of the pursuit of perfection at the Jingdezhen imperial kilns during the Yongzheng reign. It is decorated

with five bats in underglaze copper red, which is brilliant red shading into pale red at the edges.

This five-bat bowl is an excellent example of underglaze-red porcelain made in the Ming and the Qing dynasties (about 1400-1900 CE). The word Fu (bat) phonetically resembles the word blessing or happiness, and the five bats represent the five blessings: long life, fortune, tranquillity, a love for virtue, and a good end to crown one's life.

This pilgrim flask - also decorated in underglaze-red - adapts a classic design. Its flattened, globular shape dates from the early–middle Ming dynasty (1338-1500 CE) onwards. A similar form is called the Baoyue ping (precious-moon vase) by the Chinese as the body resembles the shape of a full moon.

Vase

乾隆款天蓝釉长颈瓶

Porcelain with light blue glaze
China, Jiangxi province
Qing dynasty, Qianlong reign, 1736-1795 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.201

This light-blue glaze emerged during the Qing dynasty, Kangxi reign (1644-1722 CE). The Chinese name for the glaze type is tianlan, meaning sky-blue, as a variation of the tianqing (pale-celadon) glaze. The fresh, pale, almost clear blue glaze is derived from the cobalt blue colour that is used on blue-and-white porcelains, showing a mature manipulation of the technique.

Figure
白釉善财童子立像
Porcelain sculpture with cream white glaze
China
Qing dynasty, 1644-1911 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.256

The Dehua kiln began operation in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644 CE). It is renowned for its pink-tinted or ivory-white glaze. The kiln was famed for its representations of the bodhisattva Guanyin, as seen in the Ming dynasty case to the left. This figure depicts Sudhana, the faithful follower and servant of Guanyin. He is presented as a young boy dressed in casual clothing, with a soft, gentle and approachable facial expression.

Modelling in porcelain is much more difficult than with courser clays. Potters need to be very highly skilled to achieve the high level of detail seen in pieces like this.

Bowl
乾隆款仿官窑月白釉葵口洗
Porcelain with crackle white glaze
China, Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen
Qing dynasty, Qianlong reign, 1736-1795 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.199.B

The imitation of Song dynasty Guan ware began in the Yongzheng reign (1723-1735 CE) and production was very successful. Many objects were made in archaic shapes and were not marked with a reign mark, intending to be a perfect copy of the authentic Guan wares.

One distinctive feature of Guan ware is the purple-toned rim and the deep-grey iron coloured foot, giving the name Zikou tiezu (purple mouth and iron foot). The original Song dynasty Guan ware was made with a dark biscuit (the clay core), with the glaze intentionally running thin at the rim, revealing the deep purple tone of the biscuit, while the unglazed foot is burnt deep grey.

As is shown on this bowl, the Qing dynasty imitations copied the same style. On some objects the mouth and the foot are covered with an extra layer of deep grey glaze to enhance the design.

Gourd vase

窑变釉扁葫芦瓶

Porcelain with suffused glaze
China, Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen
Qing dynasty, Qianlong reign, 1736-1795 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.433

In the Ming and the Qing dynasties, the Jingdezhen kilns recreated some famous glaze types of the Song dynasty (907-1279 CE), including Guan ware, Jun ware, Ge ware, Ru ware and Longquan ware.

The flamboyant glaze on this vase is inspired by Jun ware. The suffusing red, violet, blue and white colours are the result of various metallic colorants in the glaze.

The shape of the vase imitates a gourd, which symbolises happiness, fortune and married bliss. In ancient China, married couples drank wine from a gourd on their wedding day. The gourd was cut into two pieces and then tied with a red string before they drank. The two parts represented inheritance, support and virginity.

Bowl

康熙款素三彩海八怪纹碗

Porcelain with green, yellow and aubergine decoration, plain three-colours style
China, Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen
Qing dynasty, Kangxi reign, 1662-1722 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.165

Bowl

虎皮三彩折沿碗

Porcelain with green, yellow and aubergine decoration, tiger-fur three-colours style
China, Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen
Qing dynasty, Kangxi reign, 1662-1722 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.162.A

The first of these two bowls is decorated with green, yellow and aubergine enamels. The colour combination is inspired by the Tang dynasty (618-906 CE) Sancai (three-colours) wares. This type is called the Su Sancai (plain three-colours).

The gargoyle patterns on this bowl are known as the Sea Gargoyle motif. It includes a range of mythical animals such as unicorns, seahorses, lions and fish all chasing each other in a wavy representation of the sea.

Another form of the plain three-colour wares is the second bowl shown here. This brightly coloured bowl has green, yellow and aubergine colours in large patches. The pattern resembles animal fur thus this design is often called Hupi Sancai (tiger-fur three-colours).

Brush pot

五彩携琴访友图题诗文笔筒

Porcelain with overglaze polychrome decoration,
five-colours style
China, Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen
Qing dynasty, Kangxi reign, 1662-1722 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.265

New variations in the five-colours style became popular during the Kangxi reign. In particular the colour green often dominates the design. The designs also became more sophisticated and artistic. This group is named famille verte (the green family) by Westerners.

In the early Qing dynasty, many Chinese scholars despaired that the nation was being ruled by the Manchu. To encourage scholars to work for the Manchu court, Emperor Kangxi promoted traditional Chinese literati culture. This led to the popularity of long inscriptions on ceramics as seen here. The picture on this brush pot depicts a scholar meeting his friend or pupil. The inscriptions on the side praise the secluded life of the scholar and the pure spirit of the orchid flower.

Plate

雍正款粉彩加金彩仕女图盘

Porcelain with overglaze polychrome decoration, famille rose style
China, Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen
Qing dynasty, Yongzheng reign, 1723-1735 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.267.A

This delicate, pinkish enamel type is called the Fencai, better known as famille rose (the rose family) by Westerners. This type is a variation of the enamel colours that flourished around the Yongzheng reign.

Because the famille rose enamels are so delicate they can be used to create exquisite designs. The scene on this plate reveals the domestic life of the upper-class Chinese. The picture is very detailed, individual strands can be seen in the ladys' hair. The pink and gold colours emphasise the luxurious clothing and furnishings.

Vase

炉钧釉象耳瓶

Porcelain
China, Jiangxi province
Qing dynasty, Qianlong reign, 1736-1795 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.315

This speckled, opaque glaze of turquoise and blue colour is called the Lujun glaze. It was inspired by the Song dynasty Jun ware. The vase takes an archaic form with a pair of decorative handles in the form ofelephant heads, imitating ancient bronzes.

The origin of the name Lujun is disputed. One theory is that the ceramics are fired in a Lu (furnace) rather than a kiln, therefore the type is called Lujun, meaning Jun wares fired in a Lu. Another explanation is that the potter who invented the glaze was named Lu.

Republic of China

Stem plate

浅绛彩梅占花魁图诗文高足盘

Porcelain with overglaze polychrome decoration, pale-umber colours style
China, Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen
Late Qing dynasty to Republic of China, 1850-1920 CE

DUROM.U10316

This stem plate is decorated with overglaze polychrome colours in the Qianjiang cai (pale-umber colours) style. The colours are pale and light, almost like water-colours, in sharp contrast to the rich, almost gaudily painted porcelain of the late Qing dynasty.

The term Qianjiang cai comes from a Yuan dynasty (1271-1368 CE) painting style. Unlike other porcelains which are decorated by various craftsmen working in a production line, the decoration on pale umber colours ware is usually done by one highly skilled person. Therefore the decoration on pale umber colours ware is closest to traditional art.

The pattern on this stem plate features a magpie standing on plum branches, and the inscription reads Mei zhan hua kui (plum crowns all flowers).

Vase

仿雍正款珐琅彩灵芝纹撇口瓶

Porcelain with overglaze polychrome decoration, enamel colours style
China, Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen
Late Qing dynasty to Republic of China, 1900-1950 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.496

As the Qing Empire collapsed, some skilful potters who had worked for the imperial kilns started making replicas of imperial wares for others. During this period, numerous imitations of ceramics of all periods were made.

To forge valuable genuine works, some potters even utilised fragments of authentic pieces, such as adhering an authentic, reign-marked base piece to a forged body. These reproductions, although not genuine, are usually of very high quality.

Parts of a dinner service

中国款白菜纹套杯

Porcelain with overglaze polychrome decoration
China
Republic of China, 1912-1949

Gift from Dr. H.N. Spalding
DUROM.1954.Spalding32
DUROM.1954.Spalding24
DUROM.1961.9

These pieces from a dinner service are some of the most interesting objects in the whole ceramic collection at the Oriental Museum. The decorative motif is not a mythical monster or religious symbol, but rows of ‘Pak-choi’ (Chinese cabbage) which represents purity, innocence and many children. What makes it even more special is the trade mark under the base — the English word ‘China’ in capital letters. These objects may be among the earliest export wares made in China with an English trade mark.

Vase
仿乾隆款粉彩
五老观画图观音瓶

Porcelain with overglaze polychrome decoration, famille rose style
China, Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen
Late Qing dynasty to Republic of China, 1900-1950 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.419

This is an excellent example of the very fine quality of replicas made in this time. The vase bears a Qianlong reign (1736-1795 CE) mark, and its depiction of five old men admiring a scroll painting reflects a social custom of the Qianlong reign but it was actually made between 1900 and 1950.

Emperor Qianlong who died at the age of 89 was the longest-lived emperor in Chinese history. Qianlong was quite a remarkable emperor who was remembered not only as an excellent ruler, but also for his love of the arts and literature.

In the 50th year of the Qianlong reign the emperor invited over 3,000 old men to a banquet held in the Qianqing palace in the Forbidden City. The banquet celebrated the teaching that everyone should respect the elderly as well as celebrating the prosperity of the Qing Empire. The decoration on this vase depicting old men admiring arts and literature recalls this event.

Teapot

铁画轩款宜兴紫砂茶壶

Fired clay
China, Jiangsu province, Yixing
Republic of China, 1912-1949

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.497

This teapot is distinguished by its unglazed brown body. It was produced in Jiangsu province at the Yixing kilns which were famous for making unglazed brown, red, and yellow buff pottery teapots out of the local Zishatu (purple clay).

On the base of the teapot there is a incised trade mark of Tiehua xuan, which was a major Yixing teapot trading company in early 20th century. Its products were famous for their fine calligraphic refined ornamentation, and were largely exported to Europe, Japan and Southeast Asia.

Brush washer
Porcelain
Republic of China, 1912-1950

DUROM.1969.243

This brush washer bears a Kangxi imperial reign mark (1662-1722 CE). However, experts have recently suggested that the piece was made in the first half of the 20th century. For several centuries, Chinese artisans added reign marks from earlier dynasties as a sign of reverence and respect for these earlier periods. They were not necessarily created to fool potential buyers. Many more recent copies have been created as forgeries with fake reign marks that are intended to deceive.

People's Republic of China

Apple
By Li Lihong
青花云龙纹苹果
Porcelain with red glaze and underglae blue decoration
China, Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen

Modern, 2011 CE
DUROM.2011.63

Nike - CHINA
(dragon and clouds)
By Li Lihong
Porcelain
People's Republic of China, Jiangxi Province, Jingdezhen
2007 CE

Purchased
DUROM.2017.178

Artist Li Lihong (born 1974) was born in Jingdezhen, the traditional heart of the
Chinese porcelain industry.

His reworking of Western company logos are among his most notable pieces. Here we see Apple's bitten apple and Nike's swoosh. He has also reworked Disney's Mickey Mouse ears, and MacDonalds golden arches. These works all reflect Li's upbringing in China in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution with the influx of American brands and products into the country looking for a share of the huge Chinese market.

Li Lihong presents both the confrontation between tradition and modernity and the meeting of West and East. These concepts are important ongoing subjects for contemporary artists in China and also resonate with Western collectors.

Song
By Zhu Le Geng
Porcelain
People's Republic of China, 2017 CE

Donated by the artist
DUROM.2017.290

Zhu Le Geng is Director of the Ceramic Centre of the Chinese Academy of Arts and is recognised by the Chinese Government as a 'National Master of Ceramics'.

Zhu is well known for the way that his work explores the relationship between artworks and modern architectural spaces.

'Song' is part of a series of which grew out of a commission for the Beijing Opera House. The form of the figures was inspired by watching a congregation singing in a Church. The pieces made for the Opera House are life size to match the dimensions of the space in which they are displayed.

Zhu's work also references ancient Chinese art and philosophy. Han dynasty tomb figures were part of the inspiration for 'Song'.

Horses features in much of Zhu's work and can also be related both to ancient tomb figures and to Chinese philosophy relating to the link between heaven and earth. His full horse sculptures are often shown galloping. In one interview he explained this as follows: 'It's the sky and nature, a living thing, heaven and nature together... You have to have respect for nature. You have to respect the environment you are living in.'

Chairman Mao
Ceramic
People's Republic of China,
After 1949 CE

Gift of David and Anne Hyatt King via the Art Fund
DUROM.2016.412

Sculptures of Chairman Mao are among the most recognisable pieces of mid 20th century Chinese ceramic art and they are still produced in huge numbers today for sale around the world.

The original Cultural Revolution busts were produced in a range of materials from plastic to glass. In common with the example shown here, Mao is usually shown as an older man with an impassive expression. This portrayal is often called the 'Great Helmsman'. During this period art was required to be functional rather than decorative. Pieces such as this were designed to inspire awe and reverence towards the leader.

Worker statue
Ceramic
People's Republic of China,
After 1949 CE

Donated by Dr Craig Barclay
DUROM.2017.322

During the Cultural Revolution ceramic artists were forced to work anonymously and to adhere to strict guidelines on what they could portray and how. Because much of the work produced during this period was subsequently destroyed, original examples have become highly sought after and today there is a thriving market in reproductions, often made from the original moulds from the factories.

This piece shows as worker in the process of writing a banner. He has paused to seek inspiration from his copy of the 'Little Red Book' of Chairman Mao's writings.

All things are visible
By Yang Maoyuan
器
Ceramic, unglazed
China
People's Republic of China, 2011

Gift of the artist
DUROM.2011.64

Yang Maoyoun is one of China's leading contemporary artists. His work encompasses painting, sculpture, photography and installation.

This artwork was created by the artist specifically for this gallery at the Oriental Museum to bring the museum's collection of Chinese ceramics right up to the present day.

The installation is based on an idea that Yang explored in his installation at the Venice Biennale 2011 and is entitled 'All things are visible'. For the installation Yang has created many medicine pots which contain nothing except for the smell of medicinal herbs. According to the theory of traditional Chinese medicine 'all things are visible'. However, much of traditional Chinese medical knowledge, from acupuncture points to meridians and collaterals are not recognised by modern medical science. Yang explores this paradox in this work.

Terracotta Warriors

These figures are exact replicas of the terracotta warriors that protected the tomb of the First Emperor of China, Qin Shi Huang, who died in 210 BCE. They have been crafted in Xi'an, the location of the Emperor's tomb, using the same materials used to create the original sculptures. The statues represent a general and two archers.

Three types of high-ranking officer are found among the terracotta warriors. They can be identified by their clothing and hand gestures. This general wears a double-layered gown and armour, although he does not carry a weapon. The tassels on his chest and back symbolise his high rank.

Archers were an important element of the Qin army and started an attack by raining arrows on the enemy. Both of these archers would originally have held real crossbows. The standing figure is not wearing any armour. This enabled him to move more quickly around the battlefield.

When buried, the original terracotta warriors were brightly painted. We have used the evidence revealed by archaeologists working in Xi'an to recreate how these figures might originally have looked.

Decorative Jades and Hardstones in the Qing Dynasty

Tripod wine vessel (Jia)
Nephrite carving with wooden stand
China
Qing dynasty, 1800-1900 CE

Gerard Arnhold collection, donated by Anthony and Mayca Arnhold
DUROM.2017.2

Vase
青白玉牡丹纹
蝙蝠环耳尊
Nephrite carving
China
Qing dynasty, 1700-1900 CE

Gerard Arnhold collection, donated by Anthony and Mayca Arnhold
DUROM.2017.10

In 222 CE, the Wei imperial court banned the use of jade funerary body protectors, a ruling which led to a decline in the quality of jade working which lasted for over 700 years.

In the Song dynasty (960-1279 CE), Neo-Confucianism promoted a renaissance of ancient rituals. This encouraged a fashion for the collecting and deliberate imitation of ancient objects. The making of jade artefacts in archaic forms began and was to remain popular in succeeding dynasties. This green nephrite covered vessel is modelled is in the shape of a jia, an ancient ritual wine vessel.

During the Ming and the Qing dynasties (1369-1911 CE), the making of jade artefacts reached new levels of craftsmanship in terms of the diversity of forms and styles. Ritual objects were much sought after and animal figures, writing tools, clothing accessories - whether roughly cut or exquisitely decorated; archaic or innovative - became fashionable with scholars and the upper classes.

Buckle

青玉龙纹带扣

Nephrite carving
China
Qing dynasty, 1700-1900 CE

Gerard Arnhold collection, donated by Anthony and Mayca Arnhold
DUROM.2017.23

Belt hook

青玉苍龙教子纹带扣

Nephrite carving
China
Qing dynasty, 1700-1900 CE

Gerard Arnhold collection, donated by Anthony and Mayca Arnhold
DUROM.2017.32

This buckle is a variation of the belt hook which emerged in the late Zhou dynasty (about 600-400 BCE). During this time a new type of clothing known as Shenyi emerged. This outfit took the form of a long robe, which was held in place by a belt. As a result, belt hooks and buckles came into use.

This green nephrite belt hook is carved with a large dragon and a small dragon. This Canglong jiao zi (dragon coaching son) motif signifies the owner's wish for a flourishing and prestigious clan.

Vase
青白玉荷叶形花插
Nephrite carving
China
Qing dynasty, 1700-1900 CE

Gerard Arnhold collection, donated by Anthony and Mayca Arnhold
DUROM.2017.26

Perfumier
青白玉松石纹香薰
连碧玉座
Nephrite carving
China
Qing dynasty, 1700-1900 CE

Gerard Arnhold collection, donated by Anthony and Mayca Arnhold
DUROM.2017.40

In early Chinese tradition, jade was considered a material with ritual significance and was seldom used for making daily utensils. Songshi (History of the Song dynasty) recalls that the Song emperor Huizong (reigned 1101-1119 CE) had been concerned about using jade wine cups on his birthday banquet because 'people might say it is too extravagant'. By the Ming and Qing dynasties, jade artefacts had become more functional. Confucian scholars admired the purity of the lotus; therefore containers such as brush washers and vases made into the shape of lotus or lotus leaf became common.

This tube-shaped perfumier is decorated with a pine forest design, another popular motif signifying high morals. Small perfumiers might be worn inside the long sleeves of a robe, whilst large ones such as this would have been reserved for domestic use.

Bowl

灰玉莲式碗

Nephrite carving
China
Qing dynasty, 1700-1900 CE

Gerard Arnhold collection, donated by Anthony and Mayca Arnhold
DUROM.2017.39

The design of jade artefacts in the Qing dynasty was inevitably influenced by the core patron Emperor Qianlong (reigned 1736-1795 CE). Qianlong's taste in jade was exquisite. He admired elegant shapes and simple designs, and was especially fond of Islamic Hindustani jades which featured a thinly-cut body and floral designs. This bowl is made in imitation of the Hindustani style.

Censer
黃玉镂空花卉纹香薰
Nephrite carving
China
Qing dynasty, 1700-1900 CE

Gerard Arnhold collection, donated by Anthony and Mayca Arnhold
DUROM.2017.19

Brush washer
碧玉巧色荷叶洗
Hardstone carving
China
Qing dynasty, 1700-1900 CE

Gerard Arnhold collection, donated by Anthony and Mayca Arnhold
DUROM.2017.52

Carving of a tree trunk with peaches and a crane
Carnelian
China
Qing dynasty, 1700-1800 CE

Gerard Arnhold collection, donated by Anthony and Mayca Arnhold
DUROM.2017.60

The Qing imperial court commissioned workshops in Suzhou and Yangzhou, Jiangsu province, to make jade artefacts for the imperial palace. These folk workshops followed regional tastes producing extravagant designs in contrast to the simpler, more elegant court taste.

This censer is carved with a compact openwork design all over the body. Although the openwork decoration is pretty, it would allow the ashes of incense to fall out of the container. Here the maker is showing off his skill without considering the function of the object.

Another fashionable technique was Qiaose, which exploited and followed variations in the original colour of the hardstone. This brush washer is carved into the shape of a frog sitting on a lotus stem. The green and yellow body of the stone is carved as the lotus, while the crystallised part is carved as the frog. The carving of tree trunk with peaches and a crane makes use of the natural red and white colouring of the carnelian to great effect.

Desk screen

青金石御制诗山石纹插屏

Lapis lazuli carving
China
Qing dynasty, 1700-1900 CE

Gerard Arnhold collection, donated by Anthony and Mayca Arnhold
DUROM.2017.55

Screens were a common form of furniture in imperial China. Large screens were used for dividing spaces in a big room; whilst smaller screens were placed around beds. In the Ming dynasty (1368-1644 CE), the practical function of screens gradually disappeared. Simultaneously, decorative desk screens made with solid, expensive materials such as jade and hardstones became fashionable.

Basket

青白玉吊篮

Nephrite carving
China
Qing dynasty, 1700-1900 CE

Gerard Arnhold collection, donated by Anthony and Mayca Arnhold
DUROM.2017.1

This basket demonstrates the exceptional workmanship of the Qing dynasty craftsmen. The basket is decorated with a floral pattern in low, thread relief; whilst the lid of the basket is carved with openwork decoration and the handle is a chain of separate, movable yet un-detachable rings. It is difficult to imagine how Qing dynasty jade-workers could have crafted all of these without access to modern tools.

Archers' thumb rings
Nephrite, agate
China
Various dates

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.1911, 995 & 3342

Thumb rings were worn to assist an archer in drawing and releasing the bowstring.

While the crossbow was the weapon of China's soldiers, traditional archery was highly valued as a skill among the elite, even forming part of the civil service exams during the Ming dynasty. Thumb rings therefore became symbols of status, worn as an indicator of rank by men in China's higher social classes.

The Scholar's Desk

Abacus
Wood
China
Qing dynasty, 1800-1899 BCE

Wellcome Collection
DUROM.W93

The abacus (suànpán 'counting tray') has been in use in China for more than 2000 years. It is divided into two decks. Beads are moved up and down the rods to add, subtract, multiply and divide. Sums can be done at very high speed once the correct method has been learnt.

Pair of Seals
皂石螭龙印
Soapstone
China
Qing dynasty, 1644-1912 CE

Gift from Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.3253.a-b

Seal
皂石果老树下骑驴纹诗文印
Soapstone
China
Qing dynasty, 1644-1912 CE

Gift from Hardinge Collection
DUROM.Gq18

Seal Paste Box
素面印盒
Glass
China
Qing dynasty, 1644-1912 CE

Gift from Dr. Mary Prouse Gell
DUROM.1978.147

Seals and seal paste are mainly used to authenticate and identify scholars' works. Seals often bear written information such as the scholar's name or a quotation, but can also be decorated with patterns. To fit multiple characters beautifully into a small seal is not easy, therefore seals are considered not only a means of identity authentication but also an art form.

Seals can be made of multiple materials, the most popular of which is soapstone. Carved or sculpted patterns are often applied to decorate the chunky body of seals. These decorations are also an important aspect of seal art. This exquisite seal is carved with the story of Zhang Guolao, one of the Eight Daoist Immortals.

Seals must be used with seal paste, which is made from finely pulverized cinnabar mixed with castor oil and silk strands or plant extract.

Seal paste is usually kept in a small container such as a lidded porcelain box. The box on display is a glass example and still contains the original seal paste.

Ink Rubber
Jade
China
Date unknown

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.2092

A highly polished, smooth object could be used as a rubber to remove mistakes from documents by rubbing. Like many other scholar's accessories luxurious forms were made in materials such as jade. This example is in the form of a shoe.

Water Dropper
德化猪油白釉荔枝型砚滴
Porcelain, Dehua ware
China, Fujian province, Dehua
Ming dynasty, 1368-1644 CE

DUROM.1975.10

Water droppers and water pots are used for storing water for diluting ink.

This white water dropper is in the shape of two lychee, a fruit originally grow in Southern China. The main body of the water dropper is made in the shape of the plump body of the fruits.

Wrist Rest

玉石双蟾臂搁

Hardstone
China
Date Unknown

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.2518

The wrist rest is used for supporting the wrist in order to keep the paper neat when scholars are writing from right to left. Bamboo is the most common material for wrist rests. Wrist rests can also be made from many other luxury materials such as ivory, ceramics or hardstone as in this example decorated with a pair of toads.

Ink Stone
Slate
China
Qing dynasty, 1700-1899 CE

Gift from Miss Anne S. Spalding,
DUROM.1986.D41

Ink is one of the ‘Four Precious’ items, writing tools for Chinese scholars; the other items being the brush, rice paper and ink stone. Ink is made by mixing pine soot with lampblack and glue which is then moulded into sticks or cakes. Calligraphers grind an ink stick on an ink stone to make fine ink for writing and painting.

Brush Rest
刻石松鼠枇杷纹笔架
Hardstone
China
Qing Dynasty, 1800-1899 CE
Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.1949

The brush rest is one of the most common types of writing tools on a scholar's desk. It is made from solid materials such as hardstone, wood, or ceramics and usually made with a wavy top in order to hold brushes. As well as having a practical function, it is often carved into different shapes such as a mountain or a bush, giving it an ornamental appearance.

Writing tools on a scholar's desk are called 'Wenwan' in Chinese, meaning the scholar's toys. These objects are usually both practical and decorative so that the scholar can admire and play with them. The brush rest on display here depicts a vivid natural scene with a squirrel running among a loquat bush. The combination of squirrel and loquat (or mouse and grape) symbolises fertility.

Ink Sticks
高永有制点漆条墨
Ink
China
Date Unknown
Gift from Dr Walter Perceval Yetts
DUROM.1956.YETTS13.1
DUROM.1956.YETTS13.2

This pair of ink sticks is marked with the producer's name, Gao Yongyou, and the place of production, Yantang. Early use of brush

and ink in writing is recorded in ancient scripts dated to the Eastern Zhou dynasty (770-256 BCE). The technology of ink making improved over time, and those made by great masters became exceptionally valuable.

Brush Washer

凤形玉洗

Jade

China

Qing dynasty, 1644-1911 CE

Hardinge Collection

DUROM.1960.1439

The brush washer is an essential piece of equipment for writing. It is a small container made from ceramic, hardstone, cloisonné or even rhinoceros horn. Because the function of the brush washer is so simple, it can be made in various shapes. This brush washer, for example, is in the shape of a phoenix, the diversity of shapes and materials made the brush washer a popular collectible for Chinese scholars.

Desk Screens
Jade and wood
China
Qing dynasty, 1700-1800 CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.1311.a&b

This pair of desk screens are made from jade carved into the shape of double gourds. The characters carved on the screens read 'good luck'. The use of jade suggests that the screens were made for a scholar of high rank. Table screens could be positioned on the scholar's desk to shield wet ink from the sun or drafts of wind coming through the window. The decoration could also act as a source of inspiration.

Cricket pot
陆慕袁氏堂印百子图
澄泥蟋蟀盆
Clay
China, Jiangsu province, Suzhou
Modern, 2000-2007 CE

Gift of Dr Xu Biao
DUROM.2008.2

Singing crickets have been kept as pets in China since for hundreds of years. Crickets were also raised for fighting. Singing and fighting crickets became favoured pets of the Emperors of China and so the pastime attracted much interest among Chinese nobles.

Cages were used to trap the crickets. In summer they were then kept in gourds to enhance the sound of their 'song'. Clay pots like this were used as winter homes or for breeding of pet crickets.

Example of Calligraphy

The calligraphy shown here are quotes from the song poem Ode to Lotus written by Zhou Dunyi, in the spring of Yinhai year (2019), Pang Wai-Tong.

The following is a translation of the calligraphy, courtesy of Mr. Vincent Wai-Tong Pang and Mrs. Shuk-Wa Chan.

荷香

出淤泥而不染
濯清漣而不妖
中通外直
不蔓不枝
可遠觀而不可褻玩焉
己亥春月彭偉堂書

"Even growing up in the muddy pond, it springs above the surface of the water with an unaffected grace: pure, bright and delicate. It appears to be straight and coherent, and has no unnecessary vines or branches. It could be only appreciated from a distance but not to be touched or debased."

Craftsmanship

Lacquer Ware Box

剔彩锦地八宝纹春字桃形盖盒

Wood, lacquer with carved decoration
China
Qing dynasty, Qianlong reign, 1736-1795 CE

Purchased with funds from the Sir Charles Hardinge Bequest
DUROM.1969.474

Lacquer was the plastic of pre-modern East Asia. Derived from tree sap, lacquer is heat resistant, waterproof and can be coloured through the addition of pigment.

Before the carving process, craftsmen would paint layers of liquid lacquer onto the surface of the foundation shape which was usually constructed from metal or wood. Each new layer could only be applied after the previous layer had dried, and the carving could only be done once all the lacquer layers were dry. Therefore, lacquer carving is extremely time consuming and demands a great deal of work.

This lacquer box in the shape of a peach contains a wealth of information and showcases an outstanding carving technique. Its design features a combination of the eight Buddhist emblems, the eight precious things, as well as folk symbols. The lacquer of the box has five coloured layers, including red, black, brown, purple and brownish-orange. The differences of the colours are subtle and a magnifying glass must be used to fully appreciate the workmanship.

‘Devil’s work’ ball and stand

牙雕穿花龙纹鬼工球

Ivory carving
China, Guangdong province, Guangzhou
Qing dynasty, 1800-1900 CE

DUROM.2017.115

This ivory ball contains 9 layers: the inner layers are decorated with openwork pattern in a star motif, while the outer layer is decorated with three dragons amongst swirling clouds.

This form of ivory ball was made for the 19th century export market. The ball and all inner layers are carved from a single piece of ivory; all inner layers are moveable, and the central layer is a solid ball. Each layer is decorated with carving in relief or openwork patterns. The craftsmanship is extremely exquisite and complicated, and the type is known as a 'Devil's Work Ball’ (Guigong qiu).

According to historic accounts, the devil’s work ball emerged in the Song dynasty, at which point there were only three layers. In the Qing dynasty, the demand for exports boosted production and by the late Qing dynasty, the number of layers reached 25-28.

Astronomical Clock
Wood, metal and glass
China
Qing dynasty, 1700-1799 CE

DUROM.1960.880

This astronomical clock is one of only two known in the world. The other, which differs in only minor details, is housed in the Forbidden City in Beijing. The face of the clock shows the brightest stars visible over southern China, with the Milky Way (Tianhe - the Celestial River) as the most prominent feature.

The outer brass ring is fixed and allows for time keeping in fen (minutes), ke (quarters of an hour) and the 12 shi (double hours) which make up a day. Thus the hour hand moves once around the clock each day. The inner brass ring marks the seasons. This moves one degree each day so that it completes one revolution of the clock each year.

The clock's movement is Chinese, but appears to be based on an English movement of about 1790. There is no maker's name but the clock is thought to have been made in Guangzhou. The design of some parts is unusual suggesting that the maker was not copying an actual clock but working from sketches or notes, and improvising when necessary.

The accuracy of the depiction of the heavens means that today it is regarded as a masterpiece of both Chinese astronomy and the clockmaker's art.

Jade mountain and stand
碧玉山子
Carved jade with wooden stand
China
Qing dynasty, 1700-1800 CE

Gerard Arnhold collection, donated by Anthony and Mayca Arnhold
DUROM.2017.31

Jade stone carvings in the form of imaginary mountains became very fashionable during the reign of the Qianlong Emperor (reigned 1735-1796 CE). Craftsmen were challenged to recreate in three dimensions themes that had long been popular in Chinese painting.

Mountains were seen as spiritual and supernatural. They were places of retreat with strong cosmological associations and so were favoured sites for monasteries and temples. The figures on piece are shown journeying towards a walled settlement that is probably intended to signify such a place.

The extremely high quality of this piece and its stand suggests that they were created in an imperial workshop.

Pair of jade table screens

玉雕人物风景插屏
Carved and gilded jade set in cloisonné frame with wooden stand
China
Qing dynasty, 1700-1800 CE

Gerard Arnhold collection, donated by Anthony and Mayca Arnhold
DUROM.2017.7

This pair of table screens, created for a scholar's studio, exhibit the highest level of workmanship in jade carving gilding, cloisonné and wood carving from the high point of Qing dynasty craftsmanship.

At the base of the wooden stands are the waves of the sea. Dragons rise out of the water and bats fly overhead. The dragon is symbolic of knowledge and wisdom. The bat symbolises wealth. Above these, the supports for the jade screens are carved to represent the clouds.

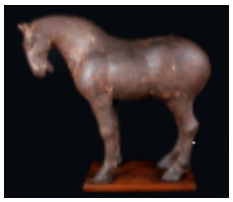
On the carved jade sides the screens depict scenes of an ideal life in heaven. The images are full of symbols of long life and good fortune such as pine trees and cranes set in a landscape of mountains and clouds. Children mix with wise old men, all carrying further symbols of health and wellbeing.

The two gilded sides depict very different scenes. One shows a man ploughing, while an elder watches on. It is early spring and the leaves are beginning to sprout on the trees.

On the second screen, a family are harvesting and classifying silk worm cocoons according to their quality. A shed nearby holds more cocoons ready for working into silk. It is June or July, the rainy season. Spring has given way to summer.

These images are copies of a famous painting called 'farming and weaving pictures' 耕织图, created in 1712 by the Yongzheng Emperor (r. 1723-1735 CE) as a tribute to his father the Kangxi Emperor
(r. 1661-1722). Yongzheng's painting was in turn a copied from an original Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279 CE) set of works.
This succession of works based on each other demonstrates the value placed in Chinese art on looking back to important earlier works of art. Copying an earlier work was seen as a sign of admiration and understanding of its importance and quality.

Weapons and Warfare



Horse model

铁马

Cast iron
China
Tang dynasty, 618-906 CE

Hardinge collection
DUROM.1960.3942

Horse bit

铜马辔

Cast bronze
China
Warring States period to Han dynasty, about 500-100 BCE

Hardinge collection
DUROM.1960.3435

Harness jingle

銮铃

Cast bronze
China
Warring States period to Han dynasty, about 500-100 BCE

De Laszlo collection
DUROM.2001.182

Chariot axle cap

铜车軎

Cast bronze with mould-relief decoration
China
Eastern Zhou period,
771-221 BCE

De Laszlo collection
DUROM.1992.13.A-B

In Chinese traditions, the horse is a symbol of courage and strength. It is also famed as the faithful companion of ancient Chinese warriors and heroes. In the year 636 CE, the Tang dynasty Emperor Taizong (reigned 627-649 CE) commissioned the famous artist Yan Liben (about 601-673 CE) to draw a sketch of his six beloved warhorses. These were later translated into stone-carvings on the wall of his tomb.

The Tang Emperor Taizong was not the only one who attempted to bring his horses into the afterlife. This iron figure of a horse, probably a Ferghana horse, was designed for a tomb of a high ranking dignitary, according to the scale of Tang laws regulating the height and number of figures for burials. Although ceramic tomb figures of horses were quite common in the Tang dynasty (618-907 CE), this hollow cast tomb figure has only one possible parallel in a figure now in the collections of the
Hermitage in St Petersburg.

Chariots emerged in China as early as the Shang dynasty (1600-1046 BCE). During the succeeding Western Zhou dynasty (1046-771 BCE) a formal system was set up to regulate the types of chariot which might be ridden by members of the ruling elite. The number of harnesses used on a chariot symbolised the rank of the owner. This

harness jingle would have stood at the front of the chariot. The highest-ranked chariot could have carried eight-harness jingles.

This pair of bronze chariot axle caps is decorated with complex relief patterns. The open end is ornamented with the 'Animal Mask' motif, which is a combination of various beasts representing power. The main body is decorated with cloud patterns on a geometric, thread-relief background. The end of the linch pin is moulded in the shape of an animal head. The heavy emphasis on the decoration of chariot fittings reflects the ritual significance of the chariot in ancient times.

Cross-bow lock
弩弓
Cast bronze
China
Warring States period to Han dynasty, circa 400-0 BCE

De Laszlo collection
DUROM.1992.11

Scholarly opinion varies as to when the crossbow was first used in China, and whilst some writers have argued that weapons of this type may have been in use as early as the second millennium BCE, the earliest surviving bronze trigger mechanism dates to about 600BCE. What cannot be disputed, however, is that, from the Warring States period onwards, the crossbow was to become the key weapon in the hands of China's peasant armies.

The most technologically advanced weapon of its day, the crossbow allowed even an unskilled soldier to fire an armour-piercing quarrel with considerable accuracy. Crucial to its success was a complex trigger mechanism which, by the Han dynasty, had been developed into a piece of precision-cast machinery which was set into the wooden stock of the bow. The bow-string was held in place by a pair

of cocking lugs which sat on either side of the bolt. This ensured that the bolt would be released smoothly, as it was able to sit in direct contact with the bow-string. Accuracy was further aided by a trigger which allowed the string to be released without jerking and by the provision of an upright sight which helped the archer to aim his weapon effectively.

Bronze shield decoration

青铜兽面纹盾

Bronze
China
Western Zhou dynasty, 1000-700 BCE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.3459

When this object first entered the museum collections it was thought to be a mask for a horse.

More recent research has suggested that this mask was actually designed to attach to the front of a shield. It is a simplified form of the classic taotie mask design. The fierce face would have provided protection to the carrier of the shield and acted as a threat towards the enemy.

Han Dynasty Burial Practices

Model of a pigsty and privy

绿釉猪舍

Pottery
China
Han Dynasty, 206 BC--220 CE

Gift of Dr G H Manley
DUROM.2013.120

Model of a granary

绿釉磨坊

Earthenware
China
Han Dynasty, 206 BC--220 CE

Gift from Mrs Juliane Von Hessert from the De Laszlo Collection
DUROM.1992.177

Model of sheepfold

绿釉羊圈

Earthenware with green glaze
China
Han dynasty, 206 BCE-220 CE

Gift from Mrs Juliane Von Hessert from the De Laszlo Collection
DUROM.1992.89

Like the ancient Egyptians, ancient Chinese believed in an afterlife and a great deal of effort was put into the preparation of burials. In early periods, people buried expensive materials such as jade, bronze, food, animal and even human sacrifices.

During the Eastern Han dynasty (25-220 CE), the quantities of precious materials included in burials declined. Rather than burying their treasures, wealthy landowners realized that it was more practical to bring all their property and goods to their afterlife in the form of models. Pottery models were made to take the place of real items.

Since the emergence and spread of ironware and the cattle plough in the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BCE) China began its cultivation of grains. From this point onwards agriculture was the foundation of Chinese society. The agricultural system endured for thousands of years alongside the development of Chinese feudal society.

The possession of land, crops and agricultural implements represented wealth and social status that the owner wished to take into the afterlife. The three pottery models on display here, showing a pigsty, a mill and sheep fold respectively, were made as burial items in the Han dynasty (220-206 BCE). They were buried in tombs as a replacement for real farm buildings, animals and implements so that the owner could continue to use them in the afterlife. For modern scholars this burial ritual is an important and effective way of gaining insight into agricultural practices in ancient China.

Pig amulets
猪形握
Nephrite carving
China
Han dynasty, 206 BCE-220 CE

Hardinge collection
DUROM.1960.4006
DUROM.1960.4241

In the Han dynasty pig amulets became the most common funerary artefacts. They were commonly placed in the hands of the deceased. The pig is a symbol of fertility, and the ancient Chinese placed the amulets in the hands of the dead, hoping that they would bless the family with many offspring.

Tomb model of a cockerel
绿釉鸡
Pottery
China
Han Dynasty, 206 BCE– 220 CE

MacDonald Collection
DUROM.1969.7

Tomb model of a hen
陶鸡
Earthenware
China
Han Dynasty, 206 BCE–220 CE

MacDonald Collection
DUROM.1969.8

Model of an ox
黃釉牛
Pottery
China
Tang dynasty, 775-825 CE

MacDonald Collection
DUROM.1969.24

Early in the Han dynasty (206-220 BCE) nobles and other wealthy people sometimes had their livestock buried with them so that they could continue to use them in the afterlife. Later, real animals were replaced by pottery models. These models were probably all designed for use in tombs.

Chickens were one of the earliest domesticated animals in ancient China. In a series of classic books written before the Qin dynasty (221-206 BCE), the chicken was included as one of six main livestock types, along with horses, cattle, sheep, pigs and dogs.

Cattle were important to Chinese farmers as working animals. Cattle replaced horses as the main livestock for ploughing between 750 and 220 BCE. Today, some farmers in China still use cattle in a similar way.

Spade-shaped coin
(huò bù)

Copper alloy
China
Han dynasty, reign of Wang Mang, 14-22 CE

Gift from Steve Race in memory of Joseph Race
DUROM.1970.7.6

Round coin (ban liang)
Copper alloy
China
Han dynasty, reign of Emperor Wen,
180-157 BCE

Gift from Steve Race in memory of Joseph Race
DUROM.1970.7.1

Round coin (da quan)
Copper alloy
China
Han dynasty, reign of Ruzi Ying, 7 CE

Gift from Steve Race in memory of Joseph Race
DUROM.1970.7.17

Money has played an important part in Chinese burials from the earliest times of its use. It is meant for use by the dead in the afterlife. It can also be offered as a bribe to the God or Judge of the Dead to encourage a favourable judgement.

Early Chinese coins were made in a range of shapes including the spade shown here and also knives and a form known as 'ant nose' as well as round or 'ring-shaped' coins. The hole through the centre of

these coins allowed them to be threaded together on a string for easy carrying and storage.

The custom of burying money and other valuables also attracted tomb robbers. In response to this during the Han dynasty imitation money began to be made from hardened clay. This surrogate money could be used in the realm of the dead but had no value for the living. This tradition survives today in the offering of fake paper money at the tombs of ancestors.

Mirrors

四神规矩镜

Bronze

China

Han dynasty, 206 BCE–220 CE

Gift from the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum
DUROM.W257 and 258

Glass was not used for mirrors in China until the Qing dynasty (1644-1912 CE). For thousands of years before this mirrors were made of bronze. These mirrors are displayed to show their highly decorated backs. The front of the mirrors is flat and smooth and would have been highly polished to give a reflective surface.

A mirror was an important part of burial goods in the Han dynasty. Not only would the dead person need their mirror in their afterlife, the highly reflective surface was thought to bring light and life to the darkness of the tomb. This brightness helped to keep evil at bay.

Mask
石真容覆面
Stone carving
China
Han dynasty, Jian'an reign,
196-219 CE

Hardinge collection
DUROM.1960.3063

This mask is carved with a representation of man's face featuring realistic, slender eyes, a big nose and a heavy beard. The realistic design is intended to represent a real person. On the back there is a 12-character inscription reading: "Made in the Han dynasty, Jian'an reign; a man's face is the precious possession of the immortals." In the late Han dynasty (23-220 CE), the economy declined. People who wanted to follow the traditional burial practices but could not afford expensive materials like jade were forced to use cheaper alternatives. This is probably why this mask is made with stone rather than jade.

Carving of the face of a monster

青玉兽面纹件

Nephrite carving

China

Late Han dynasty, around 200 CE

Hardinge collection

DUROM.1960.2984

The precise function of this jade carving is unknown. The holes in the top suggest that it may have been worn. The inscription on the back indicates that it was a gift from one of the Han dynasty emperors to one of his generals.

The general may have worn the jade while he was alive but is also appears that he was buried with this royal gift. The discolouration around the bottom half of the piece may suggest that it was placed in close proximity to the body.

Early Ritual Jades and Bronzes





Body protectors
葬玉
Nephrite carving
China
Various dates

Hardinge collection

DUROM.1960.2599
DUROM.1960.2612
DUROM.1960.2595

From Neolithic times, the ancient Chinese were accustomed to using nephrite and other hardstones to make weapons and farming tools. As time went by, they discovered the long-lasting quality of nephrite and came to believe that these beautiful, tough stones were the essence of the earth and could last eternally.

By the time of the Longshan culture (2600-2000 BCE), nephrite had become a material monopolised by an elite which used them to make ceremonial weapons and ritual items. Nephrite - together with jadeite which became popular much later - were given a suitably elegant name: Yu (jade).

As jade had come to be regarded as a material with religious and ritual significance, it was believed to be the carrier of communication with spirits and gods. From the Western Zhou dynasty (1046-771 BCE), the use of burial masks made from several pieces of jade sewn together emerged. The ancient Chinese believed that by covering the dead with jade, not only could the body be protected from decaying, but also the soul of the deceased could absorb the spirit of jade and attain immortality.

During the Han dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE), the burial system evolved and the use of jade became more flamboyant. Instead of a single mask, a jade suit made from numerous individual plaques might be used to encase the entire body: almost like a jade coffin. The use of this type of funerary costume remained in fashion with the ruling elite for almost four hundred years until it was banned in 222 CE due to frequent tomb robberies.

Apart from covering the corpse, the ancient Chinese believed that 'holes' of the body - such as the nostrils, ears and mouth - had to be blocked with jade plugs to prevent the soul from leaving the body. Examples of eye, ear and nose protectors are shown here which may have been used for this purpose.

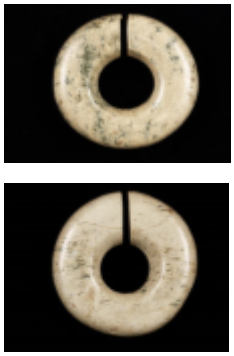
Cicada amulet
玉蝉
Nephrite carving
China
Han dynasty, 206 BCE-220 CE

Hardinge collection
DUROM.1960.2351

The ancient Chinese believed that 'holes' of the body - such as the nostrils, ears and mouth - had to be blocked with jade plugs to prevent the soul from leaving the body. The cicada amulet is a common type of plug placed in the mouth of the deceased.

The cicada played an important role in Chinese burial culture, especially during in the Han dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE). One of the reasons for this is that the cicada extricates itself from its skin and lives 'another life'. It was accordingly seen as representing the afterlife. In addition, the cicada appears in late summer and the

beginning of autumn. This made it an appropriate symbol for Yin - the cosmological concept representing the earth, the moon, darkness and death.



Jue earring

耳饰玦

Hardstone carving
China, east
Neolithic period, Majiabang culture, 4500-3500 BCE

Hardinge collection
DUROM.1960.1646
DUROM.1960.1647

Many of the artefacts found in ancient burials had been used by their owners in life. These split rings were probably worn as a earrings. This type is called the Jue, which was among the earliest ornaments to be made in fine polished stones such as jade. The earliest Jue, dating from 6200-5400 BCE, were tubular rather than ring-shaped, while the later ones of the Zhou dynasty (1046-256 BCE) were flat and carved with patterns.

Set of pendants

组玉佩

Nephrite carving
China
Various dates, from Shang to early Zhou dynasty,
about 1200-1000 BCE

Hardinge collection
DUROM.1960.4037
DUROM.1960.3402
DUROM.1960.4023
DUROM.1960.3488.B
DUROM.1960.3163
DUROM.1960.3378
DUROM.1960.3380
DUROM.1960.3452
DUROM.1960.3479
DUROM.1960.3645
DUROM.U10781
DUROM.1960.1817
DUROM.1960.3404
DUROM.1960.4131
DUROM.1960.3774

Necklaces made from a set of pendants were a popular accessory among noblemen from the Zhou dynasty to early Han dynasty (circa 1000-150 BCE). In a fashion that lasted for a thousand years, the types and quality of pendants and the length of the necklace symbolised the wearer's noble status.

This set has been assembled from individual pendants dating to various periods. Together they reproduce a typical set of the Zhou dynasty (about 1000-800 BCE). The fish and bird designs of the pendants reflect the primitive beliefs of ancient Chinese: birds represented communication with the heaven, and fish - which were the prototype of the dragon - represented rain and fertility.

Dragon pendants

谷纹龙形佩

Nephrite carving
China
Warring States period,
475-221 BCE
DUROM.87A-B

In the late Zhou dynasty (about 600-400 BCE), a new type of clothing called Shenyi emerged. This outfit required the use of a belt and, as a result, the wearing of jade pendants shifted from the neck to the waist.

Large pendants were hung from the belt in sets; the individual pieces became larger in scale and the combination of sets became simpler. The S-shape dragon shown here is one of the most popular pendants. The whorl patterns on its body are derived from a simplistic form of dragon pattern.

Cong tubes
玉琮
Nephrite carving
China
Various dates

Hardinge collection
DUROM.1960.2704
DUROM.1960.3122

The Cong tube was an important ritual item for several Neolithic cultures (about 5300-1900 BCE). It is believed that its rectangular exterior and circular interior represented the earth and heaven. Many of them are carved with the 'Animal Mask' or other mythical patterns. Later examples, dating from the Shang and Zhou dynasties (1600-700 BCE), seem to have lost their ritual significance, and to have been used instead as hair decorations or body protectors.

Bi disc
青玉蒲璧
Nephrite carving
China
Warring States period to early Han dynasty, about 476 BCE-23 CE

Hardinge collection
DUROM.1960.4034

Gui dagger and Bi disc
谷纹圭璧

Nephrite carving
China
Warring States period to Western Han dynasty, about 476 BCE-23 CE

Hardinge collection
DUROM.1960.4118
DUROM.1960.4109

The Bi is one of the oldest ritual jades. A flat disc with a small circular hole in the centre, it has several variations depending on the size of the hole. It is believed that the outer and inner circles represent the path of the sun and the heaven. For a time, the Bi disc was used in combination with the Cong tube whose rectangular exterior represents the earth.

From the early Zhou dynasty (mid 11th century BCE), the Gui dagger replaced the Cong tube. The combination of Gui and Bi thereafter remained the most important ritual jades until the end of the Qing dynasty (1911 CE). The shape of the Gui dagger was derived from a ritual weapon Ge dagger. It was usually placed on top of the Bi. Later examples combined the two forms into one object named the Guibi.

Sword

铜剑

Cast bronze
China
Warring States period, 476 -221 BCE
Hardinge collection
DUROM.1960.3948

Dagger

铸铜镶绿松石剑

Cast bronze with turquoise inlay
China
Spring and Autumn period, about 700-500 BCE

Hardinge collection
DUROM.1960.3898

The Chinese word Jian (sword) specifically refers to a type of weapon with a straight body and double-edged blade. Weapons with a curved body and single blade are called Dao. The first official account of the making of bronze swords can be found in a text dated to the Shang dynasty (1600-1046 BCE). These early swords were short and often topped with a prominent pommel.

This sword and dagger are dated to the Eastern Zhou dynasty (Spring and Autumn period, and Warring States period respectively), a time of constant wars and conflicts between the Zhou imperial court and subordinate states. At this time, warriors became powerful. Swords - the most important and personal weapon of the warrior - were therefore considered not just a weapon but also a symbol of status.

Sword fittings

玉具剑

Nephrite carving
China
Various period

Hardinge collection
DUROM.1960.3137
DUROM.1960.4009
DUROM.1960.4022

Spear Head

碧玉矛头

Cast bronze and nephrite carving
China
Date unknown

Hardinge collection
DUROM.1960.3912

The ownership of swords and jades were two of the badges of China's ruling elite. The combination of these two status symbols in the form of jade sword fittings emerged in the Spring and Autumn period (770-476 BCE). By the succeeding Warring States period (475-221 BCE), the making of weaponry jades was fully developed.

A basic set of jade sword fittings includes three items: the Yutan (sword pommel), the Yufeng (sword guard), and the Yubi (scabbard shape). The set might also include a Yuzhi, or scabbard slide. They were not for everyday use, but were rather used as decorations and as a symbol of status and power.

Although a hard stone, jade was not a good material for the production of practical weapons. It was, however, ideal for luxury items which reflected both the wealth and the warrior status of their owners. This fine jade spearhead was probably made as a reflection of the rank of its owner rather than for use on the battlefield.

Belt hook

错金卷云纹带钩

Cast bronze with gold inlay
China
Eastern Zhou dynasty, Warring States period, 475-221 BCE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.3731

The belt hook is perhaps one of the oldest fashion accessories. Made from jade, the earliest belt hooks found to date come from archaeological sites of the Liangzhu Culture (3300-2200 BCE).

This belt hook has been cast in a slender 'S' form; with the hook-end shaped as the head of an animal. The body is decorated with classic cloud scroll patterns in intricate gold inlay, whilst the knob on the back is also gilded and has a flower design. The use of gold on bronze reflects influences from beyond the Zhou frontiers.

Ge dagger-axe

青铜戈

Cast bronze with inscription
China
Eastern Zhou period, 771-221 BCE

Hardinge collection
DUROM.1960.3862

Shaft terminal

青铜错金银柄首

Cast bronze with sliver and gold inlay
Warring States period, 476-221 BCE

De Laszlo collection
DUROM.1992.16

The prototype of the Ge dagger-axe emerged in the Neolithic period. These dagger-axes were made of stone or hardstone and their shape was derived from the agricultural sickle.

In the Shang dynasty (1600-1046 BCE), the rapid development of bronze-casting boosted the production of bronze weapons. During this period, the shape of the Ge dagger-axe was developed: a characteristic projection being added to the rear of the shaft.

In the succeeding Zhou dynasty (1046-256 BCE), the Mao spear and Ge dagger-axe, fixed together on a shaft, were often used as a halberd. On the mainland, a new type of halberd called the Ji developed, combining the spear and dagger-axe in a single weapon.

A metal ferule or shaft-terminal was often used to protect the end of a dagger-axe or halberd's shaft. The weapon to which this shaft-terminal was fitted probably once belonged to a high-ranking warrior, as it is decorated with gold and silver inlay, and is inscribed with a name.

Confucianism

Confucianism is not a religion but rather a philosophical system of social ethics. It was founded by Kongzi who lived around 500 BCE. Drawing on the ritual traditions of the earlier Xia, Shang (1500- 1050 BCE) and Zhou (1046-221 BCE) dynasties, Kongzi developed a series of theories concerning personal behaviour and social governance.

Confucianism was just one one of many philosophies that flourished during the Eastern Zhou period (771-221 BCE). In the Han dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE) however, the imperial court realized that Confucian ideas could be used to support its government. Confucianism was accordingly encouraged and further developed, becoming the dominant ideology of the Han and of all the succeeding dynasties.

Between the Han dynasty and the present day, Confucianism experienced several periods of reinterpretation and oppression. Confucian ethics and values have pervasively merged into the lives of Chinese and other East Asian countries such as Japan, Korea and Vietnam. Even today, Confucianism still influences how China and Chinese people see themselves and the wider world.

Figure

皂石圆雕加彩关帝坐像

Soapstone carving painted and incised
China
Date unknown

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.3535

Humanity is the central principle of Confucianism. Its teaching focuses on an ethical philosophy which promotes a series of virtues such as loyalty, filial piety, upholding righteousness and the moral obligation to do good. Some historical or legendary figures have become Confucian deities in recognition of their good morals.

This figure portrays Guan Yu (?-220 CE) who was a general serving under the warlord Liu Bei (161-223 CE) during the Three Kingdoms period (220-280 CE). General Guan Yu was highly praised in Chinese history for his loyalty and bravery.

After his death, he was crowned Guandi (Emperor Guan) and Wusheng (God of War) by succeeding imperial courts, and was deified in folk culture. Even today, he remains one of the most widely worshipped deities in all of China.

Mirror

孝先铭铜镜

Cast brass with inscription
China
Qing dynasty, 1644-1911 CE

Gift of the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum
DUROM.W37

Filial piety - the importance of treating your parents with the proper respect - is one of the most important teachings of Confucius. The idea that it was important to show respect to ancestors began in the Western Zhou dynasty (1046-771 BCE). It is widely discussed in many Confucian texts. The inscription on this mirror says 'filial piety comes first'.

Grave model

皂石墓室模型

Soapstone carving with incision
China
Date unknown

Gift from Mrs. T.W. Joy
DUROM.1968.34.3

This model depicts a Chinese family tomb. On the 15th day after the Spring Equinox Chinese celebrate the Qingming festival by visiting their family graveyard. Flowers (usually chrysanthemums), wine, fruit and other offerings are presented at the grave. Paper money, incense sticks and candles are burned. The graveyard is cleaned and the ground is swept.

In some traditions, a whole roast pig is offered at the celebration. After the ceremony, one of the men in the family chops the pig into

pieces and shares them with all family members, symbolising the ancestors' happiness nourishing the clan.

Portrait of ancestors
木刻版画
Woodblock print (facsimile)
China
Qing dynasty to early Republic of China, circa 1875-1925 CE

DUROM.1956.Yetts30.5

This is a woodblock print portrait of ancestors in Manchu court costumes. The image is divided into two levels, the upper level depicting an elderly couple with a boy and a girl on the right and left respectively. The lower level depicts a younger couple, with a boy and a girl in the same positions.

This painting portrays the Confucian teaching of reverence for one's parents and forefathers. In modern China, enshrining portraits and tablets of ancestors is still a common practice in many households.

Photograph
先师牌位与三供
Copper plate photograph by John Thompson (print)
China
Qing dynasty, 1871 CE

DUROM.1956.Yetts40.41

This is a photograph of the Dacheng dian (Hall of Great Accomplishment) in Kongmiao (the temple of Confucius) in Beijing.

Temples of Confucius have been built all over China to worship Kongzi (551-479 BCE), founder of Confucianism. While the earliest temple was built not long after Kongzi's death (478 BCE), this one in Beijing was built much later in the Yuan dynasty, Dade reign (1302-1306 CE).

On the columns there is a commemorative inscription reading 'Wan shi shi biao' (Good example for all generations). A reference to the Confucius' character, the inscription was written by the Qing dynasty Emperor Kangxi (reigned 1662-1722 CE), while the quote can be dated back to the Three Kingdoms period (220-280 CE). Inside the hall, an altar set is laid out, showing how people worship Confucius in the same way that they worship the Buddha or ancestors.

Daoism

Daoism is a Chinese religious tradition which draws upon sources such as primitive religion, divination, alchemy and philosophy. Its origins can be traced back to early ritual systems of nature and ancestor worship dating back to Shang (1600-1100 BCE) and Zhou (1100-256 BCE) dynasties.

During the Eastern Zhou period (770-221 BCE), these early rituals experienced a rationalising process. At about the same time, a philosopher called Laozi composed a work titled Daodejing, or The Way. This classic text about a philosophy of life set the theoretical foundation of Daoism. In the Han dynasty (206 BCE- 220 CE), Daoism matured as a religion through the development of adapted Daoist philosophical institutions.

In the Southern and Northern dynasties period (386-589 CE), Daoism was widely spread and systemized as a result of the fashion for alchemy. It found favour among some of the emperors in later dynasties because of its mysterious and somehow believable link with eternal life. For the same reason, Daoist deities are very popular in Chinese art and are often depicted on artefacts as auspicious symbols.

Figure

铸铜老子骑牛像

Cast bronze
China
Qing dynasty, Kangxi reign, 1662-1722 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.573

This figure portrays the philosopher Laozi riding a buffalo with a scroll in his hand. According to Chinese legend, Laozi lived in the Spring and Autumn period (about 600-700 BCE). He is said to be the author of the Daoist classic text Daodejing (Book of Way and Virtue) and the founder of Daoism.

Having noted the moral decay of city life and the corruption of the kingdom, at the age of 160, Laozi ventured west to live as a hermit on the unsettled frontier. As he left the country on a buffalo, he was recognized by a guard called Yin Xi, who asked the master to produce a record of his wisdom.

The text which Laozi then produced was Daodejing. This text is fundamental to Philosophical Daoism and has strongly influenced other schools, such as Legalism and Neo-Confucianism. The topics of the Daodejing range from political advice for rulers to practical wisdom for people, while the core discussion is the relationship between human-beings and nature.

Dragon-horse figure

灰玉龙马负图

Nephrite carving
China
Ming dynasty, about 1500-1600 CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.1425

The dragon-horse is an auspicious animal, comprising the body of a horse covered in dragon scales. The legend of dragon-horse is recorded by late Ming dynasty calligrapher Wang Duo (1592-1652 CE). He wrote:

'Dragon-horse, is the essence of Heaven and Earth; it appears as a body of the horse and the scales of the dragon, so as it is named.'

In Chinese legends, the scrolls carried by the dragon-horse were maps of the lands of China. The maps inspired Fuxi - the legendary ancestor of the Chinese - to create the Bagua (Eight Trigrams), which represent the fundamental principles of reality, seen as a range of eight interrelated concepts in Daoist cosmology.

Censer

青铜熏炉

Cast bronze with openwork decoration
Han dynasty, 206 BCE-220 CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.1201

This censer shows a typical design of Han dynasty censer. The incense stick is burned in the container, and the smoke comes out from the openwork lid.

In the Han dynasty, bronze censers in all forms became extremely popular as a result of the spreading belief of eternal life. Ancient Chinese believed in immortality, and the fashion of pursuing immortality and eternal life was largely led by the First Emperor of the Qin dynasty (221-207 BCE). The emperor sent official Xu Fu to go on an expedition on the sea in the hope of finding the legendary immortal mountain Penglai.

In the succeeding Han Dynasty, the emperors, as well as their people, continued to believe in immortality, this time by practicing Daoism and meditation. During meditation, they burned incense to create an aromatic, smoky environment which enhanced the mystery of the process.

Boulder carved in the form of a mountain landscape
Jade
China
Qing dynasty, Qianlong reign, 1736-1795 CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.2205

This carving depicts the three star gods of longevity, prosperity and happiness being worshipped by Daoist pilgrims on the side of a mountain.

Mountains were seen as spiritual places, an intermediate realm between heaven and earth. The symbolic link between jade and immortality makes it a particularly suitable stone in which to carve such a scene as it emphasises the spiritual elements of the scene represented.

Although closely associated with Daoism the three gods do not appear in the Daozong, the Daoist canonical text. They appear to have been gods of popular religion who came to the fore during the early Ming dynasty. They have remained popular since then and their images are among the most commonly encountered of Chinese gods today. They are Shouxing (longevity), Fuxing (happiness) and Luxing (prosperity).

Burial jar
青白釉堆塑日月纹皈依瓶
Stoneware with white glaze and applied-relief decoration, Qingbai style
China, south
Yuan dynasty, 1271-1368 CE

Gift from Mr. Julian Gardner DUROM.1999.124

The imagery on this jar shows what happens to the spirit after death as it rises from the earth, through a guarded entrance to enter heaven.

Xi Wang Mu, the Queen Mother of the West, is depicted. Evidence suggests that worship of this important mother goddess predates Daoism but she becomes strongly associated with Daoist religious practice as it develops.

Xi Wang Mu appears as an individual figure standing at the waist of the jar holding a ruyi sceptre. Below her, there are fairies or warriors standing in a line, whilst above her a dragon flies amongst clouds. Above the dragon there is a round plaque, probably representing the sun, the moon, or a flaming pearl. The lid of the jar, probably decorated with a bird finial, is unfortunately missing.

The burial jar was popular in southern China during the Song, Yuan and Ming dynasties (960-1644 CE). They were produced in pairs, and a few surviving examples have remains of grain carbide in the inside, suggesting that they were used as barns for the afterlife.

Some believe that jars of this type sheltered the souls of the dead, while the mythical animals and figures on their exteriors provided protection. In consequence, the jars are known both as Guiyi ping (jar of conversion) and Hunping (jar of the soul).

Buddhism

Buddhism originated in India during the second half of the first millennium BCE. Some have claimed that Buddhist missionaries visited China as early as the 3rd century BCE, but the earliest official account of the introduction of Buddhism into China was not written until the 8th year of Yongping reign (65 CE). Buddhism shares many features with Daoism, and followers of both religions were often attracted to the faiths as a means of pursuing immortality.

During the Three Kingdoms period (220-280 CE), numerous scriptures were translated and many temples and statues were built across the nation, leading to the booming of the religion in the succeeding periods. Between 400 and 500 CE, Buddhism became the national religion, and the scale of temples and the number of believers grew significantly. By the Tang dynasty (618-907 CE), Buddhism was being widely practiced not only in China but also in Japan, Korea, Vietnam and Indonesia.

At several periods in Chinese history Buddhism was severely oppressed, but it remains one of the most important religions and philosophies in China. Buddhist art - originally introduced from India - merged into Chinese culture and influenced Chinese art and artefacts.

Wall tile

菩萨造像砖

Earthenware with white slip, unfired pigments and carved-in relief decoration
China, north
Northern dynasties, 386-581 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.233

It is generally acknowledged that Buddhism was introduced into China during the late Western Han dynasty (around 2 BCE). Very little early Buddhism art or archaeological evidence has been found. In the Southern and Northern dynasties (220-581 CE) several generations of rulers believed in Buddhism, which led to a significant development of the faith as well as religious sites.

During this period, Buddhist temples were built across the country, and grottos with Buddhist cave carvings and paintings were cut into mountains. This Pusa (Bodhisattva or enlightened being) is engraved on a wall tile which may have once decorated a temple. The face of the Bodhisattva is unclear, but its slim figure and wide shoulders are characteristic of Buddhist art of this period.

Carving of Buddha
石刻佛像
Stone carving with traces of lacquer
China, north
Northern Qi dynasty, Tianbao reign, 552 CE

Gift from Mrs Juliane von Hessert from the De Laszlo Collection.
DUROM.1992.43

This stela depicts the Buddha. Around the base is an inscription:

'On the Yihai day of the Renshen month, during the Tianbao reign (13th February, 552 CE), Ji Mi, follower of the Buddha, commissioned this stele of enshrining, in order to pray for good deeds and good luck for his younger brother Ji Shao.'

The commissioning of Buddhist statues or stelae was a common practice in the Southern and Northern dynasties period. Believers, sometimes a family, had their statues placed in a temple, and prayed to the Buddha for good fortune or enlightenment.

Statue
铸铁菩萨三尊像
Cast iron
China
Southern dynasties, 557 CE

DUROM.1970.19

A bodhisattva is an 'enlightened being' who wishes to help all beings attain a state of enlightenment. Such figures are said to be full of compassion. The central figure of this statue is the Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, whose Chinese name is Guanyin, which means 'observing the cries of the world'.

Dish

雍正款青花结带宝杵梵文盘

Porcelain with underglaze blue decoration,
Blue-and-white style
China, Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen
Qing dynasty, Yongzheng reign, 1723-1735 CE

Gift from Mrs Juliane von Hessert from the De Laszlo Collection.
DUROM.1992.179

Bowl and cover

Jade
China
Qing dynasty, 1700-1800 CE

Gerard Arnhold collection, donated by Anthony and Mayca Arnhold
DUROM.2017.24

As Buddhism merged into the Chinese culture, Buddhist concepts and iconography became common on a range of different types of artefact.

This porcelain dish is decorated with the double–vajra motif and Sanskrit script, both of Buddhist origin. The vajra is a ritual object believed to represent firmness of spirit and spiritual power; it is symbolically used by Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism. On Chinese ceramics, the vajra often appears in pairs in the form of a cross, sometimes along with ribbons and Sanskrit.

The jade bowl is decorated with images of the Buddha. The panels on the lid are carved with seven of the eight 'auspicious symbols' of Buddhism: conch shell, lotus, wheel, endless knot, pair of golden fish, treasure vase and banner proclaiming victory. The knob on the top of the lid has been carved into the form of the eighth symbol, the parasol.

Figure

磁州窑白釉褐彩送子观音像

Stoneware with white slip and brown decoration
China
Yuan dynasty, 1271-1368 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.350

This figure is a local variation of the Guanyin (Avalokiteśvara) in the Chinese folk culture. Early iconographies of the Guanyin are in male form. Around the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279 CE), Guanyin somehow evolves into a female form and has remained female ever since.

Guanyin is a merciful deity and is prayed to for all kinds of wishes. This Guanyin figure, holding a child in her hand, is called the Songzi Guanyin (Guanyin who brings child); she is kept in households to bring happiness to, and provide protection for, the mother and the child.

Statue

铜胎镏金菩萨造像

Cast bronze with gilt
China
Tang dynasty, 618-907 CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.3734

The making of bronze or brass Buddhist figures, sometimes with gilt, began in the Southern and Northern dynasties period (420-589 CE) and was carried on into the Tang dynasty. This statue of a Bodhisattva is typical of those produced during the Tang dynasty. The body of the Bodhisattva is relatively short, while the head is large and has a round face. The body slightly bends to one side, showing elegant curves around the waist. The upper body is naked, ornamented with prayer beads, while a long robe falls down to his knees.

Bodhisattva Cundi

德化奶白釉准提菩萨像

Porcelain
China
Qing dynasty, 1644-1911 CE

Bequest from Richard Sneddon
DUROM.1977.50

Cundi means ‘extreme purity’. She is a bodhisattiva known as bhagavati or ‘mother of Buddhas’. She is often equated with the bodhisattva Avalokitesvara but may also be linked to the Hindu goddess Chandi. Chanting her mantras is associated with healing sickness, ending of suffering, long life and good fortune.

Cundi is venerated in China and Japan, and to a lesser extent, in Tibetan Buddhism. She is depicted with eighteen arms which hold implements that symbolise the skilful following of the Dharma. These include the sword, prayer beads, mythical fruit, axe, clasp, Vajra, flower ring, banner, lotus, water pot, robe, wheel, precious vase, script case and conch.

Boulder

白玉罗汉山子

Nephrite carving
China
Qing dynasty, 1644-1911 CE

Gerard Arnhold collection, donated by Anthony and Mayca Arnhold
DUROM.2017.47

This boulder depicts a Luohan resting in a cave with a joyful smile on his face. He is a spiritual practitioner who has achieved certain high stages of attainment. In Chinese Buddhist temples, Luohan are an important subject for statues, usually in groups of 16, 18 or 500.

It was believed that Luohan were able to use their magical powers to remain alive indefinitely and so preserve the Buddha's teachings, even in times of trouble. Each Luohan has his experience of attainment and they were often shown with strongly characterised faces, as if they were particular recognisable individuals.

Statue

金彩供养菩萨跪像

Porcelain with overglaze blue and gilt decoration
China

Qing dynasty, 1644-1911 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.358

This is a hollow moulded porcelain figure shows a Bodhisattva (enlightened being) kneeling on a circular lotus petal patterned base, with both hands raised shoulder-high. The Bodhisattva is wearing an ornamental head-dress and has an expression of joy on his face.

Decorative elements of the costume are picked out in relief and reinforced with opaque pale blue enamel and gilt on a coffee coloured ground.

Chinese Collecting

Chinese scholars have always respected tradition and valued history. During the Song dynasty (960-1279 CE) Confucianism encouraged the collecting of antiques and the copying of ancient forms of artefact as a renaissance of ancient rituals and ethics. Since then, educated Chinese people have sought to form collections of antiques and objects from the past. Fine examples of calligraphy, painting, bronze-working and jade carving have always been particularly prized.

Confucian "literati", or educated scholars, came to associate different types of objects with specific qualities. Jade, for example, was held to represent high morals and gentleness. Over time, the owning a collection of antiques came to be seen as a symbol of refined taste and the badge of an educated person. Appreciating antiques became a leisure pursuit of the wealthy classes, and meeting as a group to admire and discuss a friend's collection was an important social occasion.

Objects of special beauty attracted the eyes of connoisseurs, especially in the field of ceramics. Demand for beautiful antique objects often outstripped supply, and collectors acquired instead newly-made objects of archaic style. Accordingly, in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644 CE), the imperial kilns produced reproductions of Song ceramic types; while in Qing dynasty (1644-1911 CE) both Song and Ming ceramics were copied!

He vessel

青铜错金凤盉

Cast bronze with carved decoration and gold-inlay
China
Song dynasty, 960-1279 CE

De Laszlo Collection
DUROM.1992.7

Bo bell

灰玉八卦纹镈

Nephrite carving
China
Song dynasty, 960-1279 CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.3272

Ding incense burner

绿玉方鼎

Nephrite carving
China
Qing dynasty, 1750-1850 CE

Gerard Arnhold collection, donated by Anthony and Mayca Arnhold
DUROM.L.2001.A136

This vessel is known as a He. The form was common in late Shang to early Zhou dynasty (about 1100-900 BCE). In the Han dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE), a special form with the vessel's spout in the shape of a phoenix became popular. The vessel shown here was made in the Song dynasty, copying the Han dynasty form. The spout is also made into the shape of a bird, probably a phoenix.

The collecting and imitating of ancient objects began in the Song dynasty. At this time, Neo-Confucianism had come to dominate the intellectual world in China. This school of thought promoted the revival of ancient rituals and values, and believed that contemporary rituals should follow ancient forms.

Before this time ritual objects had been made using written descriptions as a basis for design rather than real objects. Collecting ancient ritual objects came into favour to allow scholars to understand what they really looked like. As a result new objects started to be made in archaic forms. This bell is called the Bo. It was originally a bronze ceremonial instrument which was included in 'Zhou Li' (Rituals of the Zhou dynasty). This nephrite carving of the bell is not for practical use but for appreciation and collecting.

The Song imperial court not only promoted but also led the collecting behaviour of the time. In 1107-1123 CE, the Xuanhe Bogu tu (Catalogue of Antiquities of the Xuanhe reign) was created to make a record of the 839 ancient bronzes collected by the Song imperial court.

In the Qing dynasty, Qianlong reign (1736-1795 CE), another catalogue was produced of the 1529 bronzes collected by the Qing imperial court. This shows how collecting had become a cultural tradition that was continued by successive dynasties. This nephrite Ding vessel may have been inspired by the design of one of the 1529 bronzes.

Zun vase

灰玉兽面纹方尊式花插

Nephrite carving
China
Ming dynasty, 1368-1644 CE

Hardinge collection
DUROM.1960.837.a-b

Functional utensils as well as ritual objects have been made in archaic forms. This vase, in the shape of the ancient ritual vessel Zun, was made with nephrite jade and used for display in house. Scratches and marks inside the vase indicate that it has been used as a flower vase. The shape of the Zun vessel has been slightly altered to meet the function: the body has been made shorter, and the mouth is narrower than would be expected.

Lamp

澹然居士款白釉雁足镫

Porcelain with underglaze blue inscription
China
Qing dynasty, 1825-1875 CE

Macdonald collection
DUROM.1969.232.B

In the early part of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644 CE), the extent and purpose of collecting ancient objects and creating new objects in archaic forms was extended as scholars began to keep collections on their desk as a source of inspiration.

This lamp is a ceramic reproduction of a Han dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE) bronze lamp whose stand is shaped into a wild goose claw. An example of this kind of lamp is mentioned by the Qing dynasty scholar Qian Yong (1759-1844 CE). In his book Qian wrote:

'Official Wang Lanquan has a Wild-Goose Claw lamp, whose leg looking like a standing Wild-Goose foot; upon the lamp lids the flame. Both candle and oil can be used on the lamp; delicate craftsmanship indeed……I reproduced 4 lamps and gifted them to Official Bin, who then wrote a poem on them. At banquets, the lamps twinkle and trigger a reminiscing inspiration.'

The quote indicates that the wild goose claw lamp was considered an archaic object and found favour among scholars in the Qing dynasty.

Zhong Bell

白玉钟

Nephrite carving
China
Qing dynasty, 1750-1850 CE

Gerard Arnhold collection, donated by Anthony and Mayca Arnhold
DUROM.L.2001.A21

Ancient jades often assume a brown colour after being buried for a long time. For this reason jade with natural brown or grey-green markings was sometimes considered highly desirable.

The Qianlong Emperor (reigned 1736-1795 CE), who led the fashion for jade-carving, said that this kind of marking is the essence of nature and time, and ‘can be compared to Han dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE) jades’.

Cup

绿地五彩描金兽面纹螭耳觥

Porcelain with overglaze coloured enamels and gilding
China, Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen
Qing dynasty, Kangxi reign, 1662-1722 CE

MacDonald Collection
DUROM.1969.300

Ancient forms were sometimes combined with more modern techniques. Here a porcelain cup has been decorated with wucai (five colours style) enamelling popular during the Kangxi reign, but the shape is based on the form of an archaic gong wine vessel from the Shang dynasty. The original bronze vessels were often decorated with a taotie design. This has been reproduced in bright blue enamel on this cup.

Vase

仿哥釉铁花兽耳尊

Porcelain with crackled greyish white glaze and applied-relief decoration
China, Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen
Qing dynasty, Qianlong reign, 1736-1795 CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1968.103

The collecting and imitation of ancient objects was not restricted to bronze and jade ritual objects, but also included famous ceramic types. In the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1911 CE), the imperial

kilns at Jingdezhen recreated the Song dynasty (960-1279 CE) Guan ware, Ge ware, Jun ware, Longquan ware.

This vase is shaped like a Zun bronze vessel and the glaze is inspired by the Ge ware crackled glaze, one of the major Song dynasty ware types recreated at the Jingdezhen kilns. During the Qianlong reign (1736-1795 CE), the workmanship at Jingdezhen became so highly sophisticated that some of these reproductions have been mistaken by modern ceramic experts for real Song dynasty examples.

Yue axe

翡翠双龙纹钺

Jadeite carving
China
Qing dynasty, 1750-1850 CE

Hardinge collection
DUROM.1960.1703

Many jade weapons and tools were specifically made for ritual ceremonies. The jade axe in particular was important as it represented power and kingship. When the king presented himself to the court, guardians stood on either side, holding jade axes.

This jade plaque adopts the archaic shape of a Yue axe, but the sharp edges have been replaced by curves, and the body is heavily decoration with dragon patterns.

Ceramic Production

Chinese ceramic production stretches back over 20,000 years. For the last 1,000 years many of the principles and manufacturing techniques have stayed largely the same.

First, the potters prepare the clay by adding water. Containers including plates, bowls and vases are then thrown on a wheel, while more complicated shapes are made in a mould or hand formed. Decorations such as carving, incising and applied-relief can also be added whilst the pot is still relatively soft.

The piece is left to dry and harden becoming the core (biscuit) of the ceramic. The next stage is glazing. Potters apply glazes using different methods to create different effects. Coloured and painted decoration can be applied before or after glazing, creating underglaze and overglaze patterns respectively. Traditionally, decoration is done by teams of artists, each of whom contributes a different piece to the final design.

After the glaze has dried the ceramic is fired in a structure called a kiln. Firing conditions need to be strictly controlled as the slightest change of temperature or air circulation can significantly affect the ceramics. Even objects fired at the same time can appear different if they are placed in different areas in the kiln. Potters have developed various ways of combating this including placing their pots in saggers - ceramic boxes that can be stacked on top of each other inside the kiln.

Ming dynasty

'Dragon Kiln',
Foshan City

The film showing the stages of ceramic production was produced by the Bureau for External Cultural Relations, Ministry of Culture of People's Republic of China. The Oriental Museum would like to thank the Bureau for their permission to include this film in this gallery.

Sagger box

匣钵
Stoneware
China, Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen
Song dynasty, 960-1279 CE

Gift from Ran Zhang

This sagger box comes from the Jingdezhen kilns, Jiangxi province. Inside it there is a small, shallow bowl with the Qingbai (pale blue-green) glaze. There is a large crack on one side of the bowl, resulting in a chip. This is the reason why this bowl is abandoned at the kilns site.

The use of sagger boxes emerged in the Southern dynasties (420-589 CE) and became common in the Tang dynasty (618-907 CE). It minimizes the direct contact between the firing smoke and the pot, or between pots, and prevents dust coming off on the surface of the vessel being fired. In addition, stacked saggers make full use of the kiln space. The invention of saggers was a significant development in the history of Chinese ceramic-making.

Western Collecting

In the West, the establishment of direct maritime trade links between Europe and China encouraged a wave of interest in collecting Far Eastern art. Few westerners however had the opportunity to explore and understand China and during the 17th and 18th centuries pioneering Western collectors focussed their attention on artefacts – especially ceramics - produced specifically to meet the demands of Western connoisseurs.

During the 19th century a series of conflicts between China and the West forced the conservative Qing court to open its borders to foreign embassies, missionaries and merchants. A new wave of collecting resulted, this time focussed on more authentic art and antiquities. Western tastes did not however fully map those of Chinese literati, and Europeans tended to focus their attention on ceramics, bronzes and jades, whilst paying less attention to the highly esteemed arts of painting and calligraphy.

Rt. Hon. Malcolm MacDonald (1901-1981 CE)

Candle holder

黄绿釉锦狮烛台

Stoneware carving with green and yellow glaze
China
Ming dynasty, about 1550-1650 CE.

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.246.A

Standing horse tomb figure

立马俑

Earthenware with traces of pigment
China, north
Tang dynasty, about 700-800 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.34

Malcolm MacDonald first visited the Far East in 1929 CE when, as a recently elected MP, he attended a conference in Kyoto. Already a connoisseur and collector of English pottery, MacDonald's post-conference travels through Korea, China and Manchuria opened his eyes to the wonders of Chinese ceramics. It was on this visit that he made his first purchases.

In 1946 MacDonald returned to the Far East as a senior diplomat. Although based in Singapore, he travelled extensively throughout the region and began to collect Chinese ceramics in earnest. In 1955 MacDonald was appointed as High Commissioner to India. Reluctant to move his Chinese ceramics to India, MacDonald turned his attention to finding a museum in the UK which would be willing to

accept his collection on loan. His search led him to Durham's recently formed School of
Oriental Studies.

This lion candle holder is one the very first Chinese ceramics collected by Macdonald, purchased during his trip to Kyoto in 1929. It shows his early taste in Chinese ceramics. Many European collectors were initially drawn by the brilliant enamelling of Chinese ceramics, and started collecting objects with distinctive shapes and colours. This is one of the reasons why famille rose ware, the enamel type with the strongest colour palette, became the dominant type of export porcelain.

As MacDonald's knowledge grew his tastes changed. Tang dynasty tomb figures like this magnificent horse became a favourite with MacDonald. At first out of his reach financially, he was able to purchase a number of examples later in his career.

Vase

钧窑天蓝釉梅瓶

Stoneware with blue glaze, Jun ware
China, Henan province, Yuzhou
Ming dynasty, about 1400-1450 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.98

The MacDonald collection arrived in Durham in 1956, initially on the basis of a 5-year loan agreement. A total of 235 objects were shipped from Singapore, with a further small selection travelling north from MacDonald's London home.

MacDonald did not however stop collecting, and almost as soon as the collection arrived in Durham he began to add pieces with the aim of creating a fully comprehensive Chinese ceramic teaching collection.

This vase is a very different style of Chinese ceramic to the lion next to it. This diverse range of styles and types is what MacDonald was aiming for when he was collecting for the museum. The vase, commonly known as the Meiping (Plum Blossom Vase), is named after its distinctive, constricted neck which is narrow enough to only allow a single plum stem to go through.

Happily, with the help of a number of generous donors, the museum was able to acquire the collection in 1969 and it continues to form a cornerstone of our Chinese collections.

List of donors to the purchase of the Malcolm MacDonald collection

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Sir Charles Hardinge (1878-1968 CE)

Toad figure
青玉蟾蜍
Nephrite carving
China
Date unknown

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.971

Rooster figure
Nephrite carving
China
Date unknown

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.2506

Sceptre
乾隆款铁胎错银蚱蜢如意
Cast iron with silver inlay
China
Qing dynasty, Qianlong reign,
1736-1795CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.2495

Sir Charles Edmund Hardinge, fifth Baronet, had family associations with Stanhope in Weardale, County Durham. He began collecting jade in 1917 while recuperating from an illness. Walking with the aid of crutches he frequented 'junk shops', as he called them, as places

where he could rest. A lifelong collector, he now found himself attracted to one material in particular: jade.

As a trained petrologist he became concerned with the different types of stone that were described as ‘jade’ and set about assigning them to the more precise geological families of amphibole and pyroxene, publishing his findings in 1961 as Jade: Fact and Fable. Sir Charles kept detailed records of his purchases, itemising date of acquisition, a short description of the material, price paid, from whom purchased and, if relevant, when it was sold, gifted or exchanged and for how much.

Hardinge had intended the collection to come to the museum on his death. However, in 1959 he suffered an accident which compelled him to give up his house and move into a nursing home. He therefore asked the School of Oriental Studies to accept his gift prematurely and, at very short notice, the entire collection of several thousand objects (including furniture, pictures, five clocks and a number of display cases) had to be transported to Durham.

From the University’s perspective, the timing could not have been better, for, whilst the Oriental Museum building had been completed, its cases had yet to be filled. It was accordingly possible to incorporate Hardinge’s fantastic collection into the displays which opened to the public in May 1960.

Snuff Bottle

翠玉葫芦型鼻烟壶

Nephrite
China
Qing dynasty, 1700-1900CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.1114

Snuff Bottle

石制梅纹鼻烟壶

Stone
China
Qing dynasty, 1700-1900CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.3631

Snuff Bottle

玛瑙鼻烟壶

Agate and pink amethyst
China
Qing dynasty, 1700-1900CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.3198

Snuff Bottle

玻璃牡丹纹鼻烟壶

Glass
China
Qing dynasty, 1700-1900CE
Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.2074

The selection of snuff bottles shown here illustrates Sir Charles' wide interest in different kinds of stone, and other materials, as well as jade.

The first bottle shown here is carved from nephrite - true jade. The bottle has been designed and carved to take advantage of the natural variations in the colour of the nephrite. The greener part has been carved to resemble the body of a gourd, while the slightly browner parts are carved as the stem and leaves. The second snuff bottle is carved from an unidentified stone, but is perhaps meant to resemble jade as this was so highly valued.

The final two bottles are made from completely different materials. They demonstrate the way in which Sir Charles collected examples of types of object that could be made in jade, not just in jade, but in other materials as well.

The first of these snuff bottles is carved from agate with brown markings which resemble a Chinese landscape painting. The lid is made from contrasting pink amethyst.

The final snuff bottle is made from glass. Its clean, simple, contrasting colour scheme gives the object a very modern and stylish look.

The Chinese snuff bottle is designed to be carried on the person. Its small size and the enormous diversity of designs and materials used make it a favourite collectable among both Chinese and Western collectors.

Mr Gerard Arnhold (1918-2010 CE)

Bowl
玉雕菊花笔洗
Jade
China
Qing dynasty, 1700-1800CE

Gerard Arnhold collection, donated by Anthony and Mayca Arnhold
DUROM.2017.9

Bowl
玉雕菊纹笔洗
Jade
China
Qing dynasty, 1700-1800CE

Gerard Arnhold collection, donated by Anthony and Mayca Arnhold
DUROM.2017.44

Gerard Arnhold was born in 1918 in Dresden, Germany into a well-known family of bankers and philanthropists. The Arnhold family was Jewish and in 1936, while Gerard was still a student, his family were forced to flee Germany with the National Socialist Party took power and the family's assets were seized and their bank absorbed into the German Dresdner Bank.

Gerard moved to the UK and continued his studies at Cambridge while other members of the family scattered around the globe. In 1940 he joined the British Army and went on to work in intelligence. After the war he began a long and very successful career in business, first in the chemical industry and then in technology.

Outside business Gerard had a strong love of art, music and the natural world. He became a keen collector of Chinese art, amassing

a significant collection including jades, carved rhino horn, ivory and other items, all of the highest quality.

Gerard also followed in the family tradition of philanthropy and had a particular interest in supporting cultural projects. In Dresden he donated significantly to organisations such as the Dresden Philharmonic orchestra and also contributed to the Dresden state art collections and helped to found the Museum of Ethnology there.

In the early 1980s Gerard loaned a significant portion of his Chinese collections to the Oriental Museum. He was keen that the collections should be seen and used and supported the museum in a number of schools education projects in particular. Following his death in 2010 his family donated a significant proportion of the loaned material to the museum in his memory.

Dr Gilbert Manley

Tea bowl

吉州窑黑地洒釉花纹盏

Stoneware with black glaze and splashed decoration, Jizhou ware
China
Song dynasty, 960-1279 CE.

Manley Bequest
DUROM.2010.50

Tea bowl

吉州窑黑地玳瑁斑花纹盏

Stoneware with black glaze and splashed decoration, Jizhou ware
Song dynasty, 960-1279 CE.

Manley Bequest
DUROM.2010.51

These bowls were given to the museum by Mrs Jane Manley, on behalf of her late husband Dr Gilbert Hampden Manley. Dr Manley was born and grew up in China in the early 20th century. He left China in 1950 and came to Britain, where he studied to become a zoologist and anthropologist. Between 1974-1994, Dr Manley was a lecturer and later, senior lecturer at Durham University. Dr Manley had a wide field of interests, including Oceanic art, Chinese ceramics, the costumes, textiles and accessories of Chinese minority peoples and British studio pottery.

The first of the two bowls is covered with black glaze and decorated with splashes of white glaze depicting an abstract, floral pattern. Black-glazed wares are not among the favourites of Western collectors. There are, however, several similar black-glazed tea bowls in the Manley bequest, showing the collector's discerning eye.

The second bowl, also glazed in black, is decorated with the Daimao ban (Tortoise-shell pattern), which is a special effect of brown and yellow splashed dots. The pattern resembles the shell of a type of tortoise whose Chinese name is Daimao. Daimao shell was regarded as a precious material and was often used for making accessories.

Dr Henry de László (1901-1992)

Plaque

铅人

Lead with mould decoration
Cast iron with silver inlay
China
Southern dynasties, about 300-600 CE.

De Laszlo Collection
DUROM.1992.145

Handles

铜胎包金兽面钮

Cast bronze with gilt decoration
China
Tang dynasty, 618-907 CE

De Laszlo Collection
DUROM.1992.15.A-B

The son of the distinguished Hungarian painter Philip de László, Henry de László was born in Budapest in 1901. Educated in England and Switzerland, Dr de László came to England with his family in about 1908. A chemist by training, Henry de László began collecting in 1941, drawing his inspiration from a visit to New York's famous Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Of Jewish descent, Dr de László feared that the Second World War would result in the destruction of many of the kinds of objects he had seen during that visit and he resolved to play his part in preserving what he could for future generations. His collection of

objects ranged from Chinese Han Dynasty farm models to bronzes from the Luristan region of Iran.

The collection was loaned to the museum in 1970 by Dr de László's widow, Mrs Juliane Von Hessert, and in 1993 Mrs Von Hessert generously agreed to make a gift of much of the collection. It was a gesture which was greatly appreciated both by the museum and by its visitors, Anthony de Boulay excitedly recording in the Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society (1992-93) that:

'Members were able to handle pieces recently given to the museum by Henry de László.'

The remainder of the collection was auctioned by Sotheby's in 2002. The Oriental Museum was keen to retain as much of the splendid de László Collection as possible in Durham and, with the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Resource/V&A Purchase Grant Fund and the Friends of the Oriental Museum, the Museum was able to beat off stiff competition from dealers to purchase most of the material on offer.

Jade and hardstone carving

Modern geologists use the term jade to refer to the minerals jadeite and nephrite. The first Chinese dictionary, written in the first century CE, describes jade (*yu*) as ‘a beautiful stone with five virtues – smooth, straightforward, clear-sounding, unbending and sharp’. This description can apply to many other hardstones and is often still used in this sense by modern Chinese speakers.

Archaeological evidence suggests that hardstone carving is one of the oldest arts in China, dating back to the fifth millennium BCE. Jades and other hardstones were worked in a very similar way. While tools improved over the millennia, the basic method remained largely unchanged from Neolithic times until the development of modern diamond-tipped tools.

The stones were not carved so much as gradually worn away. This was achieved by laborious grinding of the surface of the stone with abrasives such as powdered quartz. Various grades of fineness were used to move from creating a rough shape to working the final form and polishing. Tools of metal, leather, wood or felt were carriers of the abrasives rather than cutting tools.

Using this technique Chinese stoneworkers achieved incredible results, creating objects of great complexity and craftsmanship. One distinctive feature is the exploitation of varying colours, layers or inclusions in the stone. Chinese craftsmen excelled at creating works that could turn potential flaws into stunning features.

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Archaeological evidence suggests that jade carving is one of the oldest arts in China. Jade is the most precious of all stones in Chinese culture, associated with the best qualities of human beings. However, many other precious and semi-precious stones were also used in Chinese art. These displays showcase the enormous range of stones used and the equally wide range of objects created, both practical and decorative.

Carving of a dog
Jade
China
Date not known

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.2260

This carving of a dog is executed in jade. Today in the West we think of jade as green but nephrite jade is found in a wide range of colours, all of which were used in Chinese art. This stone has been chosen for the variation in colour that runs through it which brings vitality to the fur of the dog's coat. This exploitation and celebration of the natural variations in colour found in stones is one of the hallmarks of the Chinese stone carver.

Rabbit carving
Rock crystal
China
Date not known

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.1784.a-b

Carving of a female deity
Rock crystal
China
Date not known

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.2211

This rabbit and carving of a female figure have both been created in rock crystal (colourless quartz). The golden threads that run through the rabbit carving are formed from inclusions of the mineral rutile which give a golden hair-like look which was much admired. In contrast the female figure is clear. The object which was once held in the woman's hand has been lost. This would have helped to positively identify her. She may be Guanyin the Buddhist bodhisattva or perhaps He Xiangu, one of the Daoist immortals. Rock crystal was associated with purity and clarity, making it a suitable medium for a carving of a deity meant for contemplation.

Monkey and horse carving
Soapstone
China
Date not known

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.1129

Carving of a luohan
Soapstone
China
Qing dynasty, 1700-1900 CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.1462

These two carvings are made in soapstone. As the name implies, this stone is softer than many others and thus easier to carve. This allows more intricate and details pieces to be created. The combination of a horse and a monkey can have two meanings based on puns in Chinese language, either 'may you quickly be made an official' or 'may your descendants gain high office'. Both of which make this a suitable gift for someone you wished to gain favour with. The luohan were the original disciples of the Buddha. Represented as shaven-headed monks, having attained enlightenment themselves, they were seen as sages. Images such as this were used for meditation and were usually created in groups of 16 or more figures.

Carving of a goat
Smaragdite
China
Qing dynasty, 1800-1900 CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.2282

Purple is a colour associated with the North Star which the Chinese believed was the centre of the cosmos. It was also linked to the imperial family and particularly the emperor's grandsons. The goat (yang) is one of the 12 animals of the Chinese zodiac. The word yang, written with a different character, is the masculine, positive energy from the Doaist pairing of yin and yang. As such, depictions of goats came to be linked with positive concepts. The kneeling goat in particular was seen as a symbol of the virtuous child, following the Confucian concept of filial piety. This carving of a kneeling goat in a purple stone brings together these ideas linking the imperial grandsons with Confucian ideals.

Budai
Jade & feldspar conglomerate
China
Qing dynasty or later, after 1644 CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.2448.a-b

During the Qing dynasty, the bright green of jadeite became fashionable in China, in contrast to the more muted colours of nephrite jade favoured in earlier dynasties. Jadeite was imported from Burma but other deep green stones could also be found in China. The colour green is associated with dragons, plants, springtime, youth and immortality. This statue represents Budai.

Said to have lived around the 10th century, Budai was said to have been a generous, happy monk who was poor but content. He has become part of the Buddhist pantheon and is often called the 'laughing Buddha'. He is associated with contentment and abundance. The positive meanings of the colour green complement these associations.

Seal with pig carving
Lapis lazuli
China
Date not known

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.2469

Seal with cat carving
Lapis lazuli
China
Qing dynasty, 1700-1799 CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.3183

The deep blue of lapis lazuli has been valued by peoples from Europe and Asia since the dawn of civilization. Found in the region of Afghanistan and Pakistan it has been traded over huge distances for millennia. Deep blue is associated with dragons, springtime and the direction east in Chinese culture. As with other stones, Chinese carvers made use of inclusions of different colours within the lapis to enhance their designs, as seen with this cat. According to legend, cats were introduced to China by Buddhist monks to kill rats that chewed sacred books, making a cat an appropriate motif for seal to be used on paper documents of all kinds.

Carving of a buffalo
Jade
China
Late Ming/early Qing dynasty, 1600-1799 CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.3295.a-b

The ox or water buffalo is one of the 12 animals of the Chinese zodiac. Buffalo were crucial in rice cultivating areas and were highly valued by farmers. As such they came to symbolise the happiness to be found in a simple rural lifestyle. A jade carving such as this may have been intended to decorate the studio of a gentleman scholar, as part of the idealisation of a simple life far from the responsibilities of the city and official life.

Guanyin seated on a lion
Soapstone, gold
China
Qing dynasty, Kangxi reign, 1675-1725 CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.3297

Flecks of gold are still visible on the surface of this carving of the Buddhist bodhisattva Guanyin, known in China as the goddess of mercy and compassion. As such, we can assume that soapstone was chosen for this carving due to its softness which gives the ability to render more detail. It is likely that the finished piece would then have been completely covered in gold so that the original colour of the stone would not be visible.

Tortoise
Coral
China
Date not known

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.3357

Red coral was highly revered throughout East Asia. It was imported into China from Iran and Sri Lanka, forming an important item of trade along the Silk Routes. Red coral was associated with long life, good fortune but also with high rank and nobility and is often found combined with other signs of rank. The tortoise was a symbol both of long life and also of career success, particularly in the imperial civil service exams. As such the combination of coral and the image of the tortoise expressed a wish for success and long life at court.

Figure of a lokopala
青玉巧色虎首母像
Jade
China
Date not known

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.3400.a-b

This lokopala takes the form of a tiger-headed human. These mythical creatures are Buddhist protector deities, originally derived from indigenous Tibetan beliefs. This protector deity holds a spray of lotus in one hand and the Dharmachakra, (the Wheel of the Dharma), a representation of the Buddha's teachings, in the other. He stands on clouds. Once again, the variation in colour within the stone has been used by the carver in planning the composition of the piece to highlight these details.

Staff head
Jade
China
Date not known

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.3418

Dragon seal
Turquoise
China
Qing dynasty, 1800-1899 CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.3440

Carving of qilin and pups
Soapstone
China
Date not known

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.3574

Mythical animals have been depicted in Chinese art from earliest times. They often combine elements of real animals to create hybrids which represent the powers associated with these animals such as strength, beauty, grace, intelligence of long life.

In stone carving the attributes of the animal being depicted were often matched to the symbolism of the stone being used, particularly its colour. For example, the dragon is the most high-ranking animal in chinese art. The blue-green dragon is the manifestation of the supreme deity associated with spring, wood and fertility. The qilin is a symbol of honour and rank, long life and wisdom. Portrayed with

their pups they were said to bring baby boys to happy parents. These special sons would then be destined to become high-ranking officials. Red coral was the stone closely associated with high rank and so the use of this red soapstone may be intended to evoke that image.

Rhinoceros carving
玉石犀牛
Jasper
China
Date not known
Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.3526

Although rhinoceros horn was highly valued in Chinese society, images of rhino rarely appear in Chinese art. Rhino were indigenous to southwest China but were hunted to extinction by the 14th century CE both for their hide and their horns. The image of a rhino was used as the badge of rank for military officers of the eighth rank in both the Ming and Qing dynasties and so this carving of a rhino may have been intended for a military officer.

Carving of a crab
Jade
China
Date not known

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.3816

The colour variation in this jade has been used to excellent effect to pick out the details of shells and seaweed in this carving of a crab. The crab is symbol of harmony in Chinese art and many depictions can be found on objects ranging from water pots intended for the scholar's studio to women's hair ornaments. This concept of harmony fits very well with the associations of jade with concepts of purity, duty, loyalty and truth.

Carving of a lion
Jade
China
Date not known

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.3982

Lions are not indigenous to China. They were known from areas along the Silk Routes such as modern Iran and India and were associated with royalty. Admired for their strength and courage they were associated with hunting and military prowess and were the symbol of the highest ranks of military officials. However, they were also seen as protectors and a small jade lion like this may have been given to a child to guard them from harm. The eyes may originally have been painted but this has worn away with use.

Phoenix carving
Jade
China
Ming dynasty or later, after 1344 CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.4046

The reds and oranges of this piece of jade have been used to wonderful effect to create this image of the phoenix in its form as the ‘red bird of the south’. One of the oldest creatures known in Chinese art, it is associated with the compass direction south and the season of summer. Later in Chinese history, the phoenix also comes to be associate with the empress and is a common motif associated with the women of the royal family and is often found on accessories made for their use.

Carving of a camel
玛瑙骆驼
Agate
China
Date not known

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.590

Agate is one of the most commonly used stones in Chinese hardstone carving. It is found in various colours from red, to green or purple. The transparent or semi-transparent forms, such as found here, were most valued. The double-humped camel is indigenous to the Taklamakan Desert in modern Xinjiang province, an area to the far west of modern China. They have no special significance in Chinese art but instead appear as exotic animals linked to the trade along the Silk Roads.

Carving of a rooster
Jade, silver, wood
China
Qing dynasty, 1644-1911 CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.627

The rooster is the only bird among the 12 animals of the Chinese zodiac. As in many other cultures he is associated with the dawn and so by extension in Chinese art he is linked to the sun, masculinity and strength. Many variations in depictions of the rooster were used to in Chinese art to send a message that could be understood and appreciated by a member of the elite based on verbal puns and other allusions. This made it a popular motif for objects made as gifts. The use of jade adding to the meaning of the gift.

Goldfish carving
Jade, carnelian
China
Date not known

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.897

Carving of a duck
Jade, carnelian
China
Date not known

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.961

Carnelian and other red stones are often used in Chinese art to create the eyes for birds, fish and animals. The red colour could make a striking contrast with jade and other hard stones, as shown here.

The goldfish (jinyu) was a popular motif as its name include jin (gold) and yu (jade). Another word yu also means surplus and so an artwork carved in jade depicting a goldfish when given as a gift can be interpreted as hoping that the recipient might have 'an abundance of gold'

Ducks are most commonly depicted in pairs in Chinese art. Mandarin ducks were thought to mate for life and so a pair of ducks came to symbolise happy marriage, peace and fidelity. As such artworks depicting ducks were popular choices for wedding gifts.

Goldfish were also often used as motifs on artworks for weddings. The combination of a goldfish and a lotus can be read as wishing the couple an abundance of harmony and wealth in their marriage.

Chinese Zodiac

In the traditional Chinese calendar each year is named after a different animal in a twelve year cycle. Each animal has its own distinctive characteristics and people born in the same year are believed to share these. This is called *Shēngxiào* or 'birth likeness' in Chinese, but it is usually referred to in English as the Chinese zodiac.

There are many stories to explain the origin of the Chinese zodiac. In the most famous, the Jade Emperor called a meeting of the animals. To get to the meeting the animals had to cross a river. The Emperor decreed that the years of the calendar would be named after each animal in the order they arrived. The rat won the race by cunning, and so the first year in the cycle is named after him. Eleven other animals followed. Which animal are you?

Rat	charming but bossy
Ox	patient but grumpy
Tiger	lovable but moody
Hare	sensitive but haughty
Dragon	charismatic but demanding
Snake	fun-loving but clingy
Horse	generous but anxious
Ram	creative but lazy
Monkey	faithful but gullible
Cockerel	adventurous but vain
Dog	helpful but nervous
Pig	hospitable but greedy

Look for your birth year and find your sign

Lunar New Year is determined by the phases of the moon. It can fall on any date between 21 January and 20 February.

For a birthday 1-20 January look at the column to the left of your birth year. If you were born between 21 January and 20 February you will need to check the exact date of Lunar New Year for that particular year to be sure of your sign.

Rat	Ox	Tiger	Hare	Dragon	Snake
1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929
1936	1937	1938	1939	1940	1941
1948	1949	1950	1951	1952	1953
1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965
1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977
1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025

Horse	Ram	Monkey	Cockerel	Dog	Pig
1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935
1942	1943	1944	1945	1946	1947
1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959
1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971
1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031

The Story of the Jade Emperor and the Zodiac Animals

The Jade Emperor is an important figure in traditional Chinese culture and religion who features in Daoist and Buddhists mythology.

One day the Jade Emperor invited a group of animals to compete in a race to become one of the 12 guardians of the Heavenly Gate. The Emperor told them that the order in which they crossed the finish line would decide the order in which they would appear in the zodiac calendar. To complete the race, each animal had to cross a wide, fast flowing river.

The cunning rat persuaded the kindly ox to let him ride across the river on his head, only to leap off when they reached the other side and claim first place, with the ox coming in second. Next came the tiger who had been swept off course. The next animal to cross the finish line was rabbit, who had almost drowned, but save himself by jumping onto a floating log. The fifth place went to the dragon, who stopped both to extinguish a fire in a local village and to secretly blow the rabbit across the river to safety.

Following closely behind was the horse who, at the last moment, realised that the snake was wrapped around its leg. The snake wriggled free and crossed the line in sixth place, forcing the poor horse into seventh. The sheep, monkey and roaster worked together to paddle across the river on a makeshift raft, but once on the other side they dashed for the line with the sheep coming in eighth, the monkey in ninth and the roaster in tenth. Trailing at the back were the dog and the pig. The dog had become distracted by having fun in the water so arrived in eleventh place, while the pig decided to stop for food and a nap, and so was last to cross the finish line.

Rat carving
Jade, ruby
China
Qing dynasty, 1700-1900 CE

Gift of Sir Charles Hardinge
DUROM.1960.2307

Ox carving
Serpentine
China
Qing dynasty, 1644-1911 CE

Gift of Sir Charles Hardinge
DUROM.1960.966

Tiger tally
Bronze
China
Eastern Han dynasty,
25 BCE to 220 CE

Gift of Sir Charles Hardinge
DUROM.1960.3242

Hare carving
Soapstone, ruby
China
Date unknown

Gift of Sir Charles Hardinge
DUROM.1960.1603

Dragon seal
Burnt jade
China
Ming dynasty, 1368-1644 CE

Gift of Sir Charles Hardinge
DUROM.1960.4202

Snake carving
Chalcedony
China
Date unknown

Gift of Sir Charles Hardinge
DUROM.1960.2098

Horse carving
玉马
Jade
China
Date unknown

Gift of Sir Charles Hardinge
DUROM.1960.3050

Goat carving
Serpentine
China
Date unknown

Gift of Sir Charles Hardinge
DUROM.1960.2345

Monkey figure
Lapis lazuli
China
Date unknown

Gift of Sir Charles Hardinge
DUROM.1960.1902

Rooster figure
Soapstone
China
Date unknown

Gift of Sir Charles Hardinge
DUROM.1960.1143

Dog and puppy carving
Jade
China
Date unknown

Gift of Sir Charles Hardinge
DUROM.1960.1540

Carving of a boar
Jade
China
Date unknown

Gift of Sir Charles Hardinge
DUROM.1960.1479

Charm money
花钱
Copper alloy
China
Date unknown

Gift from Steve Race in memory of Joseph Race
DUROM.1970.9.208

The twelve animals of the Chinese Zodiac are shown around this coin charm. Coins like this could be worn for good luck, sometimes as a necklace or from the waist.

Lucky red envelopes
利是封
Paper with colour and gilt
China
Modern, 2008-2010

Chinese Lunar New Year (the Spring Festival) is the biggest and most important festival in China. Traditionally, celebrations begin three days prior to the New Year and last until the 15th day of the New Year.

In different areas of the country there are different traditions for the celebration of the Spring Festival, although certain general practices are generally followed. Prior to the festival a thorough clean-up of the household is done by all members of the family. On Chuxi (New Year's Eve) the family gathers for a big dinner. During the Spring Festival people visit their relatives, children receive pocket money in red envelopes as a symbol of protection and good luck, and ritual ceremonies and other celebrations such as dragon-dance, lion-dance and fireworks are performed everywhere in the country.

Significance of Jade

Jade has been highly valued in Chinese culture for at least 7000 years. Confucius praised it as the 'embodiment of virtue'. Its translucency, smoothness and strength were qualities that every gentleman should seek to emulate. Even the sound of jade beads or plaques touching as someone wearing jade jewellery moved was valued for its musical qualities.

In earlier Chinese history jade was strongly associated with ritual and particularly with the burial of people of high status. Until the end of the Han dynasty (220 CE), the Chinese buried significant quantities of jade with their dead including ritual objects, jade weapons and jewellery. The rise of Daoism from the fifth century BCE onwards gave rise to the belief that jade had a preserving effect on the body. It was thought that jade could provide a route to immortality and royalty and nobles sought to cover their bodies in jade after death so that they would not decay.

From around 220 CE jades ceased to be buried with the dead. There seem to be two reasons for this; changing attitudes to death and also a possible shortage of jade as local supplies were used up. From the Tang dynasty (681-907 CE), the Kingdom of Yutian (modern day Xinjiang province) became a major new source of jade but objects were now made for use by the living rather than the dead. Decorative belt plaques, as well as food and drink vessels, became signs of wealth, only affordable by the richest families. Decorative objects were made for scholars interested in 'ancient style'.

As supplies of jade grew through conquest and trade during the Qing dynasty (1644-1912 CE), collecting jade became a fashionable hobby for wealthy merchants as well as officials and scholars. Craftsmen vied to create ever more extravagant and skilful pieces for display.

Snuff bottle
Chalcedony
China
Qing dynasty, 1644-1912 CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.2467

Snuff bottle with coiled dragon design
玛瑙龙纹鼻烟壶
Agate
China
Qing dynasty, 1644-1912 CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.1388

Snuff bottle in the shape of a cicada with stand
Jade, metal, carnelian
China
Qing dynasty, 1644-1912 CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.2358

Snuff bottle with dragon design
Amethyst
China
Qing dynasty, 1644-1912 CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.1848

Snuff bottle with design of birds and plants on stand
Malachite, wood
China
Qing dynasty, 1644-1912 CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.2295

Jade has been highly valued in Chinese culture for many thousands of years. Modern geologists use the term jade to refer to the minerals jadeite and nephrite but the traditional Chinese definition of jade (yu) includes a wide variety of stones and minerals. These stones were valued for the beauty to be found in variation of all kinds from different colours, to irregular blotches, layers and veins or differing levels of translucency.

Chinese craft workers exploited the possibilities of this variation in their work. This required detailed knowledge of the material, great skill in stone working and the ability to adapt the design to suit the individual piece as it revealed itself during working. What might be considered flaws in other cultures, could be turned into highlights by a skilled Chinese artist. The Chinese love of variation in hard stones is seen very clearly in snuff bottles.

Snuff is tobacco which has been ground to a powder and often has aromatics added to it. It is ingested by sniffing a pinch held in the fingers, or the case of snuff bottles, from a tiny spoon attached to the stopper of the bottle.

Tobacco is native to the American continent. It was introduced to Europe during the 16th century and from there European traders spread its use to Asia. It is not certain when the first snuff was used in China. Several early references list 'Japanese tobacco' and it is known that Portuguese traders introduced tobacco to Japan as early as the mid-16th century. Tobacco growing and use may have spread from Japan via Korea into China. At first it seems that pipe smoking was favoured. It clearly came to be regarded as an unpleasant habit as in 1639 the Ming Emperor, Chongzhen issued the first of several decrees aimed at banning tobacco smoking.

Snuff bottle in the shape of a cocoon
Agate
China
Qing dynasty, 1644-1912 CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.2138

Snuff bottle
Agate, jade, silver, wood
China
Qing dynasty, 1644-1912 CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.3798

Snuff bottle in the shape of a mudfish
巧色玛瑙鱼型鼻烟壶
Agate, coral
China
Qing dynasty, 1800-1899 CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.1433

Snuff bottle in the shape of a toad with stand
Jade, coral, wood
China
Qing dynasty, 1644-1912 CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.2320

Snuff bottle depicted the Buddha
Jade
China
Qing dynasty, 1644-1912 CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.2408

Taking snuff, rather than smoking tobacco, seems to have been favoured by the Manchu rulers who overthrew the Ming and established the Qing dynasty in 1644 CE. Snuff taking appears to have been regarded as medicinal, credited with being able to cure headaches and infections. However, its popularity was ensured by the Kangxi Emperor (reigned 1662-1722 CE). Numerous references to his liking for snuff survive. Kangxi was also a great patron of the arts and established a number of workshops within the imperial palace in Beijing for the manufacture of small objects of the highest quality for court use. Among these were snuff bottles.

Having found favour with the Emperor, the use of snuff and snuff bottles spread within court circles. Throughout the 18th century snuff bottles of the highest quality were produced. Their small size made them ideal as objects to be made in the most expensive of materials as evidence of the status and good taste of the owner.

Snuff-taking slowly spread through Chinese society in the 19th century. This is when the majority of hard-stone snuff bottles were made. Earlier bottles tend to be in glass, jade or enamels. To meet the growing demand across the country, craftsmen turned to the huge variety of hardstones as well as porcelain, lacquer, bamboo and ivory. They continued to be markers of status, taste and fashion.

Jade and hardstones were ideal for snuff bottles as their hardness and bright colours allowed for the creation of miniature sculptures of animals or people or for detailed decoration of dragons or other auspicious symbols. These stones also have a pleasant tactile quality which is important for a piece intended to be held in the hand.

The production of snuff bottles has continued in China to the modern day to meet demand from tourists for small, attractive souvenirs.

Stem bowl
Jade
China
Yuan dynasty, 1271-1368 CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.3743

Pair of cups
Jade
China
Qing dynasty, 1800-1900 CE

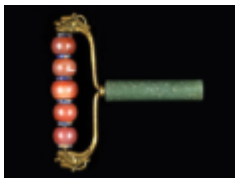
Bequest of Miss Dorothy Crawford Pape
DUROM.1995.90.a-b

Jade was only rarely used to make vessels in earliest periods of Chinese history. Bronze was preferred. Jade food and drink vessels begin to be signs of status and wealth from the Tang dynasty, used only on very special occasions. The enormous labour involved in creating jade cups and bowls lent them special status and made them highly desirable for the elite members of Chinese society. As such, production of jade vessels increased through the Ming and Qing dynasties. In 1756 CE the Qianlong Emperor received a gift of jades from the Mughal Kingdom in northern India. These pieces ushered in a new fashion for Indian-style jades which emphasised simple lines and the thinness of the vessels. The pair of small cups shown here are typical of this fashion.

Water pot in the shape of two peaches
Carnelian
China
Qing dynasty, 1644-1912 CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.3325

The creation of writing accessories in jades and other hardstones seem to have begun in the Song dynasty. The study of ancient jades was seen as a suitable pastime for scholars. Ancient pieces would be displayed in the scholar's study to be admired by guests. The use of the same materials to create practical writing accessories such as a water pot for washing ink from a brush after use marked the owner as a scholar of taste and refinement. The carnelian has been used here to echo the colour of the peaches depicted. Peaches are a symbol of long life.



Massager
Carnelian, lapis lazuli, jade, bronze
China
Qing dynasty, 1800-1899 CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.3360

Massage has always been a part of traditional Chinese medicine. However, the emphasis has been on the use of the hands rather than massage tools. This massager dates from the 19th century and may therefore have been made with a foreign market in mind rather than for domestic use. The use of jade, carnelian and lapis lazuli leaves no doubt that it was designed as a marker of wealth and status.

Pendant

碧玉福在眼前纹佩

Jade
China
Qing dynasty, 1700 –1900 CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.3770

Sleeve Weight

青玉龙狮纹坠

Jade
China
Date unknown

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.4212

Sleeve Weight

卧蚕纹佩

Jade and gold
China
Han dynasty, 220 BC –220 CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.3103

Hair Pin

白玉巧色夔龙饰

Jade
China
Date unknown

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.4041

Hair Pins

喜字金玉钗

Jade and gold
China
Qing dynasty, 1800-1899 CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.2645A-B

Wearing ornaments was a very popular part of dress in historic China. Initially jade ornaments such as pendants and necklaces were worn for ritual purposes. Leaders of tribes would wear jade pendants in divination ceremonies as a means of communicating with spirits. Belt hooks were used to fasten the clothing as well as to show off one's status. Jade sleeve weights were worn within sleeves or hung over the belt.

There were several reasons for wearing jade. The moral significance was that jade had five virtues; kindness; righteousness; wisdom; bravery; and purity. Carrying jade was a reminder to keep these virtues through one's behaviour. Secondly, wearing jade weights could avoid the dress and sleeves being puffed up, which was very impolite. Wearing jade could also discipline people's behaviour.

The wearer could not move too fast due to the fragile nature of the jade ornaments.

Historically, the Chinese wore their hair long for their whole life. Both men and women would bind up their hair into a bun and used hairpins to keep it in place. There are two common forms of hair pin. One named Zan is a single stick; the other is called Chai, and has two tips. When a Chai is combined with a hanging pendant, it turns into a Buyao (meaning ‘dangle by steps’), a beautiful hair ornament that dangles and moves as the wearer walks.

Flute
翠玉笛
Nephrite
China
Date unknown

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.3374

The flute is one of the oldest musical instruments in China. Most Chinese flutes are made with bamboo but some of them are made with stone or jade. Jade flutes are made, collected and played for their beauty which is thought to match the beauty of the music. However, they may not be able to match the tone of the humble bamboo flute as the material is less resonant.

Model stirrups
Jade
China
Date not known

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.3685.a-b

The dating and purpose of these model stirrups require further study. One possibility is that they were designed as paperweights for a scholar's study. There is a long tradition in China of the creation of ornamental pieces in jade which take their form or decorative motifs from historic objects originally made in other media. During the Ming and Qing dynasties this often meant using early Shang and Zhou dynasty bronzes for inspiration in the creation of jade vessels. These pieces take more practical items as their inspiration and this suggests a later date from the 19th or early 20th century for their creation.

Model of a boat
Jade
China
Qing dynasty, 1644-1912 CE

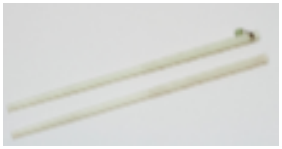
Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.1354

This model of a boat includes lucky symbols such as a stag, a bird and a tree. Due to the small size it is difficult to precisely identify the species of bird or tree and decode the meaning of the object. Such pieces were usually made to bring good luck to a person or a family and were displayed in the home for this purpose.

Vase
Jade
China
Late Qing dynasty, 1800-1912 CE

Bequest of F W Pierce via the Artfund
DUROM.1978.104

Pieces like this were not designed to have any practical function but simply to be spectacular. They allowed the jade carver to demonstrate their skill in creating such difficult details as the ring handles and the owner to impress their friends. Such pieces would be displayed in the home as signs of wealth.



Chop sticks
Jade
China
Qing dynasty, 1800-1899 CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.1959

Chopsticks have been used across East Asia for thousands of years. The earliest surviving chopsticks were bronze and are thought to have been used for cooking rather than eating. Early Chinese people used spoons as their main eating implement. Changes in diet together with a Confucian prohibition against having knives at the table are thought to have encouraged the increasing use of chopsticks. Jade chopsticks would have been a sign of status and wealth.

Axe head
Chalcedony
China
Qing dynasty, 1800-1899 CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.3095

Dagger
Jade
China
Date not known

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.3271

Jue vessel
Serpentine
China
Late Qing dynasty, 1800-1912 CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.3553

Vase recalling the form of a gu vessel
Jade
China
Date not known

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.3437

Circular box
Jade
China
Late Qing or Republic Period

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.2224.a-b

In traditional Chinese culture there is a great respect for antiquity. For this reason in later periods of history, jades were often carved in imitation of much older objects. These are sometimes regarded by Westerners as 'fakes', but should not be seen in this way. Rather they are archaistic pieces, reflecting the desire for objects in an ancient style. Some were created to very closely mimic the ancient piece, while others take inspiration from ancient pieces in their form or decoration but also incorporate later motifs or designs. In addition ancient jades were sometimes recut and reused at later periods.

The axe head and dagger displayed here are based on ancient jade carving in both form and decoration. The jue vessel on the other hand reproduces in stone a form which would originally have been made in bronze. The addition of the loose ring is a common feature of Qing dynasty pieces of this kind. It is designed to demonstrate the skill of the carver, rather than mimic any ancient style.

The square vase also displays the addition of rings to embellish a simpler form. The shape of this vase recalls the ancient gu vessel, originally a form of bronze wine cup for ritual offerings.

The circular box draws its inspiration from ancient bi-discs and also perhaps from ancient curved pendants and bracelets.

The type of pieces which inspired works such as these can be seen in the cases in this gallery devoted to the Shang dynasty and to ancient burial jades.

Pair of carved seals
Soapstone
China
Qing dynasty, 1700-1899 CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.2395.a-b

Seals have been used as a means of identification and verification for more than 2000 years in China. They fall into three main types.

First are personal seals which might carry the name and/or title of the owner. These act as a signature – confirming ownership or agreement to a contract. They are also used by artists to confirm the authenticity of their work.

Second are what are known as free seals. Rather than a name, these seals reflect literary, philosophical or religious sources, including lucky phrases or inspirational quotations.

Finally there are collectors or studio seals. These were used by Chinese collectors to mark their ownership of important art works.

These seals fall into the second group. The seal reads 'everything goes well'. Around the sides are poems by famous Tang dynasty (618--907 CE) poets.

Seal engraving came to be regarded as a distinct art form itself in China and as a special branch of calligraphy. Seals might be produced and used as an artistic expression as well as for practical or commercial purposes. As in the case, the top of the seal might also be carved into a sculptural form. A number of different stones were used for seal carving, selected for their colour and beauty.

Paper weight
Jade
China
Date not known

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.3041

This practical paperweight has been embellished with Chinese characters written in an archaic style.

Writing

Oracle scripts – the earliest form of Chinese writing – were in use in the Shang dynasty (1600-1046 BCE). These scripts diverged into many local forms in different parts of China until the Qin dynasty (221-207 BCE), when a standard script was created. Since then Chinese characters have remained largely unchanged, although they can be written in a range of different script styles.

Chinese script is not written using an alphabet but is instead based on a series of characters constructed by phonetic, pictographic or other elements. Because the script does not depend on pronunciation to be understood, written Chinese can be read by people who speak different dialects. Texts written hundreds – or even thousands - of years ago can likewise be read and understood by modern scholars, even though we have no idea of how the spoken language of the writer might have sounded.

There are more than 70,000 Chinese characters, of which about 3,500 are in regular use. The difficulty of learning to read and write these ensured that literacy was closely linked to high social status, and passing the civil service examination was a key goal for all aspiring Chinese scholars.

Oracle bone
甲骨
Animal bone with incised inscription
China, Henan province
Probably Shang dynasty, 1600-1046 CE

Gift from Bluett & Sons
DUROM.1969.495.13

Oracle bone
甲骨
Animal bone with incised inscription
China, Henan province
Modern

Gift from Bluett & Sons
DUROM.1969.495.64

People of the Shang dynasty (1600-1046 BCE) used oracle bones to predict the future. They cut ox bones and turtle shells into pieces, and looked at how they broke when exposed to fire. The outcome of the divination would then be inscribed onto the bones.

In 1899, an official named Wang Yirong discovered the existence of oracle bones. He began to study the script they were written in and started collecting them. To date, a total of 154,000 pieces of oracle bone have been unearthed, and over 4,000 ‘oracle characters’ have been identified from the inscriptions.

These characters have revealed a great deal about Shang society. Many of them can be linked to characters in the modern Chinese script. It is generally acknowledged that the oracle script is the first written system used for the Chinese language.

Demand for these bones in the early 20th century led to many fakes being produced. However, these modern bones can still be of use as often the forgers copied ancient inscriptions from original bones onto the fakes.

Gui vessel

兽面纹簋

Cast bronze with carved decoration
China
Western Zhou dynasty,1046-771 BCE

De Laszlo Collection
DUROM.1992.4

The Shang and Zhou dynasties (about 1600-221 BCE) are particularly notable for the production and use of bronze ritual vessels. These were used to make offerings of food and wine to ancestors in ritual ceremonies. This gui vessel is inscribed with a dedication that reads:

'In the year of Bingyin, the first day of the 4th month, the king was in the capital of Hao. The king granted great peace to the country. [We] bowed and bowed to the ground [and] presumed to praise the king, therefore [we] made [this vessel] to be used as a sacrificial container in the temple. May [our] sons and grandsons always treasure and use [this vessel]'.

Knife coin

齐之法化币

Cast bronze with inscription
China, Shandong province, Linzi
Warring States period, 476-221 BCE

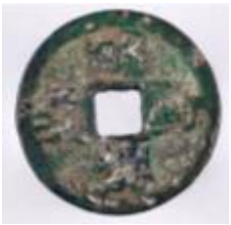
DUROM.U10838

Tongbao coin

大观通宝

Cast bronze with inscription
Song dynasty, Daguan reign, 1107-1110 CE

DUROM.1970.7.107



Tongbao coin

宣和通宝钱

Cast bronze with inscription
Song dynasty, Xuanhe reign, 1119-1125 CE

DUROM.1956.ASH3.35

The knife shape of this coin is derived from a bronze tool Tongxue. The type of coin was used in northern and eastern China during the Warring States period. The inscription on this coin reads Qi zhi fa hua (currency of the Qi city). It is written in one of the early variations of the Chinese script.

The First Emperor of the Qin dynasty (221-206 BCE) united the states of China, and unified all local forms of written Chinese into one standard script. Since then, the Chinese script has altered very little despite the use of diverse script styles.

The two round coins were cast in the Song dynasty. They demonstrate how very different script styles can be. The larger coin bears an inscription written in the Kaishu (Standard Script), specifically, the Shoujinti style created by the Song dynasty Emperor Huizong (reigned 1101-1119 CE). The inscription on the smaller coin is in Xiaozhuan (Small Seal Script), a script style inherited from the Qin dynasty unified script.

Bottle

磁州窑系白釉褐彩招财利市四系壶

Stoneware with white slip and overglaze brown decoration, Cizhou-type ware
China, North
Jin or early Yuan dynasty, about 1100-1300 CE

Macdonald Collection
DUROM.1969.67

Vase

同治款浅绛彩花鸟纹诗文方尊

Porcelain with overglaze polychrome decoration, pale umber colours style
China, Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen
Qing dynasty, Tongzhi reign, 1863-1873 CE

DUROM.1981.23.B

The Chinese style of writing with brush and ink led to calligraphy becoming an important art form in Chinese culture. Calligraphy has given rise to script styles such as the Xingshu (running script) and the Caoshu (cursive script or grass script).

Chinese art history scholars promote the concept of ‘Shu hua tong yuan’, meaning that inspiration for calligraphy and painting comes from the same source - nature - and that the two art forms have the same aesthetic value. Calligraphy is often used in paintings as an integral part of the composition and vice versa.

Both the ceramics shown here are decorated with calligraphy. The inscription on the brown-and-white bottle is the lucky saying ‘abundance of fortune and market’, while the long inscription on the pale umber colour vase shows how calligraphy can be integrated into a painting.

Wrist rest with inscribed poem

竹制臂搁

Bamboo
China
Ming dynasty, 1368-1644 CE

Gerard Arnhold collection, donated by Anthony and Mayca Arnhold
DUROM.2017.133

Chinese is traditionally written vertically from top to bottom and from right to left. A wrist rest can be used to place over the last line written while it dries so that is not smudged by the writing of the next line. As such, rests are usually rectangular in shape with a curved shape like a roof tile. This protects the text beneath the hollow. Bamboo makes an ideal material for wrist rests because of its naturally curved shape.

This rest is carved with a poem.

Type blocks
金属活字
Wood and metal
China, Shanghai
People's Republic of China, 1970s CE

Gift from the Department of East Asian Studies, Durham University
DUROM.2009.1.6

This box of movable type blocks is part of the set for a typewriter of the Shuangge (Double Pigeon) brand. The box contains metal frames filled with metal type arranged in radical order with an accompanying card sellotaped onto one side showing the layout of the type. Double Pigeon brand typewriters were still being produced by the Shanghai Typewriter Company until the mid 1980s.

The ancient Chinese spread literature and knowledge using hand-written manuscripts until the Tang dynasty (618-907 CE), when wood-block printing was invented. In the Song dynasty (about 1040 CE), a man named Bi Sheng invented movable-type print, in which characters were carved on individual blocks. Blocks could then be assembled into texts and printed. This invention had an enormous impact on the circulation of knowledge.

Text book
平民千字帖
Mounted paper with print
China
Republic of China, 1933 CE

Mylne Bequest
DUROM.1993.141

In Imperial China, the ability to read and write was a privilege of the upper classes and scholars. Most ordinary people, especially women, had no opportunity to learn to read and write. This situation changed around 100 years ago.

This text book is the ‘1000 Characters Script for the Masses’, whose first edition was published in 1926 as an learning aid for the ‘1000-character Lessons for the Masses’, a language teaching programme of the Mass Education Movement.

In 1918, Yale graduate Yan Yangchu (YC James Yen, 1890-1990 CE) went to France and worked for the YMCA. In France, Yan spent a great deal of time writing family letters for the 5,000 Chinese labourers who lived in the neighbourhood. It was then that he realised the importance of teaching basic reading and writing to ordinary Chinese people.

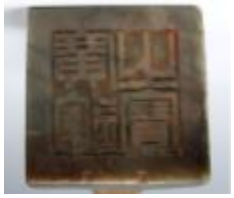
In 1920 CE, Yan returned to China and started planning an education programme. Two years later, the first edition of ‘1000-character Lessons for the Masses’ was published. Yan trialled his program in Hunan province, Changsha, where he hired 80 voluntary teachers to teach the lessons. Mao Zedong, the man who later changed the history of China, was one of the members of his team. Yan also designed 'Maths for the Masses', 'History for the Masses', 'Geography for the Masses', and the ‘1000 Characters Script for the Masses’ to assist with writing practice.

Over the coming years Yan promoted his programme across the Chinese nation. After 1949, Yan left mainland China and introduced his Mass Education Movement to South America, Africa and Southeast Asia. He is known as the 'Father of the Mass Education'.

Imperial mandate
五彩圣旨
Woven brocade with embroidery and hand script (facsimile)
China
Qing dynasty, Qianlong reign, 1777 CE

DUROM.1995.4

In Imperial China, the emperor's instruction was usually written on a mandate, which was then delivered and read to the receiver. An imperial mandate represented the presence of the emperor, therefore the writing needed to be of the highest quality and was often done by members of the Hanlin yuan (imperial academy). This mandate was written in Chinese and Manchu script, the language of the Manchu minority. The original document is in the collections of the Oriental Museum but a facsimile copy is displayed here due to the fragile nature of the original.



Imperial seal
青玉广运之宝印
Nephrite carving with engraved inscription
China
Qing dynasty, 1644-1911 CE

Hardinge Collection
DUROM.1960.3373

Combining carving and calligraphy, seal-cutting is an important form of traditional Chinese art. A seal is used as a symbol of authorship, connoisseurship, ownership and authority. This seal is a replica of the Ming and Qing dynasty imperial seal 'Guang yun zhi bao', one of a series of 25. The seal was used when the emperor wrote commemorative inscriptions. The Ming dynasty Emperor Xuanzong (reigned 1425-1435), who was a talented artist, often used this seal on his paintings.

Tiger tally
青铜错金虎符
Cast bronze with inscription in gold inlay
China
Date Unknown

Hardinge collection
DUROM.1960.3391

The tiger tally is an ancient form of military verification. An inscription was carved onto the body of the tiger, and the tally was then disassembled into two segments. One half was kept by officials in central government, the other half was given to a military leader stationed away from the capital. The tally allowed local army commanders to verify the identity of a messenger from the capital. Only when the two segments had been reassembled could the orders that accompanied it be undertaken.