The Nat Yuen Collection of Chinese Antiquities

Learning Resource
Introduction

The Nat Yuen Collection is regarded as one of the significant survey collections of Chinese antiquities in Australia, comprising works of art crafted in bronze, porcelain, stoneware and earthenware. In 1995, Hong Kong-based medical philanthropist Dr Nat Yuen gifted a substantial collection of Chinese antiquities to The University of Queensland, subsequently donating additional pieces in 2005 and 2006. Thirty years prior in 1965, Dr Yuen, a Hong Kong resident, graduated from the School of Medicine at The University of Queensland. Dr Yuen began collecting Chinese antiquities in the 1960s, when his father – a scholar and connoisseur – passed on several such works to him.

Dr Yuen always intended that a significant portion of his collection be donated to a public museum to foster a wider appreciation of Chinese arts and culture for students, scholars of Chinese antiquities, as well as members of the general community. Spanning 5000 years of Chinese visual culture, the 84 works in the Nat Yuen Collection represent special features of particular periods, such as form, patterns, clay types and glazes. You can find out more about the UQ Art Museum collection at http://www.artmuseum.uq.edu.au/about-the-collection.

This Learning Resource highlights 20 objects in the Nat Yuen Collection of Chinese Antiquities, and aims to promote inter-cultural awareness of Chinese social and cultural traditions. Objects were chosen on the basis of innovation and cultural relevance. The resource provides descriptive accounts of the 20 objects with activities and questions that provide entry points for further self-guided exploration and research. The texts explore cultural and historic themes, and make references to the three religious doctrines of Daoism, Confucianism and Buddhism, imperial contexts, and trade on the Silk Road. In addition to the questions and activities, the resource includes a chronology of ancient China, glossary of key terms (highlighted in bold in the texts), along with listings of resources on Chinese visual culture and history, and museums with significant collections of Asian art.
Curriculum areas and linkages

The resource is intended for use by students and teachers from diverse school curriculum areas, including Ancient History and Visual Arts, tertiary students from History, Museum Studies and Art History, and the general community. It is available to download from www.artmuseum.uq.edu.au/learning.

In terms of curriculum linkages, the resource acknowledges the cross-curriculum priority of Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia in the Australian curriculum (Foundation to Year 10) and the focus on developing learning experiences for students that support knowledge and understanding of Asian societies, cultures, beliefs and environments (see http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/History/Cross-Curriculum-Priorities#Asia-and-Australias-engagement-with-Asia).

Teachers may find study of the 20 objects in the Nat Yuen Collection provides opportunities to develop classroom learning activities that can be integrated into existing units of study, or adapted to suit student needs.

For Queensland teachers, this resource is useful for the Senior Ancient History and Senior Visual Arts learning areas (see https://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/13636.html). Interdisciplinary themes that might be investigated include ‘animals in art’ ‘ancient design patterns and motifs’ ‘ceramic production’ ‘spiritual beliefs’ ‘Chinese export porcelain’ ‘the role of patronage’ ‘Warring States in China’ and ‘political structures and power’. These themes align with the inquiry learning model in the senior Visual Art syllabus, and the general objectives of making and appraising, and with specific inquiry theme topics in the senior Ancient History syllabus, including ‘Studies in conflict’; ‘Studies of the everyday lives of people in ancient societies’ and ‘Studies of funerary practices’.
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**Neolithic Tripod Ewer**  
**Dawenkou Culture, 4100–2600 BCE**

**Title:** Neolithic tripod ewer  
**Period:** Dawenkou Culture, 4100–2600 BCE  
**Medium:** Painted earthenware  
**Dimensions:** 31 x 15 cm
The bulbous body of this Neolithic ewer (a wide-mouthed pitcher or jug) is supported by three *mammiform* legs that end in pointed feet. A tall flared neck opens into a beak-like spout, and a ‘twisted-cord’ handle arches from the neck to the body. The individual parts were shaped by hand and then assembled. Crafted around five thousand years ago, this ewer demonstrates a ceramics culture that favoured form derived from ‘animal’ parts.

Dawenkou vessels show several advances, such as the use of the potter’s wheel and firing techniques, to produce delicate wares. Thin-walled ‘white’ earthenware pottery emerged around 3500 BCE and, though produced in small quantities, seems to have enjoyed a long tradition in the Dawenkou Culture. Pouring vessels such as these, with short hollow legs attached to a round body, and a handle joined high on the neck, were seen as a standard feature in the later Dawenkou Period (c. 2800–2400 BCE). Vessels such as this ewer were reserved mainly for ritual and funerary purposes rather than daily use.

Archaeologically, this period is significant as many gravesites have been located. A study of archaeological records reveals a complex society with differences according to wealth, gender and age. For instance, graves of the wealthy contained wooden coffins with burial goods, unlike those of the poor that possessed none. Most excavated graves reveal the presence of funerary objects such as tripod vessels, pots and tools.

**Activities and Questions**

- What impact does the potter’s use of material have on your understanding of the work?
- Why do you think this vessel takes this unique shape and what does the shape imply about Dawenkou Culture?
Title: Neolithic storage jar (Kuan)
Period: Majiayao Culture, Banshan Phase, c.2500 BCE
Medium: Painted terracotta
Dimensions: 45 x 43 cm
Characterised by striking abstract design, this Kuan or storage jar demonstrates the sophisticated material culture of Banshan Neolithic (New Stone Age) communities, c.2500 BCE. Swirling earth colours encircle crosshatched markings, while two tiny handles augment the jar’s bulbous structure. Constructed from the base upwards, early pottery pieces such as this jar were coiled by hand rather than thrown on the wheel. After smoothing the joints between individual coils, the piece was fired in the kiln. Archaeological records broadly reveal these designs as specific to regions, progressing from purely representational to more abstract patterns. Banshan artists gave a focus to the decorative surface, though this feature changed with time and subsequent periods saw form prioritised over decoration.

Funerary ritual and burial customs dictated the need for large quantities of painted pottery vessels; pots were buried with the dead and also exchanged between living relatives of the deceased. This period was defined by intensive ceramic production, with sizable quantities of painted pottery produced not only for burial ceremonies, but also for general domestic use.

The Banshan phase of Majiayao Culture (c. 3800–2000 BCE) is renowned for painted pottery. Variations and fluctuations in patterns often articulate social and economic exchanges within regions; pots and pottery designs were exchanged between village communities in the same region, with painted pots also in demand for inter-regional exchanges. While an understanding of such economic, social and cultural exchanges remains limited, literary accounts attest to the availability of craft products across all social strata.

**Activities and Questions**

- Geometric designs from the combination of circles and lines allowed artists to explore countless patterns and motifs. What methods do you think were used to draw circles and lines on the pot with such precision?

- Look closely at the shapes that make up the design on the pot. How do the shapes relate to one another? How would the choice of colours and patterns reflect the regional identity of the pot?

- Research the defining features of the material culture of Neolithic Cultures in other parts of the world such as the Levant (present day West Bank). Although much earlier than the Chinese Neolithic era, do these cultures have anything in common in terms of technology, farming styles and social organisation?
Bronze Ding (Tripod Vessel with Cover)
Warring States Period, 480–220 BCE

Title: Bronze Ding (Tripod vessel with cover)
Period: Warring States Period, 480 BCE–220 BCE
Medium: Cast bronze
Dimensions: 24.5 x 24 cm
The sophistication of Chinese Bronze Age art (c.1600 BCE–221 CE) is revealed in the complicated form and decoration of this bronze ritual ‘ding’ (tripod vessel with cover). Cast in bronze, a horizontal band of geometric patterning encircles the entire outer rim, including the cover. Rigid geometric ornament preceded the more free-flowing curvilinear forms of Han Dynasty decoration (206 BCE–220 CE), when ceramics vessels became more prevalent. Such a Bronze Age ding would have been created for ritual use in a crypt or altar, archaeological evidence indicating that bronze tomb vessels were markers of symbolic prestige and social status. Wealthy patrons sought expensive bronze vessels, with inlaid bronze especially expensive to produce. Bronze decorative techniques would influence porcelain designs in later periods.

In the ancestral cult of this period, mortuary rituals afforded living relatives an opportunity to communicate with the deceased. Offerings placed in the body of a ‘sacrificial cauldron’, such as the ding, were intended to connect with ancestral spirits. As an external medium, this ding allowed living relatives an opportunity to affirm ties with their lost ones. Literary texts from this period invoke references to tripods and ‘sacrificial stands’ in tombs.

By the fifth century BCE, China had descended into the Warring States Period (480–220 BCE), losing all semblance of an organised confederacy of feudal states under sovereign authority. Paradoxically, increased trading routes and improved communications facilitated the spread of artistic ideas over vast areas. A unity in artistic style and form subsequently developed across urban centres and rural provinces. Fewer regional stylistic differences are observed in bronze vessels of this period than seen previously in the Spring and Autumn periods of the Eastern Zhou Dynasty (770–476 BCE).

Intensified activity in representation, especially in painting and sculpture, signalled the end of the Bronze Age around 221 CE. Bronze objects were imbued with a new secular and social role to invoke notions of ‘ancient piety’ as an intellectual ideal, and to epitomise principles of Confucian rationalism. The melding together of form, decoration and meaning led the way for future artistic representation in China.

**Activities and Questions**

- Look closely at the bronze ding, what items might have been placed inside this vessel as ‘offerings’ to the spirits of ancestors?

- The use of patterning is very important in ancient Chinese art and connects with social values and belief systems. Research the function of decoration on bronze vessels and how they may have influenced objects created with other materials.

- The development of art can be traced through a chronological study of form and ornament. Discuss this statement with reference to specific examples from the Nat Yuen Collection of Chinese Antiquities.
Title: Bronze sword
Period: Warring States Period, 475 – 221 BCE
Medium: Bronze
Dimensions: 47.7 x 4.5 x 1 cm
This sword was produced in an era marked by continuous violence between feudal states, known as the Warring States Period (475–221 BCE). Fashioned primarily for ceremonial use, it demonstrates the innovative technology of bronze inscription. The significance of this weapon lies in its ritual function; it was used to propagate a sense of order and stability against a backdrop of continuous strife.

The short handle zoomorphic decorations along the double edge communicate its ceremonial use in animal sacrifice. Artistic ideals were cultivated around animal motifs in this period. These patterns were directly influenced by the art of nomadic people from the steppe and desert regions. Birds, deer, horses and even tigers appear in the decorative schema of this time. Inlaying artists faced with the problem of depicting three-dimensional animals on a flat background resolved the issue by representing the creature as two halves. These split units were then arranged in a symmetrical fashion on the two-dimensional decorative plane.

Paradoxically, the Warring States Period gave rise to robust cultural and philosophical debate, including Confucian philosophy, which is based on rigid adherence to social hierarchy. Confucius, (551–479 BCE), a renowned Chinese educator and philosopher, formulated a philosophical code that emphasised morality at personal and governmental levels. The proper maintenance of ritual was imperative in maintaining the social code according to Confucian principles.

Animal inscriptions on Chinese bronze objects have functioned as potent symbols, often helping shamans to mediate communications between the realms of Heaven and Earth; the dead and the living. The ‘nature-mystic’ religion of Daoism also emerged from the philosophical debates of this era, and is related in part to the practice of shamanism.

**Activities and Questions**

- How would you interpret the decorative inscriptions on the sword? Would the decorative scheme have some bearing on how the sword was used?

- Artists from the ancient Chinese world used various motifs to denote a range of social functions. Use the internet to research the meaning of animal motifs and inscriptions on bronzes produced during the Warring States Period.
Bronze Mirror
Han Dynasty, 206 BCE–220 CE

Title: Bronze mirror
Period: Han Dynasty, 206 BCE–220 CE
Medium: Bronze
Dimensions: 1.4 x 16.5 cm
The Han Dynasty bronze mirror (206 BCE–220 CE) has a dual function; one side a mirror and the other a map of the ancient unified order of the Universe. Often circular in form, and more rarely square or shapes, mirrors occupy a unique place in Chinese bronze production. Fashioned from an alloy of copper, tin and lead, the smooth side when polished provides a reflective view – for context, glass mirrors were only introduced during the first century BCE. At the centre of the decorative emblem is a perforated hemispheric projection, or ‘boss’, on a square panel through which a cord may have been fastened for hand-holding.

In its ritual form, this mirror represented a complete symbol of the great expanse of the Universe in microcosm, bordered by a pattern of scrolling clouds, commonly known as the ‘drifting cloud’ design.

The key design schema centres on three sets of angles that resemble inverted letters: T, L and V. Accepted as a way to visually represent the nature of the Universe, at the time of the Han Dynasty, the commonly used ‘TLV’ design allowed individuals to feel that they were present at the centre of the greater Universe, under the direct influence of the heavens.

In ancient China, apart from being employed for toiletry purposes, mirrors were used in temple and burial rites. Bronze mirrors of the Han Period also functioned as amulets or talismans. Some bronze mirrors carried signs inspired by the ancient science of alchemy.

**Activities and Questions**

- What does the use of bronze tell us about Chinese civilization in this period?
- The most important stylistic innovation of the Han Period is probably the use of inlay inscriptions on bronze objects. Research the development of bronze decoration during this Dynasty (206 BCE–220CE).
Mythical Beast (Qilin)
Han Dynasty, 206 BCE–220 CE

Title: Mythical beast (Qilin)
Period: Han Dynasty, 206 BCE–220 CE
Medium: Unglazed pottery
Dimensions: 12.7 x 30.5 x 9.5 cm
Similar to the fantastical chimera from the ancient worlds of Greece, Mesopotamia and Egypt, this mythical beast integrates realistic and imaginary features. Created as a funerary object, to be placed in a tomb with the deceased, this ceramic sculpture – known as a Qilin – was a feature of elaborate burial rituals of the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) following through to the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE). A central objective of ancient Chinese art was to fulfil burial rituals that would magically ensure an enchanted afterlife.

Figures such as this Qilin were primarily shaped in clay moulds. After firing in kilns, the ceramic bodies were enhanced with paint strokes to resemble muscles and fur, providing notions of realism. Three horn-like protrusions on the crown complement a taut muscular trunk and shoulders that bristle in a show of brute strength. The Qilin is a portrait of pent-up power and impending motion. Crouched low on cloven hoofs the animal is ready to strike, its form articulating the artist’s adept mastery of animal physiology and mimetic skills.

This Qilin was crafted to safeguard a smooth passage to the otherworld and to ensure the deceased person’s eternal life in an infinite Universe. Created to bridge boundaries between worldly and heavenly realms, this creature conferred a sense of protection and companionship to the deceased, while furnishing a zest for existence into the world beyond. Although originally minute in scale, these figures were the forebears of the monumental stone guardians carved to protect lined pathways to tombs and burial mounds of the Han (206 BCE–220 CE) and Tang Periods (618–907 CE).

The balance, symmetry and clarity in Chinese art, the use of durable materials such as stone and metal (although this particular object is clay), and keenly observed details of the natural world, effectively expressed the Chinese desire for order and beliefs about eternity.

**Activities and Questions**

- Research how other ancient cultures explored the afterlife through visual representation, for example in Egypt or Japan or Greece.

- Look closely at the physical features of this part-animal part-mythical creature. What animals do you think inspired the artist in third century China, and why?

- Animals act as symbols in various cultures and certain human qualities and traits are commonly associated with them – strength, loyalty and endurance. Investigate the functional and symbolic significance of mythical animal imagery across ancient cultures. The Egyptian sphinx is an example you could refer to.
Horse and Groom
Tang Dynasty, 618–907 CE

Title: Horse and groom
Period: Tang Dynasty, 618–907 CE
Medium: Pigments on earthenware, horsehair
Dimensions: 54 x 58 x 20 cm
The form and decoration of this earthenware horse and groom from the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE) represent one of the pinnacles in the development of Chinese ceramics. Fashioned as funerary objects or *mingqi*, to be placed in tombs, these figures were intended to serve the deceased in an after-life. Their unadorned and unmarked facial features, coloured in white, signify this otherworldly role. Crafted by firing in moulds before being decorated by hand with low-fired mineral pigments, the lifelike elements such as the raised hoof and natural posture define the artist’s skills at portraying realism. The groom waits with reins in hand in readiness for the owner to mount the animal. Dressed in the Central Asian attire of a long coat with wide lapels and trousers tucked into knee-high boots, the groom’s hair style and features communicate his foreign origins. The saddle, which is removable, is decorated with a floral motif. The horse’s mane and textile reins have disintegrated over time, but would have added to the overall realism. The horse, while not always white, may also have featured black eyelashes and a red mouth. The scale and finesse of the horse and groom underscores the high social status of the deceased.

The significance of the horse to Chinese visual culture is borne out in ceramic statuary and the developing genre of horse painting. Poets and scroll painters of the time portrayed myths about imported ‘celestial steeds’ that ‘sweated blood’, and were really dragons in disguise.

During this period, horses were a signifier of military strength, political power and wealth; horsemanship was a prerequisite for the aristocracy. Riding across the saddle or side-saddle, rather than in horse chariots, demonstrated the Tang penchant for adopting international customs. The robust anatomy identifies this horse as originating from Ferghana in Central Asia. Horses from Ferghana were regarded as status symbols on account of their size and speed. Among the most prized foreign tributes in the imperial court, they were faster and more powerful than native horses.

**Activities and Questions**

- How did the beliefs of the people in the Tang Dynasty affect their burial customs?
- Do you think the artist was familiar with horses? Give reasons for your answer.
- Research some of the ways horses have been represented in history in other cultures or artistic forms.
- The Tang Dynasty is recognised as a golden age, one that witnessed prosperity of culture, economy, diplomacy and politics. The Tang rulers encouraged trade and cultural exchanges with Western countries. Find out all you can about the Silk Road trade route during the Tang era (618–907 CE).
Pottery Figure of a Court Lady
Tang Dynasty, 618–906 CE

Title: Pottery figure of a court lady
Period: Tang Dynasty, 618-906 CE
Medium: Painted pottery
Dimensions: 23.5 x 8.5 x 6.5 cm
Elements of realism define this clay portrait of an aristocratic lady as one from the Tang Dynasty (618–906 CE). The figure is modelled with precision and close attention to physical features, including hairstyle and dress, demonstrating a sophisticated approach to representing the figure at this time. The artistry underpinning this sculpture is strongly connected to its function as a funerary object. In tombs of Tang nobility, groups of ceramic attendants were positioned in small side chambers, waiting symbolically to serve the occupant in the afterlife.

The elaborate drapery and elegant hairstyle categorise this figure as a ‘lady of the court’, either as a lady in waiting to the empress or as an aristocrat’s spouse or relative. The cosmopolitan flavour and liberal attitudes of the Tang Period permitted significant freedoms for women, which can be gleaned from aspects of this portrait. Tang women could walk outdoors without restrictive veils or headdresses. Showcasing the fashion of the times, the Tang lady’s long skirt is tied over a tunic with a sash, with the length of skirt fabric cascading down to her feet. Although original pigments and hand-painted patterns have faded over time, these would have provided insight into fabric weaves and ornamental motifs. Faint traces of polychrome pigments remain on the garments. The figure’s handsomely coiffed appearance supports ancient literary assertions that beauty and presentation were very important to Tang women.

The original function and context of this object may not be apparent when displayed in a museum among works created for non-funerary purposes; viewers could misinterpret this Tang figure as simply representing the fashions at court at this time.

**Activities and Questions**

- What does this clay portrait tell us about Tang society and what role do you think this person played in her community?
- Research where this object might have been displayed before it came to the UQ Art Museum.
**Pair of Grey/White bowls (Qingbai ware)**  
**Song Dynasty, 960–1279 CE**

**Title:** Pair of grey/white bowls (Qingbai ware)  
**Period:** Song Dynasty, 960–1279 CE  
**Medium:** Glazed stoneware (proto-porcelain)  
**Dimensions:** 7 x 15 cm, 6.5 x 15 cm
The Song Dynasty (960–1279 CE) white/grey glazed porcelain bowls represent one of the most notable innovations of this time, demonstrating the Song artists’ talents for achieving perfect symmetry of form and evenness in glaze. In Song Dynasty texts, the term Qingbai can be translated literally as ‘bluish-white’ shade. Although the beauty of these bowls lies in their minimal form and masterful glaze, the objects were designed not only to please the eye, but also the hand. A central focus was to ensure smoothness and pleasing tactility. The bowls were press-moulded on a carved clay mould, with moulded fish and floral motifs decorating the interior. The double fish ornament signifies harmony between husband and wife, and fish swimming amid waves symbolise abundance, wealth and harmony.

In a departure from the highly cosmopolitan and colourful Tang Dynasty (618–906 CE), Northern Song Culture was based on principal rational ideals of Confucianism (Confucius, 551–479 BCE), such as reverence and piety. This was communicated in the austere form and decorations of these bowls. Art primarily articulated a moral purpose, and the primary goal of the object was to embody noble and spiritual values.

Patronage was essential to the success and proliferation of the arts in imperial China. The key figure associated with the patronage and aspirations of Song artists was Emperor Huizhong (1082–1135 CE). Reputed as one of the greatest connoisseurs in Chinese history and an avid scroll painter and calligrapher himself, Huizhong established palace workshops to produce articles for use in the imperial household. Aesthetic values were controlled rigorously, with patrons prizing precision in form and decoration. This period also saw the rise of the merchant class as competitive art patrons and collectors.

Activities and Questions

- In a historic context, artworks often reflect the interests, personal tastes and core values of their patrons. Discuss how this is reflected in the production of Song artworks.

- Identify the visual and tactile qualities of objects produced under Song patronage. Research the role of the court workshops in generating a unified visual language across various media, such as scroll painting and ceramics.
Tripod Censer (Longquan ware)
Southern Song Dynasty, 960 – 1279 CE

Title: Tripod censer (Longquan ware)
Period: Southern Song Dynasty, 960–1279 CE
Medium: Stone ware, green celadon glaze, censer in bronze form with bluish glaze, Longquan ware
Dimensions: 8 x 11 cm
In the history of ceramic production, Song ceramics (960–1279 AD) are prized for their celadon glazes and simplified forms. The tripod censer was created in the kilns of Longquan town, in east China’s Zhejiang province, during the Southern Song era (1127–1279 CE). It features the delicate blue-green glaze for which Longquan celadon ware is renowned. These ceramics were named and classified according to the geographical location of their production. Modelled on an antique bronze or jade incense burner, this censer would have been used as an altar piece, during religious or funerary ceremony. Objects based on archaic forms were also commissioned purely as collectibles.

Educated literati and members of the upper class were avid collectors of such objects modelled on archaic forms, and published detailed illustrated catalogues of their collections. Scholar-officials placed great value on the possession of works of art that revealed deep knowledge of antiquity. Ceramics patronage was not restricted to Song nobility and court officials; such pieces were commissioned by connoisseurs and mandarins in China and also more widely in Japan and Korea. The philosophies and literary culture of these two countries have much in common with those of China.

During this period, artisans aspired to a unified aesthetics. As represented by this celadon tripod censer, form and glaze were balanced to achieve a harmonious simplicity. Song patrons and artists were inspired by the teachings of Confucius to live a moral life without seeking materialist riches.

**Activities and Questions**

- Examine the cultural patronage of the Song Dynasty and research how it shaped cultural activity in this era.
Tea Bowl (Cizhou ware)
Jurchen Jin Dynasty, 1115–1234 CE

Title: Tea bowl (Cizhou ware)
Period: Jurchen Jin Dynasty, 1115–1234 CE
Medium: Stoneware, iron glaze
Dimensions: 6.5 x 18.0 cm
Crafted in the Jurchen Jin Dynasty (1115–1234 CE), the stoneware tea bowl features the innovative Cizhou glazing technique. Tea bowls such as this are prized for their contrasting black iron glaze and mottled decorations. They were renowned for their ability to illuminate the tea served in them, lightened by golden splashes on the dark backdrop. Cizhou potters created various decorative combinations; the inner surface could be densely decorated or have a few sparse patches on a lacquer-like black-glazed ground. The mottled ornament floats on the background of the black-glazed surface of this bowl, an effect known as ‘hawksbill tortoise shell’ (daimao). Black-glazed tea vessels were also noted for embellishments such as ‘oil drops’ or ‘hare’s fur’, named after markings derived from natural patterning.

The ‘way of tea’, a Chinese tea ritual, is a cultural activity that involves leaf tea being prepared and presented in a ceremonial way. Widespread tea appreciation developed by the Song Dynasty (960–1279 CE). Poets declared the benefits of drinking tea in their verse, a cultural attitude that was exported to Japan in the Nara Period (710–794 CE). Social tea gatherings and tea-tasting competitions spread through all regional provinces by the turn of the first millennium CE. An aesthetic culture, complete with plays and poetry, developed around tea-drinking, and which also became associated with Daoist ideals and Confucian philosophy. Tea-ideals were also closely connected to religious rituals, and to this end it was quite natural for fine works of art to be produced that centred on serving tea, both at the table and altar. Tea bowls and cups are some of the forms that represent China’s most enduring artistic traditions.

The Japanese aesthetic of tea art has its origins in Chinese philosophies. Some scholars argue that the Japanese tea ceremony was not a novel concept, but rather developed in opposition to the Chinese tea ceremony that was essentially forged in the Tang and Song Periods. Daoist philosophy promoted the acceptance of the mundane and a life of constant change. The art of tea drinking encouraged people to find beauty in the mundane elements of everyday life.

**Activities and Questions**

- How would you describe the glazing on this tea bowl to someone that has never seen it before? How do you think the artist achieved this effect?

- Tea bowls and cups are some of the forms that represent China’s most enduring artistic traditions. Use the internet to find out how objects communicate ceremonial function and cultural meaning.
‘Dragon’ Dish (Longquan ware)
Yuan Dynasty, 1279–1368 CE

Title: Dragon dish (Longquan ware)
Period: Yuan Dynasty, 1279–1368 CE
Medium: Stoneware, green celadon glaze
Dimensions: 7.4 x 35 cm
The scale and iconography of this celadon dish allude to aesthetic changes driven by a shift in the balance of power from the Song Dynasty (960 –1279 CE) to the Yuan Dynasty (1279–1368 CE). The Yuan Empire heralded an era of Mongol sovereignty after the defeat of Song Chinese rule. Yuan emperors began to adopt Chinese emblems to legitimise their rule, and artisans devised an innovative Song-Yuan hybrid aesthetic to bridge this transition of power.

The iconography of the dragon has been widely used in Chinese art. Representing diverse social manifestations including a presence in the Chinese zodiac, a five-clawed dragon symbolises imperial identity and power, while a four-clawed dragon is emblematic of a high dignitary at the Royal Court.

The central motif of a dragon pursuing a flaming pearl is derived from a literary text concerning the life of a twelfth-century Chinese statesman. Chi-Liang, a minister in the imperial court, received the gift of a shining pearl in return for saving the life of a wounded serpent. He presented this enchanted pearl to the emperor, who placed it in his hall and, by its influence, the day magically turned into night. The flaming pearl is also known in Chinese literature as a ‘night-shining’ pearl, signifying the moon.

Symbolising wealth and nobility, an incised peony scroll borders the central ornament. During the period between the Southern Song (1127–1279 CE) and the Yuan dynasties, the peony dominated over other floral scrolls, including the lotus. Sketchy and impressionistic renditions often make it hard to identify floral details.

The politics of foreign rule influenced the visual culture of the Yuan Dynasty. The nomadic Mongols were traders, and they opened up two significant trading routes to the West – the Silk Road and the sea route to the Red sea and the Persian Gulf. In the wake of the enormous empirical expansion, large Persian and Arab communities were established in Guangzhou and other ports along the South-China coast. Trade between China and the Middle East soon centred on large quantities of porcelain produced in China. As part of a vast empire extending from Korea to Persia and South Russia, the Yuan Dynasty’s commerce with foreign nations brought a new infusion of ideas and cultural influences into Chinese life. Large-sized vessels that were particularly suited to the lifestyles of the Muslim populations of the Middle East began to appear in the repertoire of the Yuan potters.

**Activities and Questions**

- In Chinese iconography, the five-clawed dragon functioned as a symbol of the emperor and the phoenix represented the empress. Why do you think this was the case?
**Longquan Celadon Ribbed Jar**  
**Yuan Dynasty, 1279–1368 CE**

**Title:** Longquan celadon ribbed jar  
**Period:** Yuan Dynasty, 1279–1368 CE  
**Medium:** Stoneware with green celadon glaze  
**Dimensions:** 14.5 x 19.5 cm
Fashioned in the form of a lotus leaf, the stoneware celadon jar displays moulded vertical ribs that run through the length of its body, as if leaf veins. These radiating parallel ribs add a sculptural dimension, amplifying the visual effect of the otherwise smooth surface, shrouded in a uniform blue-green celadon glaze. Vases, shaped and styled as this one, are referred to as heyeguan, which in Chinese stands for ‘lotus leaf jar’. The form and decoration suggest a storage or ceremonial funerary use. Earlier prototypes, with lids shaped as full lotus leaves, exist as metal wares.

This piece epitomises the visual aesthetics of early Mongol Yuan rule (1279–1368 CE), which was a watershed in the history of Chinese cultural activity. The new Mongol conquerors were descendants of Ghenghis Khan (1162–1227 CE). His grandson Kublai Khan (reign 1260–94) conquered China in 1279 CE and then ruled as emperor, giving his Dynasty a Chinese name ‘Yuan’, meaning ‘origin’, relocating the capital to Beijing from Central Asia.

Several literary texts from this period recount the political shift from the Song to Yuan sovereignty. Experimentation and innovation were hallmarks of cultural activity during this era. The patronage of the Mongol elite encouraged a shift in aesthetics from simple forms and glazes, as seen in this celadon jar, to more ostentatious works of art. Western appetites for Chinese ceramics also increased substantially. Artisans were inspired by Near-Eastern metalwork and, in addition, introduced new decorative motifs and shapes to the Yuan ceramic aesthetic.

**Activities and Questions**

- The Yuan Dynasty was culturally diverse; invading Mongol rulers coexisted with their Chinese subjects. Given the shift in aesthetics with Mongol patronage, what does the shape of this jar tell us about Chinese society in this period?
- The artist drew inspiration for this jar from the shape of a lotus leaf. What does the lotus flower symbolise in the Buddhist religion?
- What was the artist trying to communicate through the choice of colour and form? How does this add to our understanding of the Mongol Yuan Dynasty?
**Title:** Blue and white ‘Grape dish’  
**Period:** Ming Dynasty, Yongle Period, 1402–1424 CE  
**Medium:** Blue and white glazed porcelain  
**Dimensions:** Diameter 37.8 cm
The ‘Grape Dish’ is a fine example of the noteworthy and formative period of porcelain production under the Ming emperor Yongle’s reign (1402–1424 CE). It communicates the refined taste of the Yongle Court and the accomplished skills of its porcelain artisans. Blue and white ware had begun to be manufactured during the earlier Yuan Period (with sherds of underglaze blue dated to the even earlier Tang Dynasty), and in time became one of the best known Chinese mediums. The freedom and versatility of this newly emerging art form of decorative porcelain was based upon the use of cobalt, either the high-quality cobalt imported from Persia or a native cobalt. Painted in controlled yet uneven gradations of underglaze blue, this dish characterises a quintessential Chinese style, distinctive of the Yongle Period. The ‘underglaze’ was painted directly onto white ware, with a clear glaze painted over the whole.

The early Ming Dynasty brushwork depicts bunches of grapes surrounded by twirling vine tendrils and leaves. Grapes were a common motif in this period (1402–1424 CE), and symbolise an abundance of produce and fertility. The central vine ornament is surrounded by floral sprays depicting twelve seasonal flowers, including the lotus, peony, chrysanthemum, camellia, gardenia and azalea. This floral scroll is encircled by a stylised wave band, alluding to potential sea voyages.

The grape dish design was a source of inspiration for potters in the Ottoman Turkish town of Iznik. They began to produce blue and white pottery in imitation of the Chinese tradition. Chinese porcelain pieces started to appear in the palace of the Ottoman Sultan in 1500 and were highly valued because of their beauty, finesse and refined decorations.

Some blue and white export porcelain ware came to be known as kraak porcelain in late fifteenth-century and sixteenth-century Europe, as the pieces were transported in Dutch and Portuguese merchant ships known as carracca or Carracks. Mass produced for export, pieces of lesser standard were sold domestically and used as grave goods. A significant trade of porcelain existed between China, West and Central Asia, and the European continent from the fifteenth century.

### Activities and Questions

- Research the east-west trade in Ming blue and white porcelains. European traders paid in silver and gold for Ming wares rather than with trade goods. Why was this so?
- Research the influence, commerce and cultural exchange between medieval China and Europe through blue and white porcelain in the fifteenth century.
COPPER-RED GLAZED BALUSTER VASE
QING DYNASTY, KANGXI, 1662–1722 CE

Title: Copper-red glazed baluster vase
Period: Qing Dynasty, Kangxi, 1662–1722 CE
Medium: Porcelain
Dimensions: 25 x 11 cm
Created during the reign of the Manchu Qing emperor Kangxi, 1662–1722 CE, this vase assumes a baluster form, slender with a broad shoulder and a narrow neck. Finger marks encircling the form indicate that the vase was thrown on a wheel, with a join mark suggesting the neck was added to the body. The vase is coloured in a striking monochromatic glaze, which is one of the most difficult glazes to achieve. Known as langyao in Chinese and sang de boeuf or oxblood in the West, this glaze was first invented in the fifteenth century, and then revived in the seventeenth century during the Kangxi emperor’s reign. With a body of white porcelain, the glaze drains slightly from the pale-greenish, glazed mouth and pools at the bevel of the foot in a perfectly controlled effect. At close quarters, the glaze is revealed to be rich in vertical streaks of colour.

The production of this glaze relies on the chemical process whereby cuprous oxide is reduced to form copper ions. Kiln firing is the key to colour. The furnace temperature is manipulated and the furnace atmosphere starved of oxygen. This is a technically challenging process and, if the glaze is not thick enough to maintain the copper during the firing and cooling processes, it becomes clear and reveals the underlying surface of the body which is not the desired effect. Master artisans were noted not only for the colour of the glazes, but also for the degree to which they were even and smooth.

The period between the late Ming and early Qing Dynasty is largely known in literary accounts as the ‘Transitional Period’, 1620–1683 CE, and corresponds to the end of imperial Ming patronage at the kilns of Jingdezhen. During this Transitional Period, control was consolidated under the regime of the Kangxi emperor, whose curiosity extended both to Chinese traditions and Western science and culture. Kangxi reactivated the Jingdezhen kilns, which had earlier flourished under the reign of the Ming emperor Yongle (1402–1424 CE), and his imperial patronage contributed substantial economic support and artistic direction for the design of ceramics. The innovations in kiln design and firing technology led to significant advancements in ceramic production and, by the middle of his rule, c. 1700 CE, the kilns were producing record numbers of wares for both the domestic and foreign market. While this baluster vase is restrained in form and colour, artisans experimented with a variety of shapes and adopted designs referencing nature, literature and mythology.

**Activities and Questions**

- The involvement of minerals in controlled temperature and oxygen conditions are responsible for generating different glaze colours. Give some examples of glazes and the minerals that generate them. Research how the presence of oxygen and heat affects these reactions.

- Iconographical symbolism is often attributed to imagery of flora and fauna. Research connections between the use of coloured glazes and imperial patronage.
Blue and White Jar with Cover
Qing Dynasty, Kangxi, 1662–1722 CE

Title: Blue and white jar with cover
Period: Qing Dynasty, Kangxi, 1662–1722 CE
Medium: Blue and white porcelain
Dimensions: 52 x 33 cm
The significance of this exemplary piece is underpinned by its scale and detailed ornamentation. The scrolling lotus motif communicates symbolic meaning as well as religious ties with Buddhism and Daoism. Traditionally known as the flower of purity and integrity, the lotus emerged from the mud yet remained pure and unstained. Although granted sacred status in Buddhism, this plant is indigenous to China and was mentioned in ancient texts long before Buddhism’s entry into China.

The cobalt blue under painting is applied in varying degrees of saturation, suggestive of depth, volume and individual artistry. The scrolling leaves suggest movement on the water’s surface. The blue and white ornamentation demonstrates one of the most important features of historic Chinese decoration in that it is never arbitrary. Predetermined as a visual code, the painter focused on an exact placement of all essential elements. The all-over design scheme allowed the artist to create a near infinite combination of motifs and associative meanings.

The Manchu Qing Dynasty emperor Kangxi (1662–1722 CE) revived the porcelain industry in the late seventeenth century (1680 CE), establishing porcelain as a luxury ceramic item. The emperor’s desire for the highest possible quality of porcelain favoured the technological advancement of this medium. The central porcelain industry at Jingdezhen was revived, becoming the Imperial Kiln Factory.

Pottery making in the historic porcelain centre Jingdezhen was dominated by men; though women also participated, especially in the decoration of porcelain objects. The names of women potters have been noted on some pieces. Political stability and economic prosperity during the Kangxi emperor’s reign gave artisans and craft persons more expressive freedom. At this time, handicraft industries were still regarded as manual labour, and artisans were considered of lower status.

**Activities and Questions**

- Discuss the division of labour at the Jingdezhen kilns under the Kangxi emperor’s rule and the social status of artisans at this time.

- Research the significance of commerce and foreign trade associated with porcelain objects in the early Qing Dynasty (1644–1722 CE).
Doucai Saucer Dish
Qing Dynasty, Kangxi/Yongzheng Period, 1723–1735 CE

Title: *Doucai* saucer dish
Period: Qing Dynasty, Kangxi/Yongzheng Period, 1723–1735 CE
Medium: *Doucai* porcelain
Dimensions: 3.1 x 15.5 cm
The innovative artistry of **Doucai** enamelling was first invented in the early fifteenth century, achieved heights of excellence in the Chenghua Period in the late fifteenth century, and was revived in the eighteenth century during the Manchu Qing Dynasty, Yongzheng Period (1723–1735 CE). Technically challenging, **Doucai** enamels require several firings, the re-firing depending on the melting point of the various oxides. The term **Doucai** stands for ‘contrasting colours’ or ‘joined colours’, and is a technique that combines an underglaze of cobalt (blue) with an overglaze of different colours yielding a ‘five-colour’ palette of yellow, green, purple, red and blue. The outline of the pattern is painted in an underglaze of blue on the unfired body, the piece is then glazed and fired at a high temperature. Overglaze colours are used to fill in design outlines, and the piece is then fired at a lower temperature. The last firing occurs in a ‘muffle’ kin.

The central scene portrays a scholar-official or mandarin in a natural setting, contemplating a scroll by a pine tree with a resting deer, framed by a floral border. The deer and the pine are emblematic of eighteenth-century Chinese auspicious imagery. The saucer is decorated with common Chinese symbols for longevity, prosperity and immortality within its pictorial scheme. The image, of the young boy in the foreground, illustrates the desire for children and the need to perpetuate a family’s line.

China’s literary men and artists of all ages have published reflections on the pine, most notably on the power of this revered tree to withstand harsh conditions of frost and snow. Pine imagery is allegorical of personal control and, being evergreen, is emblematic of longevity and prosperity. Conveying a range of symbolic values, the pine represents constancy of friendship in adversity, owing to the great height that some species attain. Pines also epitomise leadership and outstanding qualities.

The **Doucai** saucer dish illustrates the technical perfection of objects from the later Yongzheng Period. These are renowned for their technical finesse, which includes great clarity of enamels and a range of representational colours, on a clear white porcelain body.

**Activities and Questions**

- Discuss the cultural meaning of the images on this saucer. What do these images say about the life and ideals of a Chinese **mandarin** or scholar-official in the Yongzheng Period?
- This saucer might have been commissioned by a patron seeking a certain type of decorative scheme. Why do you think this was done?
Blue and White Stem cup
Qing Dynasty, Qianlong Period, c.1736 – 1795 CE

Title: Blue and white stem cup
Period: Qing Dynasty, Qianlong Period, 1736–1795 CE
Medium: Blue and white porcelain
Dimensions: 9.5 x 9 cm
Defined by the presence of Buddhist inscriptions, this stem cup carries the Qianlong emperor’s (r.1736–1795 CE) six-character seal mark on its base. The cup is in the form of a Tibetan butter lamp and would have been employed either as a ritual lamp (wick placed in yak butter, which acted as fuel for ignition) or filled with clear water and placed on an altar before an image of the **Buddha** or a **Bodhisattva**. The Manchu Qing Court followed Tibetan Lama Buddhist tradition. Burning yak butter was part of Lama ritual worship, though was practiced more widely also.

The Qianlong emperor’s sponsorship of Tibetan Lamaism forced the re-centering of Chinese Buddhist traditions. The multi-ethnic character of the Manchu Court (1736-1795 CE) is revealed in this cup by the assembly of hybrid signifiers such as Buddhist emblems, the non-Chinese material form and the presence of Sanskrit inscriptions.

The Buddhist calligraphic inscriptions on the body of the stem cup are made in Sanskrit strokes in the cursive Devanagari script and evoke **Buddhism**’s Indian origins. Resting on lotus blossoms, the individual characters are in vertical frames flanked by meandering floral scrolls. The eight lotus blossoms on the body signify purity. The cup is supported on a splayed stem decorated with bejewelled tassels drooping off ‘**ruyi**’ heads or Chinese Buddhist ceremonial sceptres, reinforcing the ritual intent of this imperial object. The ruyi heads represent the sacred fungus (from which the sceptre evolved).

### Activities and Questions

- Using examples of antique porcelain and bronze pieces, discuss how artworks carry signs of different cultures. Which objects in the UQ Art Museum’s collection of Chinese antiquities communicate cultural encounters?

- Eighteenth-century Chinese artists often used the lotus motif in their decorative schemes. During this period, Indian and Japanese artists also employed the lotus emblem to decorate porcelain goods and textiles. Research how these decorative motifs travelled from one region to the next, citing examples of porcelain objects, textiles, Chinese temple or Japanese pagoda architectural features.
Peacock-Blue Vase
Qing Dynasty, Qianlong Period, 1736–1795 CE

Title: Peacock-blue vase
Period: Qing Dynasty, Qianlong Period, 1736–1795 CE
Medium: Porcelain
Dimensions: 42 x 22.5 cm
The Qianlong emperor possessed ambitions to emulate and outdo his imperial predecessors on the cultural front. His period of reign, along with the preceding Yongzheng rule (1722–1735), is famous for the colourful glazes of its ceramics. Displaying a deep luminous turquoise glaze, this porcelain vase depicts finely incised ornament on a perfectly symmetrical form. An ornamental scroll of plantain (banana) leaves encircles the tapering neck, and archaic lotus and cloud patterns frame the peony blossoms on the globular body. Form and ornament in this period were influenced by the Manchu Qianlong emperor’s Buddhist practice and persona, and his enthusiasm for objects of antiquity. The Qing Court was Manchu and favoured Tibetan Buddhism. In Tibetan Buddhist iconography the peony is a symbol of nobility and virtue, whereas in Chinese visual imagery peonies symbolise royalty, wealth and honour. In the decorative scheme, peonies combined with lotus flowers articulated glory and power, or inter-linked wealth and power.

The production of Chinese ceramics during the Qianlong Period (1736–1795 CE) is marked by the breadth and size of the industry. An atmosphere of creative enterprise encouraged artists to introduce translucent glazes, dominated by shades of ultramarine and peacock-blue, green, yellow and red. The glaze, directly applied to the surface of the clay and fired in the kiln, emerged in various thicknesses and colours with a glassy ‘crazed’ surface.

The art and architecture commissioned by the Qianlong emperor firmly established Tibetan Buddhism in Beijing. The Manchu Qianlong emperor used his knowledge of ancient Chinese relics, particularly jades and bronzes, and books, calligraphy and paintings, to legitimise his rule in the eyes of his Chinese subjects. The emperor wielded powerful control over ideology and culture, to bring together the Han Chinese, Manchus, Mongols, and Tibetans.

**Activities and Questions**

- Survey the developments in porcelain painting and glaze innovation during the reigns of the three major Qing emperors who are also known as great cultural patrons - Kangxi (1661–1722 CE), Yongzheng (1722–1735) and Qianlong (1736–1795 CE). Discuss your findings with your class.

- Discuss why the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911 CE) has been unfavourably compared with the early modern period in Western civilisation.
**Imperial Blue and White Bottle Vase**  
**Jiaqing Period, 1796–1820 CE**

Title: Imperial blue and white bottle vase  
Period: Jiaqing Period, 1796–1820 CE  
Medium: Blue and white porcelain  
Dimensions: 37 x 21.5 cm
This blue and white bottle vase showcases technological innovations and the unique porcelain quality of late eighteenth-century Qing Dynasty China. The perfect symmetry of form, bright clarity of the material body, translucency of glaze and detailed underpainting in cobalt blue underscore the highly developed system of ceramic fabrication at this time. Used as a luxury item during the reign of the Manchu Jiaqing emperor (1796–1820 CE), this bottle vase carries the six-character imperial seal mark on its base. Porcelain objects were commissioned by the emperor for use in the imperial court or household (and for broader society trying to imitate imperial taste).

The highly refined decorative scheme, painted in uneven gradations of underglaze blue, comprises various floral scrolls, including an encircling band of plantain (banana) leaves around the slender neck. In ancient and pre-modern Chinese art, floral motifs had symbolic and allegorical associations with particular deities and Daoist Immortals. For example, the lotus blossom ornament not only symbolises purity and beauty, but also epitomises sacred Buddhist values. In the context of eighteenth-century imagery, the lotus blossom came to signify steadfastness and familial prosperity, because of its deeply rooted tubers and abundant flowers and leaves.

Metaphor can also be gleaned from form in Chinese porcelain works. A vase with an elongated neck heralds a lengthy peace, while a globular shape denotes completeness. The symbolic floral imagery of the imperial vase signals wishes harmoniously attained.

Imperial China existed in a world of imagery that was used to garner auspicious outcomes. Paintings, incense burners, vases, vessels and robes were produced for use in rituals and ceremonial festivals. This visual culture of auspicious imagery informed the decorative practice of Chinese artists and artisans, potters, metalworkers, embroiderers and scroll painters. Philosophical concepts and symbolic associations added layers of meaning to crafted objects.

### Activities and Questions

- The artist has used the flower motifs of the lotus and the peony, together with plantain (banana) leaf scrolls on the vase. Discuss the role and symbolic function of the decorative techniques used.

- Can you think of any contemporary art forms that use visual symbols to communicate auspicious outcomes? Discuss your answer with examples of contemporary art.

- Research the ways in which Chinese emperors used vases, and other objects, as symbols of power and authority in late eighteenth-century Imperial China.
CHRONOLOGY

Neolithic era.............................................................................................................. ca. 5000 – ca. 2100 BCE

Xia (Hsia) Dynasty............................................................................................................ ca. 2100- ca. 1600 BCE

Shang Dynasty (Capitals: near present-day Zhengzhou, Anyang) .......................ca. 1600-ca.1100 BCE

Zhou Dynasty (Capitals: Hao, near present-day Xi’an and Luoyang).................. ca. 1100-256 BCE

Western Zhou.............................................................................................................. ca. 1046-771 BCE

Eastern Zhou .............................................................................................................. ca. 770-256 BCE

Spring and Autumn Period ........................................................................................... ca. 770-476 BCE

Confucius .................................................................................................................... ca. 551-479 BCE

Warring States Period .................................................................................................. ca. 475-221 BCE

Qin (Ch’in) Dynasty (Capital Chang’an, present day Xi’an).......................................221-206 BCE

Han Dynasty............................................................................................................... 206 BCE–220 CE

Western Han (Capital Chang’an)................................................................................ 206 BCE-9 CE

Wang Mang Interregnum (Hsin Dynasty)...................................................................9-23 CE

Eastern Han (Capital Luoyang) .................................................................................. 25—220 CE

Six Dynasties Period .................................................................................................... 220-589 CE

Three Kingdoms Period .............................................................................................. 220-280 CE

Jin Dynasty.................................................................................................................. 265-420 CE
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Alchemy – derived from the Arabic word *al-kimia*, was a form of chemistry used in the Middle Ages (400–1500 CE). Its objective was to transform ordinary base metals (such as copper, lead, nickel, zinc, iron, aluminium or tin, among others) into gold. Alchemy is considered the precursor to the modern science of chemistry.

Archaic forms – shapes derived from an early period of art or culture.

Auspicious imagery – comprises religious and iconic images that symbolise good fortune and prosperous outcomes. The auspicious symbols of Buddhism originated in Indian iconography, and can be found in the art of most schools of Buddhism.

Buddhism – a religion that originated in India based on teachings attributed to Siddhartha Gautama (c. 563–483 BCE), who is more commonly known as the Buddha or ‘the enlightened one’. He lived and taught in the eastern part of India, and his teachings provided insights that help sentient beings eliminate inherent negativity, ignorance and desire through a positive and compassionate mindset.

Celadon – a transparent green colour glaze.

Chimera – derived from Greek mythology, a mythical animal created in an assembly of parts from various animals.

Confucius – (551–479 BCE) was a seminal Chinese thinker, philosopher and educator, who lived in the Spring and Autumn Period of the Eastern Zhou Dynasty (770–221 BCE). His teachings underpin subsequent Chinese thinking on the education and comportment of the ideal man.

Confucian Philosophy – Confucian ethics are based on three fundamental conceptual aspects: the adherence to social convention and ceremony based on antiquity, making ethical judgements in different situational contexts for the greater good of humanity, and the idea of reciprocity as a humanist value.

Confucian rationalism – was based on the belief that the universe could be understood through human reason, and that it was up to humanity to create a harmonious relationship between the universe and the individual. Confucian rationalists believed that reality could be understood by humankind, though interpretations differed depending on various schools of thought.

Cizhou ware – a type of stone ware developed during the Northern Song (960–1127 CE), Jin (1127–1279 CE) and Yuan (1279–1368 CE) dynasties. These were sturdy ceramics, decorated with freely drawn designs, and produced more for popular use than fine stone wares or porcelains crafted for the imperial household.

Celestial steeds – horse painters in the Tang Dynasty (618–906 CE) portrayed horses beyond their physical likeness, epitomising common Chinese myths about imported “heavenly animals” that sweated blood and were dragons in disguise. These attributes can be observed in the portrait of *Night Shining White*, a favourite charger of the emperor Xuanzong, (r. 712–56 CE) by Han Gan, a leading horse painter of the time.

Daoism – the notion of the *Dao* (the term *Dao* means road and is often translated as the ‘way or path’) as the origin of all creation. The *Dao* is considered the driving force, unknowable in its essence but observable in its manifestations, responsible for the functioning and changes in the natural world. The order and inherent harmony of nature is considered far more stable and enduring than either the power of the state or institutional structures constructed by human learning. *Daoists* believe that healthy human life could flourish only in accord with the *Dao* – in keeping with nature, simplicity, and a free-and-easy approach to life.

Daoist ideals – are based on a code of impeccable personal and moral values, underpinned by altruistic thinking and positive social interaction. A code of ethics and morality centred on the creation of community emerged as central tenets of Daoism.

Daoist immortals – are a group of eight immortals in Chinese mythology. They have distinct identities and communicate notions of prosperity and longevity.

Ding – Chinese term for tripod vessel with cover.

Doucai – contrasting colours or joined colours, a porcelain decoration technique formed by the combination of underglaze blue and white painting and overglaze colours to yield a combined palette of colours.
• **Earthenware** – clay fired at a low kiln temperature around 800–1100°C, which is porous and not very strong.

• **Kaolin** – a clay mineral that is the main component in porcelain. This name is derived from the Chinese *Kao-ling*, a village near Jingdezhen, Jiangxi Province, China.

• **Kraak porcelain** – a type of Chinese export porcelain produced in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and named after Portuguese vessels (*Carracks*), in which the porcelain was transported to the West. The term *Carrak* or *caracca* in Italian or Spanish is itself a derivative of the Arabic word for the type of trading ships used in the Renaissance Mediterranean trade.

• **Literati** – scholar-bureaucrats in Imperial China.

• **Mammiform** – resembling a breast, or breast-shaped.

• **Mandarin or scholar-official** – a bureaucrat or senior government bureaucrat of Imperial China, appointed by the emperor to carry out day-to-day governance from the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) to the last Chinese imperial Dynasty the Qing (1644–1912 CE).

• **Mimetic skills** – are employed by artists or authors in the imitation of life or nature or to imitate the physical world around us.

• **Mingqi or funerary objects** – Chinese burial goods including daily utensils, musical instruments, weapons, and intimate objects intended to serve the deceased in the afterlife. *Mingqi* could also include representations of figures, such as ladies in waiting, soldiers, musicians and animals.

• **Neolithic** – known as the New Stone Age, was a period in the development of human technology, which commenced with the beginning of farming and animal husbandry, and ended with the widespread use of metal tools. This period occurred at different times in various parts of the world, and ended between 4,500 and 2,000 BCE.

• **Porcelain** – a special type of clay either white or grey, to which kaolin (see *kaolin*) and white China stone (finely decayed granite, washed and prepared as small white blocks) is added. When fired at temperatures of 1280°C and over (up to 1400°C was achieved by the Chinese), the body vitrifies, i.e. it becomes completely impermeable. Glazes can be applied for the first firing, or the vessel can be decorated with a low-firing glaze and put back into the kiln a second time.

• **Qilin** – a mythical hooved chimera (see chimera), which is a symbol of luck, protection, prosperity and longevity.

• **Reduction Firing** – the amount of oxygen in the kiln chamber is reduced during firing, often by closing the kiln doors at some stage during the firing. By varying the amount of oxygen in the kiln, the glazes will turn different colours under heat.

• **Ritual** – a religious ceremony or rite that comprises a series of actions in accordance with a particular order.

• **Shaman** – a person who acts as a medium to reach out into the spirit world to channel transcendental energies into this world for the purposes of healing or divination.

• **Shamanism** – an umbrella term that covers a variety of practices followed by intermediaries or messengers, interacting between the human world and the spirit world.

• **Stoneware** – harder than earthenware, stoneware is fired at a kiln temperature of about 1200–1300°C. Stoneware is strong and can hold water, though is not completely water proof unless glazed.

• **Zoomorphic decoration** – patterns created from animal imagery, the term ‘zoomorphic’ is derived from the Greek ‘zoon’ meaning animal and ‘morphe’ which stands for shape or form.
References


List of museums with significant Asian art collections


Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, USA (http://www.asianart.org/)

British Museum, London, Great Britain (http://www.britishmuseum.org/)

Freer Gallery of Art / Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Washington DC, USA (http://www.asia.si.edu/)

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA (http://www.metmuseum.org/)

Museum of Fine Arts Boston, Boston, USA (http://www.mfa.org/)

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, Australia (http://nga.gov.au/COLLECTIONS/ASIA/)


National Museum of China, Beijing, China (http://en.chnmuseum.cn/)

National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan (http://www.npm.gov.tw/en/)

Palace Museum, Beijing, China (http://www.dpm.org.cn/www_oldweb/English/default.html)

Shanghai Museum, China (http://www.shanghaimuseum.net/en/)

Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Tasmania, Australia (http://www.tmag.tas.gov.au/home)

Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK (http://www.vam.ac.uk/)