CHINA'S DIPLOMACY THROUGH ART: A DISCUSSION ON SOME OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND ART FINDS IN THE PEOPLES' REPUBLIC OF CHINA*

AURORA ROXAS - LIM

For over two decades the Peoples' Republic of China was isolated from most of the world. It was an isolation that was even more intensified by the raging hostility between her and her former ally the USSR. The situation began to change in the late sixties and seventies when attitudes and relations throughout the world have eroded most of the barriers that kept China apart. Hence when she finally took her seat in the UN in 1971, it was already a long anticipated fact. From China's point-of-view, her entry into the UN was the culmination of a long, period of introspection, of laborious internal preparations for her final re-emergence in international diplomacy. Indeed it can be said that China put to good account her forced isolation from most of the world by carrying out fundamental reforms called "The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution." In conjunction with these reforms, total re-examination of China's national heritage was carried out that entailed systematic investigations into all aspects of her past including that of archaeology and the history of art. These investigations carried out even during the most turbulent period of the Cultural Revolution bear witness to the great pains the Chinese took to make the past meaningful to the present.

It is therefore understandable that among the avenues taken by China to conduct international relations, she preferred not only that of sports (in which the Philippines participated in the exchange of bas-

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ketball teams) but the exhibition of archaeological and art objects. Although contrasting techniques, sports and art have much in common in the profound sense that China has put them to use. Sports and art are forms of human endeavour that can stand up to close scrutiny inspite of cultural and political differences; where an error or a slip and mediocrity cannot be disguised. By the same token the stamp of excellence whenever present is unmistakably observable. Still these two types of diplomacy served different purposes. Sports can be seen as a kind of cautious probing of Chinese capacity in *pakikipagkapuwatao*, in the give-and-take of person-to-person contacts. It is an avenue explored as much to receive and make the best impression on foreigners. The second strategy, the exhibition of art objects marks the more confident phase of Chinese diplomacy. Fittingly close to traditional practice of Imperial China since the Han Dynasty (206 B.C. to 220 A.D.), it is a one-way traffic in generosity. China sending gifts to friendly lands: silk, lacquer, bronzes, ceramics, art forms where China enjoys unquestioned pre-eminence.

But we must not overlook another noteworthy aspect of this strategy of diplomacy through art. The exhibits were sent to Paris and London, two European cities where there is a most discerning cosmopolitan audience for art and whose museums such as the Musée Guimét, the Cernuschi and the British Museum to name just a few, draw their greatest pride on their collections of Chinese art. Moreover, these two cities harbor the largest congregation of art scholars, dealers, orientalists, artists and other cognoscenti whose fortunes and careers rest on the continuous flow of things Oriental. The message clearly spelled out is that the Peoples' Republic of China has temporarily put a stop to the smuggling of her ancient art treasures. And so as China rejoins the community of nations in the UN and comes out to play on equal footing as a contender in sports, she also emerges to reap the admiration of the world by exhibiting her art.

The exhibits displayed at the Petit Palais in Paris and at the Burlington House in London from the fall of 1973 to January, 1974 comprise a small selection (385 items) of thousands of art and archaeological objects excavated from 1949 to about 1970. The total number of items displayed were small but since they were obtained under scientifically controlled conditions, they provide valuable corroborative evidence to large collections of Chinese art in many parts of the world. From what we can gather about the recent findings, there

is no doubt that these have significant impact on present knowledge of Chinese art and history. Certain notions have to be revised although in many cases they serve to substantiate with stratigraphic evidence previous theories. Finally, as it is the case in major archaeological and historical research undertakings, the data gathered raise as many questions and problems that can be satisfactorily answered at the present time. In fact there are enough questions raised to keep several generations of scholars busy. Nevertheless, the most exciting outcome of China's nation-wide archaeological excavations lies in the innovations the Chinese introduced in the methods, programs and attitudes of research. For unlike conventional Western type of scholarly practice, the Chinese are bent on achieving something quite novel in the history of archaeological and historical studies.

The general practice among western-trained scholars in the field of art history and archaeology is to conduct research wherein only trained specialists are directly involved. Other less trained people are employed as subordinates in a more or less heirarchic arrangement; as researchers, assistants, secretaries, cargadores, etc. The research team is composed only of specialist who supervise workers who often have only the vaguest inkling of what is going on. With respect to the archaeological site if it is still inhabited, it is fenced-off from the native dwellers and is usually guarded from any possible encroachments. Ideally such a method assures the least possible mishandling, efficient excavation, collection and final transport of excavated items to the museums and laboratories where thorough and highly refined studies can be conducted. Publications of initial findings and reports are made available to other scholars who can then carry on further analysis.

From what can be gathered from available sources, the Chinese are concerned mainly in inculcating historical and cultural consciousness among the inhabitants where excavated sites are located. Many types of archaeological activities are undertaken from very systematic excavations to hasty salvage archaeology (by their own admission) resulting from large public works. In all cases the prevailing practice is to make such undertakings a community effort. The inhabitants of the site, the workers, the army, and those willing and able are given instruction and training so that they can work together with the trained specialists from the Institute of Archaeology of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. Sites are preserved as much as possible as an educational resource of the community where the inhabitants take charge in its

preservation and in instructing visitors to the site. The laymen are encouraged to write about their experience and knowledge gained in archaeological undertakings for national publications. Needless to say, the device works to instill in the people a certain pride in their community and encourages them to sympathize with the workers of the past. Such an experience is made to draw a lesson in contrast: the workers whose creativity and ingenuity were tested under the most adverse conditions on one hand as opposed to the notorious luxury of the ruling class on the other. The juxtaposition of these two contrasting classes, the workers as against the ruling class runs through the research effort and in the famous exhibition sent to Europe.

Western-trained scholars reading the Chinese reports are prone to complain that at present the Chinese apparently are reluctant to engage in the formulation of theoretical assumptions or to advance analysis of methodology along disciplinal lines or to engage in comparative analysis and evaluation. Most western-trained scholars given such amount of data would certainly proceed towards building up broad theories on social organization, cultural development, human creattivity, innovation, etc. The Chinese writings on archaeology and art history however are on the whole descriptive, with little attempt to make comparative analysis much less historical and theoretical synthesis. It seems that western-trained scholars in search for the broad theoretical synthesis are looking in the wrong places if they rely only on Chinese archaeological and historical writings.

For the broad theoretical framework for research is founded on the same fundamental premises that guide Chinese society today. In spite of their internal wranglings, the prevailing principles based on the ideas of Marx, Lenin and Mao are what lie behind all socio-economic-political researches and these are no less binding in the field of archaeology and art. Thus the span of time covered by the materials exhibited comprising 600,000 years represent "the long struggle of the Chinese people" to achieve the society they know today. Current Chinese system of periodization commences with the Pleistocene onto the legendary Hsia (Although this is not yet supported by archaeology but alleged by the Chou to have preceeded the Shang, the Chinese deem it right to reserve a place for it until such time as they can discover Hsia sites.) to the bronge age together with the slave-owning states beginning with the Shang Dynasty (16th century to 11th century B.C.) up to the last quarter of the fifth century B.C. From

thereon, Chinese society up to the middle of the 18th century was "feudal" and up to 1949 it was "semi-feudal" and "semi-colonial." In Chinese writings there is then marked absence of theories and general conceptions of universal import. Whatever findings they provide they are careful to point out that these were the results of conditions obtaining in China and could not be advanced for direct application elsewhere.

Nonetheless, regardless of the modest claims of Chinese archaeological research, just the enormity of the findings and the extent of excavations cannot but advance the cause of Chinese scholarship, history and many aspects of the history of technology and as an unintended bonus the specific ways by which certain changes in socio-economic relationships affect corresponding changes in art styles.

It is significant that the exhibits begin with Lantian man, *Homo erectus lantianensis* and Peking Man, *Homo erectus pekinensis.* (The latter is a reconstruction from the fossils lost while in American custody just before the outbreak of world war II.) Lantian Man and Peking Man were supposed to have lived in the middle Paleolithic of the Pleistocene. Lantian man was older than Peking Man but both shared similar cultures although the latter enjoyed a more advanced cultural stage. They used simple tools, engaged in hunting and fishing, gathered wild fruits and vegetables and lived in small isolated groups. According to Prof. Hsia Nai, Director of the Institute of Archaeology, "these discoveries prove that China is one of the cradles of mankind."[1] The development of *homo erectus* right within the heartland of Chinese civilization (the sites are Shensi and Choukoutien near Peking) prove without a shadow of a doubt that the peopling of China was an indigenous development and not the result of immigration.

The exhibition concentrates on the earlier periods tapering off towards the Yuan (1280-1368 A. D.), presents the constituent beginnings of Chinese civilization. We need not dwell here on a detailed account of the exhibits except to mention certain highlights as can be gathered from the available sources in our library.

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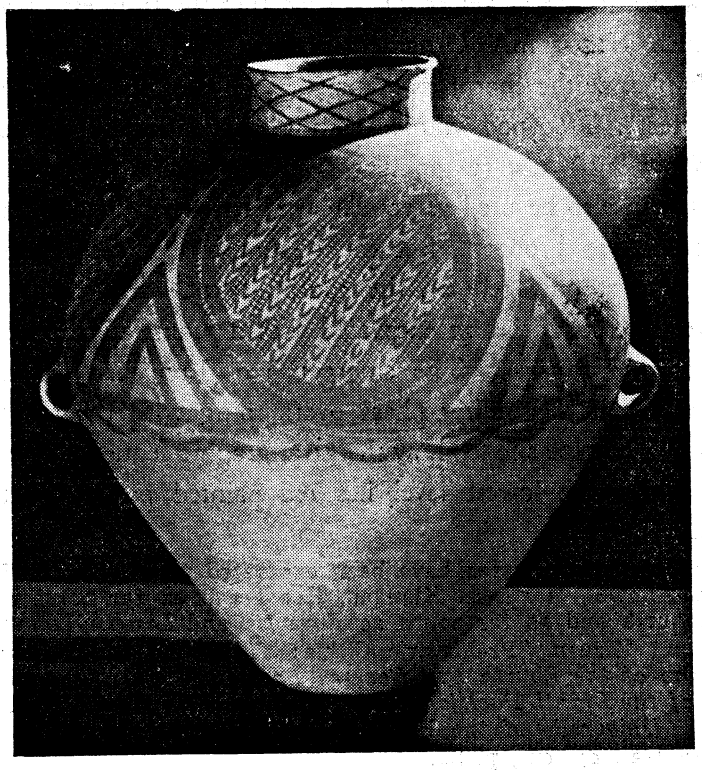
[1] Hsia Nai, "Ancient Men in China," *China Reconstructs*, June, 1973, p. 20.

At the outset we can say that the long-standing dispute surrounding Neolithic pottery can now be put to rest. The beginnings, the sequence and further development of these wares can now be traced on more solid grounds. There are two distinct types of pottery complexes namely, Yangshao named after its classic site at Yangshao ts'un, Mienchih country in Western Honan and Lungshan named after its type site Ch'eng tz'u-yai, Lungshanchen, Licheng country in Shantung. Yangshao (also called Painted Pottery) dated between 2500 — 1700 B.C. is characterized by its reddish buff color, shaped by hand in a coiling process usually into large, bulbous jars and pots. The painted decorations are composed of geometric patterns on the body arranged along a focal point vertically or horizontally, maintaining a harmonious balance of surface ornament and the integrity of the vessel shape. Yangshao vessels are generally fired at the low temperature of 1,000 degrees fahrenheit.



Painted vase (Yangshao) ornamented with four circles filled with geometric pattern. Height 49 cm. Yungtsing, Kansu.

Yangshao wares resemble those made in West Asia and Southeast Europe, a resemblance which has led some scholars to conclude that the wares were importations or the products of immigrants into China from the West. However these scholars have yet to explain the means and paths of transmission if Yangshao is indeed an importation into China. But what they generally ignore is the remarkable similarity of Yangshao with Eastern wares and the fact that recent archaeology shows its wide distribution.[2] Moreover these wares apparently had long sequence of manufacture with its last phase moving into the sequence of Lungshan on to the early bronze age. All of these facts should be sufficient proof of the indigenous development of Yangshao culture in China.[3]

Lungshan pottery known also as Black Pottery culture is characterized by undecorated black ware, burnished to a high finish, wheel-turned whose technical perfection is such that the thinness of walls can be as much as .5 mm.[4] Ornaments consist only of horizontal ridges which emphasize the sharpness of profiles. Forms such as *ting* (tripod on solid feet), *li* (tripod whose main body continues gracefully into three hollow legs), *tou* (a globular stem cup whose upper half forms a lid that can also be used as vessel) were first shaped into clay before they appeared in bronze.[5] But the relationship of these two pottery cultures do not only rely on the continuity of vessel shapes. Their respective time sequences in excavated sites demonstrate that Lungshan evolved from Yangshao. The emergence of Lungshan culture prove to be gradual, its beginning phase overlapping with the last phase of Yangshao. The type site to show this stratigraphic sequence is Houkang, Anyang where the lowest level has red painted pottery (dated 2200

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[2] Painted pottery wares have been excavated from sites in Szechuan, Northern Anhwei, Northern Kiangsu, Hopei and as far north as Southern Manchuria and as far south as Formosa and Lamma Island.

[3] Seiichi Mizuro, "Prehistoric China: Yangshao and Pu-chao-chai," *Proceedings of the Fourth Far Eastern Prehistory and the Anthropology Division of the Eighth Pacific Science Congresses Combined*, Part I (Quezon City: University of the Philippines, 1953), pp. 89-101.

[4] Hsia Nai, *ap. cit.*, p. 21.

[5] All three pottery shapes were realistically reproduced in ancient Chinese scripts. The persistence of the basic tripod as a form in Chinese material culture has led to the use of the *li* as the distinguishing emblem of Chinese civilization.

1700 B.C.), the middle layer has black pottery (1700 —1000 B.C.) and the upper level has white pottery which are found to be contemporaneous with bronzes (1500 — 1027 B.C.).[6]

The conclusion we can draw is that there existed two independent pottery traditions in China during Neolithic times with the later phase of one, Yangshao evolving into the other, Lungshan whose sequel in turn was to give rise to white, almost porcellaneous wares and then bronzes. This shows too that well within the heartland of Chinese civilization there were two contrasting norms and styles and by inference no one unifying center of power even at the height of the Shang-Yin Dynasty (1500 — 1027 B.C.). The Shang culture represented a high level mark of achievement within the capital at Anyang and was surrounded by varying degrees of cultural developments, some persisted in time along conservative, anachronistic lines, while others were explosive innovations that occurred sporadically in the center.[7]

With respect to the development of bronze, the excavations carried out at Erlikang, Cheng-chou in Honan province provide substantial evidence that bronze tradition emerged from China itself. The earlier belief was that bronze technique was introduced by the West. This view arose because many bronze vessels in Japanese and Western collections manifest a full grown, highly developed style. It was therefore assumed that these products could only be the result of external influence. Moreover, it was the contention that Chinese bronzes were made by *cire perdue* technique similar to western procedure. As archaeological findings reveal, the Chinese used instead the more difficult process of piece mold. In the excavations in Cheng-chou, bronze vessels, molds, slags were found together with tools and other foundry paraphernalia, pottery kilns and a rich variety of artifacts in bronze,

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[6] Takeshi Sekino, "On the Black and the Grey Pottery of Ancient China," *Proceedings of the Fourth Far Eastern....*, pp. 103-114.
See also note 7.

[7] Chang, Kwang-chih, *The Archaeology of Ancient China*, (New Haven Conn.: Yale University Press, 1963). This is an excellent source book on the pre-historic archaeological sites in China. Its usefulness is even enhanced by the author's summaries of original Chinese reports with analysis of the data. Its value also lies in the author's synthesis of archaeological findings with historical accounts up to the Han dynasty. pp. 142-145, 163-164 & 175.

bone, jade and ivory. Sectional molds reaching to almost a hundred pieces to build one single bronze vessel were not uncommon. Afterwards, sections were joined together which explains the presence of ridge joints on the completed vessel.[8] It was indeed more complex and cumbersome compared to the *cire perdue* technique. Although such findings argue decisively for the Chinese origination of bronze technology, still we should not discount the likelihood that the Chinese, noted for their resourcefulness could have also learned to take advantage of the relatively simpler *cire perdue* method once it was introduced from the west.

More details in the early experimentation and development of bronzes are provided by the recent finds together with their precedents in pottery, stone, and wood. Bronze tools, weapons, ritual vessels and the more homely objects from chariot fittings, belt hooks, mirrors, sculptures in three dimension, mainly animals, reveal the increasing technical competence, artistry and inventiveness that shaped them. The extent of Shang cultural influence can be mapped according to the site distribution of bronzes that appears to be wider than what has been assigned to this dynasty based on historical documents. It seems that Shang influence covered a wide area from Anyang in North Honan to Southern Hunan. Thus bronze sites are one of the primary indices in the shifts and fluctuations of the centers of power.[9] Doubtless among all technological innovations of the time, bronze was the insignia *par excellence* of the military aristocracy, the wielders of power from the Shang dynasty to Chou up to the Han (16th century B.C. to the third century A.D.).

Since they constitute the material evidence of the formative stages of Chinese civilization, it is therefore clear why bronzes together with neolithic wares form the major sections of the exhibition recently sent to the West. Along with bronze weapons, tools and other paraphernalia, a number of remarkable ritual bronzes were exhibited. Again we find a great deal of diversity in aesthetic norms even within the same

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[8] *Op cit.*, pp. 137, 151, 171, 172, 195, 139-142. Chang agrees with the conclusions of Noel Barnhard in his book, *Bronze Casting and Bronze Alloys in Ancient China.* (Australian National University, 1961), p. 108.

[9] Chang, *op. cit.*, pp. 205-206 & 210.

period and the same region which shows that the archaeological evidence cannot be fitted easily into the sequences and stylistic groupings drawn up by Perceval Yetts, Bernhard Kalgren and the eminent Chinese scholar, Kuo Mo-jo.[10] At the risk of oversimplifying the subject, we can say for purposes of our discussion that bronze vessels generally fall into two major artistic tendencies representing the two extreme poles in the spectrum of taste. One tendency treats vessels in such a way that the decorative motifs create the effect of breaking the integrity of the vessel form. The primary decorative motifs are limited to the more mythical zoomorphs, the *t'ao-tieh* mask, *Kuei* dragon and motifs derived from these two basic elements in various combinations and animals in three dimension usually on flanges creeping up the vessel or right smack on the center of the lid. The vessels strike us as heavy, solemn, enigmatic even awesome and grotesque with stark contrasts in textures, surface topography and the shapes of component parts. By comparison the other tendency is one wherein decorative motifs maintain the continuity of the vessel form creating surface textures arranged around a main axis. In addition vessel types and decorations form a much wider repertoire. Decorative techniques include gilding, chasing, inlays, etching, engraving and appliques.

Vessels of the first type can be interpreted as generally part of the magical rites of ancestral worship that was indispensable to Shang rulers. By comparison, vessels of the second style manifest directly their utilitarian function and have none of the ponderous qualities of the first. The first style lingered well into the end of the B.C. era since the Chou who were cultural upstarts readily adapted Shang magical style for their ritual vessels upon their ascendancy in 1027 B.C.[11]

On display are pictures of two wine vessels called *kuang* (a boat-like vessel with a spout and handle) where the animal takes over the shape of the vessel, completely overwhelming it so that it seems to be a three dimensional animal sculpture. It conveys something terrifying like an elemental power so that it seems inconceivable how one can

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[10] *Op. cit.*, pp. 203-210 & 271.

[11] *Ibid.*, see also Noel Barnhard, "A Recently Excavated Inscribed Bronze of Western Chou Date," *Monumenta Serica: Journal of Oriental Studies*, (Nanzan: The Catholic University of Nagoya, XVII, 1958), pp. 12-46.

Bronze Kuang (wine vessel) with dragon design. Shang Dynasty. Length 41.5 cm. Shihlou, Shansi.

drink out of such a vessel. In contrast to the *kuang* the *lei* (a jar on a stand) from Chengchou, Honan maintains the continuity of the vessel form. The ornaments are shallow engravings composed of tight curls, S curves arranged horizontally along the roundness of the *lei.*

Bronzes of the succeeding periods exemplify the stylistic and technological changes we mentioned earlier although styles from the Shang and Chou periods continued. There was in addition a tendency to replace the *t'ao tieh* mask with mythical animals and other fantastic zoomorphs with more domesticated, naturalistic scenes particularly towards the Han period (206 B.C. — 220 A.D.). The mode of naturalism occurring primarily towards the last centuries B.C., becoming the hallmark of the Tang period (618 — 907 A.D.) was already apparent in late Shang period as can be seen in the Cheng-chou finds. This naturalistic trend is one of the prominent themes in the development of Chinese art. We shall pick up this theme later in our discussion.

Before proceeding any further in our discussion of bronzes, mention must be made of yet another major technological advancement within the period designated by the term "bronze age" (ca. 1500 B. C. up to the Han period). The development of iron metallurgy, iron implements and the extensive irrigation and water control system have all enormous consequences on the rise of states and for purposes of this discussion on art and craft specializations. (A picture of an iron mold is on display.) Iron appeared in China during the Warring States period (475 B.C. — 221 B.C.).[12] It also happened to be the era of rapid urbanization and the efflorescence of literary and philosophical activities. Some of the philosophers of this period are the giants of Chinese classical tradition: Confucius, Mencius, Lao Tze, Hsun Tzu and Han Fei-tzu. Each philosophy contended with one another in the same way that kingdoms were constantly at loggerheads. Shih Huang-ti put an end to the chaotic state of affairs of the Warring States Period by unifying China into the powerful administrative state, an accomplishment that entitled his lineage, the Chin, to give China her name.

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[12] Joseph Needham, *The Development of Iron and Steel Technology in China,* (London: Newcomen Society, 1958).

Excavations from the Warring States and Han Periods are extensive. They include entire cities, cemeteries, tombs of royal personnages and irrigation systems.[13] The bronze *tou* (stem globular cup) dates to this period which gives us a picture of the life style of the rulers of the time. The *tou* represents the more elegant, lighthearted attitude characteristic of late Han style. The decorations are composed of sharp hooks in gold inlay with tiny circles placed in such a way to suggest the dragon *kuei* but in much attenuated form.

Another exquisite example of Western Han (206 B.C. — 24 A.D.) bronze is a *hu* on display showing the decorative innovations of the time. The decorations consist of lozenges and textural contrasts as an over-all pattern on the vessel surface. The composition of design motifs arranged in three successive levels conform with the continuity of the vessel shape. An inkslab of the Eastern Han Period (25 B.C. — 220 A.D.) appears by comparison to the *hu* previously discussed, to be an anachronism. The ink slab in the form of a crouching feline conceals the hollow container for the ink. Despite its size it recalls the grave zoomorphic sacral bronzes of Shang and Chou. And yet, the the technical aspects of the ink slab betrays its actual age. The use of gilding and turquoise inlays show that this is indeed a Han artifact.

One of the most amazing finds in China is the Man Ch'eng tombs in Hopei province. These were the tombs of Prince Liu Sheng, a step brother of the Emperor Wu Ti who died in 113 B.C. and his wife Princess Tou Wen. Among 2,800 funerary items the most astonishing of them all is the jade suit of Princess Tou Wen, a morbid form of *haute couture.* The suit is made up of thousands of rectangular shaped jade pieces sewn together with gold wire and silk thread. It was believed that the body so encased would be preserved. Autopsy performed on the body subsequent to its excavation revealed that much of the remains were intact enough for the doctors to diagnose the physique, the ailments, cause of death including what the Princess ate just before death. It turned out that she had water melon seeds.[14]

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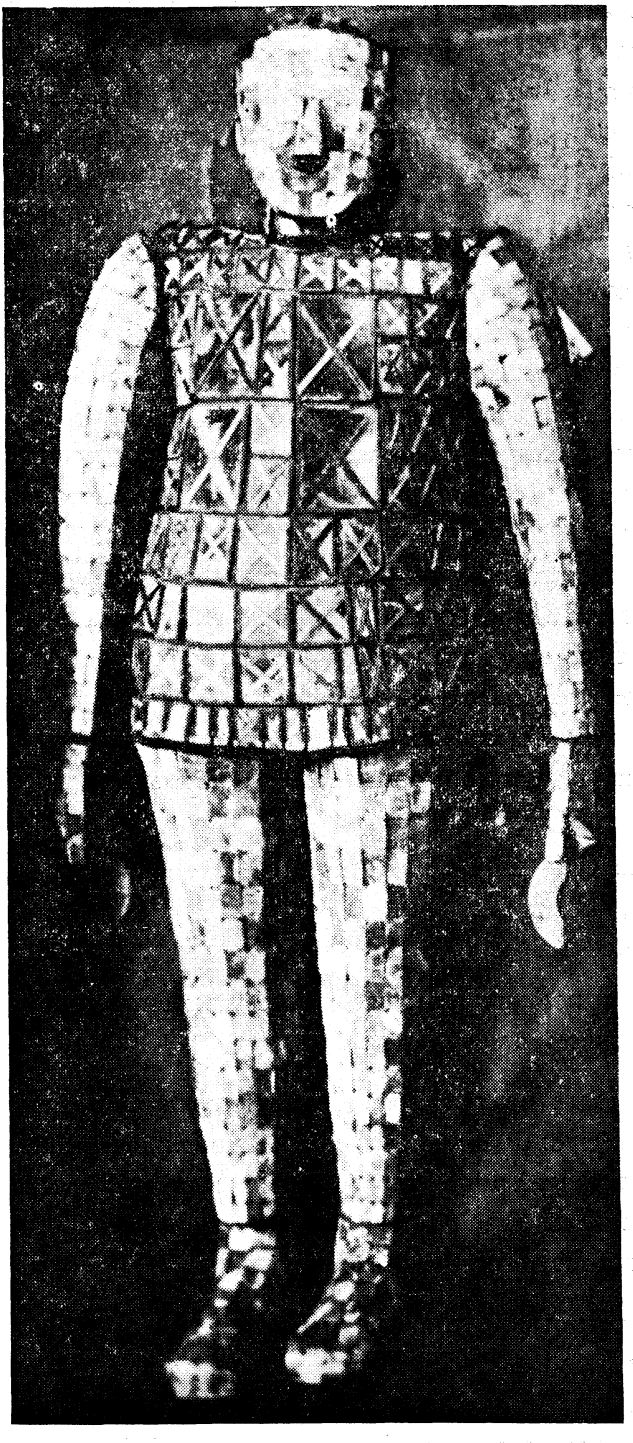
[13] Chang, *op. cit.*, pp. 184-188, 196-197 & 203.

[14] Hsia Nai, "600,000 Years of Labor and Struggle: Exhibition of Archaeological Finds in New China," Part I, *China Reconstructs,* June, 1973. Part II, July, 1973.



Jade suit with gold and silk threads worn by Liu Sheng, Prince Ching of Chungshan and his wife. Mancheng, Hopei. About the end of the 2nd century B.C., middle of the Western Han Dynasty.

Thousands of bibelots accompanied the Princess to her death, two of them whose photos are on display deserve discussion, namely a bronze stem cup censer or *po-shan* and a lamp bearer in the form of a kneeling girl. The stem cup censer represents rugged mountain peaks covered with forests where wild animals lurk about the deep gullies. The decorations are cloud scroll motifs inlaid with gold and contrast with the dark patina of the bronze surface. The mountain represents the mythical mountain called *po* in Taoist literature which is believed to sustain heaven. The censer's upper half serves as a lid so that incense can be placed within the vessel. Whereupon the incense upon being lit causes smoke to rise simulating mountain mist. Thus as the image of the *po* mountain, the censer shows the preoccupation of the Han aristocracy with notions of immortality. And yet however much the *po-shan* censer demonstrates the evocation of immortality, still the inderlying feeling remains very much close to the actual world. For compared to the other Shang bronzes we have already mentioned, the censer portrays in detail a closer interest in the natural world. Animals of different species are depicted in their characteristic movements as they lurk about the dense forests and hills. In spite of its miniature size, it is one of the most absorbing landscapes ever depicted in three dimension.

The second beautiful object found in Princess Tou Wen's tomb is a lamp whose picture is also on display. The lamp is held by a kneeling girl fitted with a movable shutter. The quiet expression of the girl and her graceful pose are remarkable since most tomb figures tend to be stolid and expressionless.

An entire tableau made up of pottery depict acrobats, musicians, singers and dancers that gives us a clue to the social amusements of the Han period. Technically less proficiently executed than the bronze examples from Princess Tou Wen's tomb, nonetheless the scene projects the gay, active atmosphere of the occasion.

Another brilliant portrayal in the naturalistic vein is on display, that of a bronze horse found at the Eastern Han tomb at Leitai, Wu-wei country in Kansu. As in the Man Ch'eng tombs where the famous jade-suited lady was found, the Leitai tombs yielded various

human and animal figurines depicted in life-like manner.[15] But the bronze horse is by far the most magnificent representation of that animal yet found. It depicts the horse in flight, its graceful swiftness is breakthtaking. No doubt this type of horse came from those species imported into China following the exploits of General Chang Ch'ien in behalf of Emperor Wu. Chang Ch'ien is considered to be one of the world's greatest explorers. He left China in 136 B.C. and returned in 126 B.C. During the intervening years he travelled through some of the most difficult and dangerous territories of his time, he was captured and held prisoner twice by the Huns and each time he managed to escape. He travelled towards the T'ien Shan mountains via the Dzungarian gap and the Ili valley up to the Jaxartes river west of the Pamirs staying at Ferghana from whence he proceeded to Transoxania. Although Chang Ch'ien never reached as far as Syria and the mediterranean ports, he received enough information about these places which he wrote about upon his return. It was this general who brought back news of this "celestial horse" (*t'ien ma*) and who stirred up the imagination of Emperor Wu who then sent no less than three emissaries to obtain these horses. Only the third mission succeeded in bringing back a dozen or so horses in 102 B.C. after so much expenses in human life and resources.[16]

The picture of the bronze horse manifests the sense of wonder that must have inspired Chinese artists for so many centuries. These horses increased all the more the predilection of the nobility to use horses and horse-drawn chariots as status symbols. It went to the extent that it became the prevalent belief that the highest tribute to the deceased was measured in the number of horses and horse-drawn chariots deployed into the funeral cortege. In the later dynasties compared to the Shang, the funeral corteges became longer and more pompous. It is easy to imagine that the supply of actual horses and chariots was easily depleted. Hence substitutes in the form of paintings and other representations on silk, clay figurines, bas reliefs for example were the ones entombed.[17]

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[15] *Ibid.*, Part II, July, 1973.

[16] Joseph Needham and Wang Ling, *Science and Civilization in China*, Vol. III, Cambridge University Press, 1959, pp. 321, 511, 522-23, 535 & 549.

[17] William Watson, *Archaeology in China*, Max Parrish & Co., Ltd., London, 1960, pp. 26-27, plates 79-84.

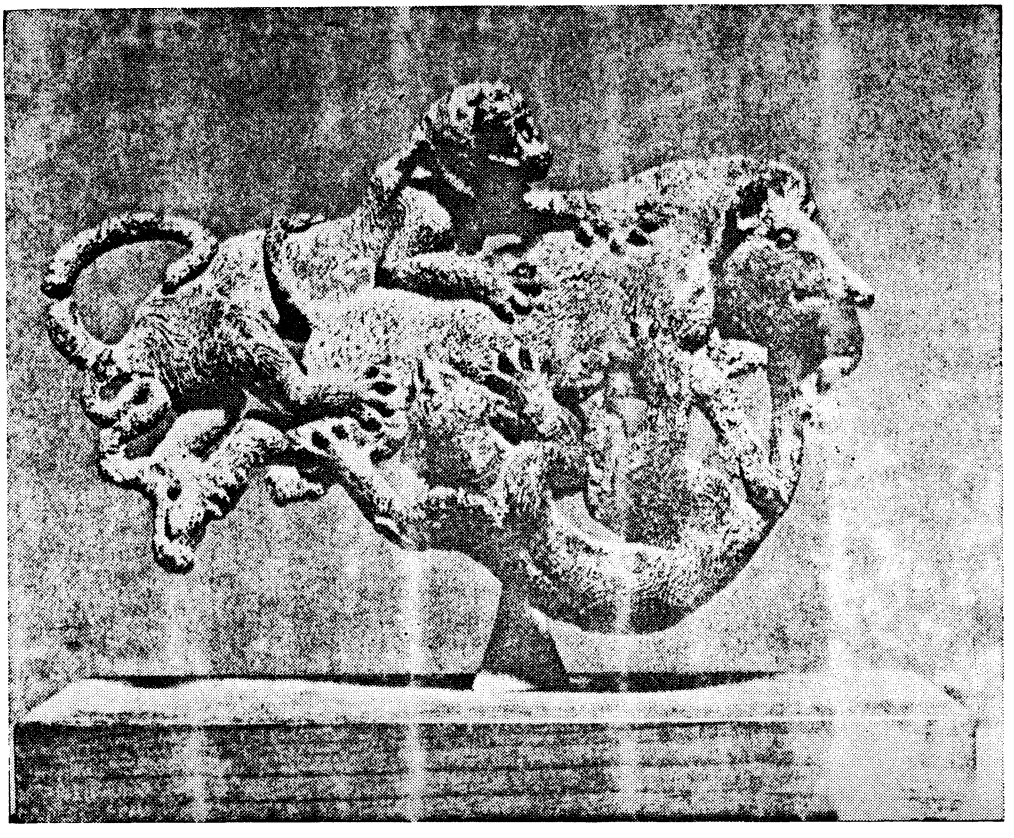
The wealth of material remains from the aristocracy are matched by quantities of objects from ordinary citizens. In the outlying provinces farther away from the capital of the Eastern Han at Loyang, excavated objects showed that there was more intense interest in common, ordinary life of the people but depicted with no loss in excellent workmanship. It is amazing how decorative motifs persist from Shang to Han, recognizable even when stylized and blended into a more localized style. In fact the objects unearthed from the outskirts of the centers of power convey a freshness of approach that eludes the more sophisticated artists of the urban center.

Among the examples of "provincial" art the ones found in the Kingdom of T'ien at Shihchaishan, Chinning, Yunnan should be of special interest for those specializing in Southeast Asia. Excavated between 1950 to 1960 a great deal of materials were retrieved.[18] But it is regrettable that much of the reports in Chinese are not yet available to English-speaking scholars working on Southeast Asia. The items on exhibit manifest still a greater degree of realism than anything we have discussed so far. For example, the boar being attacked by two tigers in bronze portrays so dramatically the horror of the kill. Not a single item from the capital comes close to this sculpture in catching this portentuous moment. (See illustration on p. 71)

Finds at Shihchaishan include bronze tools such as plowshares, axes, bronze ornaments in animal forms and most significantly for Southeast Asia, bronze drums that resemble the famous Dongson drums. These Dongson drums are important diagnostic tools in the analysis of indigenous Southeast Asian cultures.[19] In the light of these excavations, theories regarding the origin and development of Southeast Asian bronze culture ought to be revised in order to include greater influence and inter-action between China and Southeast Asia. The shape of the Shihchaishan bronzes resembles those made by the Shans of Burma right up to our own century. But the Shihchaishan drums

[18] *Op. cit.*, pp. 31-32, plates 122-123.
Chang, *op. cit.*, pp. 122-126, 297-295, plates 15-17.

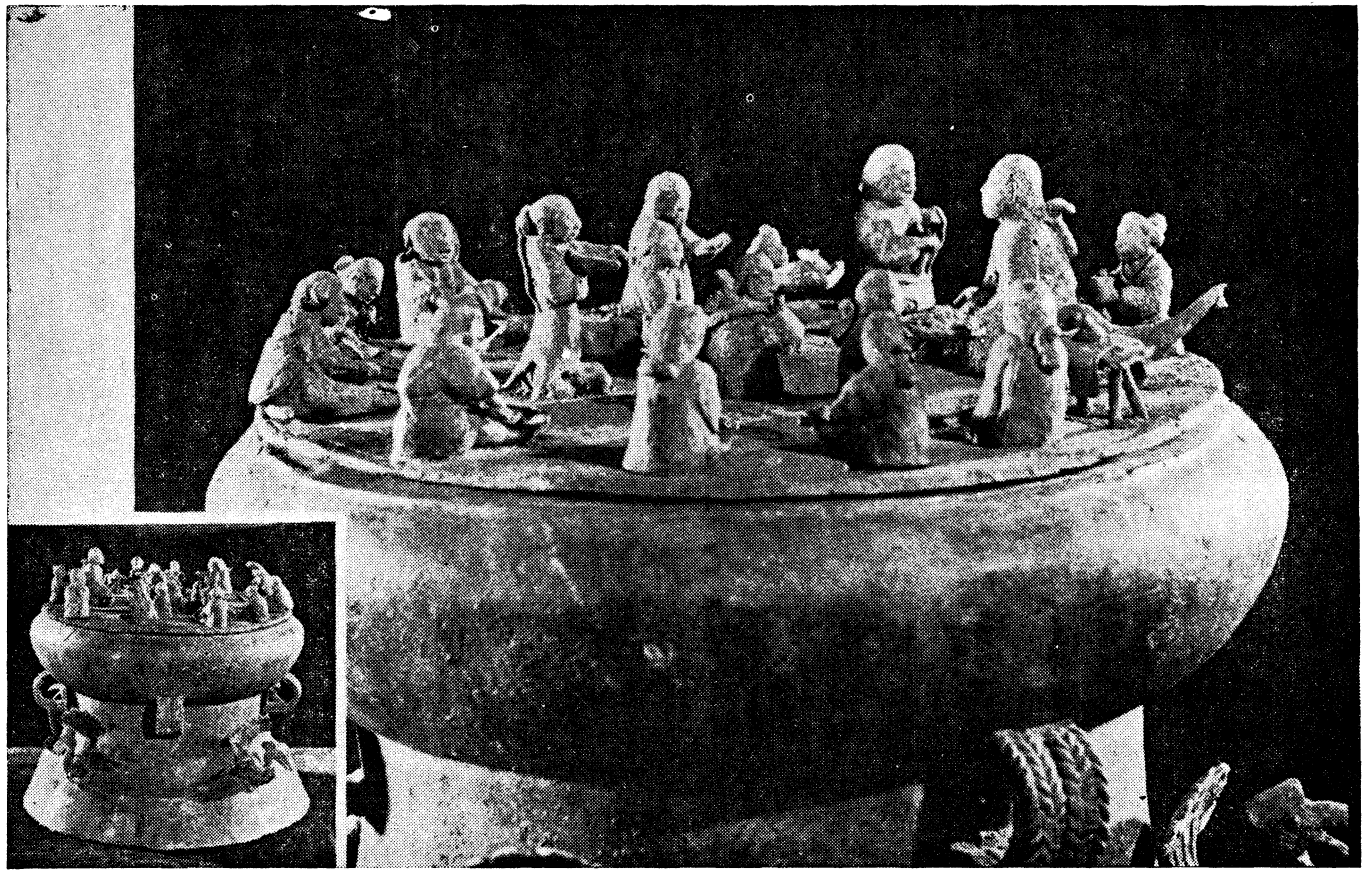
[19] Victor Goloubew, "L'Age du Bronze au Tonkin," *Bulletin*, Ecole Francaise d'Extreme Orient, 29, 1928.
————, "Sur l'Origine et la Diffusion des Tambours Metallique," *Praehistoria Asia Orientalis*, Hanoi, 1932.



Bronze plaque of two tigers attacking a boar Shihchaishan, Yunnan, Western Han.

are unquestionably unique from those drums that have so far been studied in Southeast Asia. The tops of the drums found at Shichaishan are crowded with scenes depicted in three-dimension. The drum top is used very much in the nature of a stage. The scenes represented read like the ethnography of tribal groups in South China and with those cultural groups in Southeast Asia who have not participated directly in the Hindu-Buddhist and Islamic kingdoms of the the region.[20] One drums shows a scene of a chieftainness being enthroned, other religious rites are found on others.[21] Shihchaishan drums together with the other archaeological evidence will certainly have profound changes on our knowledge of Southeast Asian prehistory.

[20] See note 18.
[21] Watson, *op. cit.*, p. 27.



Bronze cowrie-container decorated with a spinning and weaving scene on the cover, Western Han Dinasty. Height 27.5 *cm., diameter of bottom* 30.9 *cm. From a tomb at Shihchaishan, Chinning, Yunnan. Shows Chinese affinities with Southeast Asian bronzes.*

Aside from the drums which date in the last hundred years of the B.C. era, China's affinities with Southeast Asian cultures are further substantiated by textile finds. (See sample on p. 74) Although the textiles, mostly silks dated to the Tang period (618 — 907 A.D.) were found in the Northwest, they show that tie-dying and batik techniques have been practiced in North China far away from Southeast Asia where such textile techniques were believed to have originated.[22] Like the Dongson drums, these textile techniques were considered distinguishing features of Southeast Asian material culture particularly that of Indonesia before the process of "Hinduization" took place.[23] Again, the Chinese finds will have to be taken into account if these textile techniques are to be used to characterize the autochtonous elements in the cultures of Southeast Asia.

As to be expected in a country as large as China, her cultural affinities reach far and wide. Contemporaneous with the textiles so far discussed were those that show close resemblance to Iranian models. The design shows definitely an Iranian motif — a drinking couple flanking a large cup surrounded by a rondel of pearls used as a border.[24] China's middle eastern relations are amply demonstrated by art finds as we shall discuss in the latter part of this study.

The items exhibited which cover the earliest periods to the Han (206 — 220 A.D.) have been organized to illustrate the different cultural traditions that emanated from China's vast territory. Their respective material cultures, their developments and the different aspects and styles can be studied in their continuity, changes and deviations.

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[22] Hsia Nai, "Along the Silk Road: More Ancient Silks Found," *China Reconstructs,* April, 1972.

[23] This is the fundamental assumption used by George Coedes, the distinguished French scholar in explaining the historical developments in Southeast Asia. See his books: *The Making of Southeast Asia,* University of California Press, Berkeley, 1966 and *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia,* East — West Center, Honolulu, 1968. See his discussion of Dongson culture in both books.

[24] Note that Sassanian rulers (266-642 A.D.), great patron of the arts in Persia, drew from the traditions of the Mediterranean civilizations. The first Sassanian embassy to China was documented to be 455 A.D. But contacts with West Asian countries must antedate official embassies for as early as 166 A.D. the presence of Syrian merchants was recorded at Loyang.

Batik-dyed silk. Tang Dynasty. Textile technology shows close relation to Southeast Asian techniques.

In contrast to these earlier periods where a variety of art forms were displayed, the examples drawn from the succeeding dynasties, the Sui, Tang, Sung and Yuan concentrate mainly on ceramics. Enough examples however were exhibited to illustrate the range and development of various wares. One important point brought out in the exhibits is the fact that high-fired feldspathic glaze goes back to the 15th century B.C. The previous dating for this significant advance in ceramic technology was at the close of the Shang in the 11th century B.C. The excavations at Chengchou yielded a covered jar with a bright yellow glaze that showed that by the 15th century B.C. the Chinese succeeded in producing a glaze that coalesced completely with the body upon firing at very high temperatures. This technological discovery was not fully exploited until the Han period when it was systematically applied until celadons were achieved and on towards true porcelain. Representative items of this development were shown in the exhibition. The pictures on display show *Yüeh* and Lungchuan wares from Che-

kiang, *ting* ware from Hopei (a large *kundi* is on display), *ch'ing pai*-wares from Kiangsi and blue-and-writes. A picture of a blue-and-white covered jar excavated near Peking show the Chinese ingenious adaptation of Iranian motifs. Wares of this type were exported in great quantities to the Islamic world.[25]

Ceramics provide additional data of the cultural interchanges between China and the Middle East that not only supplement historical accounts but as we shall see from the new evidence brought out as a result of the excavations, require changes of earlier views. Western scholars have previously advanced the theory that the use of underglaze blue was an adaptation from the West. Originally developed in the Middle East around Mesopotamia and Persia this technique was later on introduced to China not later than the 11th century. This is proven accordingly by several factors. First the fact that cobalt blue, the raw material for the glaze was imported from the Middle East. Secondly Chinese ceramic experts notably in the *Kao-ku Yao-lun* (1367) speak of "Mohammedan blue". This same work contains a passage which describes the new repertory of forms, similar to Middle Eastern prototypes as having been the influence of the Mongols. Third, the influx of Muslims who set up their colonies in Canton and Ch'uan Chou in the 14th century as described by Ibn Battuta was considered proof of how Middle Eastern ceramic influences were transmitted.[26]

Be that as it may, archaeological finds in Hangchou reveal the presence of blue-and-white wares which means according to a Japanese scholar, that they must have been manufactured earlier than the 14th

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[25] F. Hirth and W. W. Rockhill, Chau Ju-Kua, *His Work on the Chinese and Arab Trade in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries,* St. Petersburg, 1911.

M. S. Collis, "Fresh Light on the Route Taken by Export Porcelains....," *Transactions,* Oriental Ceramic Society, 1935-36, p. 28.

[26] William B. Honey, *The Ceramic Art of China,* Faber & Faber Ltd., London, 1954, pp. 94-97.

[26] Ibn Battuta was appointed by Sultan Muhamad Tughluq to conduct an embassy to China in 1346. His work, the REHLA (Travels) is a rich mine of information on the social, economic & political conditions of his travels in the Middle East, Africa, India, Sunatra, Java and China. His accounts are invaluable for their astute observations and veracity of many aspects of life of the people & lands he visited.

century as it was previously thought. From the associated finds, the blue-and-white ware discovered at Cheng-chou was dated no later than Southern Sung.[27] Another Japanese ceramic scholar Mikami Tsuguo in his study of Tang wares suggests that the influences between the Middle East and China was not simply a one-sided affair. It is equally valid to assume a complex relationship of mutual interactions, each side contributing and learning from each other. The Chinese importing the raw material, cobalt blue as well as some of the vessel types from Middle Eastern metal ware but no less significant is Chinese perfection of ceramic technology. One of them, the achievement of true porcelain and the brilliant blues characteristic of Ming wares was highly-prized by the Sultans and Caliphs of the Middle East. Moreover, according to Mikami Tsuguo Tang tri-colored wares were well-developed by the 7th century while Islamic counterparts of polychrome ware did not evolve until late 8th century. That the Chinese potters were way ahead in experimenting with different glazes can be further proven by an excavated site in the Middle East at Samarra. This is a site occupied for about 50 years in the ninth century where many Chinese Tang wares and celadons (both porcellaneous wares) were deposited along with local wares. Here is evidence of Middle Eastern reception of Chinese material culture long before the 14th century when Chinese potters were supposed to have adapted underglaze blue.[28]

That the Chinese potters had a lively interest in the art of the Middle East and other cultures from the Mediterranean world can be demonstrated from several objects in the exhibition which could easily be mistaken as imports. On display is the picture of a yellow g'azed porcelain flask dated to the sixth century A.D. which shows in its form and decoration that the Chinese potters were always responsive to the tastes of the different peoples who imported their wares. The face of the flask depicts dancers and musicians in "Hellenistic" style and judging from the composition which uses as borders acanthus leaves to the rendering of the drapery and the musical instruments, show Chinese adaptations from the West.

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[27] Yonaiyama Tsuneo, "Blue and Whites Unearthed in Hang-chou," *Nippon Bijutsu Kogei*, 1959, Nos. 249-250, pp. 8-15 & 38-45.
K'ao Ku Hsueh Pao, 1957, No. 1.

[28] Mikami Tsuguo, "Islamic Glazed Polychrome Pottery and Tang Tricolored Porcelain," *Tosetsu*, 1958, No. 20, pp. 65, 27-32.

Gold and silver wares give more evidence of Chinese contacts and receptivity to Iranian and Hellenistic cultures.[29] At Ho-ch'ia, the site of ancient Ch'ang-an a silver box and a gold bowl were unearthed whose decorations follow very closely Sassanian design so much so that they could be mistaken for imports. However the discovery of sites with goldsmithing shops showed that they were in fact of Chinese provenance. How well Chinese artists have mastered Iranian models can also be seen in a silver wine pot in the shape of a saddle bag embossed with a prancing horse clenching a cup. Once again this shows Chinese craftsmen manufacturing goods to suit the specifications of their foreign buyers. In fact Chinese responsiveness to foreign tastes can be suggested as one of the important factors in the accelerated growth of Chinese international trade from the Tang period on to the Ming. Also on display is a gold cup with an eight-part design whose shape and dècor combines Chinese floral motifs with Sassanian composition, a happy blending that results in a magnificent piece.

One of the most delightful sections of the exhibits are the tomb figures made mostly of ceramics which provide rich material evidence of the changing attitudes and styles of the times. We find greater interest in the detailed representation of the physiognomy and psychology of people and animals. From the tomb of General Chang Sheng in Anyang, dated 595 A.D., two tomb guardians show this vigorous interest in naturalism. Other examples of the same nature are those recovered from the tomb of Ch'ung-p'u near Ch'ang-an where we find the artist making an ironic comment. The servants appear ridiculous compared to the noble character of the camels and horses while the elegant court ladies are parodied who are depicted as empty-headed and quite vacuous. (The pictures of a groom and horse as well as the court ladies are on display.)

Our knowledge of Chinese human statuary are amplified by finds from the rock-carved temple at Feng-hsi-ssu near Loyang where the guardians of the Buddhist faith are represented as heroic figures. The finds at Loyang show the resurgence of Buddhist influences

[29] Basil Gray, "The Influence of Near Eastern Metalwork on Chinese Ceramics," *Transactions*, Oriental Ceramic Society, 1940-41, p. 47.

in the beginning of the eighth century. It is the Buddhist faith as much as trade that expanded the cultural horizons of Tang China. The variety of forms and designs in art reflect the complexity of Chinese society that enjoyed long contracts with the different cultures of the world. Tang Dynasty in fact is by common agreement considered one of the most sophisticated, urbane and cosmopolitan eras of Chinese history. Chinese eagerness to learn and adapt different cultural influences include not only adaptations from well-documented civilizations of the Hindu-Buddhist world, from Hellenistic and Islamic civilizations but from the people of the steppes. From these peoples such as the Hsiung-nu, the Chinese learned among other things animal breeding, weapons technology, cavalry tactics and the game of polo. A wall painting in the tomb of Crown Prince Chang Huai discovered at Chienhsien, Shensi shows a polo game under way. (A picture of a fragment of this wall painting is on display.) One east comment on the subject of amusements, is a group of pottery figurines dated to Yuan dynasty found at Chiaotsu, Honan illustrates how well the Chinese artists have mastered the technique of depicting animated and humorous poses of actors. Besides, these figurines give us an inkling of the high level of dramatic arts at the time.

In a discussion of a major exhibition such as this one which marks at the same time the re-emergence of China from years of isolation, the principle of selectivity exercised in the choice of items on display has much to say to the audience. Absent in the exhibition are paintings of scholar gentlemen from the Sung and Yuan periods. This type of art is usually done in brush and ink on silk or paper and have been assiduously collected for hundreds of years by Japanese and Westerners. The subject matter usually are landscapes from monumental panoramas characteristic of the Northern Sung (960-1127) to little vignettes of nature such as an insect hovering on a blade of grass. Included as an important category of scholar gentlemen's *oeuvres* is calligraphy, the *sine qua non* of the artistic output of this social class. Paintings and calligraphy of such types reflected the life style of the Confucian literati, the elite intelligentsia class that dominated Chinese society as far as government and literary and artistic endeavours were concerned. By and large their artistic production depicted the refined

sensibilities, the aesthetism and romantic withdrawal from the mundane world by the artists. As for the works themselves, these were intended to be perused at leisure by a selected few.[30]

It is significant that even a few examples from virtually thousands from these *ouvres* were not shown. This seems to be consistent with the anti-Confucian attitude prevailing in China today. In their place, what have been exhibited are types of art that are relatively more utilitarian and the production of which require close collaboration between artists, designers, craftsmen, technicians and so on all along the line to the final user of the art object.

Aside from the absence of the paintings and calligraphy produced by the Confucian gentlemen literati which makes this exhibition a great departure from the conventional view of Chinese art and history, is the presence of art products produced from different regions of China. What is emphasized is the fact that these objects are the products of the multi-ethnic population living in China's present borders. The supposedly uninterrupted and continuous historical development of Han-nurtured and Confucian-oriented Chinese civilization has finally given way to another interpretation. Archaeological materials have contributed a wealth of evidence to show the checkerboard political and cultural geography of China. The general picture presented is that Chinese civilization is the outcome of the various advances made by many groups of people who contributed different ideas, technology and innovations. Confucian doctrines and institutions was merely one of the many streams that swelled the great ocean of this civilization. The contribution of peoples inhabiting the border lands, peoples who represent cultures of long and venerable standing are of no less importance than those made by the Han Chinese.[31]

Finally we cannot close this discussion of Chinese art and archaeology without bringing up the underlying motive in the nationwide

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[30] Arthur Wright and Denis Twitchett, editors, *Confucian Personalities*, Standford University Press California, 1962.

[31] Hsueh Li, "Confucius and His Times," *Peking Review*, July 15, 1974, pp. 18-21.

Mass Criticism Group of Peking and Tsinghua University, "Confucius — the Man," *Peking Review*, July 15, 1974, pp. 15-18.

research into the past. The leaders of the Peoples' Republic of China are bent on forging a new type of human relationship and social organization the likes of which was never known in China's long history. Part of the fundamental tenets that shape the new China is the belief that the workers are the undisputed instruments of the country's progress. Thus this exhibition of art is made to dramatize this belief and crowns the workers triumphantly with the achievement of beauty.

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