

National Palace Museum

Visitor Trails : Selections I

Length: 60 minutes

For Adults / School Groups

- These objects are on the Multimedia Guide. [Adults Multimedia Guide](#)
- Please note that certain galleries may be closed for renovation or objects may be off display. [Latest Exhibition Changes](#)

Exhibition Area I (Main Building) 2F

2F

01

	Pottery figure of a standing lady with painted colors, Tang dynasty (AD618-907)
	Gallery: 201
	Exhibition name: The Magic of Kneaded Clay: Ceramic Collection of the National Palace Museum
	Related network resources: NPM Selections

Introduction:

During the Tang dynasty, particular emphasis was placed on elaborate funerary ritual which often included large quantities of grave goods. These were intended both to provide for the dead in the afterlife and to glorify the wealth of the deceased's family. As a result, Tang burial frequently included large numbers of earthenware

tomb figurines. This female figure is one example.

The young woman has a plump figure; long, attenuated brows and lashes; a small peach-shaped mouth; round face; and a composed expression. These features were precisely the ideal qualities of Tang feminine beauty. The woman wears a long, broad robe, with her right hand held up before her chest and her left hand extended slightly down. Pointy-tipped shoes protrude from beneath the hem of her robe. Her casual and relaxed manner reveals a sense of stately, self-assured ease. Her tall, elaborate hairdo, with descending strands that encircle her cheeks, is a hairstyle that was particularly popular in the late Tang. The figure displays the realistic style of Tang art, embodying for us the natural appearance of Tang noblewomen.

02



White porcelain vase with loops, Xing ware, Tang dynasty (AD618-907)

Gallery: 201

Exhibition name: [The Magic of Kneaded Clay: Ceramic Collection of the National Palace Museum](#)

Related network resources:
[NPM Selections](#)

Introduction:

The Xing kilns were an important producer of Northern white wares located in the NeiQiu and Lincheng regions of modern-day Hebei province. The ceramics manufactured by these kilns are characterized by their fine clay bodies and pure white glaze, which early connoisseurs compared to silver and snow. Looking at the present vase, perhaps you can understand why they chose these metaphors.

Carrying flasks were commonly used in the Tang for holding water and were produced in particularly large quantities by the Xing kilns. Their shape resembles that of the water flasks crafted from metal and animal hide carried by the nomadic peoples of the north. The shallow grooves on either side of the flask, flanked above and below with small rings, were used for securing a rope that would have been tied longitudinally around the vessel. The Xing kilns were located rather close to regions inhabited by the northern nomads, and it is possible that vessels of this type were produced for nomadic consumers.

03



Pillow in the shape of a recumbent child with white glaze, Ding ware, Northern Song dynasty (AD960-1127)

Gallery: 205

Exhibition name: [The Magic of Kneaded Clay: Ceramic Collection of the National Palace Museum](#)

Related network resources:
[NPM Selections](#)

Introduction:

This white porcelain pillow is in the shape of a child on a mat lying on his side, the back being where the head is placed. This piece was produced using the superior molding and decorative techniques characteristic of

Ding wares, and it is also infused with a lively spirit; the figure appears equally naughty and cute, while also revealing a sense of wealth and social rank.

The Ding kilns were renowned northern kilns during the Song dynasty located in modern-day Quyang County, Hebei Province. Because the ancient name for the place was Dingzhou, it was called Ding ware. The kilns mainly produced white porcelains and were known for excellent molding craftsmanship, fine smooth glaze, white glaze with a hint of yellow, and decorative techniques that included different types of carving and stamping. The glaze on this piece is ivory white and smooth, with the head and body comprising two molds fixed together and the facial features added later. If one picks up the piece, it becomes clear that there is a small piece of clay inside that makes a faint rattling sound when moved.

Only three pillows in the shape of a recumbent child are known to exist, and the stunning glaze and exquisite decoration of this piece make it unequalled. The bottom of the piece is inscribed with a poem by the Qing emperor Qianlong, tracing it back through the generations and making this a unique national treasure.

04



Narcissus basin in bluish-green glaze, Ru ware, Northern Song dynasty (AD960-1127)

Gallery: 205

Exhibition name: [The Magic of Kneaded Clay: Ceramic Collection of the National Palace Museum](#)

Related network resources:
[NPM Selections](#)

Introduction:

This oval dish has deep, slightly flaring sides, a flat base, and four cloud-shaped feet. The body is very thin on the sides, becoming slightly thicker on the base and feet. It is covered all over in a light blue, highly lustrous glaze, which shows a hint of green at the base: the glaze is slightly thinner at the rim and the corners. During firing, the piece would have been supported from underneath by small points on the feet, and on these parts the cream color of the body could have been seen where the glaze did not cover them. The glaze over the whole piece has a wonderful smooth quality, devoid of any markings, a very rare feature among extant examples. The lustrous, elegantly aesthetic, and harmonious effect created by the artifact was much sought after during the Song dynasty.

05



Wine cup with *doucai* polychrome decoration of chicken in a garden, Ming dynasty, Chenghua reign (AD1465-1487)

Gallery: 205

Exhibition name: [The Magic of Kneaded Clay: Ceramic Collection of the National Palace Museum](#)

Related network resources:
[NPM Selections](#)

Introduction:

This wine cup was made around the 1460s, during the reign of the Ming Emperor Cheng Hua. The cup is delicate, small, and brightly colored. It combines the dou cai decorating technique developed during the Xuan De era with a new form created by the official kilns of the period. The exterior wall features two finely painted compositions of chickens with their chicks. The two groups are separated by peonies, orchids and rocks. In both cases, a rooster and a hen lead their chicks in finding food. The roosters are front, either standing guard or turning their head to look after their chicks. The hens either peck at the ground or flap their wings in a confrontational posture. The three chicks leap, play, and open their mouths to be fed. This is a heartwarming scene of domestic bliss.

Ming blue and white porcelain production continued to develop and improve into the mid-Cheng Hua period. The doucai technique used here begins by outlining the decoration in cobalt-based pigments on the unglazed cup. The artist then applies a transparent glaze and fires the cup at a high temperature to create underglaze blue patterns. Afterwards, the artist fills in details in various colors and fires the cup again at a lower temperature. The combination of high-temperature blue underglaze and low-temperature polychrome creates these rich effects. In this piece, the numerous dou cai colors include tones of red, yellow, brown and green. The combination of vivid colors and a lifelike depiction make this an animated portrait of family unity.

This treasured piece was admired by emperors and literati alike. According to a late Ming archive, a pair of such fine, almost translucent miniature cups was once purchased by the emperor for 100 thousand cash. If these pieces fetched such a high price in their own time their current value must be beyond all reckoning!

06



Revolving vase with swimming fish in cobalt blue glaze, Qing dynasty (AD1644-1911)

Gallery: 205

Exhibition name: [The Magic of Kneaded Clay: Ceramic Collection of the National Palace Museum](#)

Related network resources:
[NPM Selections](#)

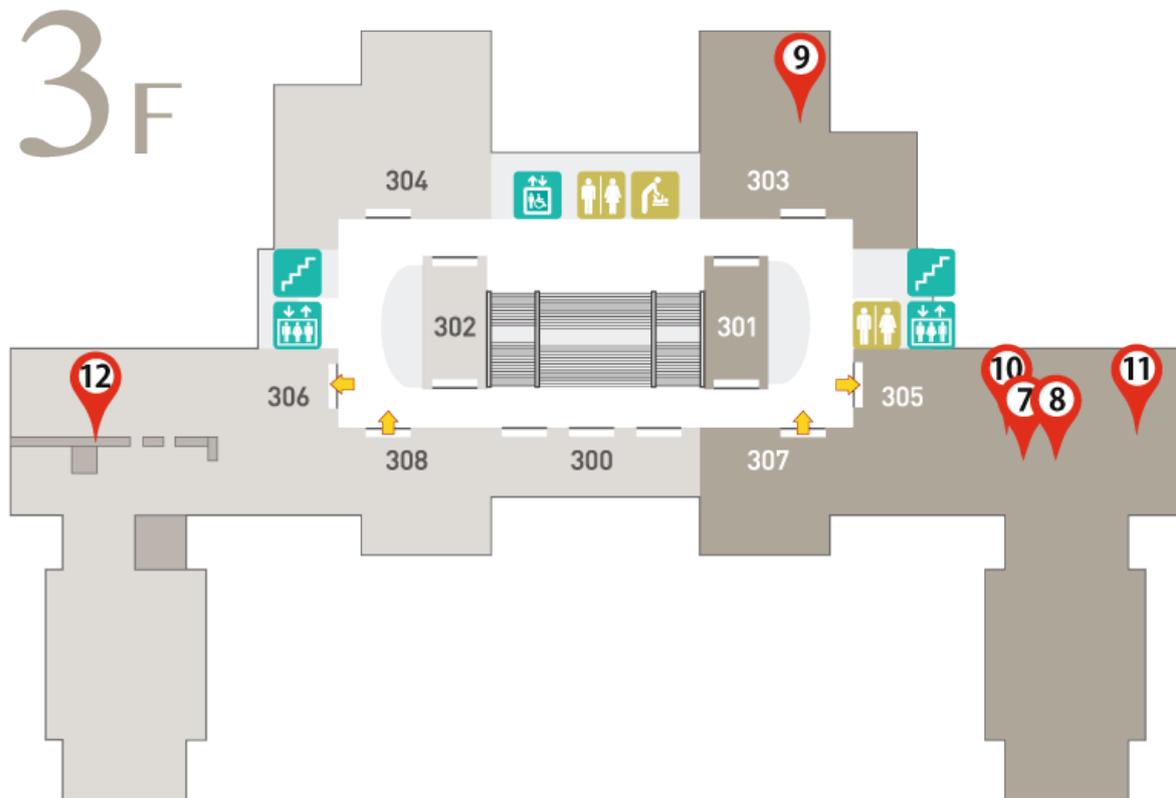
Introduction:

Revolving vases were made as composite pieces, though from the exterior they appear as a single work. This piece has a narrow opening, lipped rim, short neck, broad shoulders, downward sloping body, short round base, and four round ring holders on its shoulders. The body is divided into an internal and external sections, the former being covered with light green glaze on which is painted fallen flowers, water plants, and swimming fish. Because this is a composite vase, rotating the neck of the piece causes the inner vase to revolve at which point one can see different goldfish swim through the openings of the outer vase. The base of the piece is covered in lake-green glaze and has a white central area with a six-character in cobalt blue pigment that reads: "Made in the Qianlong reign year of the Great Qing."

By rotating the neck of the piece, the vase spins and through the openings of the outer vase creates the impression of fish swimming and playing in the water. This revolving vase with its profound sense of playfulness was made during the reign of the Qianlong Emperor. Whether such an innovation was influenced

by the traditional Chinese merry-go-round or western spinning tops with wind-up springs, the firing process required the making of individual components and assembly. One gains a better understanding of the whole vessel from the integrated complete piece.

Exhibition Area I (Main Building) 3F



07



Mao-Gong *Ding*, Late Western Zhou period (BC1046-771)

Gallery: 305

Exhibition name: [Rituals Cast in Brilliance: Masterpieces of Bronzes in the Museum Collection](#)

Related network resources:

[NPM Selections](#)

Introduction:

The cauldron of Duke Mao is significant because of the inscription on the inside is considered an important national treasure. The 500 characters make this the longest inscription of currently existing bronzes. The inscription is a testament to the history of the "Revival of King Xuan" in the Western Zhou dynasty. The first section is an injunction from King Xuan to the Duke of Mao. The text describes how, after ascending to the throne, King Xuan cherished the way in which Kings Wen and Wu followed the Mandate of Heaven and established the Zhou dynasty, but that he was more circumspect and concerned about the Mandate of Heaven he inherited from his ancestors. The latter part of the inscription details the rewards bestowed by King Xuan on the Duke of Mao. At the end of the inscription, the Duke expresses his thanks to the king and the hope that the cauldron will be handed down from generation to generation. The inscription is written in a style

that is infused with classic elegance and refinement. It also expresses King Xuan's earnest instructions, expectations, and faith in the Duke of Mao in taking on important responsibilities. Even today, the expression of such sentiment is deeply moving.

The ding cauldron of Duke Mao is extremely simple and unadorned. The semi-spherical shape of the main body is positioned on top of three hoofed-legs and on either side of the rim are broad upright handles. The body of the cauldron is plain, with only a simple dual circular pattern in a thin band around the circumference of the vessel just under the rim and a slightly raised single-line pattern underneath. The regular shape and thickness of the cauldron combined with the simple literary style of the inscription and the call of King Xuan for the Duke of Mao to take on important responsibilities showcase the solemn and respectful nature of the piece.

08



Zong-zhou *Zhong*, Late Western Zhou period (BC1046-771)

Gallery: 305

Exhibition name: [Rituals Cast in Brilliance: Masterpieces of Bronzes in the Museum Collection](#)

Related network resources:
[NPM Selections](#)

Introduction:

Only a handful of the Western Zhou bronzes currently known to exist were commissioned by a Zhou king. The bell of Zong Zhou was commissioned by King Li of in the late Western Zhou dynasty and has a 17-line 123-character inscription detailing how King Li led his forces on an expedition to the south, securing promises of fealty from 26 kingdoms in the south and east. The inscription asks the gods for a prosperous future for the king's descendants and the continued existence of his kingdom in perpetuity.

As an important ceremonial piece in the royal ancestral temple, the craftsmanship evident in the bell of Zong Zhou is particularly notable. The piece has 36 short pillar-shaped protrusions arranged in neat and orderly sets of three across and three down, creating an exquisite aesthetic quality. The center of the lower body and the area between each row of three pillars are decorated with a two dragon pattern. In addition, the lower body is where the bell is struck. Striking the bell creates two different sounds depending on whether the center or the side of bell's lower area is struck, which is why it is sometimes referred to as a "dual-tone bell." The bell of Zong Zhou was part of the Qing dynasty imperial collection and is listed in the Catalogue of Ritual Bronzes in the Collection of the Qianlong Emperor. The exquisite craftsmanship of this bell means that it is a piece of genuine historical importance.



Jade Ornament in the shape of phoenix crowned with dragon, Eastern Han dynasty (BC25-AD220)

Gallery: 303

Exhibition name: [Betwixt Reality and Illusion – Special Exhibition of Jades from the Warring States Period to the Han Dynasty in the Collection of the National Palace Museum](#)

Related network resources:
[NPM Selections](#)

Introduction:

This jade bixie auspicious beast stands upright with its head held high and is infused with an extraordinary spirit. It is an example of mystical winged beasts as portrayed in the Han dynasty. The image of fierce winged four-legged beasts possibly originated in West Asia, in the same way that the phrase "like a tiger that has grown wings" refers to boundless spirit and power. The Han dynasty inherited this tradition and used auspicious winged beasts as a symbol of the heavens.

During the Han dynasty, the objective of art was to express a sense of movement and tension. As such, although the animal depicted in this bixie stands still and upright, it is infused with a sense of momentum and appears to be about to pounce. Its four limbs take up much of the work and the round arched surface is used to represent the animal's leg muscles. The slight right-angled triangular structure together with the strong curved lines, arcing of the body, and ferocious roar from the beast create a scene that highlights the power and influence of the bixie as it glares outwards.

The Qing emperor Qianlong was particularly enamored of this piece, so much so that he commissioned a special base and had a poem engraved into the chest of the beast and on its bottom. The bixie is made from greenish jade, though the popularity of ancient artifacts at that time led people at the time to dye the head, neck, and chest a brownish-red to enhance the ancient feel of the piece.



Pan water vessel of San, Late Western Zhou period (BC1046-771)

Gallery: 305

Exhibition name: [Rituals Cast in Brilliance: Masterpieces of Bronzes in the Museum Collection](#)

Related network resources:
[NPM Selections](#)

Introduction:

The pan water vessel of San was unearthed during the reign of the Kangxi Emperor in the Qing dynasty and presented to the court as a birthday present in 1809 to celebrate the fiftieth birthday of the Jiaqing Emperor, whereon it became one of the most important pieces in the imperial collection. The interior of the vessel is inscribed with 350 characters, detailing how the vassal state of Ce ceded land to the San clan during the Western Zhou period, after the state of Ce attacked lands of the San clan and then sought to offer

compensation for its infringement. The inscription on the vessel clearly details the demarcation of land surveyed and is a real-world example of a "land contract" inscribed in detail on ancestral bronzes as described in the "office of Justice" section of The Rights of Zhou. As such, this vessel is an invaluable historical document for examining the system of land contracts that existed during the Western Zhou.

In terms of archaeological discoveries, most bronzes from the state of Ce unearthed close to the Long County and Baoji area of Shaanxi Province are from the early Western Zhou period. Most San clan bronzes were unearthed in the Zhouyuan area and date back to the middle to late Western Zhou. It is possible that the San clan was established by San Yi Sheng, an important official in the early Zhou dynasty. The characters in the inscription here are particularly vibrant and distinctive, stylistically similar to the script of the late Western Zhou period. The refined shape of the vessel and distinctive content of the inscription make the pan water vessel of San an important Western Zhou vessel and a national treasure.

11



Hu wine vessel of Song, Late Western Zhou period
(BC1046-771)

Gallery: 305

Exhibition name: [Rituals Cast in Brilliance: Masterpieces of Bronzes in the Museum Collection](#)

Related network resources:
[NPM Selections](#)

Introduction:

This artifact is named "Song hu" as it is a hu vessel commissioned by Song, an official of the time. This particular vessel is noted for its solemn and beautiful design.

It is wide at the bottom and narrow at the top. The overall shape is rectangular, yet it is curved around the edges. The surface is adorned with interlinking wave patterns and intersecting dragons. Two legendary beasts, each with a ring in its mouth, protrude from both sides of the neck. There is also a lid at the top of the vessel. This kind of large square hu vessel was very popular in late Western Zhou Period.

Two identical inscriptions, each 152 words long, are cast inside the rim and on the outside of the lid. They record the process by which the commissioner Song accepted the Zhou king's order to manage the warehouse in the Zhou kingdom's capital, Louyang.

Song commissioned this bronze piece as a memento after his appointment ceremony was completed. It is meant to pay tribute to the goodwill of the King, and honor Song's deceased parents. On one hand, it expresses his filial piety, which he could not continue to fulfill. On the other hand, it conveys his wishes for his family to enjoy happiness, health and good fortune, and the Zhou King to be blessed with longevity. This bronze vessel was then used as a ritual vessel in the ancestral temple.



Jade Ornament in the shape of phoenix crowned with dragon,
Late Shang dynasty (BC1600-1046)

Gallery: 306

Exhibition name: [Art in Quest of Heaven and Truth:
Masterpieces of Jades in the Museum Collection](#)

Related network resources:
[NPM Selections](#)

Introduction:

The left and right sides of this piece are curved and on the head of the phoenix is an "S"-shaped dragon with an arched back and curled tail. The dragon and phoenix motif is a classic compositional characteristic of Shang dynasty work. The short tenon below the bird's foot and the discoloration along the base of the piece indicate the ornament was inserted into another object for a long period of time, perhaps as the "jade tip" of a wooden staff. In the "Mystical Bird" section of the "Origins of the Shang" in *The Book of Songs*, it is written: "Obeying the Mandate of Heaven, a mystical birth descended to the Earth and gave birth to the Shang." The Shang royal family was descended from a branch of the Dongyi people, which passed on the legend of the mystical bird. This jade tip would have been used to call forth the spirits of the gods and ancestors during ceremonies.

The function of this type of ornament would have been related to magical power or religion; the form is imbued with an air of solemnity and respect to match the atmosphere of the situation in which it would have been used. In order to achieve this artistic effect, the person who created the piece employed a number of techniques, including decorating the piece with "straight lines and right angles," which naturally elicit a solemn and respectful response from viewers. In addition, hard straight lines are used to depict the outline of the dragon and phoenix's eye sockets, the eyeballs roughly portrayed and not perfectly round, thus creating a sense of foreboding reverence.