

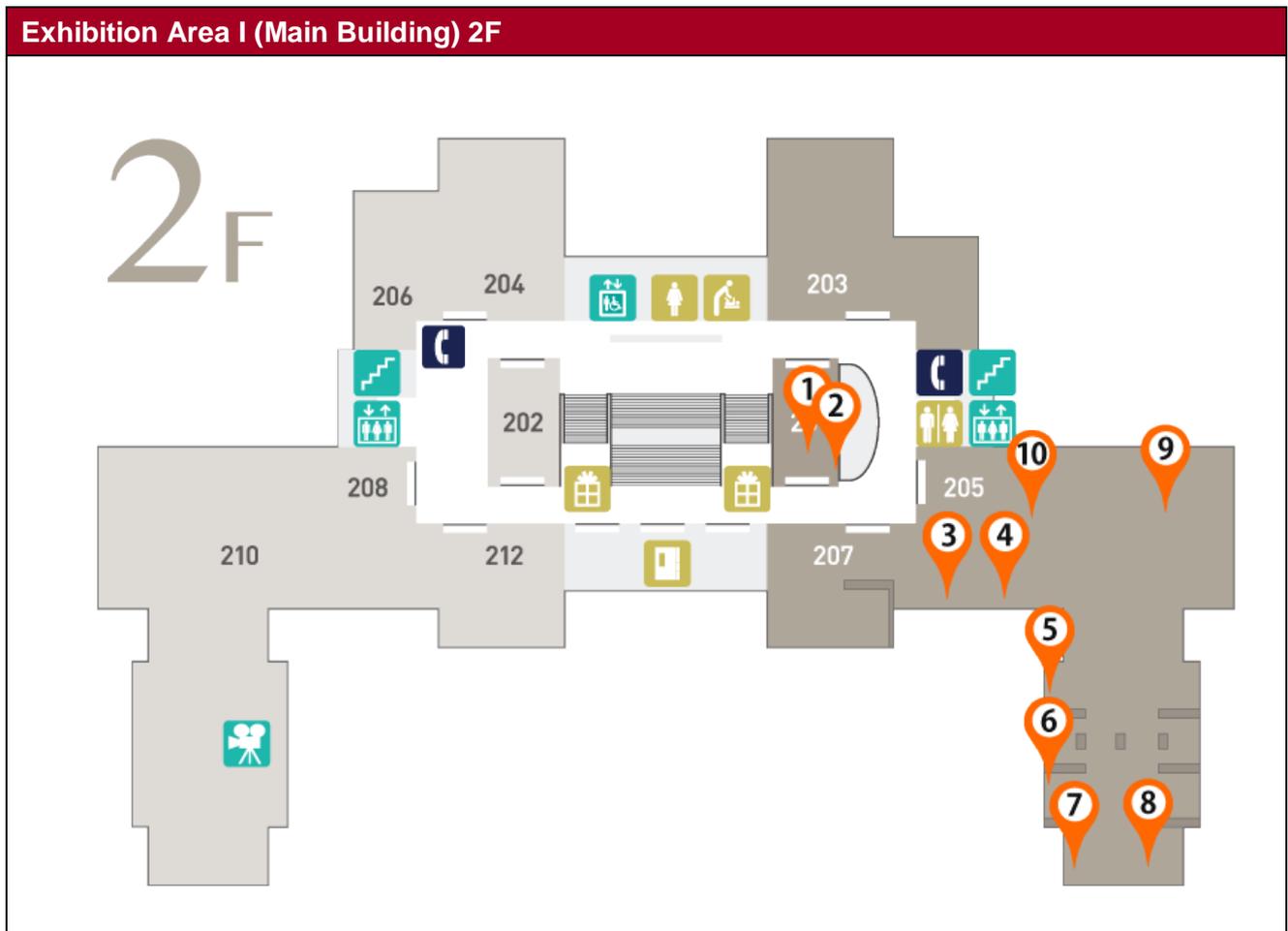
National Palace Museum

Visitor Trails : Selections II

Length: 100 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](#)



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



Celadon water container, Yue ware, Five Dynasties Period (AD907-960)

Gallery: 201

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

Related network resources:
[NPM Selections](#)

Introduction:

The opening of this celadon water container slopes outwards with a flat folded rim, deep arched body, flat bottom, and a slightly concave base. The piece is covered with greenish-grey glaze and has an irregular spur mark that goes around the edge of the base through which the grey color of the biscuit can be seen. Most pieces like this have been unearthed from the graves of members of the royal household of the Wuyue Kingdom, which often hold at least one celadon water container as a grave good.

From the middle to the late Tang dynasty, the color of glaze applied to celadon water containers was deeply influenced by the preference of literati and aesthetes. The shape and firing technique used to produce this piece is similar to that of Yue celadon water containers unearthed from the Famen Temple underground hoard, which removes any doubt that this is a Yue celadon piece. Inside the vessel, an expert of "Committee for the Disposition of the Qing Imperial Possessions" has written in black characters, "Ru ware water container with outward extending opening." The fact that this vessel was once designated a Ru ware piece reflects changes in the way Ru and Yue ceramics were viewed over the last century. During the late Tang dynasty, poets likened the color of Yue celadon glaze to "a thousand emerald peaks" stretching endlessly into the distance.

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:

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



Bowl with sky-blue glaze and purple splashes, Jun ware, Yuan dynasty (AD1279-1368)

Gallery: 205

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

Related network resources:

Introduction:

This deep-walled water jar with a wide inward mouth has a slightly flaring lower body that constricts to form a small base, the center of which has a sharp protruding point. It is covered with sky-blue glaze and a linear crackle pattern. The thick glaze color inside is dark, while the three-pronged support markings inside show where the glaze thickened around the spurs, which when removed left places where the brown body can still be seen. The exterior walls of the vessel are covered with purple splotches on the middle and lower parts down to the base, the purple covering and mixed with sky blue glaze to create a hazy wash effect. The coloring is clear and bright, making this a masterpiece of glaze color mixing from the Jun kilns. The thinness of the glaze at the rim makes for its brownish yellow color from the body, also revealed at the base, the inside of which is glazed. Compared to other Jun water jars with a stout body and small mouth, the diameter here is wider and the vessel taller, being closer in appearance to a jar found at the Yingli site in Yuzhou, Henan. The glaze color is also similar, suggesting that this work dates to the Jin dynasty. Northern kilns in the Yuan and Ming dynasties often placed three-pronged supports inside vessels so that smaller items could be stacked inside during the firing process, with those at Baofeng and Guantai in Henan all revealing this phenomenon.

06



Monk's cap ewer with ruby red glaze, Ming dynasty, Xuande reign (AD1426-1435)

Gallery: 205

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

Related network resources:

[NPM Selections](#)

Introduction:

This distinctive vessel type is known as a monk's cap ewer because of the unusual shape of its mouth. The example on display here was crafted during the fifteenth century reign of the Ming emperor Xuande. The thick coating of rich red glaze demonstrates the quality of ceramic manufacturing during this period. Red glazed vessels of this sort were particularly treasured by the Qing imperial family, with the emperors commanding that the earlier Ming vessels be used as models for contemporary imperial wares. The underside of this example, as well as the stand on which it was displayed, both bear poetic inscriptions proclaiming its beauty by the Qianlong emperor. An imperial painting also depicts a scene showing one on the wardrobe of a consort of the Yongzheng emperor.

Chinese ceramic artisans succeeded in firing deep red glaze for the first time in the early fifteenth century, during the Yongle era of the Ming dynasty. During the Xuande reign, the glaze became thicker and richer, taking on a ruby-red hue. However, because the technique used for firing these wares was highly unstable, many were discarded and very few examples have survived. The glaze is thin and clear around the mouth, handle, and edge of the vessel's foot, revealing the white body within. This quality is one of the characteristic features of Xuande period red wares, and it serves to frame and accentuate the richness of the red.



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!



Vase with *wuca*i polychrome decoration of "One Hundred Deer" motif, Ming dynasty (AD1368-1644)

Gallery: 205

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

Related network resources:
[NPM Selections](#)

Introduction:

This one-hundred-deer zun porcelain vessel has a lipped opening that flares slightly outwards, a short straight neck, gently sloping shoulders, a large body that tapers slightly inwards, and a flat bottom. The vase is decorated using wuca style, with two blue lines around the rim and an intermittent flower and peach pattern

covering the neck. The shoulders are decorated with a blue-and-white cloud pattern and hanging banners that are alternately brown and green in color. In the middle of the vase are 89 deer surrounded by rocks, bushes, trees, and clouds. Near the base is a red-and-green decorative pattern that goes around the piece and could symbolize the earth. The bottom is unglazed except for a concave center which has a six-character two-line inscription in regular script that reads: Made during the Wanli reign of the Great Ming."

Wucai porcelains from the reign of the Wanli Emperor are particularly renowned. The term wucai (literally "five colors") refers to the use of red, green, yellow, brown, and purple glazes to depict scenes on a white porcelain body that are fired at a low temperature. In this context, wu (which means "five" in Chinese) does not refer to any specific five colors, but is rather a standard term that means multicolored. This vase is sturdy and heavy, regular in shape, covered in bright and colorful glaze, and is decorated from top to bottom with various patterns. The brushwork is straightforward and the motifs used are auspicious and infused with meaning. This piece is a fine example of the excellence achieved in "wucai" porcelains in the National Palace Museum collection.

Blue-and-white wucai porcelains were most popular during the reigns of the Ming emperors Jiajing and Wanli. Because the firing techniques involved in the production of such pieces were intricate and complex, large vessels were particularly prized. Given its size, style, and exquisite decorative pattern, this vase is extremely rare and the only vessel of its kind in the National Palace Museum collection.

09



Ruby Red-glazed Vase, Kangxi reign (AD1662-1722)

Gallery: 205

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

Related network resources:
[NPM Selections](#)

Introduction:

This vase has a long and relatively thick neck, round and lofty shoulders, a gradually tapered body, and a slightly outward-flaring base. The shape of the vase as a whole closely resembles goddess Kuan-yin, from which whom it derives its name. The term tsun originally referred to a type of bronze vessel used for holding wine. The shape of the bronze vessel was characterized by a rounded body, outward flaring trumpet-shaped mouth, and slightly flared foot. This basic form was later adopted by potters.

The firing process of this type of red glazed ware was long and complicated. The glazing material did not adhere easily during firing, and frequently ran off the body of the vessel as it melted. As a result, potters had to apply many layers of glaze to achieve the desired affect. Furthermore, the coloration of the glaze was readily affected by the atmosphere of the kiln, and it was not easy to control the final color. Therefore, an exquisite ruby-red glazed piece such as the one seen here was rare indeed.

Although copper-based red glaze could be fired successfully during the early fifteenth century reigns of the

Yongle and Xuande emperors, the technique declined in later years, and it was only in the reign of the Emperor Kangxi, when Lang Ting assumed the position of governor of Jiangxi Province and took over the administration of the kilns at Jingdezhen, that it experienced a revival. In honor of Lang Ting's achievement, red-glazed wares of the Kangxi period are also known as "Lang Fired Red."

10



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.

3F



11



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.

12



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.

13



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.

14



Pan water vessel with coiling dragon pattern, Late Shang dynasty (BC1600-1046)

Gallery: 305

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

Related network resources:
[NPM Selections](#)

Introduction:

The surface of this basin is decorated with a coiled dragon, its head, an animal mask in the style of the late Shang period, protruding from the center. Around the rim of the basin are "k'uei" dragon, bird and fish motifs. Casting marks can be found on the reverse side, with traces of six join reinforcements located where the ring foot meets the underside of the vessel. On the ring foot are three square holes equally spaced that research has revealed to have been used during the casting-on process and to secure the pieces in place. As a result, holes were commonly seen on the ring feet of bronzes, and it was not until the late Shang that the problem of shift during casting was resolved. This is an important example of a Chinese Bronze Age water vessel. According to archaeological records very few large bronze water vessels such as "p'an" basins or "yu" bowls were unearthed from Shang dynasty tombs, especially not with such grand decorative work as found on this example. This suggests that the person this "p'an" was buried with had been an important member of the aristocracy.

15



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](#)

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.

16



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.

17



Zun wine vessel in the shape of animal with metal wire and turquoise inlay, Mid Warring States period (BC375-276)

Gallery: 305

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

Related network resources:
[NPM Selections](#)

Introduction:

This bronze vessel is designed in the three-dimensional shape of an animal with large ears, robust short legs, and hooves. It resembles an ox, but has no horns, and is believed to be a representation of a kind of tapir, an animal that can still be found in parts of Southeast Asia.

The body of this zun is hollow with a removable round cap on its back. Once opened, it can be filled with wine, and, when tilted forward, the contents can be poured from the mouth of the animal, contributing to an ingenious design.

The surface of the vessel is round and smooth, with great attention to detail in the way the animal's body is depicted. The surface is also decorated with precious metal wire and gem. The area between the animal's eyes is inlaid with dozens of tiny colorful turquoise pieces, and the eye sockets are filled with dark lacquer to make the golden eyes even brighter and more piercing. The neck is inlaid with a thick golden band that looks like a collar, which gives the impression of luxury. The cloud-and-geometric gold filigree pattern on the body further enhances the refinement of the piece.

This decorative method of inlaying stone or metal on the surface of bronze, known as "gold and silver inlay," was especially popular during the Warring States period. A pattern of grooves was first engraved onto the surface, then filled with metal filigree, and finally the surface was polished to refinement. Although some of the metal has since flaked off, and oxidization has taken away the luster, it is still possible to imagine the original brilliance of this piece.

18



Mirror of *Shang-fang* with TLV pattern, Han Dynasty
(BC206-AD220)

Gallery: 307

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

Related network resources:
[NPM Selections](#)

Introduction:

Bronze objects from the Han dynasty were generally simple and austere. However, bronze mirrors made in the Han dynasty are an exception. They display a great variety of fine and delicate patterns. Each was created in an attempt to outshine the others. The surfaces of these bronze mirrors are cleanly burnished and bright, and the inscriptions, rich in meaning, explain why they were favored by later generations.

The style of this bronze mirror, also known as "po-chu pattern mirror", became popular during the later part of the Western Han dynasty and continued well into the Eastern Han dynasty. The center of the mirror is a knob surrounded by a large square. There are four symbols shaped like the English letter T on each side of the square. These T shapes face four L-shaped designs on the outer circle. The corners of the square point to V-shaped marks also on the outer circle. Westerners refer to this design as the TLV pattern. It is obviously a pattern that took from the "liu po" design. The "liu po" was a chess game popular in the Han dynasty. This is why this type of mirror is known as the "po-chu pattern mirror."

Big and small rice patterns as well as legendary beasts are dispersed throughout the po-chu patterns. A dragon, tiger, phoenix and tortoise, the so-called "four spirits", are also represented. The outermost circle is decorated with patterns of drifting clouds and sharp teeth, which were commonly found on the outer rim of mirrors from the Han dynasty.

In addition to the delicate decoration, the inscriptions on the mirror are also notable. In the square, there are inscriptions detailing the twelve time periods of the day and beyond the po-chu patterns, there is an inscription that reads, "It is good to make an exquisite mirror such as this. The celestial gods in the divine mountain never grow old. They drink from the jade spring when they are thirsty; they eat dates when they are hungry. They travel around the world and enjoy a long life for the benefit of the country." The inscription is an ode to the mirror and is filled with the longing for a wonderful life in paradise.

19



Jade *Gui* Tablet, Late Shandong Longshan Culture
(BC2200-1900)

Gallery: 306

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

Related network resources:
[NPM Selections](#)

Introduction:

During the Longshan Culture, social divisions became increasingly distinct and only members of the ruling class were allowed to use jade, highlighting its use as a symbol of social status. Long narrow pieces of jade were called gui, while larger broader pieces were known as yue.

The human face decoration on this piece is yellow-gray in color and of fine texture. According to Raman spectroscopy, it has been determined to be nephrite. An analysis of the shape and pattern of the piece indicates that it is most likely a ceremonial jade from an area located midstream to downstream on the Yellow River in the Longshan period. When the tapering end of the piece points upwards, the central area is decorated with representational relief on one side and an abstract pattern on the other. The former shows a figure wearing a hat in the shape of the Chinese character for jie (介). The face has round eyes, a grin, protruding teeth and round earrings from which hang a human head in profile. The other side displays a combination of a vortex pattern and a jie-shaped hat, which stretches outwards to the left and right like wings or the horns of a bull.

This jade gui became part of the imperial collection more than 3,000 years after it was made and was particularly favored by the Qianlong Emperor. Qianlong not only commissioned an exquisite red sandalwood stand for the piece, but also wrote poems praising it on his 38th and 58th birthdays, which were then carved onto the piece. Unfortunately, Qianlong's poetry and the original Longshan motifs are oriented in opposite directions on this tablet. Over the past 30 to 40 years, the National Palace Museum has made use of scientific archaeological data to re-examine the Qing dynasty imperial collection, as a result of which a completely new understanding of prehistoric jades has been developed. Thus, it has been decided that this piece should be displayed with the wider end pointed upwards in both exhibitions and related publications in line with the intention of the original maker.

20



Jade Pig-dragon, Late Hongshan Culture (BC3500-3000)

Gallery: 306

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

Related network resources:
[NPM Selections](#)

Introduction:

This unusually shaped pig-dragon is a jade object from the Hongshan Culture. Its round form recalls the jade chueh earrings of the Xinglonghua culture. The pig-dragon has bat ears, a wrinkled nose, and an arched mouth, and it resembles an animal embryo. Prehistoric people may have believed that an embryo represented the purest primal life force, and created this formal design as a symbol of vitality.

Evidence of Hongshan Culture has been found in regions of northeastern China, today's Mongolia and Liaoning Province. It postdates Xinglonghua Culture by five or six thousand years, but inherits some of that culture's characteristics. Hongshan Culture is most notable for its fine jade objects carved with animal themes.

Scholars have debated the proper name for these objects. Some have called them "pig-dragons" and others "bear-dragons." Pigs are essential farm animals, while bears were objects of worship by ancient inhabitants of northeastern China. Dragons are mythical creatures. Whether the bodies of these carvings originated as pigs or bears, they are always curved, like the pictographic representation of the Chinese character for "dragon."

21



Jade Hooked Cloud-shaped *Pei* Ornament, Late Hongshan Culture (BC3500-3000)

Gallery: 306

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

Related network resources:
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Introduction:

Peoples of the Hongshan Culture often saw birds of prey soaring over the vast deserts and steppes to the west of the Liao River and north of Mount Yan. As a result of which they concluded that this magnificent bird with a strong arched beak was a "mystical" messenger of the gods. This beautiful piece, an abstract carving that was thought to show apparently shows the "mystical bird" hidden in the clouds, was worn by sorcerers during ceremonies held to converse with the heavens.

When polishing stone tools, the ancients discovered that jade was strong and durable, shining like the sunlight in spring. Ancestors of the Chinese believed that jade and fine silk with a sunny spring luster were rich in "power" or "energy," which is why they frequently used these two materials as ceremonial items when offering sacrifices to the gods. It was also widely believed that objects of a certain shape or decorated with certain patterns were equally magical. For this reason, jades were carved to follow the perceived rhythm of the cosmos or the shape of ancestors and mystical animals. They were used while praying, as the belief was that such adornments would help convey deepest wishes of people to their ancestors and gods alike. This also marked the early flowering of the Chinese "culture of revering jade."

22



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](#)

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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.