

# Power and Beauty in China's Last Dynasty Art Cart Materials



Manual for Power and Beauty in China's Last Dynasty: Concept and Design  
by Robert Wilson 2018





In preparation for the Power and Beauty exhibition please add to this document any questions or concerns you anticipate to come up about the exhibitions topic, content or logistics. Additionally please add any situations you foresee arising during the run of this exhibit. These questions will be answered and presented to all front of house staff at the VET in February.

## **Power and Beauty in China's Last Dynasty: An Exhibition by Robert Wilson**

**Exhibition Dates:** February 3 - May 27, 2018

The arts of the Chinese Qing court rivaled that of Europe's great kingdoms. This opulence served to affirm imperial power and prestige, and also as stagecraft for the emperor's leading role as "son of heaven." "Power and Beauty in China's Last Dynasty" presents treasures from the museum's renowned collection of Chinese art, including rare court costumes, jades, lacquers, paintings, and sculpture. Mia's curator of Chinese art, Liu Yang, has collaborated with celebrated artist, director, and New York-based stage designer Robert Wilson to create an experiential exhibition that engages the senses and evokes the otherworldly, intoxicating—and even dangerous—world of the Qing (pronounced "ch'ing") court (1644–1912).

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### **CONTENT**

#### **Who is Robert Wilson and what is his connection to China?**

Robert Wilson is one of the world's foremost theater artists. Over the course of his wide-ranging career, he has worked as a choreographer, performer, painter, sculptor, video artist, and sound and lighting designer. He is best known for his collaboration with Philip Glass on *Einstein on the Beach*. In 1991 Wilson established The Watermill Center, a laboratory for performance in Long Island, New York. Wilson has significant experience collaborating with several museums to stage exhibitions and is also a collector of Chinese art.

#### **How did this collaboration start?**

Yang Liu, Mia's curator of Chinese Art and head of China, South and Southeast Asian Art, was familiar with Robert Wilson's work and knew he was passionate about Chinese art. Liu invited Wilson to collaborate with Mia on this exhibition, with the goal of creating an immersive experience unlike anything Mia has done before.

**Shouldn't Mia have a problem with a white man interpreting Chinese history? Isn't this cultural appropriation?**

This collaboration was proposed by Yang Liu, Mia's curator of Chinese Art and head of China, South and Southeast Asian Art. Liu was familiar with Wilson's work and knew he was passionate about Chinese art. Liu invited Wilson to collaborate with Mia on this exhibition, with the goal of creating an immersive experience unlike anything Mia has done before. The staging and storytelling of this exhibition speaks to Mia's belief in art's ability to inspire wonder and fuel curiosity.

**Why are there no didactics?**

There are introductory panels about the exhibition, Robert Wilson, and the Qing Dynasty at the beginning. However, there are no didactics within the exhibition because our goal is to give our visitors a pure experience of the art and environment without the interjection of interpretive materials inside the exhibition, similar to a theatrical experience. If you need more information, we have a brochure available, and there is detailed information on the Mia website. We also invite you to visit Mia's renowned Chinese art galleries for more information about the arts of China. After your visit, please feel free to speak about your experience with our Docents and Guides in the "Stop and Chat" space in G240 (the alcove under the marble stairs), outside the exhibition.

**Where can I find print material about the objects in the exhibit?**

A brochure is available, and you can also visit the Mia website.

**Will there be a borrow-only text I can take into the galleries with me? Why not?**

A brochure is available.

**How many objects are in the exhibition?**

More than 100 objects from Mia's permanent collection are on view, along with artwork by contemporary Chinese artists Yang Yongliang and Wang Dongling.

**Will there be a catalogue? If so, how much will they be?**

There is no catalogue accompanying this exhibition. The journal *Orientations* features articles by Liu Yang and Matthew Welch about *Power and Beauty in China's Last Dynasty*. You can purchase a copy of the magazine in The Store (shop.artsmia.org or 612-870-3100). Members receive 20% off.

**Will there be any music?**

Each gallery features an original soundscape created by Wilson, in collaboration with sound designer Rodrigo Gava. Some of these soundscapes involve music, while others utilize laughter, spoken word, and other sounds.

**Can I purchase the music in the store? Online?**

No, the soundscape is not available for purchase.

**Why do I need to pay when the objects are from Mia's permanent collection?**

This exhibition is unlike anything Mia has previously organized. We have completely

transformed our galleries, from the textures on the walls to the special theatrical lighting to the unique soundscape created especially for this show.

**Where did the pieces come from? Are any works from another museum? Where will it go after this?**

This exhibition was organized by Mia and is currently exclusive to our museum.

**Will this be a good exhibition for children?**

This exhibition provides an immersive, theatrical way to learn more about Chinese art and history, but there may be aspects of the show that can seem overwhelming for visitors, such as dark rooms, surprising sounds, and repetitive noises. If you have questions, please don't hesitate to speak with our staff.

**INTRODUCTORY ROOM**

**Description of Gallery 1:**

Visitors will start their experience in the Introductory Room. They can enter this room at the time printed on their tickets. The maximum wait time inside the Introductory Room is 8 minutes. Introductory panels on Robert Wilson and the Qing Dynasty are located in the Introductory Room.

**Will I be able to look at my phone while in the first, dark room of the exhibit? Can I use the flashlight on my phone?**

We encourage you to refrain from using your phone to preserve the experience of other visitors.

**Will there be seating available in the Gallery 1?**

Yes.

**Why am I required to stay in the first gallery for 8 minutes? Can I skip that room?**

The wait time is a part of the experience. Visitors have an opportunity to clear their minds, contemplate the artwork on display, and experience the specially designed soundscape.

**I've seen this before; can I skip Gallery 1?**

Staff may escort a visitor through Gallery 1 if (a) a visitor is uncomfortable with the experience, or (b) a visitor has experienced it before. The visitor must be escorted by staff in order to move through the room; they cannot "skip" it on their own.

**If I have to use the restroom while I am in the exhibition, where do I exit and re-enter? Do I have to spend 8 minutes in Gallery 1 again?**

Please exit through the Light Room (Gallery 10). Re-enter through Gallery 1, and Mia staff will escort you through at the appropriate moment so as not to disrupt other visitors' experiences.

**Can I stay in the first gallery longer than 8 minutes?**

Yes, you may stay for another full cycle (i.e., another full 8 minutes).

**I am uncomfortable waiting/unable to wait in the darkened room. Is there another way to enter the exhibition?**

Gallery 1 is the only entry point, but staff can escort visitors who are uncomfortable with the lower lighting conditions. Please let us know if you have concerns.

**ACCESSIBILITY**

**Are strollers and double-wide strollers allowed in the exhibition?**

Yes, we welcome families with children and strollers. We ask that adults manage the strollers at all times for the safety of children and visitors.

**Are wheelchairs allowed in the exhibition?**

Yes, electric and manual wheelchairs are allowed.

**Are scooters allowed in the exhibition?**

Yes, scooters are allowed in the exhibition for visitors who need them for accessibility issues.

**Will there be seating in the exhibition?**

There is a long bench in Gallery 1.

**Are gallery stools allowed in the exhibition?**

No, Mia-owned gallery stools are not allowed in the exhibition.

**Are there any flashing lights within the exhibition? For example when we leave the darkened room what is the lighting situation for the next gallery? People with epilepsy may be sensitive to this.**

Some lights will turn on and off; however we do not anticipate any strobe effects.

**Are there going to be any intense lights/sounds that may bother people who are sensitive to those things?**

This exhibition provides an immersive, theatrical way to learn more about Chinese art and history. There are darkened rooms, surprising sounds, and repetitive noises that may affect those with sensory sensitivities. If you have questions, please don't hesitate to speak with our staff.

**I am extremely allergic to thatch (or other substance in the exhibition) and am having an extreme reaction.**

If a visitor needs immediate medical attention inform the nearest security guard or call Control at 5555 and report the location and the conditions of the visitor. Are they breathing, bleeding, unconscious? Security Captains will respond to the emergency and will have Control call 911 as needed. We will also provide a full refund for their tickets.

## **PHOTOGRAPHY**

### **Can I take photographs? Flash?**

Yes, photographs are permitted in the galleries. However, we ask that guests refrain from using flash photography.

### **Is there a photo opportunity in the exhibition?**

There are many areas of the exhibition that offer unique photo opportunities for visitors. We invite you to take photos and share on social media.

### **Is there a social media hashtag for the exhibition?**

#PowerandBeautyMia

## **TOURS**

### **Will there be guided tours of this exhibition?**

We designed this exhibition to give our visitors a pure experience of the art and environment without the interjection of interpretive materials, similar to a theatrical experience, so there are no guided tours. However, guides and docents are available to answer questions before or after your visit. They are located in the “Stop and Chat” area in G240 under the marble stairs. The China Art Cart is available with related art objects you can touch and there are make-and-take activities for all ages. This area will have volunteer guides Tuesdays through Sundays, 12 to 4 p.m. and an additional 6-8 p.m. on Thursdays.

### **Will there be any audio explaining what is happening in the first room for people to listen to as they wait in the dark?**

No. We designed this exhibition to give our visitors a pure experience of the art and environment without the interjection of interpretive materials, similar to a theatrical experience.

### **The audio is too loud.**

The sound and sound levels are part of our vision for this installation, but we take your feedback very seriously. [Please report complaints to the manager on duty so we can monitor visitor responses to the exhibition.]

### **Will school groups be able to visit the exhibit? How will that work?**

School groups can reserve an entry time with the Tours Office. They are allowed to reserve 15 tickets every 10 minutes on top of the 30 tickets VE will be reserving. If groups of 60 or more students are booked, the Tour Office will alert VE management. Day-of self-led groups may enter the exhibition if there is space and the chaperones agree to buy tickets for themselves to accompany the students through the exhibition. School groups will be escorted directly into Gallery 2 from Gallery 1.

### **Is there a Try-it Space for this exhibition?**

No, however, guides and docents are available to answer questions before or after your visit. They are located in the “Stop and Chat” area in G240 under the marble stairs. The China Art Cart is available with related art objects you can touch and there are make-and-take activities

for all ages. This area will have volunteer guides Tuesdays through Sundays, 12 to 4 p.m. and an additional 6-8 p.m. on Thursdays.

**Is sketching/drawing allowed in the exhibit?**

Not in this special exhibition, as it can present an obstacle to visitors moving through the exhibition spaces. However, we do invite you to consider visiting the permanent galleries to sketch/draw. Our guides and docents are happy to direct you to additional highlights from our Chinese art collection.

**LOGISTICS**

**How many visitors are allowed into the first gallery at a time?**

30 visitors at a time

**Will this exhibit have timed tickets?**

Yes, every 10 minutes.

**How does the arrival of a VIP (board member, Kaywin Feldman etc) impact our enter/exit timing for the exhibit and Gallery 1?**

VIP should get instant access to the information room and wait for the next entrance. Someone hoping to get in instantly may enter via the exit in Americas.

**Are there audio guides? What do they cost? How long will they be?**

There is no audio guide. We designed this exhibition to give our visitors a pure experience of the art and environment without the interjection of interpretive materials, similar to a theatrical experience.

**I use hearing aids, will the audio guides work?**

There is no audio guide.

**What is the Third Thursday plan for entry into the exhibition? I don't want to wait in a long line before going in. Can I skip ahead to an earlier entry time?**

Third Thursday is Feb. 16. New and current My Mia members get in free to "Power and Beauty." A ticket from Third Thursday may be used again (once) on another day. Logistics and timing for the evening are as follows:

- 6-7p.m.
  - 30 tickets per time slot pre sold (via phone, online, onsite). 30 tickets added to each time slot at 5:30 pm Feb. 16. Total of 60 per time slot. (We may be able to increase this further depending on the final design of the exhibit)
  - My Mia pricing rules apply in person or over the phone but not online. Phone Room and Front Desk staff will have the ability to use price override on the tickets in advance and on the day of.
- 7:10, 7:20, 7:30 p.m.



- Tickets held for AE Influencer guests (30 per time slot)
- 7:40 entrance and later
  - NOT PRESOLD - available only at the event
- No limit on tickets issued, good for validation that night, or another day.

## **PROGRAMMING**

### **Talks:**

#### **“On Power and Beauty”: An exhibition preview talk with Robert Wilson and Liu Yang**

Thursday, February 1, 2018, 6:30 PM

[Link to the website page](#)

#### **Guzheng Performance with Jarrelle Barton**

Saturday, Date to be confirmed, 2 p.m.

Jarrelle Barton is a Minnesota musician trained on the Chinese guzheng, a 21-string zither with a 2,500-year history. Barton first heard its sound at a public library as a young teenager and was instantly hooked. At home, he attempted to construct his own from a tea tray and guitar strings; later he convinced his grandmother to buy him one. He also taught himself Mandarin in order to understand guzheng video tutorials he found online. Despite this unusual journey, he is considered a virtuoso on the instrument by guzheng masters. At this special performance, the first at Mia, Barton will play music from the Qing dynasty inspired by the sweeping drama of the “Power and Beauty” exhibition.

Performance is free; tickets are recommended. See [artsmia.org](http://artsmia.org) or call 612-870-6323 to reserve.

#### **MSPIFF Spotlight on China**

April 2018

The Film Society of Minneapolis St. Paul is pleased to be partnering with Mia's forthcoming "Power & Beauty" exhibition with a Spotlight on China at the Minneapolis St. Paul International Film Festival, April 12-28, 2018. Featuring acclaimed Chinese artist and filmmaker Xu Bing's experimental first feature *Dragonfly Eyes*, and new and classic films from China. For more information, please visit [MSPFilm.org](http://MSPFilm.org).

#### **Third Thursday:**

#### **Power and Beauty in China's Last Dynasty: Concept and Design by Robert Wilson**

Thursday, February 15, 2018

6-9 PM

museum-wide

FREE; refreshments available for purchase

[Link to the website page](#)

## **SAFETY AND SECURITY**

### **How is the art protected?**

We have several methods in place, and security guards patrol the galleries to assist visitors and to ensure the safety of the exhibition objects.

### **How does Mia ensure my safety in this exhibition?**

Mia is committed to ensuring the safety of our visitors. Security guards are on duty in the exhibition galleries to assist visitors at any time and to monitor for safety and security issues.

## **SITUATIONS**

### **Lost child**

Report a lost child or vulnerable adult to a security guard or call the Control emergency line 5555. Ask the parent or chaperone to wait for the Captain who will get a description and last location where the child or adult was seen. Security and VE will implement the Mia Lost Child Procedure and search the building and grounds until the situation is resolved.

### **Crying child**

Notify a security guard who will check in with the visitor to see if they need assistance. We can offer the Family Center in the Commons area as an option to relax. VE can assist with re-entry if the adults check in at the VE Target entrance.

### **Outraged visitor condemning the exhibition**

Notify a security guard who will check in with the visitor to offer assistance. Please listen to their comments, assure them they are being heard, and let them know we appreciate their perspective. Art is a dialogue, and people will react to exhibitions in individual ways. If the person wants to speak further, take their contact information and someone from AE will respond. Please report all outraged visitors to AE. We want to make sure we keep records of comments in case anything escalates.

### **Visitor falls in Target Galleries**

Report all medical emergencies to security immediately. Security responds to all medical situations and are trained in First Aid and CPR. Please note that depending on the severity of the emergency the galleries may be evacuated for medical responders. Security Captains will be responsible for communicating the evacuation plan and route to visitors and VE. If a full gallery evacuation takes place VE will allow visitors back in the exhibit after the all clear is given by Security Captain. In this instance visitors will not need to verify their tickets upon re-entry

### **Visitor falls into a piece in Target Galleries**

If a visitor falls into a piece in the exhibition report to security immediately. Security will respond to assist as needed including medical response. Security will notify Registration and the Curator to inspect the objects for possible damage.

## **MISCELLANEOUS**

### **How can I get in touch with Robert Wilson?**

Please send inquiries to Robert Wilson directly, through his website <http://www.robertwilson.com>

### **What type of discounts can I get on tickets?**

Mia offers discounts on special exhibition tickets to all of our members

### **Who are the exhibit partners?**

Presenting Sponsor: Sit Investment Associates

Lead sponsors: Nivin and Duncan MacMillan Foundation, Johanna Maud Hill

Major sponsors: Estate of Patricia S. Ringer (Carpenter-Coan Family), Marianne Short and Raymond Skowyra, Delta Air Lines

Media partner: Star Tribune

### **Are the Summer Gala participants going to have open access to this exhibition?**

**TBD**

## Power and Beauty

Demeter® Fragrances are used in the galleries as follows. They are sprayed in the rooms every few hours by Visitor Experience staff.

Gallery	Room Theme	Scent Idea	Scent Smell
1	Darkness	None	--
2	Prosperity	Flowers	Wildflowers
3	Order and Hierarchy	Straw	Fresh hay
4	The Common Man	The People/Rice Field	Rice paddy
5	Fearsome Authority	Incense	Frankincense
6	Buddhist Art	None	-- (stainless steel doesn't absorb a scent)
7	Daoist Art	Mud/Earth	Oud (scented wood resin) + Rain
8	Court Ladies and Noblewomen	Feminine	Jasmine
9	Mountains of the Mind	Woody/Mountainous	Mountain air
10	Lightness	Flowers	Daffodil

See the website for fragrance descriptions:

<https://demeterfragrance.com/classic-a-z.html>

## Stop and Chat about *Power and Beauty in China's Last Dynasty*

### PRE-VISIT

Encourage people to visit first and come back afterwards to discuss. It's an experience; you don't want to give anything away! Be sensitive to the artist's concept: "It's Art about Art." Robert Wilson is a contemporary artist who designs theater and art experiences.

There will be a gallery layout plan available. Use it **only** as a way to orient visitors in navigating the exhibition. You can point out that there are 10 galleries so people don't miss anything.

Because of rooms that are very dark/very light, have loud sounds or flashing lights, some visitors, including parents with children, may want to know this beforehand (concern for visitor safety, sensitivities, children on the spectrum, etc.).

Offer some questions visitors can ask themselves while in the exhibition:

- What am I seeing, feeling, hearing, smelling? How are my senses taking it all in?
- How do I react to what I'm experiencing?
- What is surprising to me?
- How does the environment of a given room affect how I experience the art?
- What else do I want to know?

## POST-VISIT

**Based on visitor interest/questions**, provide background information on the Qing dynasty and objects from Mia's collection. (There is a 2-volume catalog about the robes and related objects in your library/study: *Imperial Silks, volumes 1 and 2* by Robert Jacobson. There are also many resources on the IPE volunteers special exhibition part of the website.)

Use iPads or laptops to reference and answer questions about objects in the exhibition. Show people how to extend their visit through the Mia website when they leave the museum.

Talk about the way the exhibition inspires wonder and curiosity – think about seeing and experiencing the objects in a new way.

Discussion questions for post-visit conversations:

- What do you think or feel about your experience in the exhibition? Did you like it? What did you like/not like?
- How did each room's unique environment affect the way you experienced the art?
- How did the display of the objects affect you?
- How do the concepts of "power" and "beauty" show up in the exhibition?
- What does the exhibition remind you of?
- What connections did you make with your own life experiences?
- What surprised you about the overall exhibition?
- What object or gallery surprised you? What about it surprised you?
- Art is meant to *provoke* us. Did this exhibition provoke you? In what ways?
- Have you ever been to a museum exhibition like this? Where? What was included?
- What was your favorite room?
- If you were the exhibition designer, how would you arrange the rooms? (Pick any room/s to rearrange: think about colors, textures, sounds, smells, objects.)
- How did the lack of object labels and informational panels affect your experience?
- What 3 words come to mind after this experience?
- What would you say to friends about the exhibition and your experience?
- How would you describe this exhibition to: your family, your grandmother, your neighbor who is coming to see it next week?
- In what ways does this exhibit matter to you? To your local community? To the global community?



## Calligraphy and Writing Implements

Calligraphy is very simply beautiful writing. In China it is Chinese characters written using a brush and ink. Along with painting and poetry, calligraphy is considered one of the “Three Perfections” in Chinese art.

The basis for Chinese calligraphy lies in the various styles of script developed beginning with pictographs and oracle bone inscriptions (ca. 2700-1300 BCE). The first standardized written script in China was developed and implemented during the Qin dynasty (221-206 BCE), under the reign of the emperor Qin Shi Huangdi (pronounced Qin shur-hwong-dee).

Today, the longest Chinese dictionary includes some 50,000 characters. Approximately 5,000-8,000 are commonly used. Chinese characters are complicated, subtle and require great skill and discipline to be well-written. It takes many years of training and practice to become a master calligrapher. Calligraphy is not only about writing words. Composition, balance, subtlety and energy are also important aesthetic qualities to consider. Good Chinese calligraphy possesses chi (qi), the life force or energy central to the Daoist beliefs.

The four characters on the China Art Cart represent some of the various script styles used by calligraphers. The artist who made them is Baofeng Wang (husband of former CIF guide Bin Yang).

mountain: ancient pictograph pre-dating standardized written language of the Qin dynasty; evolved into the modern character for “mountain”

山

bird: seal script/xiao zhuan; the style developed during the Qin dynasty under Qin Shi Huangdi; originally used for official documents; used later and still today for stone seals or chops (like those used by artists to sign their work)

(no image)

good fortune/happiness: regular style/kai shu; a very standardized, consistent style used in Chinese printed materials today

福

dragon: cursive/running/grass style/cao shu; a variation on regular style that allows for more creative freedom and expressiveness

龍

**The Four Treasures of a Scholar's Study are paper, brush, ink, and inkstone.**

### **Brushes**

Calligraphy is typically created using a bamboo brush (traditionally, wolf, deer, goat, rabbit, or weasel hair is used for the 'head' of the brush, or bristles) and black ink (often referred to by its Japanese name *sumi*). Brushes come in many shapes and sizes from a single bristle to a brush as big as a person. Calligraphy requires a great deal of dexterity and control on the part of the artist. To achieve and maintain flexibility and muscle tone in the hands, calligraphers often use hand exercisers.

Most calligraphers use rice paper, although calligraphy can be done on other types of paper and fabrics such as silk. Paradoxically, "rice paper" used for Chinese calligraphy and painting is not made from rice. It is instead made from the fibers of the bark of the mulberry tree. It gets its name from the fact that this smooth, strong paper was used to make packaging for rice.

An artist might practice one character or a group of characters or strokes many times before creating the final product. Black ink and rice paper are not very forgiving, so there is no room for mistakes!

### **Ink Stick and Ink Stone**

Ink traditionally comes in stick or cake form and is made from soot and a binding agent. Ink can also be purchased in liquid form. Ink sticks or cakes must be ground on an ink stone and mixed with water to create the desired hue (degree of gray or black). Grinding ink is a very slow and controlled process—one that many calligraphers feel is an important part of the preparatory period during which the artist must relax his/her body and opens and clears the mind for the intensity of the creative process.



## **Resources**

China Art Cart materials

### **Power and Beauty Connection**

Calligraphic intro area by Wang Dongling, the calligraphy is the title of the exhibit, Power and Beauty in China's Last Dynasty

For more on Wang Dongling, see bio information

### **Collection Connection**

Calligraphic hanging scroll, one of a pair, 18th century, Shih Ko-fa, Ink on silk  
2005.125.2 G218

Ink Stones and Ink Sticks - G217



## Pair of Jade Carved Ducks and Raw Jade

### Pair of Ducks

This pair of ducks from the late 19th or early 20th century are made of jadeite, as indicated by their extremely shiny surface. (Jade Mountain is made of nephrite.)

Ducks mate for life, so this pair is an ideal symbol of conjugal happiness and fidelity. Mandarin ducks are considered superior to other duck species and are distinguished by a tuft of feathers on the back of their heads, as can be seen in this pair. The ducks grasp the stem of a lotus while blossoms and leaves trail gracefully onto each duck's back. Since a lotus pod contains many seeds and its prolific flowering is symbolic of the fruits of summer, their presence suggests the early and abundant arrival of children.

In addition, one of many Chinese words for lotus is a homonym for harmony (he), perhaps connected to the lotus' importance as a Buddhist symbol. The lotus is a Buddhist symbol of purity and human potential, as the pure white lotus flower grows out of mud just as the Buddha is born into the world but lives above it. The fruits of the lotus are said to be ripe when the flower blooms, just as the Buddha's teachings immediately bear the fruit of enlightenment.

This pair of ducks holding lotus flowers might represent familial happiness and harmony in conjunction with human potential for enlightenment. They would be an appropriate gift for a newly married couple.

### Raw Jade

The term "jade" (in Chinese *yu*) refers collectively to a number of semiprecious stones that occur naturally around the world and have been used throughout history. The most common kinds of jade are jadeite and nephrite, which differ slightly in appearance and origin, though both come in a variety of colors from pink to green. Nephrite, a slightly

more expensive stone, comes from Central Asia and has been worked in China since the Neolithic period. Jade is admired for its hardness, translucency, smoothness and rarity. To many Chinese, it is emblematic of virtue, protection, and wealth, among other things.

Jadeite has a shinier surface than nephrite, comes mainly from Burma/Myanmar and was mostly unknown in China until the 18th century. The piece of raw jade on our Art Cart is nephrite. The pair of ducks discussed below is jadeite.

Jade goes through a remarkable transformation from “raw” when it comes out of the earth to “refined” after it is worked and polished. Jade naturally forms a skin on the outside hiding its beautiful interior.

Because of its extreme hardness, 6.5-7.0 (talc is 1.0, diamond is 10.0) on Moh’s hardness scale, jade cannot be carved like many other, softer stones. Instead, jade is abraded using a paste of minerals harder than jade such as garnet and quartz. The paste is rubbed against the jade using bamboo or wood sticks and strings or steel cords to incise the jade surface or saw through it completely. As many as ten specialists are required to produce one piece of worked jade.

Patronage by the Qianlong emperor during the 18th century took the jade industry to new heights, especially in the manufacture of decorative objects as symbols of status and wealth. It was during Qianlong’s reign that Jade Mountain was made in the imperial jade workshop, as well as the majority of our jade objects from the Thomas B. Walker Collection. Jade continues to be a precious material emblematic of China-- the medals for the 2008 Beijing Olympics were enhanced with white jade.

## **Resources**

China Art Cart Manual June 2009

## **Power and Beauty Connections**

### **Jade Mountain – Room 9**

The theme represented on this jade boulder, the largest piece of jade carving outside of China, refers to an event that occurred on March 3 in the lunar calendar of 353. Wang Xizhi (303-361), a scholar official and one of the most esteemed Chinese calligraphers of all time, together with 41 renowned scholars and officials, gathered at Lanting or Orchid Pavilion in Shaoxing (in present-day Zhejiang province), celebrating the Spring Purification Festival. The scholars engaged in a drinking contest: Wine cups were floated down a small winding creek as the men sat along its banks; whenever a cup stopped, the man closest to the cup was required to empty it and write a poem. In the end, 26 of the participants composed 37 poems.

Wang Xizhi was asked to write an introduction to the collection of these poems. Written in semi-cursive script and known as Preface to the Poems Composed at the Orchid

Pavilion (transcribed on the top of the mountain by the Qianlong Emperor), it is the best known and most copied calligraphic work in art history. While the mountain image alone is enough to convey a close association between the jade sculpture and many painted landscapes, the Qianlong Emperor's seal and poem carved at the top on the other side of the boulder reinforces the idea of the jade mountain as a three-dimensional landscape painting.

**Jade Mountain Illustrating the Gathering of Scholars at the Lanting Pavilion, 1790, 92.103.13** <https://collections.artsmia.org/art/4324/jade-mountain-illustrating-the-gathering-of-scholars-at-the-lanting-pavilion-unknown>

### **Covered Vase in Mughal Style 37.56 - Room 10**

#### **Pillow- room 8**

This pillow is carved in the form of a crouching boy holding a bird in his left hand. Hard pillows, usually made of ceramic, were common in China and several pottery examples in the form of children have survived from Sung times (960-1280). Pillows of jade, however, are extremely rare, and given the precious nature of the material, this piece probably was a decorative object intended for display rather than use. Children are auspicious to the Chinese, and they figure prominently in the artistic motifs of Song ceramics, as well as in the carved lacquer, paintings and textiles of the following dynasties. National holidays for both boys and girls are still celebrated in the Far East and the subject matter of this jade pillow, however strange to Western eyes, reflects a long-standing cultural value.

**Pillow, greenish white nephrite, 17-18<sup>th</sup> century, 92.103.8**  
<https://collections.artsmia.org/art/4343/pillow-china>

#### **Jades - Room 2**

Pair of Peacocks, 92.158.34.2  
Covered Vase, 29.19.1a,b  
Pilgrim Bottle, 32.47.5  
Brush Pot, 33.38.2  
Pair of Discs, 34.31.2 & 3

Hands of Buddha, 53.21  
Scholar's Table Screen 37.59a,b  
Ruyi Scepter, 38.44.2  
Amitabha Buddha, 92.103.14a,b  
Covered Vase, 92.103.19a,b

#### **Collection Connections**

China, Neolithic jades, G215

China, Ming and Qing jades, G210



## Cricket Cage

### Mahogany and brass reproduction

This is a modern example of a cricket cage that would have been used to house crickets as pets (they were initially valued for their “songs”) or to raise them for cricket fighting. Symbolically, crickets in China represented good fortune and potential wealth. For farmers, chirping crickets were also a sign that spring was arriving. People in China began keeping crickets in cages during the Tang Dynasty, while breeding crickets to fight started during the Song Dynasty and became increasingly common during the Qing Dynasty.

Keeping crickets as beloved singing pets became a hobby of literati, emperors, Buddhist monks and, of course, children who have delighted in catching and keeping crickets. The practice of buying and selling crickets, cicadas, and katydids in Chinese summer markets persists to the present day.

Crickets have come to be associated with intelligence and good fortune in China. In the earliest Chinese agrarian culture, singing insects such as crickets and cicadas played an important role, being the best indicators of changes in the climate such as when to start planting crops and when to prepare for winter. Inscriptions on ancient bones or tortoise shells show the early Chinese word for “summer” as a pictographic character in the form of a cicada and for “autumn” in the form of a cricket.

Crickets only live a few months from egg to death, and it is a time-consuming process to collect and raise particular breeds of crickets. The ability of the cricket to lay hundreds of eggs related to the Chinese belief that an important aspect of success in life was to have children. While the crickets would often be captured with nets and placed into simplistic-looking wood, bamboo or ivory cages, they would sometimes be moved to winter cages, often made from gourds, ceramic, or porcelain. Intricately carved gourds were commonly used to hold crickets--an example of this can be found in Gallery 217. Examples of the

iron and copper nets that were used to capture the crickets can be found in Galleries 216 and 217, along with a pair of small porcelain and ceramic dishes used for feeding crickets.

## Resources

China Art Cart Manual 2009

### Collection Connections:

Crickets were usually captured in the evening in small traps made out of bamboo or ivory rods fitted with sliding doors. This style of container also served as cages in some parts of China. The exceptionally rare iron "nets" shown here were used to capture insects and also act as a wire cage to hold a cricket while its gourd or pottery cage was being cleaned. The long, pointed handle of the iron net was used to dislodge wet wood, rocks and other debris while hunting crickets. - [Mia Collection](#) (not currently on view): *Cricket Trap*, 19th century, unknown artist, China

[Mia Collection](#) (G217), similar to trap described above: *Cricket Trap*, 19th century, unknown artist, China

This unusual container is crafted in the general shape of a lotus pod with stylized petals on the side. The removable lid is carved with small, round openings which acted as air vents for the *crickets* that were kept within. Gourd and wooden *cricket* containers were generally used during the cooler months. - [Mia Collection](#) (not currently on view): *Cricket Box*, 18th century, unknown artist, China

[Mia Collection](#) (G217): *Dome-shaped Cricket Carrier*, Date Unknown, Unknown artist, China

[Mia Collection](#) (not currently on view): *Cricket Fighting Ring*, 19th century, Unknown artist, China

[Mia Collection](#) (not currently on view): *Spherical Cricket Container*, Date Unknown, Unknown artist, China

[Mia Collection](#) (G216): *Cricket catcher*, 18th century, Unknown artist, China

[Mia Collection](#) (G217): *Cricket Catching Net*, 18th century, Unknown artist, China

[Mia Collection](#) - one of a pair (G216): *Cricket feeding dish*, 19th-20th century, Unknown artist, China



## Lacquer Box

Beautiful, light, and durable, small lacquer boxes held all manner of things and were also exchanged as fine gifts and treasured as fine heirlooms. Lacquerware has been described as "not unlike modern plastic in that it is light, durable and clean. Although we don't know what this box may have been made for, many smaller round boxes have been described in literature as incense boxes. They may have also been used to hold cosmetics, seal paste, or other small items.

The carving is done with a *tixi* technique (pronounced *tea-she*) or "marbled technique," is a distinctive style of carved lacquer popular in China from around 1200 to 1500.

The *tixi* technique takes excellent advantage of the layering process necessary in the production of lacquer. By layering two or more contrasting colors, the widely angled carving creates a vibrant marbled effect along the sides of the cut edges. Lacquer made in the *tixi* technique was popular with small objects datable between late Sung and early Ming dynasties. The layers of red are barely visible in the rich black lacquer.

*Tixi* is characterized by deep v-shaped grooves that expose alternating layers of colored lacquers (red and black in this example). The primary decorative motif of *tixi* lacquers is a "pommel-scroll" pattern like the one seen on this example and on others in the permanent collection. Some say that it is said to resemble the saddle pommel, the slightly raised area at the front of early Mongolian horse saddles. Others say the design resembles ancient sword pommel, the counterweight at the end of the handle of a sword.

The decorative carving is done after all the layers of lacquer have hardened. This box was coated with alternating coats of red and black lacquer. The carver makes deep u- or v-shaped cuts revealing the alternating colors of lacquer.

The Chinese are considered the inventors of lacquer. The earliest evidence of the use of lacquer in China comes from the Shang dynasty. Lacquerware is waterproof and has a high resistance to intense heat and strong acids. Since ancient times the durability and beauty of lacquerware made it a desirable and valuable trade item. Lacquerware was exported to and copied at an early date in Korea and Japan.

The basic shape of the lacquer ware object is created out of paper, cloth, leather, shell, bamboo, or the most frequently used material, wood. The wood was often covered with a glued-on coarse cloth before the lacquer was applied. Lacquerware includes small or large containers, tableware, and larger objects such as furniture and even coffins painted with lacquer. Before lacquering, the surface is sometimes painted with pictures, inlaid with shell and other materials, or carved. The lacquer can be dusted with gold or silver and given further decorative treatments.

Lacquer is the hardened sap of the sumac tree (*rhus vernicifera*, or *ch'i-shu* in Chinese), a tree native to China. The sumac tree is tapped, notches are cut into the growing bark and the sap oozes out into containers. After the sap has been gathered, straining and heating it for several hours purify it. At this point lacquer will dry to a matte black. The coloring process of lacquer occurs during the heating process with vegetable and mineral dyes being added to produce the desired color, such as red from cinnabar (the most common), black from carbon (soot) and yellow from cadmium. There appears to have been a change in the early Ming from using red from natural mineral cinnabar to synthetic vermilion which changed the coloring of the red from brownish-red a shade to a "bright scarlet."

Highly toxic in its liquid state, lacquer is applied in thin layers to the foundation material. It can take weeks for each layer to dry and harden thoroughly. Each layer is polished before the next layer is applied. Polishing provided the next layer of lacquer a proper surface to adhere to and ensured that the finished top surface was smooth. A layer of lacquer is approximately 0.05 mm thick. During this process different colors of lacquer could be applied. These different layers of color would be exposed during the carving process. Chinese lacquer objects have from thirty to three hundred layers.

## **Resources**

China Art Cart Manual 2009

Labels from related Mia objects

Wikipedia/Carved lacquer [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carved\\_lacquer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carved_lacquer)



## Power and Beauty Connections – Room 2

Snuff Bottle, 27.1.60a-c	Presentation Box and cover in Tsung form, 79.3.2a,b
Snuff Bottle, 31.112.5a,b	Hexafoil Box, 85.33.a,b
Pair of Quatrefoil Boxes, 79.3.1.1&2	Pair of Vases, 95.98.84.1&2
Tray, red cinnabar, 95.98.84.2	Circular Box with Cover, 2001.68.15a,b
Quatrefoil Box and Cover, 2001.68.16a,b	Box with Cover, 2006.41a,b
Cover of Chun Box, 2001.68.17	Cover Box, lacquer, 82.49.3a,b
Nine Dragon Box, (tixi) 2001,68.14a,b	

## Imperial Throne – Room 5

Made during the Qianlong period (r. 1736–95), this rare piece of court furniture is one of the larger and more fully decorated thrones outside China. Few lacquered thrones have dragons and celestial landscapes like those found here, painted in gold lacquer across the entire expanse of the seat. The composition and iconography of the five-clawed imperial dragons cavorting among clouds and flaming pearls above the ocean is an official insignia and similar to the decoration of court robes and other official court textiles of the period. The cabriole legs, aprons, and openwork back and side panels are all carved in relief with scrolls and lacquered in green, red, and gold. The panels of the removable back and side rails are decorated with stylized dragons and *shou* (longevity) medallions emblematic of imperial rule and long life.

**Imperial Throne, 18<sup>th</sup> century, polychrome lacquer over a softwood frame, 93.32.a-d**  
<https://collections.artsmia.org/art/4546/imperial-throne-china>

## Collection Connections

### Small Circular Box

The boldly carved, triple-pommel scroll forming the lid of this vessel and its dramatically layered polychrome create a striking effect in a relatively small object. The style of cutting is in keeping with early *tixi* lacquer, evidenced by deep, wide-angle v-shaped grooves, alternating layers of black, red, and yellow, and a high polish. Lacquer of this type is rare and mostly confined to small objects datable between late Sung and early Ming.

The *tixi* technique takes excellent advantage of the layering process necessary in the production of lacquer. By layering two or more contrasting colors, the widely angled carving creates a vibrant marbled effect along the sides of the cut edges. The designs were usually based on the pommel scroll motif: a symmetrical pattern of two linked spirals whose shape resembles that of ancient sword pommels.

**Small Circular Box, 14<sup>th</sup> century, carved black lacquer with red and yellow layers (tixi) 2001.74.2A,B G215**

<https://collections.artsmia.org/art/32530/small-circular-box-china>

### **Octagonal Box**

Lacquer carved with pommel scroll motifs probably had its beginning in the late Song dynasty (13th century). It reached its greatest popularity during the Yuan (14th century) and early Ming era but continued well into the sixteenth century. This large octagonal box is carved in the tixi technique with three layers of black, barely visible in the red. Four concentric bands of sword pommel scrolls surrounding a central design of four small c-scrolls around a central boss continue down the shoulder to the slightly raised lip, which fits onto the base. The lower section has a repeat of this design with a wide spreading foot decorated with a classic scroll. The gentle curvature of the relief design and the wide grooves with u-shaped troughs are in keeping with the late fourteenth, early fifteenth century tixi style.

This piece was constructed with a mesh fabric over its wooden core. Inside the high octagonal foot ring, the base is lacquered black and has a fine crackle. A large, covered box such as this would have made a fine presentation gift in an upper-class household.

**Octagonal Box, 15<sup>th</sup> century, Red and black carved lacquer (tixi), 2001.73.2A,B G215**  
<https://collections.artsmia.org/search/Lacquer%20box>



## Peaches and Peonies Export Porcelain Vase Reproduction

This porcelain vase is based on a mid-nineteenth century Chinese bottle and lid currently in the Peabody Essex Museum collection in Salem, Massachusetts. The original bottle and lid were part of a lady's toilette, owned by a woman in one of the grand homes of Chestnut Street, Salem, Massachusetts. Though produced in China, this and many other porcelain products were developed for and sent to a European or American market.

The technique of making porcelain was so specialized that European manufacturers competed to find the secret recipe for true porcelain-- a hard, white, heat-resistant ceramic unlike anything produced in Europe. Not until the eighteenth century did Europeans develop a substitute, creating a high demand for "China" export porcelain over many centuries.

Though the original porcelain toilette set was probably made at Jingdezhen (jing-du-jen), the porcelain capital of the world from the fourteenth century to the present. From the Ming period onwards, official kilns in Jingdezhen were controlled by the emperor, making imperial porcelain in large quantity for the court and the emperor to give as gifts. The majority of the fine ceramics produced during the Qing dynasty came from the Jingdezhen kilns.

This vase would have been part of a lady's toilette set, used in her routine of grooming and dressing, and perhaps contained water. In the nineteenth century, elaborate toilette sets were created for bureaus, dressing tables and washstands, providing a wonderful niche for Chinese porcelain makers.

It is made from kaolin/gaoling, a clay containing feldspar, granite and pegmatite that remains white when fired; combined with petuntse/baidunzi, a clay of similar composition in which the feldspar is less decomposed. When fired, the petuntse vitrifies, holding the less fusible kaolin together and resulting in an extremely hard, translucent

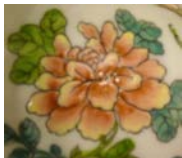
ceramic. Kaolin is sometimes referred to as the bones of the porcelain, and petuntse as the flesh.

The name kaolin refers to the hills near Jingdezhen (CHING-duh- ZHUHN) where the clay was first discovered. The name porcelain derives from the Portuguese word “porcellana,” meaning cowrie shell, which 16th century traders thought the porcelain ceramics resembled in color and texture.

Some of the decoration was then painted on, specifically, the various underglaze motifs would be outlined in pale cobalt blue. The vessel was then covered with a clear glaze and fired at a high temperature (1250- 1450° C). The outlines were then filled in with translucent enamels of various colors. The enamels were composed of pigments suspended in lead-silica glass. They would be painted on after the first firing, and then the vessel would be fired again at a lower temperature. (The enamels cannot withstand the heat of the first firing.)

The underglaze outlines fit so perfectly with the overglaze enamels that the technique became known as “doucai,” (dew-sigh) or “joined colors,” a reference to the complex joinery used in wood furniture and architecture.

**Peony Flowers:** China’s unofficial national flower. Symbolically, the peony represents royalty, rank, wealth, honor, and female beauty.



**Peach Fruit:** Peaches symbolize longevity and immortality in China. The god of longevity is often depicted carrying a peach or coming out of one. The combination of peaches and peonies represent wealth and rank over the course of a long life.



**Butterflies:** Butterflies represent longevity as well as love, indicating conjugal fidelity.



**Pomegranates:** Representing fertility in Chinese culture, the numerous seeds in a pomegranate stand for the hundreds of sons a family might hope for. Pomegranates also hold strong meaning in the Judeo/Christian tradition, perhaps enhancing the appeal of

this exported vase to European and American markets. In the Jewish tradition, the pomegranate is said to contain six hundred and thirteen seeds, representing, among other things, the six hundred and thirteen commandments of the Torah. In the Christian tradition, the many seeds represent the individuals united by their faith, and the bursting forth of seeds represents the resurrection of Christ.



## Power and Beauty Connections

### Room 2

#### Peach Dish

The Kang-hsi period witnessed the maturation of two distinct formats that featured overglaze polychrome enamels against pure white porcelain ground. The earlier of the two techniques employed translucent enamels like those in this extraordinary dish (famille verte or green family), while the other featured opaque enamels (famille rose or pink family).

This exceptionally rare imperial porcelain features four peaches in vibrant green, yellow, and aubergine on leafy branches with black outline against a white ground. Most dishes of this type show pomegranate and persimmon as their main motif. This is the only dish of this style on record to display peaches.

The peaches are superimposed on a barely perceptible incised design of a central dragon in pursuit of a flaming pearl encircled by two other dragons. The underside is incised with two dragons and decorated with a peony and camellia branch. It also contains a six-character Kang-hsi reign mark in underglaze blue

**Peach Dish, Kang-hsi mark and period (1662-1722), Famille verte ware Porcelain with peach design in overglaze enamels superimposed on incised dragon décor**

<https://collections.artsimia.org/art/48290/peach-dish-china>

Snuff Bottle, 31.113.2.a,b  
Bottle, 50.46.138  
Hexagonal Bowl, 78.1  
Moon Flask, 84.116.2  
Peach Dish, 2001.134

Bottle Vase 96.97.24  
Vase, 98.72.3  
Dish, 99.121.2  
Pair of Famille Rose Bowls with Stand,  
2000.215.1.1,2,3  
Charger, 2014.136.2.1

## **Room 5**

Large Storage Jar with Cover, 17-18<sup>th</sup> centuries, porcelain with underglaze with blue glaze, 2011.42.1a,b

Jardinier, 18-19<sup>th</sup> centuries glazed porcelain, 96.97.29.1

Garden Seat, Qianlong period, blue and white porcelain 2003.105.1

## **Collection Connection**

Doris and Leo Hodroff Gallery of Export Porcelain G209



## Cloisonné Vase

This blue vase is an example of Chinese cloisonné. Cloisonné is the technique of creating designs on metal vessels with colored-glass paste placed within enclosures made of copper or bronze wires, which have been bent or hammered into the desired pattern. Known as *cloisons* (French for “partitions”), the enclosures generally are either pasted or soldered onto the metal body. The glass paste, or enamel, is colored with metallic oxide and painted into the contained areas of the design. The vessel is usually fired at a relatively low temperature, about 800°C. Enamels commonly shrink after firing, and the process is repeated several times to fill in the designs. Once this process is complete, the surface of the vessel is rubbed until the edges of the cloisons are visible. They are often then gilded, often on the edges, in the interior, and on the base. This particular vase shows a flat style, as opposed to concave or round, meaning the wires are not raised above the glass filling or vice versa.

Cloisonné objects were intended primarily for the furnishing of temples and palaces, because their flamboyant splendor was considered appropriate to the function of these structures but not well suited to a more restrained atmosphere, such as that of a Scholar’s home. During the early Ming dynasty (1368-1644) cloisonné was dismissed as being suitable only for lady’s chambers. However, before the close of the Ming dynasty, this ware came to be greatly prized at court. The cloisonné of the Qing Dynasty are considered to be the most beautiful and intricate since the technique had been developed over centuries.

### History

Cloisonné originated in the region that is now the Middle East, where it was generally used for jewelry-making. The style that developed in the Byzantine Empire most likely reached China between the 13th and 14th centuries, during the Yuan Dynasty. It was also brought to Europe, where French artisans developed their own form of cloisonné. Trade routes connected these regions to each other, allowing unique cloisonné

techniques to be developed in different cultures. Chinese artisans also adapted the technique to their own style, which became increasingly intricate and started being used to create large decorative objects.

## Sources

Department of Asian Art. "Chinese Cloisonné." In Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000-.

## Power and Beauty Connections

### Room 2

Censer 76.72.109.1-c

Drum-Shaped Box with Lid

Cloisonné Altarpiece 95.53

Pair of Cloisonné Pricket Candlesticks,  
96.97.19.1&2

Cloisonné Box with Cover, 2014.136.5a,b

Censer in Form of an Elephant Bearing

Treasure Box, L35.4312

### Vase – Room 2

This vase derives from the bronze hu vessel but is made in cloisonné. The cloisonné technique reached China from Byzantium (present-day Istanbul) between 1200 and 1400 CE, but Chinese artisans made it their own. The general stylistic trend was toward bigger, more complicated and luxurious creations. During the Qing dynasty reigns of emperors Kangxi (r. 1662–1722) and Qianlong (r. 1736–95), cloisonné was perfected and reached its artistic summit. Colors were more delicate, and filigrees more flexible and fluent. Previously used for religious paraphernalia, cloisonné now embellished secular objects. This vase is a typical product of the 1700s.

Supported on a straight foot ring, the globular body rises to a long, cylindrical neck and terminates in a lipped rim. The vase is decorated in colored enamels on a turquoise ground. Surrounding the neck are upright leaves; below on the shoulder is a band of interlocking Ts. Farther down is an elaborate band of cloud patterns, each resembling the head of a ruyi scepter, and a narrow frieze of small lotus scrolls. The main body, below a band of C-scrolls, is decorated with scrolling, stylized lotuses. The foot, base, and mouth rim are gilt.

**Vase, Enamel, copper alloy, 2012.22.2**

<https://collections.artsmia.org/search/cloisonne%20vase>

### Collection Connection

"The cloisonné technique reached China from Byzantium (present-day Istanbul) between 1200 and 1400 CE, but Chinese artisans made it their own. The general stylistic trend was toward bigger, more complicated and luxurious creations. During the Qing dynasty reigns of emperors Kangxi (r. 1662–1722) and Qianlong (r. 1736–95), cloisonné was perfected and reached its artistic summit. Colors were more delicate, and filigrees more flexible and fluent. Previously used for religious paraphernalia, cloisonné now embellished secular objects." - [Mia collection](#), 18th Century vase description





## Ancient Bronze Vessel

The Bronze Age in China was from about 1700 through 221 BCE, primarily during the Shang and Zhou dynasties. During this early period, the Chinese experimented with and developed bronze casting techniques. As in many other Bronze Age cultures worldwide, the initial motivation for creating bronze objects in ancient China was to produce stronger weaponry and tools.

In addition to weapons and tools, bronze vessels like this one were produced in great quantities for ceremonial purposes, including ancestor worship rituals, during which bronze vessels were used to hold wine, water, and food in honor of the ancestors.

Bronze vessels were also often buried in tombs. Chinese belief held that the deceased continue to live on as spirits and needed to take along worldly possessions for the afterlife (not unlike the ancient Egyptians).

Elaborate bronzes like those in the galleries were very costly prestige items. Wealthy people and royalty had a number of bronze vessels in their tombs—some even had hundreds or thousands! The less wealthy would have had fewer and smaller bronzes and/or ceramic vessels (a less expensive alternative).

Bronze is an alloy of copper (usually about 90%) and tin. The color of bronze is affected by the amount of copper, tin, and impurities, but it is generally reddish-gold. Over time, oxidization causes bronze to develop a typically greenish outer crust called a patina.

Although the Shang and Zhou dynasty Chinese were familiar with the common practice of crafting bronzes by lost wax casting (also used by other Bronze Age cultures), they instead chose to use a much more complex, refined technique called piece-mold casting.

Piece-mold casting consists of a number of steps, summarized below.

1. A simple clay model (without decoration) of the vessel shape is made and partially dried.
2. A second layer of clay is shaped over the model and allowed to dry.

3. The second layer is cut away from the model in sections. The inside walls of these sections are decorated by carving designs into the clay.
4. After wearing down the original model a few millimeters, the outer sections are re-assembled around the model, leaving an empty space between the two.
5. Molten bronze is poured between into the empty space.
6. After cooling, the inner and outer molds are broken away and the finished vessel is cleaned and polished.

The repeated pattern on this small vessel is referred to as “interlocking T’s.” This pattern is common in Shang and Early Zhou dynasty bronze decoration. The motif may have been borrowed/adapted from Shang or Zhou textile designs.

### Resources

China Art Cart Manual June 2009

Mia labels

### Power and Beauty Collection Connection

#### Standing Figure – Room 3

This small, finely detailed *figure stands* with arms held out. His curling fingers form a socket that would have held the shank of an oil lamp. The *figure* wears a long tunic gathered at the waist by a plain belt secured by a belt hook. The skirt, sleeves, shoulders, and lapels of the costume have been inlaid with gold line decoration and cast with border motifs. The hair is carefully dressed and partially covered by a close-fitting headdress with a double-lobed crest in the center.

Human *figures* in bronze were rare throughout the Shang and Western Zhou dynasties (1600–771 BCE), but several bronze *figures* that served as lamp standards have now been excavated from Warring States-period tombs of the late Zhou era. The strong, sculptural quality of this *figure* anticipates the naturalism encountered in the succeeding Qin (221–206 BCE) and Western Han (206 BCE–25 CE) eras.

**Standing Figure, Warring States period, 5-4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE, bronze with gold inlay, 2003.140.3 <https://collections.artsmia.org/art/61921/standing-figure-china>**

#### You Wine Vessel – Room 9

This vessel is a variation of the *you* wine vessel. The foot belt displays an eye-like motif and diagonals. The belts on the neck and lid, bordered by bands of circles, display *taotie* with bodies, rows of quills on their backs. The flange marking the center line of the face has been reduced to a narrow ridge. The handle is adorned at each end with a Malayan tapir, or *mo*, a mammal species that today inhabits parts of Southeast Asia.

**You Wine Vessel, Late Shang Dynasty, bronze, 11 century BCE, 50.46.97a,b**  
<https://collections.artsmia.org/art/1159/you-wine-vessel-china>

### **He Wine Vessel - Room 9**

The *he* wine container is an old vessel type that emerged as early as the Erlitou period, dating from the 17th century BCE. During the late Shang dynasty (c. 1300–1046 BCE), its shape evolved—its bulging body, with narrow neck and spout, was supported by three cylindrical legs, as seen in this example. The vessel bears an inscription identifying that it was cast by “Shi” in honor of his father, “Gui.” Recent archaeological activities have established that all bronzes bearing the “Shi” inscription were cast during the late Shang and early Western Zhou periods. The vessel’s main body bears a decorative motif consisting of rows of scales in flat, double-band relief. It is generally recognized that by the mid–Western Zhou period (c. 976–886 BCE) Chinese bronze art began a process of stylistic transformation from that of the waning Shang to that of the distinct Western Zhou. Such change is marked by the replacement of *taotie* masks with patterned decoration. This vessel, however, demonstrates that in the early Western Zhou, the new decorative trend had already emerged.

**He Wine Vessel, Early Western Zhou, bronze, 11-10<sup>th</sup> century BCE**  
<https://collections.artsmia.org/art/818/he-wine-vessel-china>

### **Imperial Five-Piece Garniture - Room 2**

Standard ritual bronzes cast for the altar comprise five vessels (*wu kang*), a censer, two candlesticks, and a pair of vases. The pair of candlesticks shown here are part of a five-piece imperial *garniture* whose remaining three pieces, a censer and pair of vases, are now on view in the Wu family reception hall. Ritual bronze vessels like these, made for the imperial palaces and temples, were governed by state regulations under a section titled, “Rules for Making Sacrificial Vessels and Ornaments for Temple Use.” The archaic décor including *t’ao-t’ieh* masks and cicada blades against a spiral ground is a revival of a Sung dynasty (960-1279) style which was itself an interpretation of ancient Shang and Zhou (16th c.-221 BCE) ritual bronzes. Each vessel of this large and important set bears the six-character reign mark of the Yung-cheng emperor (1723-35) and the censer and candlesticks bear the additional characters *ching chih* (made with reverence).

**Imperial Five-Piece Garniture, bronze, censer, vases, candlesticks, 99.121.1-5**  
<https://collections.artsmia.org/art/31166/imperial-candlestick-china>



## Imperial Chinese Court Robe Cutout

This cutout is of the backside of the Imperial Robe Cutout of Manchu Emperor's ceremonial twelve-symbol *jifu* court robe, 1723-1735, featured in Room 3.

There is a total of eight golden dragons on this imperial robe, five are visible on this reproduction (the ninth hides under the front fold of the skirt in the front which is not visible here). These dragons are part of the twelve symbols of imperial authority whose arrangement on the robe was prescribed by official dress edicts put into effect in 1759. The sun, moon, mountain, and constellation emblems are positioned symmetrically around the neckband. The other eight imperial symbols—dragon, ax, cups, flame, bat, grain, pheasant, and waterweed—are arranged on the front and back of the robe (See symbols below). Only the top members of the royal family—emperor, empress, empress dowager, and crown prince—could wear twelve-symbol robes. A bright yellow dragon robe like this could be worn only by the emperor himself.

This robe is a *jifu*, a semiformal robe worn by all who attended court or served in the imperial government. Its decoration symbolizes the concept of universal order – a celestial landscape of mountains, oceans, and clouds where dragons live. The dragon symbolized the emperor, known as the Son of Heaven, and permission to wear the robe was given by him. Rank was further distinguished by a hierarchy of color and ornamentation. This is a man's robe with a right-side flap closure, tapered sleeves and flared or horse-hoof cuffs, common to most Manchu-inspired dragon robes. Men's robes are vented on the front and back for ease in riding on horseback.

### Construction

The robe is made of silk in a tapestry technique called *kesi* (cut silk). Chinese *kisi* tapestries woven in a pictorial design and are extremely fine in texture and light in weight. The weave is finished perfectly on both sides so that the tapestries are reversible. The warps are vertical in relation to the pattern, rather than horizontal as in European weaving.

The silk fabric is multi-filament weave with a warp of .1mm and a weft of .2mm to .3mm. Imperial silk was both time consuming to produce and expensive, taking professional weavers 1 to 2 years.







Mia's collection of Qing dynasty textiles includes over 600 imperial robes, ecclesiastical, theatrical and military costumes, one the best and largest collections in the west.

## History

After the Manchu-Qing rulers seized control of China in 1644, they moved quickly to assert authority over the dominant Han Chinese population and established a dress code. Regulations codified dress for the imperial family, the Qing court and court officials, distinguishing the ruling elite and government from the general population. Women dressed according to the rank of their husbands.

## The twelve symbols of sovereignty

Probably as early as the Zhou dynasty (11th-3rd century BC), the twelve Chinese symbols of sovereignty appear. In 1759 the twelve symbols were reserved exclusively for the robes of the emperor. As a symbolic interpretation of the universe, these symbols of imperial authority assumed a cosmic significance and represented the emperor as the ruler of the universe. (Pang, 1989: 38)

Name of symbol	Symbol	Description
Sun		Represented by a red disc with a three-legged crow.
Moon		Represented by a light blue or green disc enclosing the legendary hare pounding the elixir of immortality.
Three stars		Constellation of three stars.
Mountains		Symbols of stability and the earth.
Dragons		Symbolize adaptability because of the transformations they can perform.
Pheasant		Symbol of literary refinement. The dragon and pheasant represent the natural world.

**Pair of bronze sacrificial cups**



Symbolize respect for one's parents. One cup has a tiger (physical strength), the other a monkey (cleverness).

**Waterweed**



Represents purity.

**Grain**



Represents the country's capacity to feed its people.

**Fire**



Represents intellectual brilliance.

The mountains plus the last four symbols represent the five elements of the universe. Earth (mountains); metal (cups); water (waterweed); wood (grain); fire (fire).

**Axe**



Represents the power to punish.

**Fu**



Represents the power to judge.

Adapted from (Pang, 1989: 39) Courtesy: National Gallery of Victoria.

### **Other symbols:**

**Celestial Landscape**, dragons flying amongst mountains, oceans and clouds

- Dragons = emperor
- Clouds = heavens
- Rock = mountains
- Waves – earth's oceans (with diagonal lines below representing standing water, *li-shui*)

**Pearls** grant wishes

**Coral** symbolic of wealth

**Red Bat** Chinese pronunciation of the word is similar to *hongfu*, which means great blessings.

**Resources:**

Robert D Jacobsen, *Imperial Silks, Ch'ing Dynasty Textiles in the Minneapolis Institute of Arts*, Volume I

Powerhouse Museum

[https://www.powerhousemuseum.com/hsc/evrev/chinese\\_dress.htm](https://www.powerhousemuseum.com/hsc/evrev/chinese_dress.htm)

The Art of Silk: King's Silk Art: Embroidery from Imperial China

<http://www.artofsilk.com/blogs/news/8404057-kings-silk-art-embroidery-from-imperial-china#.V9YDMCMrlzY>

**Power and Beauty Connection – Robes in Room 3 and Room 8**

**Collection Connection**



## **Silk Cocoons, Silk Skein and Embroidered Silk Panel**

Sericulture, or silk farming, is the cultivation of silkworms to produce silk. Although there are several commercial species of silkworms, *Bombyx mori* (the caterpillar of the domesticated silk moth) is the most widely used and intensively studied silkworm.

The ancient Chinese unearthed the silkworm's secret and were the first to spin the silkworm's threads into cloth. They kept this covert, top-secret operation, from the rest of the world by imposing the death sentence upon those who smuggled the worm or its eggs out of China. Eventually, however, the secret was out, and silkworms are now farmed for their silk, in China and elsewhere in hospitable climates around the world. Cultivating silkworms is a tedious, labor-intensive, time-consuming process, a process which prominently figures into the price of silk.

### **Stages of production**

The stages of production are as follows:

1. The silk moth lays thousands of eggs.
2. The silk moth eggs hatch to form larvae or caterpillars, known as silkworms.
3. The silkworms feed on mulberry leaves.
4. Having grown for about one month, the silkworm extrudes a silk fiber and forms a net to hold itself.
5. It swings its head from side to side in a figure '8' distributing the saliva that will form silk.
6. The silk solidifies when it contacts the air.
7. The silkworm spins the filament to completely enclose itself in a cocoon in about two or three days. A silk cocoon is made of one single thread of raw silk that ranges from 1,000 to more than 3,000 feet in length. The amount of usable quality silk in each cocoon is small. As a result, about 2500 - 3000 silkworms are required to produce a pound of raw silk.



8. The intact cocoons are boiled, killing the silkworm pupa. (If the pupa is allowed to live, it spends three weeks in the cocoon, then emerge as a moth to mate and lay eggs. The eggs hatch into worms in a few weeks, and the cycle continues.)
9. The silk is obtained by brushing the undamaged cocoon to find the outside end of the filament.
10. The silk filaments are then wound on a reel. One cocoon contains approximately 1,000 yards of silk filament. The silk at this stage is known as raw silk. It requires 200 pounds of mulberry leaves to produce 1 pound of raw silk.

## **Silk Skein**

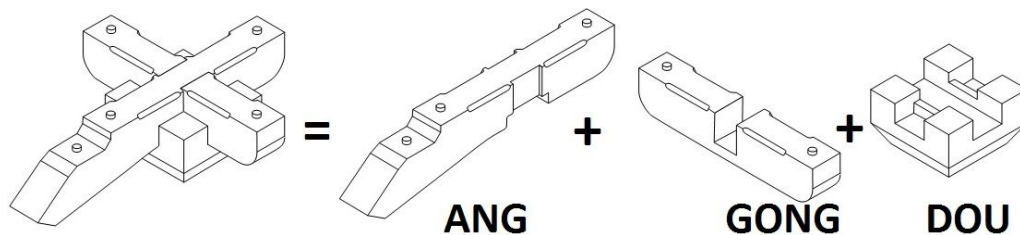
The cocoon is brushed to locate the end of the fiber filament, which is threaded through a porcelain eyelet, and the filament is reeled onto a wheel. As each filament is nearly finished being reeled, a new filament is twisted onto it, thereby forming one long, continuous thread. Sericin contributes to the adhesion of the fibers to each other. The end product, the raw silk filaments, are reeled into skeins. These skeins are packaged into bundles weighing 5-10 pounds, called books. The books are further packaged into bales of 133 pounds and transported to manufacturing centers. The silk skeins are spun into threads. One thread comprises up to 48 individual silk filaments.



## Dǒugǒng Architectural Model

Dǒugǒng – It is a unique structural element of interlocking wooden brackets and blocks and is essential to the timber frame structure of traditional Chinese building.

This model of dǒugǒng shows how an interwoven system of brackets and blocks fits together without glue or nails. As an architectural construction, dǒugǒng connects the building's pillars and columns to the roof and forms a structural network that distributes the weight and binds the roof and the pillars together.



The upward curving bracket arm (gǒng) extending from the pillar or beam supports the outwards thrust of the eaves. In turn, the bracket arms are supported by bearing-blocks (dǒu).

Due to the precision of the carpentry, the brackets and bearing-blocks are fit together by joinery, without glue or nails. The non-rigid wooden joints allow the buildings to slide and hinge while absorbing shock and vibration. This has made these structures very earthquake-resistant, and why many dǒugǒng constructed buildings have survived for so long.

Dǒugǒng structure was invented in late centuries before the common era, and further developed throughout Chinese history. Dǒugǒng construction was widely used in the China as early as the Spring and Autumn period (770–476 BCE) and developed into a complex set of interlocking parts by its peak in the Tang (618–907) and Song (960–1279) dynasties. After the Song Dynasty, dǒugǒng bracketing became more ornamental than structural. Chinese architectural dǒugǒng construction had a major influence on the architectural styles of Korea, Vietnam, and Japan.

## **Dǒugǒng construction short video**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6EMJ8sOzjrc>

## **PBS NOVA Secrets of The Forbidden City**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QgNmbaCKQw4>

## **Power and Beauty Connections**

### **Imperial Throne – Room 5**

Made during the Qianlong period (r. 1736–95), this rare piece of court furniture is one of the larger and more fully decorated thrones outside China. Few lacquered thrones have dragons and celestial landscapes like those found here, painted in gold lacquer across the entire expanse of the seat. The composition and iconography of the five-clawed imperial dragons cavorting among clouds and flaming pearls above the ocean is an official insignia and similar to the decoration of court robes and other official court textiles of the period. The cabriole legs, aprons, and openwork back and side panels are all carved in relief with scrolls and lacquered in green, red, and gold. The panels of the removable back and side rails are decorated with stylized dragons and *shou* (longevity) medallions emblematic of imperial rule and long life.

**Imperial Throne, 18<sup>th</sup> century, polychrome lacquer over a softwood frame, 93.32.a-d**

<https://collections.artsmia.org/art/4546/imperial-throne-china>

## **Collection Connections**

Prosperity Gate, China, 1858, Qing dynasty, yu and pine woods, stone, earthenware tiles, pigments, mortar, 2017.152

<https://collections.artsmia.org/search/prosperity%20Gate>

Wu Family Reception Hall, China, early 1600s, wood, ceramic, tile, plaster, lacquer, stone, 98.61.1

<https://collections.artsmia.org/search/Wu%20Reception%20Hall>

Model of a Watchtower, China, 1st-2nd century, low-fired earthenware with green glaze, 2002.90.4

<https://collections.artsmia.org/art/62040/model-of-a-watchtower-china>

Military Watchtower, China, 1st century, low-fired earthenware with green glaze, 98.69A,B

<https://collections.artsmia.org/art/5799/military-watchtower-china>



## **Eight Daoist Immortals**

### **Polychrome porcelain**

The eight three-inch-tall statues represent the Eight Daoist Immortals. These particular statues are hand painted and date back to the 1930s and 1940s, about 20-30 years after the end of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). From left to right as shown in the photo above, the names of the Eight Immortals are:

- Lü Dongbin, an Elegant Scholar (1)
- Han Xiangzi, a Difficult Nephew (2)
- Cao Guojiu, a Penitent Official (3)
- He Xian'gu, an Immortal Maid (also the only female Immortal) (4)
- Li Tieguai, a Diseased Beggar (5)
- Zhang Guolao, an Ancient Man (6)
- Zhongli Quan, a Defeated Warrior (7)
- Lan Caihe, an Eternal Teenager (depicted as both male and female) (8)

They are thought to represent the different aspects and statuses of life, and some analysts suggest that together they represent all of humanity. In a religious sense, they could potentially be seen as models of how to live a Daoist life by following “the Way” (“Dao” in Chinese). In addition to these eight, there are also other immortals that exist in Chinese folklore traditions. Common depictions of the Eight Immortals in writing and art appear to have started in the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), although they were spoken of in legends and folklore long before that. They are considered semi-historical because they are thought to be named after historical figures who became legendary while also

being seen as religious/mythological figures, having acquired some mystical powers that allowed them to live forever. The Immortals are represented in both the Daoist religion and in secular Chinese folklore. Today, they are most commonly depicted in artwork, together and separately, and in children's literature.

## **Daoism**

Daoism, also known as Taoism, is a religious or philosophical tradition of Chinese origin which emphasizes living in harmony with the Dao, literally: "the Way." The roots of Daoism go back at least to the 4th century BCE. Laozi (also known as Lao-Tzu or Lao-Tze) was a Chinese philosopher credited with founding the philosophical system of Taoism. He is best known as the author of the *Tao-Te-Ching*, the work which exemplifies his thought. Deities and immortals, models in achieving Dao, make it their duty to teach and redeem all creatures, and are therefore worshiped by those that follow Daoism.

## **Power and Beauty Connection**

### **The Three Purities - Room 7**

These three paintings depict the Three Purities, the supreme deities of religious Daoism, who were identified as the source of all Daoist teachings and as rulers of the Daoist universe. They are painted like enthroned emperors with meticulous detail in the colorful outline style associated with traditional Buddhist painting and court portraiture.

Presented are the Celestial Worthy of the Primordial Beginning (in blue robe), a teacher and patriarch of the highest scriptural tradition; the Celestial Worthy of the Numinous Treasure (black robe), patron of the second scriptural tradition, the Cavern of Mystery; and the Celestial Worthy of the Way and its Power (green robe), better known as Laozi, patriarch of the third scriptural tradition. Although images of the Three Purities would have been essential in most Daoist temples, few examples remain. This group is the only known complete set from the Ming dynasty. The three supreme deities of orthodox religious Daoism known as The Three Purities, included the Celestial Worthy of the Primordial Beginning. The paintings in this set represent The Three Purities as they were standardized by The Complete Perfection sect of Daoism which rose to prominence during the Mongol rule of the Yuan dynasty (1280-1368).

### **The Three Purities, late 16th century**

<https://collections.artsmia.org/art/62138/the-three-purities-one-of-three-china>

## **Collection Connections:**

### **Daoist Figures**

"Three figures stand in a mountainous landscape and bid farewell to each other. Their attributes identify them as three of the Eight Immortals from the *Daoist* tradition. The Eight Immortals are legendary beings, each representing a different condition of life:

poverty, wealth, aristocracy, low social rank, age, youth, masculinity, and femininity. Zhong Liquan is on the right and holds a large fan that can resurrect the dead and transform stones into silver or gold. Zhang Guolao, who characterizes old age, is in the center, with a tube-shaped bamboo drum strapped to his back. Cao Guojiu is on the left, dressed in official robes and holding a wine jar; he is regarded as the patron deity of acting and theater. The painting is likely the work of Liu Jun, a court painter of the Ming dynasty, whose work is characterized by dramatic scenes populated with figures.” - [Mia Collection](#), ***Daoist Figures, late 15th-early 16th century, attributed to Liu Jun, 2015.9 (G201)***

“Figures of the Eight Daoist Immortals were popular in Europe as exotic ornaments and novelties, which allowed the Chinese to sell them to both eastern and western markets without alteration into the 19th century. The western term for these delicately modeled, undecorated figures is *blanc-de-chine*, a reference to their white or greyish glaze.” - [Mia Collection](#), ***Figure of Li Tieguai, a Daoist Immortal, c. 1752, unknown artist, 99.217.413 (G209)***

“These sliding door panels (*fusuma*) show a group of Chinese *Daoist* immortals. The Chinese believed the immortals were historical and legendary personages who, through moral virtue, faith, and discipline, managed to transcend the bounds of the natural world and live forever. They were worshiped as saints. Old Chinese themes like this were admired in Japan by military rulers and Zen priests, who exalted Chinese culture and its heroes.” - [Mia collection](#), ***Daoist Immortals, 1646, by Kano Sansetsu, 63.37.1 ( G222)***



**Ushinisha;** the Bump of Knowledge; the uppermost bump of the head, which symbolizes spiritual wisdom; also said to represent accumulated wisdom, an elevated spiritual state.

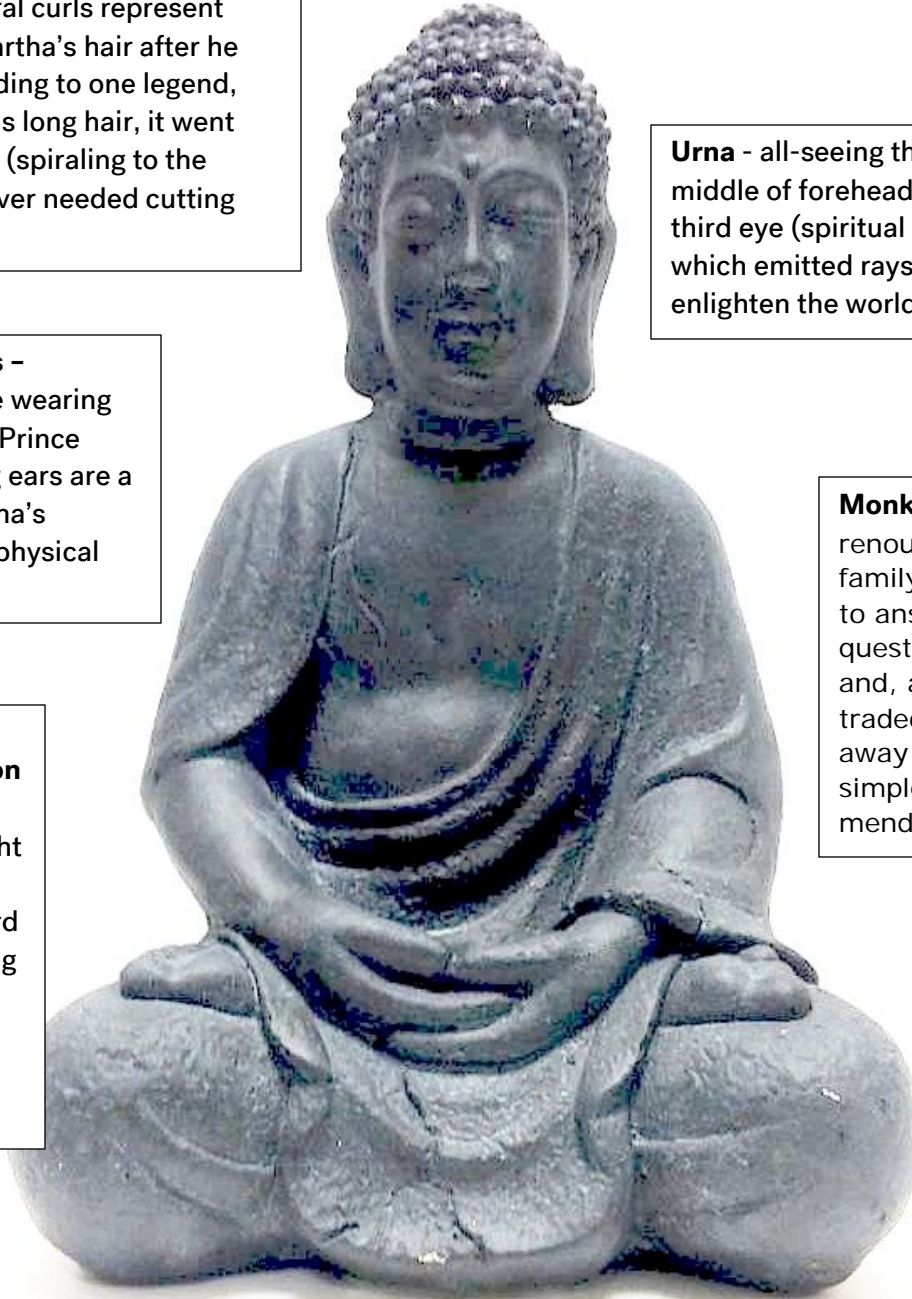
**Hair** - the spiral curls represent Prince Siddhartha's hair after he cut off; according to one legend, after he cut his long hair, it went into fine curls (spiraling to the right), and never needed cutting again.

**Urna** - all-seeing third eye, in middle of forehead; symbolic third eye (spiritual eye), from which emitted rays of light to enlighten the world

**Elongated Earlobes** - stretched from once wearing the heavy jewels as Prince Siddhartha, his long ears are a symbol of the Buddha's renunciation of the physical world.

**Contemplation Mudra or Meditation Mudra** placing both hands in the lap, right on top of left, with palms turned upward and thumbs touching to form a circle. It symbolizes the Buddha in a state of meditation.

**Monk's Robe** - Buddha renounced home and family to devote himself to answering the questions of suffering and, as was the custom, traded his fine clothing away for that of the simple robe of a mendicant monk.



**Lotus Position** - cross-legged meditation pose Like the lotus, which grows out of the mud at the bottom of a pond, the Buddha is an enlightened being who "grew" out of the "mud" of the material world.



## Seated Buddha

This statue was based on Japanese representations of Buddha but doesn't depict any particular regional stylistic traditions. Buddha statues generally vary in appearance depending on the region of Asia they are made in, the school of Buddhism, and any symbolism the artist is trying to convey.

This Buddha sits in a yogic asana (pose) called Dhyana Mudra, which is the traditional meditation pose and indicates calm and peace. The seated Buddha is often depicted sitting under the bodhi tree where he achieved enlightenment. Other Buddhas might be depicted as standing or reclining.

In a literal sense, the elongated ears serve as a reminder that Buddha was once a wealthy Hindu prince (then called Siddhartha Gautama) who would have worn heavy earrings, along with other jewelry. Symbolically, the ears represent wisdom and enlightenment, which he achieved after giving up his wealth. The "wisdom bump" on top of his head, known as the *ushnisha*, also symbolizes enlightenment and superhuman status. The closed eyes and the hands, right over left with palms facing upward, signify meditation. The *urna*, or curl of hair between his eyes, is considered to be the source of light that reveals the universe. Various Buddha sculptures can be seen in Gallery 200.

### Power and Beauty Connections - Room 6

#### Standing Buddha - Room

The short-lived Northern Qi dynasty (550–70) came between two dynasties—the Northern Wei (386–535) and Tang (618–907)—long celebrated as high points in the history of Chinese Buddhist art. But the Northern Qi dynasty was a time of fundamental changes to Buddhist imagery; newly developed sculptural styles, like those seen in this sculpture, laid the groundwork for artistic achievements to come.



This sculpture of Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha, is characterized by a solemn expression, smooth planes, and an exceedingly thin garment that falls in shallow folds. Below the thin outer garment, the hem of an underrobe falls in a series of stylized pleats above the figure's feet—a common tendency of Northern Qi sculptors. Perhaps surprisingly, after this limestone sculpture was carved, an artisan would have then painted the entire surface in bright pigments like red, green, blue, and gold. After painting, the sculpture was consecrated, which granted it the ability to receive the spirit of the Buddha and grant salvation to worshippers.

**Standing Buddha Northern Qi dynasty, late 6<sup>th</sup> century, Limestone, 2000.207**

<https://collections.artsmia.org/art/12948/standing-shakyamuni-buddha-china>

### **Collection Connections**

#### **Buddha**

The Buddha can be recognized by several marks, most prominently the *ushnisha*, a protrusion on the head that in this sculpture appears as a bun hairstyle, and the *urna*, a tuft of hair between his eyes from which he emits a ray of light that reveals the whole universe. On the pedestal a meditating Buddha is flanked by Brahma and Indra, two Hindu gods who were incorporated into the Buddhist pantheon as guardian deities. -

[Buddha, 3rd century](#), Unknown artist, Pakistan (G211)

#### **Walking Shakyamuni Buddha**

The historical *Buddha*, born Gautama Siddhartha but more commonly known in Buddhism as Shakyamuni (Sage of the Shakya Clan), renounced his princely life at age 29 after becoming aware of the suffering inherent in human life—disease, aging, and death. Several years later he attained enlightenment and devoted his life to teaching people throughout northern India about a means of escaping from forms of suffering. This was the beginning of what we now know as Buddhism. This sculpture highlights the *Buddha* as a teacher of the people, walking peacefully with his eyes lowered. It is a distinctly human presentation of Shakyamuni, in contrast to more iconic forms. This sculptural type, closely associated with the Sukhothai Kingdom of Thailand, flourished in the 1300s and 1400s. - [Walking Shakyamuni Buddha, 15th century](#), Unknown artist, Thailand

#### **Amitabha Buddha**

Amitābha is the central figure of the Pure Land schools of Buddhism. According to these teachings, Amitābha lives in a paradise called the Western Pure Land, in which all believers strive to be reborn. Amitābha's Pure Land, described in scripture as a place of

boundless beauty, provides respite from the cycle of rebirth. Today one of the most widely practiced of the Buddhist faiths in the countries of East Asia, Pure Land Buddhism emerged in India and spread to China in the 100s CE and Japan by the early 800s. This sculpture would have originally served as the principal object of worship at a Japanese Pure Land temple, and would have been flanked by sculptures of his attendant bodhisattvas: Avalokiteshvara (J: Kannon) and Mahāsthāmaprāpta (J: Seishi). - [Amida, the Buddha of Infinite Light, 12th century](#), Unknown Japanese (G200)

### **Shakyamuni Buddha Calling the Earth to Witness**

With his right hand touching the ground and his left hand held palm up in his lap, this figure shows the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni, performing the “calling the earth to witness” gesture (*bhumisparsha-mudra*). It is a depiction of the moment immediately after his enlightenment. While meditating, the Buddha was bombarded by an army of demons and other fiends sent by the demoness Mara. The steadfast Buddha nevertheless overcame her distractions and achieved enlightenment. Mara tried to claim the Buddha’s enlightenment as her own, with the demon hoards as her witnesses, but the Buddha, reaching out his right hand to touch the ground before him, called upon the earth itself to bear witness to this achievement. - [Shakyamuni Buddha Calling the Earth to Witness](#), late 18th century, Unknown artist, Burma (Myanmar) (G200)



## The Five Hundred Lohans Scroll Reproduction

This extremely fine silk weaving illustrates the five hundred Buddhist deities known as lohans. The handscroll can be divided into nine pictorial segments, each reflecting one of nine poems which deal with Buddhist subjects such as the Buddha descending from Western Paradise, the proclaiming of the Law and the enlightenment of the universe. In spite of the Buddhist theme, however there is a great deal of Daoist mythology incorporated into the activities of the numerous lohans who populate the paradise setting. This remarkable work originally belonged to the Qinglong emperor and the beginning of the scroll displays three of his nine imperial seals.

The Nine episodes:

1. Buddha Descending from Western Paradise<sup>35</sup>
2. Ju Lai Exhorting the Ignorants
3. The proclaiming of the Law (Wonderful Truth)
4. Glowing Rays Shining on Heaven and Earth
5. The Whole Universe is Enlightened
6. Gold Mountain and Wisdom Sea
7. A Mother Heart Benefits the People
8. Precious Gold Tripod and Long-Lived Buddha
9. Return to the Western Paradise

The story and the various episodes, are recorded in ten Chinese poems at the end of the scroll.

There are five characters on the outside of scroll, which give the title WU PAI LO HAN HSIANG (500 Lohan Images).

The four Chinese characters on the pale yellow silk, reserved for imperial use, are the hand of Emperor Qinglong who made them in 1796, the year after his abdication. The three small seals are felicitations. The scroll is mounted in fine yellow silk with an all-over ground of geometric medallions and finished with white jade clasp.

## **What is a Lohan?**

*Arhat* (Sanskrit: “one who is worthy”)

*Lohan* (Chinese)

*Rakan* (Japanese)

In Buddhism, a perfected person, one who has gained insight into the true nature of existence and has achieved nirvana (spiritual enlightenment) through his own efforts. The lohan, having freed himself from the bonds of desire, will not be reborn. The lohan is free from the bonds of ignorance, excitability, ambition, and the desire for existence in either the formed or formless worlds.

Lohan were often depicted on the walls of temples in groups of 16 (later enlarged to 18, or even 500). They represent 16 close disciples of the Buddha who were entrusted by him to remain in the world and not to enter nirvana until the coming of the next buddha (Buddha Maitreya), to provide people with objects of worship. Except under extraordinary circumstances, a man or woman can become an lohan only while a monk or nun.

## **Construction**

The scroll is a tapestry weave construction called *kesi*. Kesi means “cut silk” which derives from the visual illusion of cut threads, that is created by distinct, unblended areas of color. It is an extremely fine weave, woven on a small loom with a needle as a shuttle. with traces of pigment. Chinese kesi tapestries woven in a pictorial design and are extremely fine in texture and light in weight. The warps are vertical in relation to the pattern, rather than horizontal as in European weaving. The kesi technique was often used to copy famous paintings. This scroll is 350 inches long, or over 29 feet.

## **Sources**

Mia Label and TMS database

Encyclopedia Britannica

## **Power and Beauty Connection**

### **The Five Hundred Lohans - Room 9**

This extremely fine silk weaving illustrates the five hundred Buddhist deities known as lohans. The handscroll can be divided into nine pictorial segments, each reflecting one of nine poems which deal with Buddhist subjects such as the Buddha descending from Western Paradise, the proclaiming of the Law and the enlightenment of the universe. In spite of the Buddhist theme, however there is a great deal of Taoist mythology incorporated into the activities of the numerous lohans who populate the paradise

setting. This remarkable work originally belonged to the Qinglong emperor and the beginning of the scroll displays three of his nine imperial seals.

The Five Hundred Lohans, 1736-1795, Kesi (cut silk) with traces of pigment L.350 x W. 16-3/4 in. 42.8.343 <https://collections.artsmia.org/art/664/the-five-hundred-lohans-china>

## **Collection Connections**

### **A Gathering of Lohans**

Buddhist themes in jade are relatively rare, and this carved boulder is especially unusual in the way it depicts a group activity within an imaginary setting. The subject is the eighteen Lohans, shown here with their attendants in a variety of activities. Most are seen conversing in small groups. One rides a tiger, an animal strongly associated with Buddhism, while another cavorts with dragons in the clouds. Cloud patterns above, waves below, and tree and rock formations at either end suggest principal elements of heaven and earth. Lohans are enlightened saintly men. Eccentric and reclusive in lifestyle, they nevertheless signify the meditative, nonmaterial values of Buddhism and they were a favorite theme in religious paintings from the Sung dynasty onward.

**A Gathering of Lohans, 17th-18th century, Grayish white nephrite, 92.102.3 (G200)**  
<https://collections.artsmia.org/art/4338/a-gathering-of-lohans-china>

### **The Eighteen Lohans**

This highly imaginative series of paintings depicts the eighteen Buddhist Lohan with heavily distorted features in almost cartoonlike imagery. Lohan, also known as arhats, are enlightened disciples of Buddha and protectors of the Buddhist law. The artist Leng Mei was a leading court artist capable of a superb outline style (baimiao) and brilliantly colored figures that display Western-style modeling in facial features and shadows. Leng's extraordinary fantasy beasts, the Lohan's vehicles and sidekicks, possess a nightmarish charm that is humorous and original.

**Leng Mei, The Eighteen Lohans, c. 1690, Ink and color on paper 2001.71 (G203)**  
[https://collections.artsmia.org/search/Lohans/filters/room:G\\*](https://collections.artsmia.org/search/Lohans/filters/room:G*)

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## Title of Object

The Five Hundred Lohans

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## Photo of Object (optional)



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## Object Information

**Artist:** Unknown artist

**Culture:** Chinese (Qing Dynasty)

**Date of Object:** 1736-1795

**Country:** China

**Accession Number:** 42.8.343

**File Created:** 7/1/2017

**Material/Medium:** K'ossu (silk brocade) with traces of pigment

**Author of File:** Mary Ann Wark

**Department:** Chinese, South and Southeast Asian Art

**Reviewer of File:** Kara ZumBahlen

**Last Updated/Reviewed:** 1/3/2018

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## Tour Topics

Taste of Asia, Artists materials and techniques, Buddhism, Textiles, silk, spirituality/sacred, Daoism, power/status, deities, artist/patron, gods/goddesses, Chinese art, landscape, water, nature

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## Questions and Activities (list 3 to 4 sample questions here):

Take a moment to look closely at the object. Based on what you can see, what materials were used to make this?

How is this form of "painting" different from something flat on the wall?

What are you noticing, what draws you in?

What images perhaps show ideas of "Paradise"?

Describe the treatment of space. What is the relationship of things on the top, middle, bottom?

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## Key Points (Form: subject matter, medium and techniques of manufacture, style, etc.)

*Subject matter:* 1. **From Wikipedia:** The Eighteen Arhats (in Chinese: Lohans) are depicted in Mahayana Buddhism as the original followers of the Buddha who have followed the Eightfold Path and attained the Four Stages of Enlightenment. They have reached the state of Nirvana and are free of worldly cravings.

They are charged to protect the Buddhist faith and to await on earth for the coming of Maitreya, a prophesied enlightened Buddha to arrive on earth many millennia after Gautama Buddha's death and nirvana. In China, the eighteen lohans are also a popular subject in Buddhist art. ... Originally, the lohans were composed of only 10 disciples of Gautama Buddha, ...Earliest Chinese representations can be traced back to as early as the fourth century....later this number increased to sixteen to include patriarchs and other spiritual adepts. Somewhere between the late Tang Dynasty and early Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period of China two other Lohans were added to the roster increasing the number to 18. But this depiction of 18 Lohans only gained a foothold in China, whereas other areas like Japan continued to revere only sixteen and their roster differs somewhat. This depiction of having 18 instead of 16 Lohans continues into modern Chinese Buddhist traditions.

A cult built around the Lohans as guardians of Buddhist faith gained momentum amongst Chinese Buddhists at the end of the ninth century for they had just been through a period a great persecution under the reign of Emperor Tang Wuzong. In fact the last two additions to this roster, Taming Dragon and Taming Tiger, are thinly veiled swipes against Taoism.

Because no historical records detailing what the Lohans looked like existed, there were no distinguishing features to tell the Lohans apart in early Chinese depictions. The first portraits of the 16 Lohans were painted by the monk Guan Xiu (Chinese: 貫休; pinyin: Guànxīū) in 891 AD, who at the time was residing in Chengdu. Legend has it that the 16 Lohans knew of Guan Xiu's expert calligraphy and painting skills, so they appeared to the monk in a dream to make a request that he paint their portraits. The paintings depicted them as foreigners having bushy eyebrows, large eyes, hanging cheeks and high noses. They were seated in landscapes, leaning against pine trees and stones. An additional theme in these paintings was that they were portrayed as being unkempt and "eccentric," which emphasizes that they were vagabonds and beggars who have left all worldly desires behind. When Guan Xiu was asked how he came up with the depictions, he answered: "It was in a dream that I saw these Gods and Buddhas. After I woke up, I painted what I saw in the dream." These portraits painted by Guan Xiu have become the definitive images for the 18 Lohans in Chinese Buddhist iconography, although in modern depictions they bear more Sinitic features and at the same time have lost their exaggerated foreign features in exchange for more exaggerated expressions.

The Qianlong Emperor was a great admirer of the Lohans and during his visit to see the paintings (by Guan Xiu) in 1757, Qianlong not only examined them closely but he also wrote a eulogy to each Lohan image. Copies of these eulogies were presented to the monastery and preserved. In 1764, Qianlong ordered that the paintings held at the Shengyin Monastery be reproduced and engraved on stone tablets for preservation. These were mounted like facets on a marble stupa for public display. The temple was destroyed during the Taiping Rebellion but copies of ink rubbings of the steles were preserved in and outside of China.

**From Harvard.edu:** 500 Buddhist deities. Arhats or Arahants are saints or sages said to have renounced nirvana (freedom from the cycle of suffering and rebirth), vowed to remain in the world to protect the Dharma and propagate the Law of the Buddha in order to devote themselves more effectively to the relief of human misery, like the Bodhisattvas. These 16 Arhats, personal disciples distinguished by the Buddha, formed part of the 500 claimed by tradition to have attended the First Council in Rajagrha. The names and abodes of these 16 arhats are given in a work entitled "Record on the Duration of the Law, spoken by the Great arhat Nadimitra," which was translated into Chinese by the famous pilgrim Xuanzang (596-664) in 654. 16 lohans are quite often represented, especially in China and Japan, in

sculpture and painting, in poses and with attributes. Every lohan can be easily with special iconographic characteristics. ; Guanxiu (Jiang Deyin or Deyuan, a Buddhist monk also named Master Chan Yue, 832-912) -- painter during late Tang to Five Dynasties, specialized in painting lohan figures. Legend has it that the first portraits of the 18 Lohans were painted by Guan Xiu, in 891 A.D. According to records, it was because of his expert painting skill that the Lohans chose him to paint their portraits. Guanxiu depicted lohans in the form of "those beyond this world"-- strangely eccentric.

**Newark Museum:** The title of arhat (called lohan in Chinese, nanhan in Korean or rakan in Japanese) distinguishes the original disciples of the Historical Buddha (just as the disciples of Jesus Christ are called apostles). Often known by name and affiliated with particular stories and iconography, over the past 2500 years different groupings of arhat became popular in different Buddhist regions. Tibetan Buddhist religious art usually depicts groupings of either sixteen or eighteen arhat, but in the Chinese and Japanese Buddhist traditions even larger groups of as many as five hundred arhat became mythologized.

**National Palace Museum:** Lohans were originally disciples of the Buddha who, over time, became bodhisattva-like figures who could assist others. In China, a belief system developed around them, but not so in India. In fact, lohans became an important subject in the art and literature of China. As a group, lohans grew in number from 16 and 18 all the way to 500. Due to their Indian origins, lohans are often shown in Chinese art as monks with foreign features and clothes. Typical representations of them include preaching the Buddha's way and manifesting their special powers, such as subduing a dragon or a tiger.

2. 9 pictorial segments --each reflecting one of the nine poems which deal with Buddhist subjects such as the Buddha descending from Western Paradise, the proclaiming of the Law and the Enlightenment of the universe.

3. Pine trees and rocks are symbols of longevity. Mountains, clouds, streams.

4. Daoist mythology, too, is incorporated into the activities of the numerous lohans who populate the paradise setting. (artsmia)

*Medium and techniques of manufacture:*

**From Wikipedia:** Brocade silk (one sided). K'o-ssu (also called Kesi) means cut silk, a name that comes from the appearance of cut threads created by the use of color in the pictorial design. Unlike continuous weft brocade, in K'ossu each color area was woven from a separate bobbin, making the style both technically demanding and time-consuming. There are vertical gaps between adjacent areas of color visible then held up to the light. Like tapestry in west. A needle is the shuttle. The weave is microscopically fine—Compared to Gobelins tapestry may have 30 warp threads to the inch, Song kesi has double that. Song kesi has 300 weft threads per inch of warp, compared with 56 of Gobelins.

*Style:*

**From A World of Radiant Awakening: Buddhism and the Painting of China:** Professional artists generally focused on figurative paintings, including depictions of buddhas, bodhisattvas (nearly enlightened beings that stay on earth to help people), arhats (the original followers of the Buddha), and eminent monks. During the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) the imperial patronage of esoteric Buddhism—the



primary school of Tibetan Buddhism—resulted in a vast number of religious works in the Tibetan style. These paintings combine Tibetan attention to iconographic detail with Chinese decorative elements.

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### Key Points (Context: use, history, cultural information, artist bio, etc.)

1. A handscroll is meant to be intimate, revealed one arm's length at a time. Because it was for occasional viewing as opposed to being in constant view (like Western art), it had the feeling of surprise. (Met Museum)

Many kesi or k'ossu imitated paintings and were mounted on scrolls or album leaves, like the paintings. (Britannica)

2. Weaving in silk and hemp. Silk invented 500 BCE. Chinese already accomplished and producing for the export market for 2000 years. The Silk Road gets its name because the most desired, most luxurious product traded was silk. The Silk Road derives its name from the lucrative trade in silk (and horses) carried out along its length, beginning during the Han dynasty (207 BCE – 220 CE). The Han dynasty expanded Central Asian sections of the trade routes around 114 BCE, largely through missions and explorations of the Chinese imperial envoy, Zhang Qian. The Chinese took great interest in the safety of their trade products and extended the Great Wall of China to ensure the protection of the trade route.

According to legend, the consort of the Yellow Emperor first taught the Chinese People how to cultivate the mulberry on which the silkworm feeds and to spin, dye and weave threads. So important was the silk industry that until the 1911 Revolution, the empress sacrificed to the spirit of the consort of the Yellow Emperor every year in her temple. (Wikipedia)

3. Buddhism reached China sculpture and then architecture in the 4th c.

4. Woven by professional artists who focused on figurative depictions of buddhas, bodhisattvas (nearly enlightened beings who stay on earth to help people), arhats (the original followers of Buddha). (A World of Radiant Awakening)

5. K'ossu first appeared in the Tang Dynasty (618-907), and became popular in the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279), reaching its height during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). The style continued to be popular until the early 20th c. and the end of the Qing Dynasty in 1911-12. (Wikipedia)

6. Belonged to the Ch'ien-lung emperor and the beginning of the scroll displays his imperial seals. (artsmia)

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### Current Mia Label Information (optional)

This extremely fine silk weaving illustrates the five hundred Buddhist deities known as lohans. The handscroll can be divided into nine pictorial segments, each reflecting one of nine poems which deal with Buddhist subjects such as the Buddha descending from Western Paradise, the proclaiming of the Law and the enlightenment of the universe. In spite of the Buddhist theme, however there is a great deal of Taoist mythology incorporated into the activities of the numerous lohans who populate the paradise setting. This remarkable work originally belonged to the Ch'ien-lung emperor and the beginning of the scroll displays three of his nine imperial seals.

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## Sources of Information and/or Prop Ideas (photos/videos)

Gallery information for exhibit: A World of Radiant Awakening: Buddhism and the Painting of China

Wikipedia, various articles: Silk Road, K'ossu, 18 arhats

Tapestry, article from Britannica: <https://www.britannica.com/art/tapestry#ref1079822>

Met Museum Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History: Chinese Handscrolls:  
[https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/chhs/hd\\_chhs.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/chhs/hd_chhs.htm)

Michael Sullivan, *The Arts of China*, Fifth Edition, p 95, pp 247-8.

Newark Museum, exhibition "Arhat, Disciples of the Historical Buddha."  
<https://www.newarkmuseum.org/arhat>

Sixteen Arhats at Shengyin Temple, Chinese Rubbings Collection, Harvard.edu:  
<http://vc.lib.harvard.edu/vc/deliver/~rubbings/olvwork245882>

Lohans Painted on a Bodhi Leaf, National Palace Museum:  
<http://www.npm.gov.tw/english/exhibition/edon0104/a/sel-main.htm>