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Stories

Exploring the Glamour of
Museums throughout
the Capital City

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GLAMOUR OF MUSEUMS

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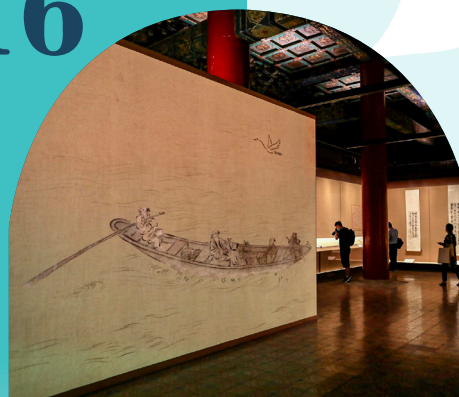
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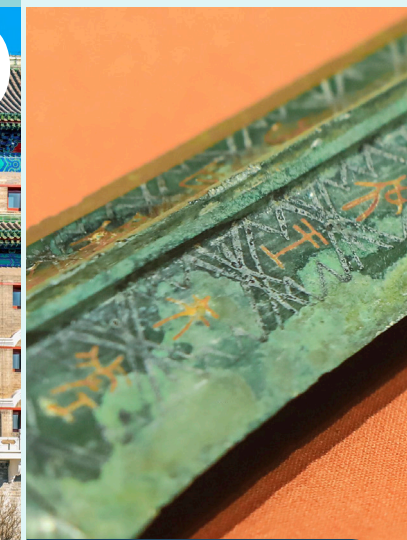


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GLAMOUR OF MUSEUMS

Since 1977, May 18 has been recognised as International Museum Day. The theme of International Museum Day in 2023 was “Museums, Sustainability and Well-being.”

Beijing has long been known as a capital of museums. With 3,000 years of history as a city and over 800 years of history as a capital, the city itself is like an unparalleled museum. Home to more than 200 museums, Beijing is one of the cities with the most museums worldwide.

Today, visiting museums to experience the glamour of history and culture has become a key part of the daily cultural lives of the city’s residents, and an increasingly popular activity for parents and children to do together. The Peking Man Site at Zhoukoudian in Fangshan District is one of the most important sites of archaeological discovery, and includes the remains of an ancient man (*Homo erectus*). The Palace Mu-

seum receives an endless stream of visitors every day. According to its management, the museum has contained 1.8 million pieces (or sets) of artefacts over the years. Beijing also has a considerable number of local and professional museums, focusing on the history and culture of the city itself. Each museum has its own rich and diverse collection, and each is worth visiting.

Chinese President Xi Jinping pointed out that the “Chinese nation has a long history, Chinese civilisation has a long historical standing and Chinese culture is both extensive and profound. A museum is a large school.” These “schools” draw countless seekers of knowledge, who come to explore the relationship between history and the future with an eagerness to learn about the most important moments in the long history of humanity. Museums throughout the city are ideal settings for its residents to gain knowledge, reflect on history and look to the future.

THE BEAUTY OF ANCIENT CHINESE PORCELAINWARE

Translated by Wang Wei Edited by Brad Green, Anne Ruisi Photos by Qu Bowei, Pu Feng



For thousands of years, the Chinese have made great contributions to the progress of human civilisation. In this long and glorious period, one of the most outstanding creations of the Chinese nation is porcelain art.

Porcelainware represents not only its use as a practical tool, but also a type of works of art containing the wisdom and techniques of the Chinese nation. The outstanding techniques and exquisite craftsmanship of Chinese artisans in porcelain production have had a profound impact on civilisations around the world since ancient times. In fact, the word “China” is not only the English name of the country, but also the English name for porcelain, showing the significant influence that Chinese porcelain has had on the world.



▲ Gourd-shaped porcelain vessel with flower patterns



▲ Blue and white porcelain jar with cloud and dragon patterns



▲ Porcelain flowerpot with goldfish patterns

Highlights of Porcelain Art

Ancient Chinese Porcelain Art, an exhibition held at the National Museum of China, displays numerous porcelain works of art in chronological order, telling the history of Chinese porcelain from its invention to its development.

China has a long history of porcelain creation. The porcelain objects exhibited are not only beautiful, but also show their practical usages. One of the more famous items in the collection is the Azure Glazed Plate produced by the Ru Kiln from the Northern Song Dynasty (AD 960–1127). The Ru Kiln was located near today’s Qingliangsi

Village in Baofeng, Henan Province. In ancient times, the kiln made celadon wares for the imperial family, and its workmanship was comparable to the famous Ding Kiln at that time. The texture of the Ru Kiln’s products was delicate, and often featured a light grey tone. It often took the technique of *guozu zhishao* (“supporting the bottom of a porcelainware item when being fired”) and added agate powders to the glaze, creating an extremely pure azure hue. During the Southern Song Dynasty (1127–1279), scholar Zhou Hui (1126–1198) highly praised

the porcelainware produced by the Ru Kiln. The plate exhibited at the National Museum, a typical product of the Ru Kiln, features an elegant design and clear and pure azure glaze. Today, the artefact is considered an authentic national treasure.

Mise (“secret colour”) porcelainware is also one of the precious varieties on display at the National Museum. In one of his books, Zhou Hui wrote: “When Qian Liu (reign: AD 907–932) established the State of Yue (AD 907–978), he ordered the Yue Kiln to make *mise* porcelainware for the

royal family’s exclusive use, and not be allowed to be available for ordinary people. Thus, it was deliberately called *mise* (“secret colour”).” A celadon pot, a *mise* porcelainware made by the Yue Kiln during the Tang Dynasty, is on display in the exhibition. The artefact, with a height of 22.6 centimetres (cm) and a diameter of 10.2 cm, was unearthed in today’s Ningbo, Zhejiang Province in 1974. The pot features a beautiful shape, with a trumpet’s bell-like opening, a long neck, a short and cylindrical spout, a curved handle and a long-ribbed melon-styled body. The

porcelainware has a delicate surface, featuring a bluish-yellow glaze and a bright lustre. The marks on its bottom prove that its base was supported when it was being fired. After the mid-Tang Dynasty, people enjoyed drinking warm liquor. Thus, the pot was made to keep liquor warm.

After selecting over 300 cultural relics, the National Museum of China presents the special exhibition, introducing the formation and development of ancient Chinese porcelain, and highlighting brilliant achievements of Chinese civilisation in this area.

*A Porcelain Vase
Created with Second-to-None
Vase Techniques*

In 2017, China Central Television presented *National Treasure*, demonstrating the cultural relic craze highlighting throughout the country. Among the precious artefacts presented in the television programme, Large Vase with Variegated Glazes made during the reign of Emperor Qianlong (1736–1796) of the Qing Dynasty became a hot topic. The porcelainware is known as the “mother of porcelain.” This term came from Geng Baochang, a researcher and cultural relic appraisal expert from the Palace Museum. Geng highly appreciated the craftsmanship of the work and hailed it as the pinnacle of ancient Chinese porcelain art.

The large vase was fired by Tang Ying (1682–1756) under an imperial edict of Emperor Qianlong in 1748. At that time, Tang received an edict that sounded extremely absurd. A dozen different glaze techniques would be applied to just one piece of porcelain. Even Tang, an experienced porcelain maker, was momentarily overwhelmed by the emperor’s whimsical idea. Tang did not give up, but advanced despite many difficulties, sending his trusted assistants to learn from famous kilns from around the country in search of glaze formulas or porcelain samples. Failure is the mother of success, and where there is a will, there is a way. The unparalleled porcelain vase was unexpectedly completed by Tang, and is now placed in a major position in the



▲ Celadon glazed vase made in the Guan Kiln



▲ Rouge glazed vase

Palace Museum hundreds of years later.

The work of art features the largest variety of glazes, and from top to bottom includes gold, purple-ground and green-ground famille rose, Ge Kiln-style celadon, blue-and-white, turquoise green, flambe, blue-and-white, red-ground with gold painting, Guan Kiln-style celadon and cloud blue with gold painting. Each type of glaze has its own unique charm, giving the entire body of the vase elegant artistic features. On the belly of the vase are 12 framed panels with polychrome paintings of buildings, landscapes and historic tales, which imply auspiciousness, prosperity and happiness. Its opening, long neck, long round belly and foot feature elegant shapes. On each side of the neck

is a *chi*-shaped handle. According to traditional Chinese culture, *chi* is a kind of dragon. The inside of the vase and the bottom of the foot are covered with turquoise green glazes, making them appear fresh and full of vitality. On the centre of the bottom are characters written in blue and white *zhuanzi* (seal script), reading “Made during Emperor Qianlong’s reign of the Qing Dynasty.”

The vase, one of the most important items in the Palace Museum’s collection, has become an outstanding representative of Chinese porcelain-making techniques and has been listed as a national first-class cultural relic. The vase is second-to-none, and a living fossil in the developmental history of Chinese porcelain making.



▲ Famille-rose vase with peach patterns

*Longevity - Themed
Porcelain Items*

The Chinese expression “*wanshou wujiang*” (“long live”) appeared in *Book of Poetry* written during the Spring and Autumn Period (770–446 BC). Not long after, the term began to be dedicatedly expressed during blessings to the emperor. In ancient China, porcelainware was considered one of the major works of art for the imperial family. Thus, many imperial porcelainware pieces with longevity patterns emerged, reflecting the emperor’s pursuit and desire for immortality at that time.

The Palace Museum has a porcelain item themed on the imperial birthday celebration called Blue and White *Zun* with Tens of Thousands of *Shou* Characters, which was made by the Imperial Kiln during the reign of Emperor Kangxi (1661–1722) of the Qing Dynasty. In Chinese, *shou* means longevity; *zun* served as a kind of ritual vessel in ancient China. The porcelainware has a height of 76.5 cm, and the diameter of its top opening and its foot are 37.5 cm and 28 cm, respectively. Its design has dignified, elegant and attractive features. The ware is decorated with 10,000 *shou* characters on its entire body, such as the rim of its top opening, neck, belly and bottom, symbolising a wish for the emperor’s eternal life. These 10,000 *shou* characters are written in *zhuan* (a kind of Chinese calligraphic style), including its pictographs and ideographs, together with mountain, river, animal, plant and star patterns to constitute the character. The design embodies the essence of traditional Chinese culture and cosmology. Each *shou* character has a natural calligraphic style.

In addition, the blue and white glaze is elegant and delicate, reflecting the superb techniques of the Imperial Kiln. The national treasure, a masterpiece among blue and white porcelainware from the time of Emperor Kangxi’s reign, represents the perfect combination of Chinese calligraphy and porcelain arts.

Famille Rose on Light-Yellow Background Porcelain Bowl with Longevity and Happiness Patterns is another of the important wares produced by the Qing Imperial Kiln, and was created to celebrate the birthday of Empress Dowager Cixi (regency: 1861–1908). Cixi experienced three grand birthday celebrations. To celebrate her birthday, the Imperial Kiln focused on creating porcelain items. The porcelain bowl with yellow glaze as its background has a large opening and belly. Its decorations include golden *shou* characters, red bat patterns and other blue characters. According to traditional Chinese culture, the bat is a symbol of good fortune. The inside of the bowl and bottom of the foot are covered with white glazes, and the rim of the opening features golden glaze.

Wanshou Temple in Beijing served as a dedicated venue for the birthday celebrations of imperial family members during the Ming and Qing dynasties. Beijing Art Museum, which was established inside the temple in the 1980s, houses many porcelainware items with decorations related to the theme of “longevity” for imperial birthday celebrations. The museum holds exhibitions to display artefacts, such as Blue and White *Zun* with Pipe-Shaped Handles.

Numerous porcelainware items were made in ancient China, and many of the surviving wares have become national treasures. Each piece of porcelainware found in Beijing’s museums is a precious work of art, and each embodies the wisdom and craftsmanship of ancient artisans.

▶ Blue and white *zun* with tens of thousands of *shou* (longevity) characters



MAGNIFICENT BRONZEWARE WITH EVERLASTING MEMORIES

Translated by Wang Wei Edited by Brad Green, Anne Ruisi Photos by Pu Feng, Qu Gelin,
Sviatlana Makarevich (Belarus)



Bronze, as the earliest alloy created by humans, has excellent strength, an extremely low melting point and a good casting performance, as well as resistance to abrasion and stable chemical properties. In the historical evolution of metal smelting and casting, bronze has held a distinctive position and had profound significance. During a long period of thousands of years from the Xia (21st century–16th century BC), Shang (16th century–11th century BC) and Zhou (11th century–256 BC) dynasties to the Qin (221–206 BC) and Han (206 BC–AD 220) dynasties, the ancients commonly used tools and ritual vessels made of bronze, creating a brilliant and splendid element of Chinese civilisation.

Ancient Chinese mainly took bronzeware items as ritual vessels intended for the worship of heaven and ancestors. To some extent, they were exclusive treasures of the imperial family and nobles. Bronzeware has been regarded as a symbol of ancient Chinese civilisation, embodying a noble spiritual significance. Today, each unearthed piece of bronzeware seems to have retained the prayers from the ancients of those past ages.

1

Bo Ju Li: a Symbol of Yan State Culture



▲ Bronze hugui vessel

To explore Beijing's local bronze culture, one can go to the Capital Museum of China on Fuxingmenwai Street, Xicheng District. The museum has a permanent exhibition, Selected Works of Ancient Bronze Art in the Yan Area, showcasing Beijing's earliest bronze art. At the exhibition, visitors will experience the features of the bronze culture of the State of Yan (1044–222 BC).

The State of Yan was one of the vassal states of the Zhou Dynasty. With its capital located in today's Liulihe, Beijing, the state of Yan was adjacent to the then ethnic groups who lived on the steppes. Thus, bronzeware items, especially weapons and tools from the Yan state, were deeply influenced by steppe culture. The exhibition contains a total of 132 sets of precious artefacts, introducing the outstanding casting techniques, shapes and patterns of bronzeware from the State of Yan.

A bronze *ding* vessel, a type of ancient Chinese cooking or holding vessel, usually has two handles on the rim and is supported by three or four legs. The Bo Ju Li from the Western Zhou Dynasty (1046–771 BC), a bronze vessel, is another

highlight of the exhibition. According to *Brush Talks from Dream Brook* by Shen Kuo (1031–1095) from the Song Dynasty (AD 960–1279), "Li is an ancient bronze *ding* vessel with three hollow legs." This type of bronzeware has a history of over 3,000 years, making it nearly as old as the city of Beijing itself. In ancient times, bronze *li* vessels usually had their own wooden covers. However, during a period of thousands of years, the wooden covers of some unearthed *li* vessels had already decomposed. The Bo Ju Li became a highlight, as its bronze cover was still intact when it was unearthed. In addition, from its cover knob to its feet, the entire body of the vessel is carved with patterns of seven bull heads with upwards horns. According to an inscription inside the vessel, "In the Year of Wuchen, the King of the State of Yan gave some shell money as a reward to Bo Ju (a noble from the Yan state). With the money, Bo Ju made the vessel to honour his dead father." The vessel has not only a unique style in shape, but also contains an inscription for later generations to explore ancient Chinese history and culture.



Bo Ju Li



A museum staffer introduces ancient bronzeware to students.

2

Bronze Bingjian: an Early Predecessor to Refrigerators

One poem in *The Songs of Chu* depicts a scene of drinking cool liquor in hot summer during the Warring States Period. For people who lived in the State of Chu (1030–223 BC) in today's central China's Hubei Province, drinking cool and refreshing liquor certainly provided wonderful moments of enjoyment in summer. However, people today are still curious how the ancients could keep the liquor cool on hot days at that time.

In many ways, the intelligence of the ancients far exceeded the imagination of people of today. In the 1970s, a large special-purpose bronze vessel, the *Bingjian* of the Marquis Yi of Zeng, was unearthed from Tomb No. 1 of the early Warring States Period in Suizhou, Hubei Province. According to *The Rites of Zhou*, "In spring, bronze vessels are made to contain ice. Whenever a monarch or other nobles enjoy food or beverage, this type of vessels will be used to maintain their freshness. When offering sacrifices during ceremonies, the vessels will be available." Obviously, the unearthed bronzeware was used by the ancients to keep food fresh and to cool beverages. The vessel is praised as China's earliest "refrigerator." There is a container placed in the bronze vessel called *fou* (jar). Inside the vessel, ice cubes could be put around the jar to cool the beverage inside it. In so doing, the ancients could enjoy cool drinks in the hot summer. In ancient times, in winter, thick ice would be cut from frozen rivers and stored in ice cellars for use in summer. Similarly, in winter, hot water was poured and stored around the jar to keep food or beverages inside the jar warm.

The unearthed bronzeware proves that China already had primitive refrigeration technology during the Warring States Period, and the culture of enjoying cool drinks began to develop during that time. One of the bronzeware items of this type is housed at the National Museum of China.



▲ Zuning Zun

3

Houmu Wu Ding: a National Treasure

Ding vessels originally served as cooking containers, similar to today's pots, and were used by the ancients to cook and hold food. Later, according to legend, Yu the Great, founder of the Xia Dynasty, cast nine *ding* vessels as

a symbol of supreme monarchy and national unity and prosperity. Later, the ancients turned bronze *ding* vessels into divine objects for worshipping heaven and ancestors. The Houmu Wu Ding, in the collection of the National Museum of China, served as a sacrificial vessel cast by the son of King Wuding (reign: 1250–1192 BC) of the Shang Dynasty to honour his mother Fujing.

Naming a bronzeware item usually depends on whether there is an inscription on or inside it. Bronzeware with an inscription is often named for the characters of its owner's name, which is revealed from the inscription. There is a three-character inscription on the vessel. Scholar Guo Moruo (1892–1978) interpreted the inscription as "*si mu wu*." According to Guo, *si* means "to offer sacrifice," while *mu* and *wu* mean "a mother named Wu." Some archaeologists agreed with Guo's interpretation. Thus, the artefact was first named the Simu Wu Ding. How-

ever, the name was not recognised by the entire academic community. Many scholars raised objections to Guo's naming. Some scholars believe that *si* and *hou* in ancient oracle bone inscriptions were originally the same character. In ancient China, *hou* was an honourable title used only for addressing a noble mother. In 2011, the National Museum of China changed its name from Simu Wu to Houmu Wu, but the controversy has lasted to this day.

The world's largest and heaviest bronzeware unearthed to date has a height of 133 centimetres (cm), a length of 110 cm, a width of 78 cm and weighs 875 kilogrammes. Making the large bronzeware first required pottery moulds. After that, the different moulds could be placed together for later casting. Casting the vessel needed the cooperation of as many as 300 artisans. The Houmu Wu Ding shows the Shang Dynasty's outstanding metallurgical and casting technology.



▲ Houmu Wu Ding



▲ Replicas of Yuanmingyuan's Animal Head Sculptures, on display at the Poly Art Museum

4

Recovering Yuanmingyuan's Animal Head Sculptures

In October 1860, during the Second Opium War (1856–1860), Beijing, the capital of the Qing Dynasty, was captured by British and French coalition forces. Yuanmingyuan, or the Old Summer Palace in the capital city, was burned to the ground by the foreign invaders, and numerous treasures in the large imperial garden were looted, including 12 bronze animal head sculptures. However, 140 years later, on April 30, 2000, a highly anticipated auction was held at Christie's in Hong Kong, where three of the 12 bronze animal head sculptures of the Old Summer Palace re-appeared. At that time, rep-

resentatives of the Poly Group, a state-owned enterprise based in Beijing who participated in the auction, received instructions from their headquarters and were determined to recover the artefacts at all costs. For the Chinese nation, they are priceless treasures. In the fierce bidding, the Poly Group finally spent a massive amount of money to purchase the bronze monkey, bull and tiger head statues, greatly contributing to heritage protection for the Chinese nation.

Stepping into Poly Art Museum on Chaoyangmen North Street, Dongcheng District, one will see replicas of these animal head sculptures. The originals are currently on display in museums across China. Although those in Poly Art Museum are not originals, it is not difficult to appreciate their artistry. The original 12 bronze animal head sculptures were designed by Giuseppe Castiglione (1688–1766), a Jesuit missionary from Italy, who served as an imperial painter for the Qing court. His designs of the animal head sculptures combined Eastern and Western artistic characteristics, reflecting the spirit of cultural exchange and integration.

Ancient bronzeware items throughout the capital city's museums showcase the solemnity and beauty of heritage traces of the long and storied history of the Chinese nation.



▲ Rabbit head sculpture



▲ Horse head sculpture



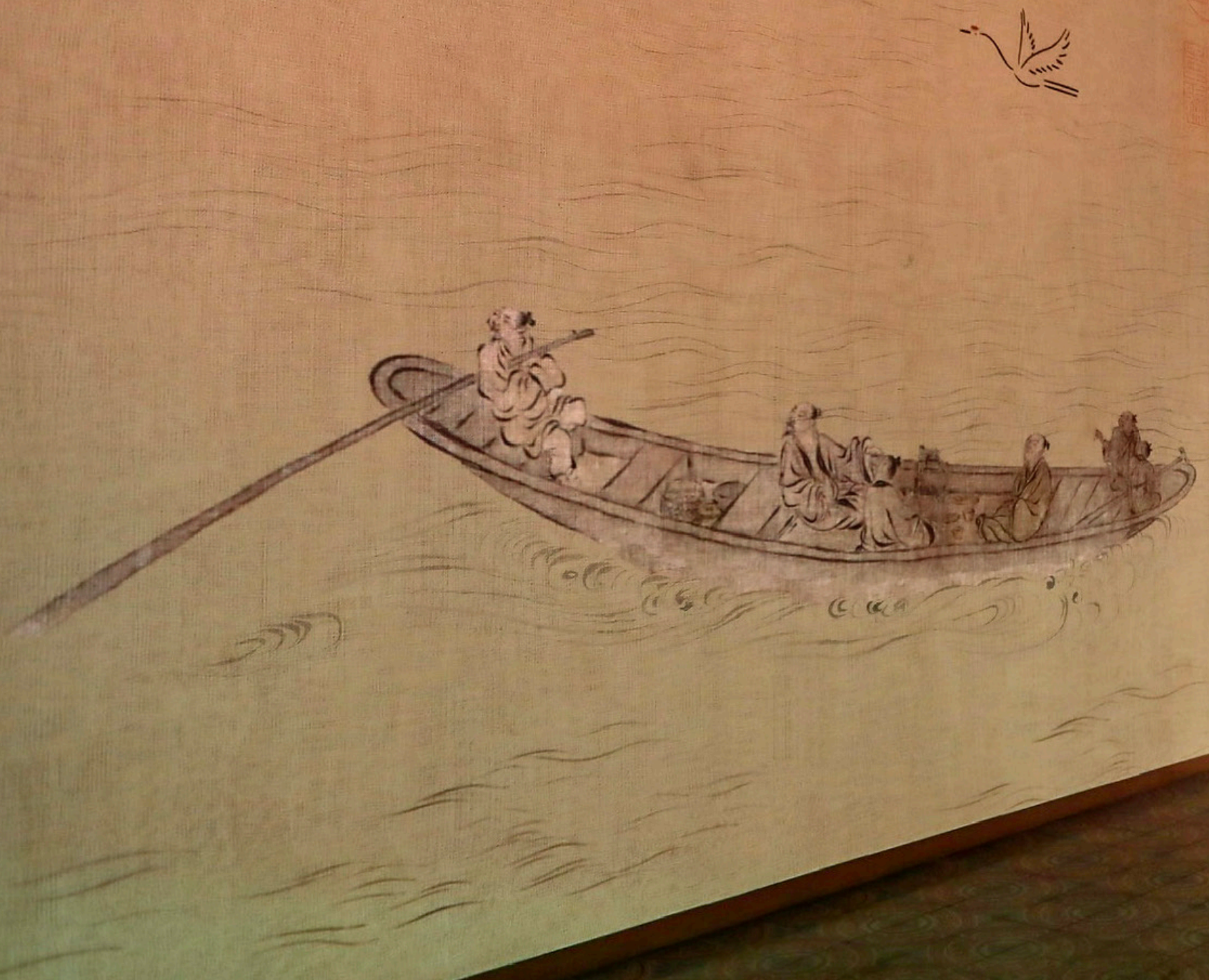
▲ Tiger head sculpture



▲ Monkey head sculpture

EXPERIENCING THE CHARM OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE CALLIGRAPHY AND PAINTINGS

Translated by Wang Wei Edited by Brad Green, Anne Ruisi
Photos by Pu Feng, Yan Yusheng



Calligraphy and paintings hold a prominent position in China's artistic history. Chinese calligraphic and painting arts evolved from carved icons and primitive drawings during the Neolithic Period, and were in their heyday during the Sui (AD 581–618) and Tang (AD 618–907) dynasties. The two dynasties saw painting arts covering subjects such as human figures, landscapes, flowers and birds. Chinese calligraphy, such as regular, running and cursive scripts, reached a new height during the two dynasties. During the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties, woodcut and New Year paintings emerged, and Chinese calligraphic art saw further development.

Chinese often say that painting and calligraphy have a common origin because the oldest Chinese script, oracle bone inscriptions (pictographs), evolved from primitive drawings. In each period of ancient China, calligraphy and painting each had their own charm, reflecting the changes in the artistic talents and aesthetic tastes of the ancients. This holds true for today's calligraphy and painting arts as well.





▲ "The Origin of the Liberation Rite of Water and Land," on display at the Capital Museum of China



Reproduction of Religious Culture in Paintings



▲ Part of the Ming Dynasty mural from Fahai Temple

The ancients thought the Liberation Rite of Water and Land, a major Buddhist ceremony, was a devout worship of Buddha and deities, and benevolence towards the souls of the dead. Paintings of land and water, a genre of traditional Chinese painting, were closely related to the Buddhist ceremony.

In ancient times, paintings of water and land were religious paintings used and hung during the Liberation Rite of Water and Land. Each painting of this genre had special significance, showcasing piety and prayers to deities through delicate strokes and bright colours. The genre came into being in the late Tang Dynasty or perhaps earlier. Painters used natural mineral pigments for colouring. They followed the techniques of the fine brushworks for traditional Chinese human figure paintings, highlighting bright colours, vivid contrasts and fine compositions to portray water and land with a unique visual impact.

The exhibition The Boundless Universe in Paintings kicked off in Beijing's Capital Museum in January and will conclude in July. The exhibition displays a variety of water and land paintings from the Ming and Qing dynasties. "A Portrait of Virupaksa (Bilupaksa)," a silk painting from the Ming Dynasty, is one

of the representatives of water and land paintings displayed at the exhibition. The deity in the painting is one of the Four Heavenly Kings of Buddhism, and with a divine eye can see great distances as well as the karma of sentient beings. Virupaksa, the protagonist, who accounts for the largest proportion of the painting, wears a crown on top of his head, with a majestic and dignified air. On the upper left portion of the painting is an inscription, which is the title of the deity written in a golden pigment. In the painting, there are two attendants, one holding a flag and the other holding a *pipa* (four-stringed Chinese lute) on the left side of Virupaksa. The work presents the anonymous painter's superb techniques, especially in depicting the faces of the characters and capturing their expressions with great detail.

Other water and land paintings on display at the exhibition are also worth enjoying one by one, such as "Realm of Form (Rupadhatu)" and "A Portrait of Cundi." Thanks to the land and water paintings on display at the exhibition, people today can learn more about ancient religious rituals and cultural activities. These works showcase the wonderful scenes of the past eras through the mysterious religious culture.

History of Su Shi's 'Bamboo and Rocks'



▲ Part of Su Shi's "Bamboo and Rocks"

The National Art Museum of China (NAMOC) is a boundless world of ancient and modern arts. The museum presents a variety of exhibitions, including the Exhibition Series in Celebration of the 60th Anniversary of NAMOC, concluding in early July. Visitors can enjoy numerous calligraphy and painting masterpieces housed at the museum, each of which belongs to an authentic classic work.

"Bamboo and Rocks" by Su Shi (1037–1101), a luminary from the Song Dynasty, is a highlight of the exhibition. As a famous ancient masterpiece and the earliest created work among the items in the museum's collection, the painting has an extraordinary history.

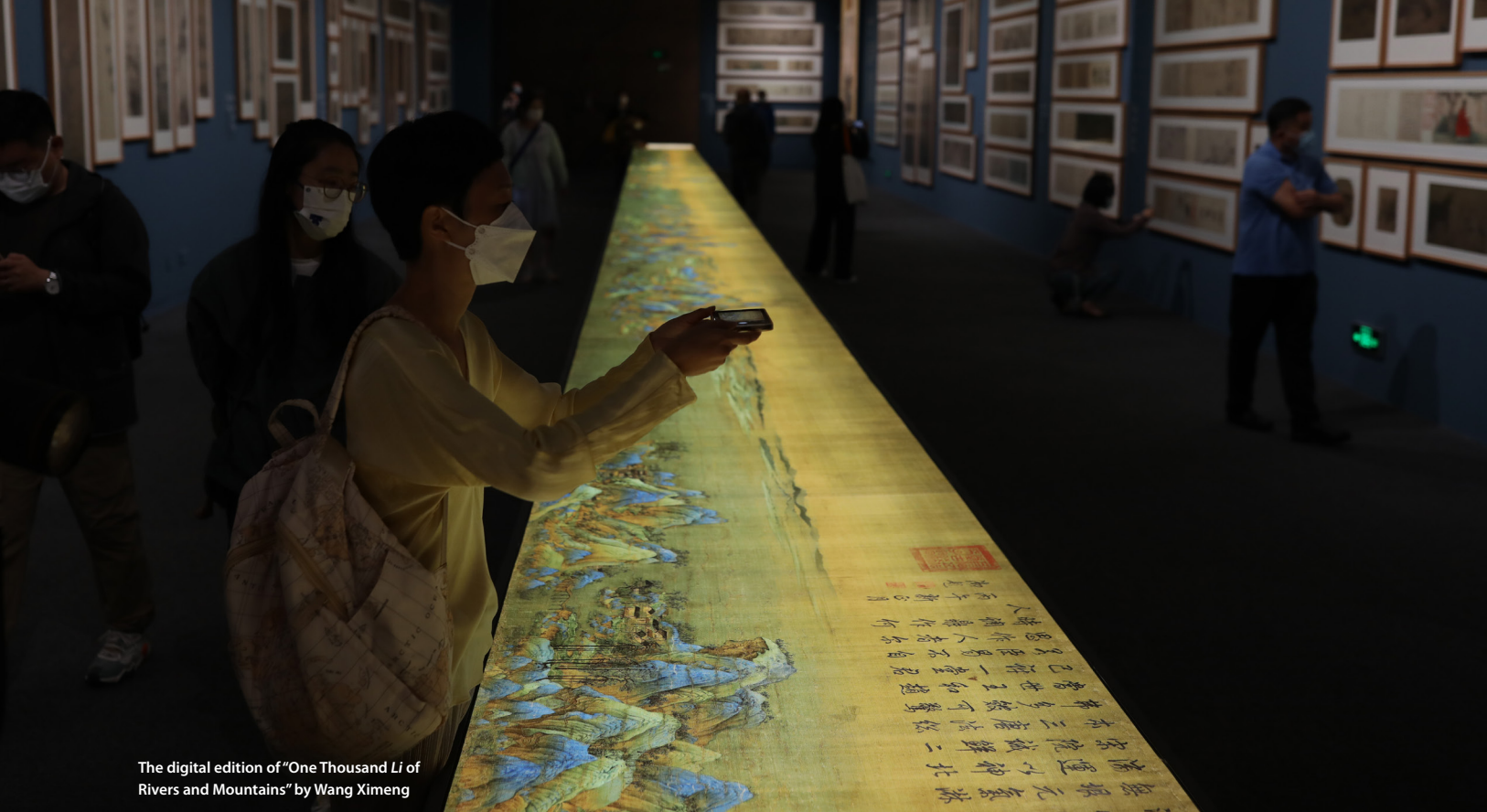
As a renowned figure from ancient Chinese literature, Su was also a great calligrapher. Huang Tingjian (1045–1105), also known as one of the "Four Scholars of the Song Dynasty," highly praised Su's calligraphy. Su's painting style was influenced by his calligraphy and like his handwriting as he pleased, forming his own style. Su created a vivid atmosphere for his 'Bamboo and Rocks' with *feibai* (a style of calligraphy characterised by hollow strokes) to paint rocks and traditional Chinese calligraphic styles to paint bamboo, as well as light ink to draw fog, water, clouds, mountains and trees in the distance.

"Bamboo and Rocks," a silk ink painting created by Su for one of his friends Sun Jue (1028–1090), is 105.6 centimetres (cm) long and 28 cm wide, with an inscription of "Created by Shi for Shenlao (Sun's courtesy name). As a landscape painting, it depicts the intersection of the Xiaoshui River and Xiangjiang River in Lingling County, Hunan Province. In the painting, the water receives the sky, and the mist blurs rocks, seemingly connected with Dongting Lake. The use of a long scroll composition allows visitors to enjoy a panoramic scenic view of local rivers and mountains. In 2018, the painting was auctioned in Hong Kong, with an astonishing transaction price of HKD 463.6 million.

The painting was one of Su's representative works. If one wishes to enjoy the painting, they should not miss the exhibition. At the same time, they will have an opportunity to admire other famous works as they explore an unforgettable artistic journey.



▲ "Bamboo and Rocks" by Su Shi



The digital edition of "One Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains" by Wang Ximeng

The Unique Charm of a Digital Exhibition



▲ A 3D printed replica Buddhist statue, modelled after the original found in the Northern Wei Dynasty's Longmen Grottoes

At China Central Television's Spring Festival Gala 2022, an excerpt of the dance drama *Only Blue and Green* amazed viewers from around the country, and also allowed them to rediscover a famous painting. "One Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains" by Wang Ximeng, who lived in the late Northern Song Dynasty (AD 960–1127), has been handed down from ancient times to this day.

The masterpiece has only been on display four times in the last century. The reason for this is that exhibiting the more than 1,100-cm-long silk painting may cause its pigments to peel, which will lead to irreparable damage. Thus, the Palace Museum in Beijing has carefully preserved the work and rarely exhibits it to the public.

Fortunately, *Compilation of Classics in the Flourishing Age: The Exhibition of Achievements in Compiling a Comprehensive Collection of Ancient Chinese Paintings*, a major exhibition, is being held at the National Museum of China. Thanks to the use of digital technology, visitors will have the opportunity to enjoy many national treasures, such as "One Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains." At the centre of the exhibition hall of the Song Dynasty painting section, a magnified version of Wang's

famous work will catch people's eyes. With special lighting effects, the original appearance of the masterpiece is clearly reproduced. The landscape painting featuring blue and green hues is set against the backdrop of Wang's journey to the capital city of Bianliang (today's Kaifeng). It depicts the scenery along the way, with a rigorous impression and a panoramic view showing the vast expanse between heaven and earth. Thanks to Wang's exquisite techniques, from a horizontal perspective, mountains are magnificent in grandeur; from a vertical view perspective, every peak is amazing. Digital technology not only allows visitors to enjoy the cultural relic in close detail, but also avoids potential damage to the original work.

The exhibition at the National Museum gathers over 10,000 Chinese calligraphic works and paintings from around the world, including some national treasures.

Thanks to the exhibition, visitors will have the opportunity to explore the long history of traditional Chinese calligraphy and paintings. With the wonderful combination of ancient Chinese arts and modern technology, they can begin their journey of rediscovering the amazing charm of Eastern heritage.

Wonderful Journey of Rediscovering Chinese Calligraphic Art



▲ Part of "Epitaph of Luo Wanshun" by Yan Zhenqing

If one would like to specifically explore the beauty of traditional Chinese calligraphy, he or she can visit the Summer Palace Museum's exhibition *Chinese Character Culture with Various Forms and Ideas*, which will conclude in August. This exhibition focuses on the development and inheritance of Chinese character culture and calligraphic art, with three sections: "Origin and Evolution," "Perfection of Calligraphy" and "Spread of Calligraphy." From oracle bone inscriptions and inscriptions on ancient bronze objects to seal, clerical, regular, running and cursive scripts, and from changes in writing materials to printing technology, the exhibition presents the evolution of Chinese characters and the diversity of calligraphic art.

"Epitaph of Luo Wanshun" written by Yan Zhenqing is a highlight among cultural relics in the exhibition. Yan Zhenqing, a calligrapher from the Tang Dynasty, created his own style, known as the Yan style. The style is solemn, and has its own unique characteristics compared to regular script created by Tang calligrapher Liu Gongquan. Both styles have been collectively referred to as "Yan Liu" since ancient times. Scholar Su Shi highly praised Yan's outstanding calligraphic style.

The cultural relic was unearthed in Shaanxi Province in 2020, and had never been exhibited out of the province since its excavation. This is the first time that the work has been exhibited in Beijing. The epitaph was written by Yan at the age of 38. At that time, the Yan style was not yet formed. According to the epitaph, Yan's calligraphy was square and upright, with fine and vigorous strokes, making him a remarkable calligrapher of the same generation.

"Duobao Pagoda Stele," a regular script work, was written by Yan after "Epitaph of Luo Wanshun," and is one of the representative works of his calligraphic art. The inscription on Duobao Pagoda Stele was written by Yan at the age of 44. Later calligraphers and critics greatly admired the inscription. The Summer Palace Museum displays the rubbings of the inscription on the stele. If visitors compare the inscription with "Epitaph of Luo Wanshun," they will clearly see the changes in Yan's calligraphic style.

Visitors should not miss the opportunity to explore the exhibition in the Summer Palace Museum to rediscover the charm of Chinese character culture and calligraphic art. It will undoubtedly be an in-depth and exciting journey into calligraphic art.



The magnified version of *Xingrangtie* by Wang Xizhi

Eight Major Crafts from the Ancient Capital

Translated by Wang Wei Edited by Brad Green, Anne Ruisi
Photos by Hou Shaoqing, Wang Yuanzheng, Pu Feng, Jin Jianhui, Qu Bowei



In 1904, at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition (St. Louis World's Fair), Aisin Gioro Pulun (1874–1927), a prince from the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), led China's official delegation to participate in the fair. At the China Pavilion, a replica of the prince's residence—a typical Beijing-styled courtyard, including a living room and a bedroom—was built to show the world the characteristics of the imperial family.

The China Pavilion displayed a variety of exhibits brought by the delegation. According to a news report, "At the fair, the exhibits of the Chinese imperial family were the replicas of Prince Pulun's residence and other works of art, including one of the world's most elegant embroidery works." These exhibits featured Beijing-styled crafts, including jade carvings, carved lacquerware, cloisonne, filigree inlay, gold inlay lacquerware, palace carpets, Beijing embroidery and ivory carvings. These works of art, highlighting traditional Chinese culture and Beijing-styled techniques, have been praised as the "Eight Wonders of Yanjing" or "Beijing's Eight Major Crafts." These crafts were developed in service to imperial families of the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing dynasties.

The items exhibited at the fair were not only works of art, but also symbols of traditional Chinese culture. They conveyed to the world the Chinese pursuit of beauty and the inheritance of the nation's cultural traditions through their unique forms and exquisite craftsmanship. Thanks to the fair, the eight Beijing-styled crafts were introduced to the world, allowing more people to learn about and appreciate the wisdom and charm of the Chinese nation.

Filigree Inlay

With the upcoming Opening Brush Ceremony (*mingchuang kaibi*) to welcome Lunar New Year, Emperor Qianlong (reign: 1736–1796) of the Qing Dynasty was busy preparing for the ceremony. The event was established by Emperor Yongzheng (1722–1735) and continued by his son Emperor Qianlong. During the ceremony on every Lunar New Year's Day, the emperor would sit by the window of the East Warm Chamber at the Hall of Mental Cultivation in the Forbidden City and personally light a candle. He would pour *tusu* liquor (a liquor immersed with Chinese herbal medicines) into a gold goblet with jewel inlays and the engraved Chinese characters “金瓯永固,” reading “*jin'ou yonggu*” (“eternal territorial integrity”). Next, he would pick up a traditional Chinese brush and wrote down his good wishes for Lunar New Year, such as “All is at peace.” The emperor's earnest expectations for the prosperity of his nation would be expressed by this brush. His wishes and prayers combined with the gold goblet to jointly create a brilliant prelude to Lunar New Year.



The *jin'ou yonggu* gold goblet

Filigree inlay is a unique traditional Chinese form of craft art utilising gold and silver.

The jin'ou yonggu gold goblet features jewel, pearl and gem inlays, and intricate patterns.

The gold goblet, a national treasure, is housed in the collection of the Forbidden City today. The artefact has a distinctive shape, which resembles a *ding* vessel, a tripod-styled container, decorated with lustrous pearls and gemstones on its outside, symbolising the eternal stability of a nation. Each of its two handles features a soaring dragon shape, representing the ruling of a prosperous nation. The container is also carved with exquisite fret patterns on its rim. According to traditional Chinese culture, these patterns integrate auspicious and prosperous meanings and represent good wishes for the country's development. In addition, whether it

is placed upright or upside down, the container presents a distinctive symbolic significance. When it is placed upright, it is a precious gold goblet; when it is upside down, it resembles a luxurious crown. Both demonstrate the majesty and nobility of the imperial family, and highlight the unique beauty of the container.

Filigree inlay, the technique used for the gold goblet, ranks first among Beijing's Eight Major Crafts. It has been a unique form of art utilising gold and silver dating back to ancient China. The process of filigree inlay is like magic, turning gold and silver into hairlike threads and then using eight traditional

techniques: inlaying, filling, coiling, soldering, piling, stacking, plaiting and weaving to create a variety of patterns with inlaid gemstones, pearls and other precious materials. The exquisite craftsmanship of filigree inlay technique takes the beauty of gold and silver materials to the extreme. The craft originated from the Spring and Autumn Period (770–446 BC), and saw thousands of years of development and innovation. From the gold crown of Emperor Wanli (reign: 1573–1620) of the Ming Dynasty to the gold goblet of Emperor Qianlong of the Qing Dynasty and today's National Orders, filigree inlay has contributed to the brilliance of traditional Chinese craftsmanship.



Part of the gold inlay lacquerware “The Nine-Dragon Wall”

Gold Inlay Lacquerware



Making gold inlay lacquerware art

Gold inlay lacquerware, another of Beijing's Eight Major Crafts, is applied on lacquerware objects made of gold, silver, tin and timber. The surface would be coated with multiple layers of lacquer, and then inlaid with gemstones and mother of pearl to form exquisite patterns. With a wide

range of subjects, gold inlay lacquerware features bright colours and dazzling decorations.

The history of the craft dates back to the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368). At that time, the imperial palace set up a lacquer bureau specialising in the production of lacquerware. During the reign of Emperor Chengzu (1402–1424) of the Ming Dynasty, a large number of gold inlay lacquerware items were produced for the purpose of diplomatic gift-giving. During the Qing Dynasty, the Imperial Workshop under the Imperial Household Department had an office that was responsible for making gold inlay lacquerware items for the imperial family. After the fall of the Qing Dynasty, the technique spread out of the imperial palace, and many workshops appeared in Beijing. In

1956, a total of 16 workshops of this type jointly established the Beijing Gold Inlay Lacquerware Plant, a state-owned enterprise, to further develop the ancient craft.

“The Nine-Dragon Wall” is a masterpiece housed at the Beijing Gold Lacquer Inlay Art Museum. It is a large three-dimensional work of art with inlaid decorations that was modelled after the Nine-Dragon walls in Beijing and Datong, Shanxi Province. The work of art housed by the museum in Beijing features inlay with a total of 629 dragons and other auspicious animals. It took 60 famous artisans more than one year to complete the work, using 20 tons of a variety of materials, including beautiful nephrites from throughout China. Thanks to the amazing work and others, the museum is a must-visit.



The ivory carving work "Avalokitesvara Holding a Basket Containing Fish" from the Qing Dynasty

Ivory Carving

Ivory carving methods include three-dimensional carving, relief carving and hollowed carving. The creative themes of this type of work of art cover human figures, animals, flowers and landscapes. Thanks to their three-dimensional and layered features, ivory carving works of art are dynamic and vivid.

Ivory carving has a long history in China. As early as the Neolithic Age, the ancients began to use ivory to make tools and ornaments. During the Shang (16th century–11th century BC) and Zhou (11th century–256 BC) dynasties, ivory became a symbol of power and was used to make sacrificial and ceremonial vessels, as well as imperial supplies. During the Sui (AD 581–618) and Tang (AD 618–907) dynasties, economic development and foreign trade advanced the maturity and diversification of ivory carving techniques. For example, ivory carving with dyed features appeared during this time. During the Song (AD 960–1279) and Yuan (1271–1368) dynasties, craftspeople could create ivory carving works of art with more difficult techniques, such as carving a large ball containing smaller balls.

Beijing-styled ivory carving formed around the Ming and Qing dynasties, which was also the heyday of other ancient Chinese crafts of this type. During this period, the imperial workshop in

Beijing was the main production venue for ivory carving, and the works focused on ladies and flowers, with exquisite and elegant characteristics.

"Playing Chess under a Pine," an ivory carving work crafted during the Qing Dynasty, is in the collection of the Beijing Eight Imperial Handicrafts Museum in Cheng'en Temple. On a small boat are two elderly people who play chess intently. The chessboard and pieces are elaborately carved and a pine at the bow of the boat is lifelike. The beauty of various ivory carving techniques is vividly displayed in this single work of art. "Immortals Go to Celebrate the Birthday of the Queen Mother of the West" is another ivory carving work housed by the museum. With different postures, immortals ride on auspicious clouds to arrive at a celebration gathering. Absorbing the essence of traditional Chinese painting techniques, the work of art also features painted elements.

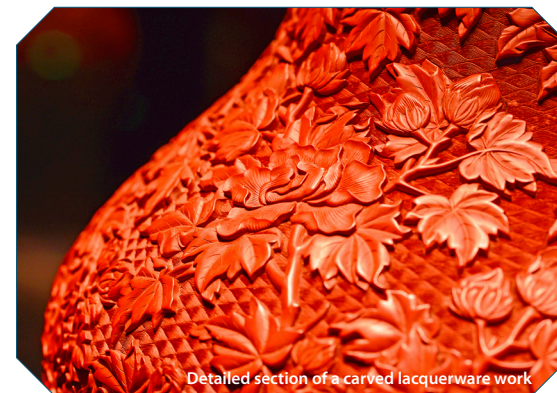
Nowadays, with the ivory trade ban and the protection of elephants, craftspeople are seeking to update their ideas, innovate their technology and replace their materials so that the technique developed from the art form may survive.



The ivory carving work "Playing Chess under a Pine" from the Qing Dynasty



The ivory carving work "Immortals Go to Celebrate the Birthday of the Queen Mother of the West"



Detailed section of a carved lacquerware work

Today's carved lacquerware technique originated from the artisans of the imperial workshops in ancient dynasties, and also absorbed the essence of other folk crafts from around the nation, creating a new peak of traditional Chinese crafts. "Carved lacquerwares have brilliant colours and marvellous decorations, resembling the graceful coral dancing on the bottom of the sea or the quietly rising rosy clouds, bringing a gentle glow to the eastern sky." Yuan Mei (1716–1798), a Qing Dynasty poet, praised the extraordinary splendour of carved lacquerware technique with these words.

Carved Lacquerware

An excerpt from the 40th chapter of *A Dream of Red Mansions* reads: "By now Wang Xifeng and her helpers had everything in perfect order. There were two couches on the north side, left and right, spread with brocade cushions and velvet coverlets. In front of each couch stood two carved lacquer teapots of different shapes with pyrus-blossom, plum-blossom, lotus and sunflower designs, some square and some round." These teapots were made with carved lacquerware technique, another of Beijing's Eight Major Crafts.



Carved lacquerware plate with dragon patterns from the Ming Dynasty

The process of carved lacquerware is extremely complex, and has many stages, such as lacquerware body making, painting, carving and polishing. Each ware needs to be coated with dozens to hundreds of layers of lacquer, and then carved with a knife to create exquisite patterns.

The colours of carved lacquerware are mainly red, yellow, green and black, with rich and diverse subjects, including landscapes, flowers, birds, dragons and phoenixes, human figures and auspicious patterns.

Carved lacquerware originated from the Tang Dynasty and gradually declined in the late Qing Dynasty and early Republic of China period. Its technique was later restored and developed

by folk artisans. Beijing Eight Imperial Handicrafts Museum also displays many exquisite carved lacquerwares, such as the Ming Dynasty carved lacquer plate. This collection has a vermilion lacquer pattern, with vivid gold carved dragons flying between a sea of clouds. The cloud and dragon patterns and lacquer colours all have the characteristics of the Ming Dynasty technique, showing superb craftsmanship.

Ivory carving refers to the process of carving on elephant tusks and related finished products. With a delicate texture, ivory, known as "an organic gemstone," is as smooth, durable and precious as jade. Because of these features, ivory carvings are naturally exquisite and unparalleled.

Jade Carving

Jade carving is one of the oldest forms of handicraft in China.



The jade carving work "Yongsheng kettle"

Jade carving has a number of procedures, such as cutting, grinding and carving to create jades with beautiful decorations. Jade carving is one of the oldest carving varieties in China, reflecting traditional Chinese aesthetics and wisdom. As early as the Neolithic Age, jade was considered a sacred object, adored by the ancients.

Beijing-styled jade carving appeared during the Yuan Dynasty, with the forerunner Qiu Chuji (1148–1227). Qiu, a Taoist, was proficient in the art of crafting jade ware and personally made a Taoist crown featuring gold wires inlaid on jade in a workshop. During the Ming Dynasty, the imperial palace set up a jade ware workshop, gathering famous jade-carving craftspeople from all over the nation. As a result, jade carving in Beijing reached its heyday. During the Qing Dynasty, the trend of jade ware collection was prevalent, and the technique of jade carving reached its peak of perfection in the city. Beijing's jade carving is renowned for its selection of high-quality raw jade, exquisite carving technique, diverse shapes and a wide range of subjects. The types of jade carving include vessels, human figures, flowers, beasts, bonsai and jewellery.

Beijing Eight Imperial Handicrafts Museum houses several jade carving masterpieces by artist Guo Weijun. Guo is renowned for his profound and

outstanding artistic talent. As a jade carving artist, Guo has truly mastered the art of jade carving with inlaid gold and silver decorations. One of the items in the museum's jade carving collection is Guo's "Yongsheng Kettle." The kettle is made of first-class Hotan blue jade, with an elegant and grand shape. The kettle body is inlaid with dragon patterns made of silver threads, featuring complex, exquisite and smooth lines, as well as the decorations of 148 red gorgeous corals and turquoise.

Beijing-styled jade carving embodies the essence of Chinese jade culture and an important value of traditional Chinese arts and crafts. In this field of art, Beijing's jade carvings highlight the profound connotations of ancient Chinese aesthetics while also demonstrating modern innovation. The city's jade carving artworks not only show the solemnity and grandeur of former imperial palace features, but also integrate the liveliness and neatness of folk art and shine with the unique beauty of Chinese civilisation.

Palace Carpets

Palace carpets (blankets), one of Beijing's Eight Major Crafts and a representative of Eastern art, include hand-made carpets, wall carpets and blankets made of wool and silk threads.

During the Yuan Dynasty, woven materials of these types began to be

referred to as "palace carpets" as they were made for and used by the imperial family. In ancient dynasties, making palace carpets required a high level of skill. With rich patterns and colours, they integrated a variety of Chinese and Western artistic elements to form

a unique style. The patterns of palace carpets are symmetrical and balanced, giving a sense of solemnity and stability, and showing the atmosphere of traditional Chinese culture.

During the Yuan Dynasty, a weaving and dyeing bureau was responsible for making carpets for the imperial palace. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, palace carpets were more widely used, and every palace carpet represented the status and taste of nobility.

With the fall of the Qing Dynasty, palace carpets that had been used exclusively by the imperial family became a legacy of history, but the technique of producing palace carpets did not disappear. It soon began to spread to the public. Today's palace carpet-making still absorbs the wisdom and technique of the ancient craftspeople. Their colours, textures and patterns make viewers associate products of this type with the luxurious lives in the former imperial families. Nowadays, palace carpets have become invaluable cultural heritage shared by the entire Chinese nation.

Beijing Eight Imperial Handicrafts Museum houses a palace carpet given the name "Good Fortune over One's Head." The making of the exhibit was copied from the patterns recorded in Carpets Housed by the Forbidden City. The patterns of this particular palace carpet symbolise auspiciousness and good fortune. The surface of the carpet was woven by hand, with 100 percent cotton used for the warp and weft lines. Pure wool was used for its tufting parts. Traditional Chinese herbal plants were used to dye the carpet, creating a natural, soft and harmonious range of colour. The carpet is a microcosm of a total of more than 1,000 pieces of old carpets with a wide variety and exquisite craftsmanship housed by the Forbidden City.



The palace carpet work "Good Fortune over One's Head"

Palace carpets, a representative of Eastern art, feature beautiful designs and exquisite craftsmanship.

Beijing Embroidery



The Beijing embroidery Dragon Robe

The stitches of Beijing embroidery are flat, fine, uniform and smooth. With auspicious meanings and rich connotations of traditional Chinese culture, patterns on Beijing embroidery cover landscapes, flowers, birds, beasts, dragons, phoenixes and auspicious objects, forming unique styles and characteristics.

To the east of Moshikou Street in Shijingshan District, opposite Beijing No. 9 High School, is a small temple called Cheng'en Temple. The temple, with its long history, once served the imperial family. First built during the Ming Dynasty, the temple covers an area of about 20,000 square metres and its layout resembles the Chinese character "回." The temple has four small courtyards and its main structures, including the Front Gate, the Hall of Heavenly Kings, Great Buddha's Hall and Dharma Hall. Each of its courtyards seems still to exude an ancient and solemn atmosphere.

Today, the temple is open to the public and has set up a museum inside it to show Beijing's Eight Major Crafts, allowing visitors to learn about and experience the charm of the city's traditional culture. One of the eight crafts displayed in the museum is Beijing embroidery.

Beijing embroidery, a distinctive craft from the capital city, is the art of using needle and thread to embroider a variety of patterns on silk fabrics. Beijing embroidery originated from the Tang Dynasty and found its heyday

during the Ming and Qing dynasties. With excellent materials and superb techniques, Beijing embroidery was mostly used for palace clothing and decorations. Beijing embroidery features northern China's folk embroidery arts while absorbing the strengths of embroidery techniques from the rest of the country.

The museum displays a truly outstanding work—a Beijing embroidery dragon robe. The robe is a highlight of Beijing embroidery art. In ancient China, patterns such as dragons on robes were strictly regulated, and only the emperor had the right to wear such a robe. There were more than 10 special patterns, including dragon decorations, reserved exclusively for the emperor. The dragon robe housed by the museum showcases the outstanding technique of Beijing embroidery and the charm of palace culture. Through delicate embroidery and magnificent patterns, the robe highlights the grandeur of the imperial family, presenting the grand atmosphere of ancient palace life.

Cloisonne Enamel

Cloisonne, or enamel filigree, is a traditional Chinese handicraft technique. During the reign of Emperor Jingtai (1450–1457) of the Ming Dynasty, the enamel process reached maturity and the products made with this technique were also referred to as "Jingtai Blue." The process of crafting cloisonne enamelware is complex and highly skilled. Today, with elegant designs and brilliant colours, enamelware still shows the characteristics of former palace art. The decorations on

enamelware have a wide range of patterns, including flowers, birds, human figures, landscapes, dragons and phoenixes, symbolising good fortune and prosperity. Making cloisonne enamelware involves many steps, such as copper base-hammering, copper-strip inlay, enamel-filling, enamel-firing, enamel-polishing and enamel-gilding.

To learn more about cloisonne art, one can go to the Cloisonne Art Museum on Anlelin Road in Dongcheng District. The museum is open to the public

throughout the year, and mainly displays cloisonne artefacts of the Ming and Qing dynasties, as well as masterpieces made in the Beijing Cloisonne Enamel Factory and works of art by other old artists throughout various periods. Here, one can not only enjoy cloisonne works of art, but also experience a variety of authentic techniques of the traditional Chinese craft.

Beijing has over 3,000 years of history as a city and more than 800 years of history as a capital. During this long period, the city not only emerged with techniques from the imperial palace represented by the Eight Major Crafts, but also nurtured numerous outstanding folk crafts. The blending of palace and folk arts contributes to the unique charm of traditional Beijing culture. The ancient yet modern city, one of the world's cultural and artistic treasures, still features the millennial aesthetics of the Chinese nation with its unique tradition.

Heartfelt gratitude is extended to the Beijing Eight Imperial Handicrafts Museum that has provided help and assistance.



The cloisonne enamel work "The Gathering of Seven Stars"

Originating in the imperial palace, cloisonne enamel served as a major part of imperial craftwork.



A set of cloisonne enamel plates

Astonishing Furniture Masterpieces, a Journey through Time

Translated by Li Shasha Edited by Brad Green, Anne Ruisi
Photos by Pu Feng, Wang Yuanzheng

Traditional Chinese furniture has a rich and storied history. Serving as a tangible representation of various eras, it not only reflects the rigid social hierarchy but also offers a glimpse into the vibrant lives of those who came before us. Today, historical objects such as furniture allow us to perceive the profound spiritual culture and experience the lifestyles of bygone times.

Life Imprints and Historical Memories

The Roll of a Painter Drawing Emperor Qianlong Featuring His Inscribed 'Buddhist Verse: It's One or Two? They Can't Be Separated.' is a renowned portrait of Emperor Qianlong (reign: 1736–1796) from the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), which is housed in the Palace Museum. The painting depicts the emperor, believed to be in his forties, dressed in traditional Han attire, with a hat and gown. He sits comfortably on a piece of furniture, with a portrait resembling himself displayed in the background. The surroundings showcase a variety of furniture and objects that the emperor favoured.

Centuries have passed, and the emperor depicted in the painting has transformed into a prominent figure in historical accounts and folk tales.

Within the vast collection of treasures housed in the Palace Museum, there are over 6,200 pieces of classic furniture that were closely associated with the emperors of the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing dynasties. Among them, the golden throne placed in the Hall of Supreme Harmony holds the distinction of being the largest, and occupies the highest position in the ceremonial structure within the Forbidden City. With a

history spanning over 400 years since its completion during the reign of Emperor Jiajing (1521–1566) of the Ming Dynasty, it witnessed the ascension ceremonies of 16 emperors throughout the Ming and Qing dynasties. In contrast to the imperial grandeur and magnificence of the golden throne, a pair of intricately carved rosewood cabinets adorned with moiré dragon designs embodies the romantic tale of Emperor Qianlong and his Empress Fucha.

Measuring 192 centimetres (cm) in length, 80.5 cm in width and towering at a height of 518.5 cm from bottom to top, this pair of cabinets holds the distinction of being the tallest items of furniture within the esteemed collection of the Palace Museum. Historical records reveal that Emperor Qianlong commissioned the creation of this new pair in 1742 to replace the older ones that were showing signs of aging and lacquer deterioration. The meticulous craftsmanship required approximately nine months to complete, resulting in these exquisite cabinets that have stood as a testament to the enduring love between the emperor and his empress for more than 280 years.

The Palace Museum is also home to an impressive collection of furniture, including notable pieces such as the Round-backed Armchair with Scroll Grass Designs crafted during the reign of Emperor Yongzheng (1722–1735) of the Qing Dynasty, among others. These exquisite pieces were not only utilised by the emperors themselves but also preserved for their historical and artistic value. With their employment of high-quality raw materials, intricate carving techniques and meticulous craftsmanship, they stand as a remarkable testament to the richness of Chinese culture.



A restored life scene of Emperor Qianlong according to an ancient painting

Returning to the Homeland with Deep Patriotism

Rosewood and red sandalwood are widely regarded as the premier wood varieties in Chinese furniture craftsmanship, renowned for their robust and dense texture that facilitates the carving of intricate and captivating patterns.

During the Ming Dynasty, the rise of scholar-officials as furniture designers led to the emergence of Ming rosewood furniture, characterised by impeccable craftsmanship, elegant silhouettes and a harmonious blend of aesthetics with literary culture. These remarkable attributes have solidified Ming rosewood furniture as a timeless representation of classic traditional Chinese furniture.

Prince Kung's Palace Museum houses a permanent exhibition featuring seven exceptional pieces of Ming rosewood furniture. These invaluable artefacts were donated by the renowned painter Tseng Yu-ho (Betty Ecke, 1925–2017), lending them immense research significance.

Tseng Yu-ho enrolled in the Girls' School Affiliated to Fu Ren Catholic University at the age of 16, majoring in fine arts. Following

her daily studies, she would frequently wander through the neighbouring Prince Kung's Mansion, captivated by its allure. After graduation, she married Gustav Ecke (1896–1971), a distinguished German professor renowned for his research on Ming furniture. Ecke found success teaching at esteemed institutions such as Fu Ren Catholic University. It was during this time that he frequented junk markets in search of Ming rosewood furniture, meticulously studying the intricate mortise and tenon structures. He later completed *Chinese Domestic Furniture in Photographs and Measured Drawings*. This book has since become an invaluable reference on Chinese rosewood furniture.

In 1948, Ecke and Tseng left China for the United States, bringing along their cherished collection of Ming rosewood furniture. Throughout their more than 50 years abroad, these pieces of rosewood furniture became symbols of the homeland for Tseng. She eventually made the decision to return to China, once again accompanied by these precious treasures of Ming rosewood furniture.



Traditional Chinese round-backed armchairs

Upon her return to her homeland, Tseng revisited the old site of Prince Kung's Mansion, where a flood of beautiful memories came rushing back. Fuelled by her deep affection for the mansion, she ultimately made the heartfelt decision to donate her cherished collection of seven classic Ming furniture pieces to the museum. This remarkable contribution includes a rosewood table adorned with a marble top and a rosewood round-backed armchair embellished with the Chinese character “寿” (*shou*, “longevity”). These exquisite pieces are regarded as standard examples of Ming furniture and are referenced in the *Standard Legends for Grading Cultural Relics—Furniture* compiled by the National Cultural Heritage Administration.

Today, visitors have the opportunity to admire these seven invaluable Ming furniture pieces at an exhibition hall in Prince Kung's Palace Museum, open year-round. These remarkable artefacts infuse the historic mansion with renewed intrigue, offering a captivating journey into the past and a chance to uncover new fascinating stories.

Antique Tranquillity Cleanses the Soul

A famous Chinese proverb states, “Better to save one life than build a seven-storied pagoda.” At Guanfu Museum, visitors can witness a remarkable pair of red sandalwood seven-storied pagodas that capture the imagination. Standing at an impressive height of 2.16 metres (m), these pagodas boast 48 shrines adorned with exquisite Song Dynasty (AD 960–1279)-style brocade (although the original Buddha figures are no longer present). With their elegant overhanging eaves, these pagodas are crafted from red sandalwood and adorned with gilded bronze on the exterior. They are truly precious treasures from the Qing Dynasty, showcasing the grandeur of imperial craftsmanship.

The Beijing Guanfu Museum proudly showcases over 100 exquisite pieces of furniture from the Ming and Qing dynasties. These remarkable pieces



▲ Tiao'an (a long narrow table)

are thoughtfully arranged in different exhibition halls, categorised by the materials used, such as redwood, red sandalwood, rosewood and others, and includes the renowned “Quqing Study.” To bring forth the captivating essence of traditional Chinese furniture culture, the museum employs a creative display layout that beautifully recreates the daily living habits of the ancients. Visitors can explore the “living room,” adorned with redwood chairs and a long narrow table, or step into the “bedroom” featuring a rosewood canopy bed and meticulously crafted cabinets. It's as if one has been transported back in time, experiencing a glimpse of the ancient lifestyle while strolling through these diverse and captivating furniture halls.

To enhance the splendour of the ancient furniture, a delicate vase of flowers or Buddhist hand ornaments are carefully placed on the Ming- and Qing-style pieces showcased at the Beijing Guanfu Museum, adding a touch of elegance. It seems that through these timeless furniture masterpieces, people have found a means to connect and engage in silent conversation with the spirits of the past.

Qing emperors developed a preference for red sandalwood. The allure of red sandalwood lies in its silk-like, delicate texture and its enchanting fragrance, earning it the title of the “exotic wood” cherished by many.

With the lifting of the sea ban by the Ming Dynasty, the influx of a large quantity of rare wood from Southeast Asia was allowed into China. Among these imports were a limited number of red sandalwood furniture and articles, which have now become treasured rarities. However, it was during the reign of emperors Yongzheng and Qianlong of the Qing Dynasty that red sandalwood furniture truly emerged on China's historical stage. Today, these items are among the most commonly encountered red sandalwood cultural relics.



A space with authentic classical Chinese furniture

Fossils Write the Story of Life

Translated by Li Shasha
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Fossils, formed over billions of years, resemble a historical scroll depicting the Earth's natural and biological history. As one of the most vibrant regions for paleontological research and a current hub for scientific exploration, Beijing is home to diverse forms of paleontological fossils, as well as animal, plant and human remains. These fascinating relics are now showcased in several museums, including the National Natural History Museum of China, the Paleozoological Museum of China, the Geological Museum of China, the Museum of Yanqing Geopark and the China Fangshan Global Geopark Museum. Through the various exhibits, the secrets of ancient life and the ever-changing passage of time are unveiled.



Ancient Legends, Living Impressions

China boasts the highest number of dinosaur species discovered worldwide. As of the end of 2020, over 300 species of dinosaurs, varying in size and form, have been unearthed in the country. Among China's dinosaur family, Mamenchisaurus stands out for its towering and majestic skeleton, making it the most captivating star among dinosaur exhibits in various museums. The Paleozoological Museum of China showcases a Mamenchisaurus specimen from Hechuan District, Chongqing, measuring 22 metres (m) in body length and over 9 m in neck length. Another noteworthy Mamenchisaurus skeleton fossil, this one unearthed in Sichuan Province's Jingyan County, has become a symbol of the National Natural History Museum of China, adorning the museum's emblem.

In addition to the impressive Mamenchisaurus, the fossil specimens of Lufengosaurus Xu showcased in the "Dinosaur Corridor" on the second floor of the Paleozoological Museum of China and the special exhibition titled Ancient Reptiles at the National Natural History Museum of China are also considered treasures in their own right. Lufengosaurus Xu, one of the earliest known dinosaurs in China, inhabited the Earth over 200 million years ago. Its remarkably preserved fossil skeleton was unearthed in Lufeng City, Yunnan Province, in 1938. Being the first dinosaur skeleton to be independently discovered, studied, named and exhibited in China, Lufengosaurus Xu is often referred to as "the first dragon of China."

The fossil known as "Sinosauropteryx," housed in the Geological Museum of China, along with other ornithosaur fossils, has shed light on the evolutionary process of "dinosaurs taking flight." Unlike typical scaled dinosaurs, the Sinosauropteryx fossil was initially mistaken for a bird fossil due to its silky feather-like covering, which led to its name. However, through phylogenetic analysis, scientists later determined that Sinosauropteryx was a small theropod dinosaur. As the world's first feathered dinosaur to be unearthed, the discovery and classification of the Sinosauropteryx fossil provide compelling evidence for the evolution of reptiles into birds.

In July 2011, during an investigation on the distribution and characteristics of geological relics in Yanqing District, China University of Geosciences accidentally discovered dinosaur footprint fossils in Yanqing Silicified Woods National Geopark. These footprints were found in different shapes and sizes, ranging from the largest, measuring 48.3 centimetres (cm) in length, to the smallest, approximately 10 cm long. Their discovery provides the first evidence of the existence of dinosaurs in the region that makes up today's Beijing.

The dinosaur fossils exhibited in museums, representing the rulers of the earth from hundreds of millions of years ago, serve as invaluable records of Earth's ancient inhabitants. Approaching these fossils, visitors cannot help but feel as though they are stepping among the mythical legends of ancient times.



Fossils of dinosaurs, on display at the National Natural History Museum of China



The fossil skeleton of Lufengosaurus Xu



Ancient Fossils, Captivating Creations

In addition to dinosaur fossils, museums house a vast collection of precious prehistoric biological fossils, including fish, birds, insects and plants. These fossils possess both scientific and aesthetic value. Often arranged in chronological order, they depict the epic evolution of ancient organisms as well as the diverse array of animals and plants that have existed over hundreds of millions of years.

Haikouichthys is currently recognised as the earliest known vertebrate in the world. Fossils of Haikouichthys, now housed in the Paleozoological Museum of China, were discovered by Chinese scientists in Yunnan Province and date to the early Cambrian period approximately 520 million years ago. This discovery occurred alongside the unearthing of over 200 fossils belonging to various marine organisms within the same geological strata. Encompassing more than 10 major biological categories, this assemblage of fossils is collectively referred to as the “Chengjiang Biota.”

The emergence of the Chengjiang Biota is considered to be the most compelling evidence of the Cambrian Explosion, a period around 540 million years ago when a wide array of major animal groups began appearing in the fossil record, signifying a rapid diversification of life on Earth.

Over two million years ago, an ancient elephant found itself in a predicament while quenching its thirst by

the Yellow River in what is now Heshui County, Gansu Province. Slipping into the mud, it gradually became entombed by sand, transforming into a fossil over the course of countless years. Its existence remained hidden until 1973 when it was discovered. This remarkable creature came to be known as the Yellow River Stegodon, owing to its birthplace in the Yellow River Basin. While its scientific name is “stegodon zdanskyi,” the widespread tale of the Yellow River Stegodon in China has perpetuated its popular name to this day.

The skull fossil of the Yellow River Stegodon currently resides within the halls of the National Natural History Museum of China, while its body and other bones are showcased on the third floor of the Paleozoological Museum of China.

The evolution of plant fossils is also astonishing. Among them, petrified wood stands out as a magical and captivating specimen.

The petrified trees from the late Jurassic period showcased in the Museum of Yanqing Geopark stand at an impressive height of approximately one metre. Over the course of hundreds of millions of years, they have unravelled the enigmatic tales of Beijing’s ancient geographical environment, as well as the broader region of North China, leaving behind a captivating testament for generations to come. These ancient relics also bear witness to the extraordinary transformations that life has undergone throughout the history of our planet.



A boy observes a reconstruction of Peking Man's head at Zhoukoudian Site Museum.

In addition to the captivating display of enormous dinosaur skeleton fossils and ancient mammal fossils, museums also hold a special place in the hearts of the public with the compelling narrative of human evolution, conveyed through a series of meticulously curated fossils.

In 1965, geologist Qian Fang and his team made a significant discovery near Nabang Village, Yuanmou County, Yunnan Province—two tooth fossils belonging to “Yuanmou Man.” This remarkable find represents a significant milestone in the Chinese people’s quest to unravel the mysteries of human evolution and explore our historical lineage. Scientific calculations have confirmed that Yuanmou Man lived approximately 1.7 million years ago. Today, these two incisor fossils are proudly showcased in the Geological Museum of China, silently recounting the ancient human world to all who behold them.

The Zhoukoudian Site Museum houses over 1,000 fossil specimens that provide clear answers to the enduring questions of the Chinese people about their origins and identity.

Since the successful excavation of a human tooth fossil in Zhoukoudian Town, Fangshan District, in 1921, this extraordinary site, which holds the secrets of human ancestral evolution, has unfolded like a treasure chest, revealing one surprise after another to the world. In 1927, a remarkably well-preserved human tooth fossil was unearthed, leading to the naming of the ancient human it represented as “*Sinanthropus pekinensis*,” commonly known as “Peking Man” (700,000–200,000 years ago). In 1933, over 40 human fossils, including three relatively complete skulls (30,000–10,000 years ago), were discovered in the Upper Cave. Through scientific and technological means, re-

Historical Explorations, Human Origins

searchers painstakingly reconstructed the skulls of the “Upper Cave Man” and were astounded to find that their physical features closely resembled those of modern humans.

In addition to the Peking Man and Upper Cave Man fossils, ancient human fossils from 200,000–100,000 years ago and 42,000–38,500 years ago were also unearthed in Zhoukoudian. As various fossils of different periods were successively excavated at the Zhoukoudian site, people were surprised to find that the ancient human fossils unearthed here covered three stages in the history of human evolution—*Homo erectus*, *homo sapiens neanderthalensis* and modern *homo sapiens*. They constitute the continuous sequence of ancient human evolution, and are of extremely important scientific research value.

The Zhoukoudian Site Museum proudly exhibits six remarkably intact models of ancient human skull fossils. Research reveals that Upper Cave Man represents a significant advancement compared to Peking Man. Not only did they surpass their predecessors in physical attributes, but they also displayed a unique aesthetic sense. Based on calculations, the average height of Upper Cave Man was approximately 1.74 m for males and 1.59 m for females, which is 0.18 m and 0.15 m taller than Peking Man, respectively. Moreover, Upper Cave Man exhibited a newfound artistic expression by using animal tendons to string together animal skulls, teeth, shells and bones into ornaments, reflecting their innate appreciation of beauty.

Today, the Zhoukoudian Site Museum offers a wealth of multimedia and interactive facilities, providing visitors with the opportunity to “touch” history and engage in a virtual conversation with our ancestors through an immersive experience.



The Ivory fossil skeleton of a mammoth

Splendid Architecture of the Ancient Capital

Translated by Wang Wei Edited by Brad Green, Anne Ruisi
Photos by Wang Guibin, Wang Jianing, Wang Zicheng

Beijing has long attracted the attention of the world thanks to its ancient history and splendid culture. The city came into being more than 3,000 years ago, and served as the capital for various dynasties for over 860 years. This rich experience has resulted in the city's unique temperament today.

Divided by a 7.8-kilometre (km) central axis running from north to south, Beijing features a symmetric layout within its design. At the centre of the city, the imperial palace (the Forbidden City) originally took the shape of the Chinese character “凸” (*tu*), and later expanded outward. The city's development reflects the traditional design concept of looking to the future while respecting the past.



Yongdingmen Gate

Yongdingmen Gate was originally built in 1553 during the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) and is the southern starting point of the Central Axis of Beijing. It was rebuilt in 2004 to commemorate the people's wish for lasting peace. The middle of the three gates along the south city wall and the largest of the seven gates of Beijing's outer city wall during the Ming and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties, it has witnessed Beijing's urban development.

After it was completed, the capital's Central Axis was extended from Zhengyangmen Gate to Yongdingmen Gate, for a total distance of 7.8 km, ending at the Bell Tower in the north. This laid the foundation for Beijing's Central Axis to become the world's longest urban central axis.

Yongdingmen Gate

Temple of Agriculture

The Temple of Agriculture complex, dedicated to the god of agriculture, was built in 1420. This was the place where emperors of the Ming and Qing dynasties performed rituals to ensure that nature provided a bountiful harvest. In 1531, two more altars for the Goddess of Earth and the Goddess of Heaven were added.

Located in the Temple of Agriculture, Beijing Ancient Architecture Museum is China's first special museum dedicated to collecting, studying and displaying the technologies, art and developmental history of ancient Chinese architecture. The permanent exhibition “Development History of the Technologies of Ancient Chinese Architecture” displays the long history of ancient Chinese architecture through real objects, pictures and models. The caisson ceiling in the main hall of the Longfu Temple and the model of old Beijing in 1949 are the most valuable of all the collections. Built during the Ming Dynasty, the caisson ceiling is round outside and square inside. The entire ceiling



▲ An exhibition hall in the Beijing Ancient Architecture Museum

is so exquisitely and splendidly decorated that it is indeed a wonder. The most precious part of the work is a horoscope map with a diameter of nearly two metres. Located in the core of the caisson ceiling, the map is a hard-to-get object for studying ancient astronomy. The caisson ceiling is generally accepted as a unique work in the field of ancient architecture. Made in 1950, the model of old Beijing is pieced together by 108 sand plates, and it occupies an area of nearly 90 square metres (sq. m). The model gives a detailed and realistic description of each street and lane, government authorities, residential houses, gardens and ancient buildings of Beijing, providing rare and vivid visual material for studying the ancient capital.





Zhengyangmen Gate

Zhengyangmen Gate

Zhengyangmen Gate, the main south gate of the inner city of old Beijing, was built at the same time as the Forbidden City. As one of the important remnants of the city wall of Beijing from the Ming and Qing dynasties, it has been standing on the Central Axis for nearly 600 years. Among the old city gates of Beijing, it was the most highly regulated, with the tallest and grandest buildings. It embodies the city layout, military defence, ritual system and architectural art of ancient China. It is also an important carrier of the history and culture of the ancient capital.

Surrounded by a moat, it once included a gate tower, archery tower and barbican of the Ming and Qing dynasties. A splendid example of Old Beijing's city wall, it was grand and magnificent. Zhengyangmen Gate served as a national gate for ceremonies in the Ming and Qing dynasties due to its important geographi-

cal location. On February 3, 1949, the Chinese People's Liberation Army held a grand entrance ceremony here.

Today, the Zhengyang Gate Tower and archery tower are two separate single buildings. Qianmen Gate has been referred specifically to the archery tower. Qianmen Street, a well-known and prosperous business street, is located along the Central Axis of Beijing, with the archery tower at the centre.

Zhengyangmen Gate, the main south gate of the inner city of old Beijing, was built at the same time as the Forbidden City.

Imperial Ancestral Temple

Looking at the Central Axis of Beijing, two old buildings in front of the Forbidden City are particularly important. These are the Imperial Ancestral Temple on the left and the Altar of Land and Grain on the right. According to a masterpiece combining Chinese and Western elements, the east of the palace would always be the location for the Imperial Ancestral Temple, while the west would be the location for the Altar of Land and Grain.

The Imperial Ancestral Temple is where Chinese emperors stored their ancestors' tablets and worshiped them during festivals and ceremonies. Emperors of the Ming and Qing dynasties used the Imperial Ancestral Temple for nearly 600 years. Visitors will be struck by the solemn and imposing structures surrounded by towering cypress trees. Most of the striking cypress trees in the complex are several hundred years old, yet they are still strong, vigorous and attractively shaped.



Dipamkara Pagoda

Tongzhou was once the terminal point for grain transported to Beijing along the Grand Canal. This thriving transportation network has left many historical monuments, including Dipamkara Pagoda, which has been recognised as a symbol of grain transportation at the northernmost end of the canal. In ancient times, when travellers saw the pagoda, they knew that they had arrived at Tongzhou. The pagoda is the oldest of the four famous pagodas along the canal, the other three being Sheli Temple in Linqing, Wenfeng Pagoda in Yangzhou and Liuhe Pagoda in Hangzhou. Dipamkara Pagoda dates back to the Northern Zhou Dynasty (AD

557–581). The time-honoured pagoda is still the most beautiful landmark in today's Beijing Urban Sub-Centre and Grand Canal Cultural Belt.

Dipamkara Pagoda is located inside Sanjiao Temple in Tongzhou. Sanjiao Temple is also known as "three temples and one pagoda," referring to a Confucian Temple, a Buddhist temple called Youshengjiao, the Taoist Ziqing Palace and Dipamkara Pagoda. The temples are arranged to form the Chinese character "品" and stand independent of each other. This is China's only architectural complex in which Confucian, Buddhist and Taoist temples can all be found.

Yuanmingyuan

Yuanmingyuan, also known as the Garden of Perfect Brightness, was a large-scale imperial garden built during the Qing Dynasty. The park was composed of Yuanmingyuan and its affiliated gardens, Changchun Garden and Qichun Garden (later named Wanchun Garden). Yuanmingyuan, covering 3.5 square kilometres, has 150 iconic landscapes. Combining various garden styles, it is dubbed as a model of garden-building art.

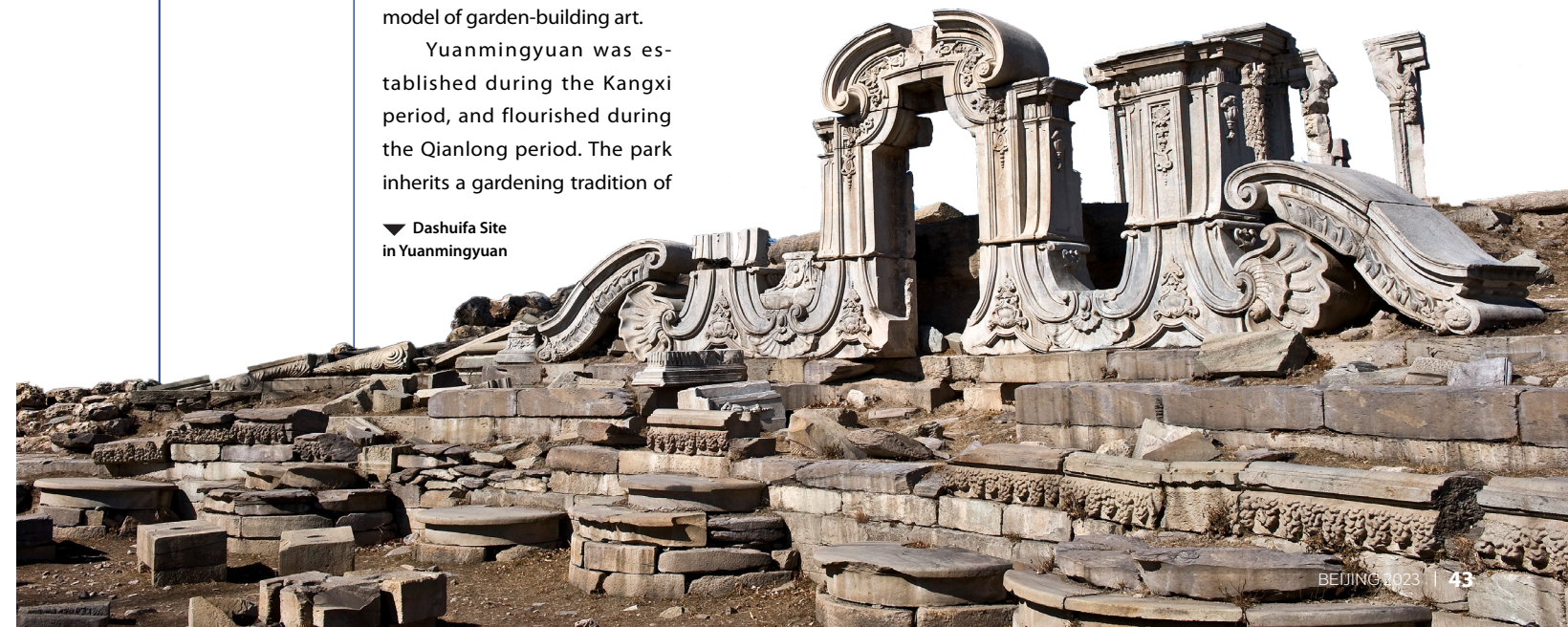
Yuanmingyuan was established during the Kangxi period, and flourished during the Qianlong period. The park inherits a gardening tradition of

more than 3,000 years in China. It not only has the grace and luxury of palace architecture, but also the charm of gardens in the south of the Yangtze River combined with European architectural styles. As a whole, the overall layout is harmonious and perfect. Yuanmingyuan occupies an important position in the world's history of garden architecture. Its reputation

spread to Europe, and is known the world over as a Garden of Ten Thousand Gardens.

In 1860, the Eight-Nation Alliance invaded Beijing and the palace was destroyed by war. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the Yuanmingyuan site has undergone repairs and restoration, and has gradually become a cultural heritage park.

▼ Dashuifa Site in Yuanmingyuan





In ancient China, rituals and weapons were of significant importance to the country. Since ancient times, civilisations have been intertwined with the battles that forged them. Weapons, which play an important role on the battlefield, reflect a nation's wisdom, technological level and military prowess. Today, we can learn more about the evolution of science, technology and human thought by studying the developmental history of weapons.

Historical

Development of China's Weapons

Translated by Zhang Hongpeng Edited by Brad Green, Anne Rulsi
Photos by Pu Feng, Xue Jun

Significant Rituals and Weapons

Bronze has been a witness to Chinese civilisation since ancient times. In addition to bronze ritual vessels, weapons were also a group of important bronze implements. The National Museum of China and the Palace Museum store many ancient bronze wares. At these museums, visitors can find myriads of bronze weapons.

The oldest and most popular weapon from the ancient Chinese battlefield is the bronze dagger-axe (pronounced "ge" in Chinese). Compared with other bronze weapons such as battle axes, spears, halberds, axes and golden melon hammers, dagger-axes were preferred by soldiers for their special shapes and structures.

During the Western Zhou Dynasty (11th century–771 BC), chariots were used as a main tool of battle. While driving a chariot, soldiers found that the dagger-axe was the best weapon, as it could be used to cut, pierce, pull and push enemies. When wielding the weapon, one will realise that the point on its dagger can cause more serious damage than the spear's point. Moreover, the blade of the dagger-axe can be used to pull enemies. In chariot battles, soldiers could attack their enemies only after chariots approached each other. Therefore, the dagger-axe was the most effective weapon in those days. For a long period, the bronze dagger-axe was considered the best of the top five weapons for chariots.

In addition to bronze dagger-axes, the Palace Museum also houses many other exquisite bronze weapons from the Western Zhou Dynasty, which have various shapes. All the weapons are witnesses to historic battles in ancient times.

When bronze weapons were popular in China, the casting of bronze swords was a unique technique. During the Spring and Autumn and the Warring States periods, the production of bronze weapons thrived as a result of the frequent wars. At that time, the states of Wu and Yue were renowned for their bronze weapon production. During Fuchai's reign, Wu's techniques for casting swords were much better than those of other regions in China.

Currently, nine swords of Fuchai have been discovered, one of which is stored in the National Museum of China. It measures 59.1 centimetres (cm) long and its blade is 5 cm wide. The sword remains sharp, and it attracts many visitors every day.



▲ An ancient bronze sword

▼ Shaoxu Sword from the Spring and Autumn Period



Shaoxu Sword from the Spring and Autumn Period

Bows, Arrows, Knives and Swords

Weapons no doubt have an influence on a country's safety. Nurhaci (reign: 1616–1626), a Jurchen chieftain who founded the Later Jin (1616–1636), the precursor of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), in 1616, agreed with this notion. Afterwards, Dorgon (1612–1650, the 14th son of Nurhaci) led armies into Shanhai Pass, which was the gateway to the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) in those days. For decades, Nurhaci and his sons used various weapons to battle with other tribes, ethnic groups and the Ming Dynasty, finally establishing the Qing Dynasty. Therefore, weapons, including swords, knives, armour and arrows, played an important role in the founding of the dynasty.

During the early Qing Dynasty, rulers ordered their successors to not forget military preparation in peacetime. A permanent exhibition of weapons at the Palace Museum (also known as the Forbidden City) displays weapons under the rules of Hong Taiji (reign: 1626–1643, the eighth son of Nurhaci) to Emperor Jiaqing (reign: 1796–1820), including saddles, armour, horsewhips, bows, arrows and quivers. The weap-

on-themed exhibition gives visitors a glimpse of the importance that Qing Dynasty rulers placed on weapons. Today, when visiting the museum, people are still impressed by the old weapons.

During the Qing Dynasty, the Eight Banners were the military divisions. To inspect the military training of the Eight Banners, Hong Taiji established the military parade system. After designating Beijing as the capital, Emperor Shunzhi (reign: 1644–1661) required a military parade every three years. Before the military parade, the armour-clad emperor rode a horse into the venue with a horsewhip in hand and a quiver and a knife on his waist. The military parade was at its largest during the Qing Dynasty. The number of participating infantrymen, cavalymen and artillerymen was about 20,000 people. During the parade, soldiers performed shooting arrows, firing guns and group exercises. To avoid overworking soldiers, Emperor Qianlong (reign: 1736–1796) ordered the production of over 10,000 suits of cotton armour to replace the heavy iron armour during the military parade.

Most helmets and armour displayed at the Palace Museum were produced in those days.

In ancient China, bows were divided into multiple types according to their strength. People who want to draw different types of bows require different physical strengths. Emperors Kangxi (reign: 1661–1722) and Qianlong were excellent archers. Emperor Kangxi could draw a bow with a draw weight of 105 kilogrammes and was able to shoot 13 arrows one after another.

Through their long-time evolution, Chinese weapons reached their heyday in terms of designs and casting techniques during the Qing Dynasty. Knives and swords produced during the dynasty were distinguished for their high quality and exquisite designs. They played a great role on battlefields during the mid-Qing Dynasty. However, sharp knives and swords could only work in the cold weapon era. With technological development, the roles of knives and swords were taken over by modern firearms. As a result, knives and swords have become common exhibits at museums.



Bow and arrow used by Emperor Taizong of the Qing Dynasty

A Kingdom of Weaponry

A tank named Gongchen (meaning, "a meritorious official") stands out from other tanks displayed on the first floor underground of the Military Museum of the Chinese People's Revolution. The Gongchen was the first tank of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA). Due to its long service life and outdated parts, the tank was initially called the "old-guy tank." In 1949, the tank played an important role in the Jinzhou battle of the Liaoshen Campaign. During the battle, the tank was frequently repaired. After the battle, it was named "Gongchen." It continued to achieve great accomplishments in the Pingjin Campaign.

At the ceremony for the founding of the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949, the Gongchen was the first tank to pass Tian'anmen Square during the military parade. Today, the Chinese PLA's new-generation tanks have been ranked as world-class armoured vehicles. The Gongchen tank

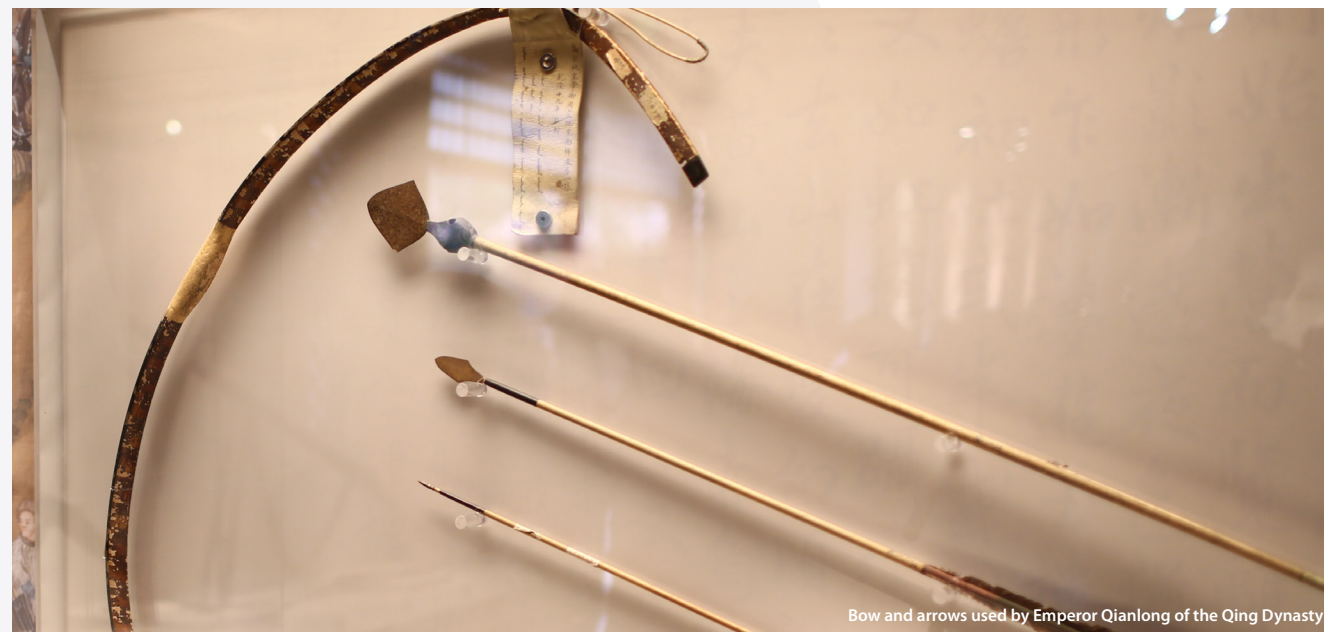
is housed in the collection of the Military Museum of the Chinese People's Revolution as an honourable piece of historical weaponry.

When the Gongchen led a tank formation across Tian'anmen Square on October 1, 1949, an aircraft formation flew above the square at the same time. At the time, the tank and aircraft formations both rumbled with a loud noise.

Currently, the 26 aircraft that attended the ceremony of the founding of the People's Republic of China are stored at the China Aviation Museum. The museum also houses various aircraft that took part in the War to Resist the US Aggression and Aid Korea, playing a significant role in air defence. Aircraft stored in the museum include the plane taken by Mao Zedong (1893–1976) and other Chinese leaders, the bomber and strike aircraft that attended the nuclear tests, China's first subsonic jet fighter, and China's

domestically designed and produced supersonic jet fighters. These aircraft have witnessed the development of China's air force.

In addition to the Gongchen tank, Type 59 medium tanks displayed on the first floor and the basement of the Military Museum of the Chinese People's Revolution reflect the development of the tank industry in China. The Dong Feng-2 intermediate-range ground-to-ground missile on display marks the start of the development of China's missiles, rockets and satellites. The J-5 fighter is a model of the development of China's aviation industry. Dongfanghong 1 at the museum was China's first manmade satellite. The museum houses over 1,000 weapons and resembles a kingdom of weaponry. Each piece of armament exhibited at the museum has its own story to tell. All the items on exhibit have witnessed the development of the Chinese PLA.



Bow and arrows used by Emperor Qianlong of the Qing Dynasty

