

**TITLE:** Jade Cong **LOCATION:** Liangzhu, China **DATE:** 3300-2200 BCE

**ARTIST:** **PERIOD/STYLE:** Neolithic/ Liangzhu **PATRON:**

### **MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:**

#### **FORM:**

The disk is known as a Bi. The tube is known as a Cong. The meaning and purpose are both a mystery. They have both been excavated from burial sites. The face pattern on a cong may refer to spirits or deities. According to the British Museum, a cong is a box-like grid structure around a central hole. The hole in the center stored items. The design forms the face of a creature or animal. The artist rubbed jade against sandpaper to smooth each piece. Although the cong appears to be made of layers upon layers of jade sheets, the artist created the cong using one super-big piece of jade.

#### **FUNCTION:**

While many similar objects have been uncovered, art historians do not know the exact function of this cong. From ancient China to today, jade has symbolized wealth. Possession of this object would have marked status, but the cong could also have been used as a container for spices, herbs, or money. It may also have been used for ritual purposes; the jade cong was found buried in a grave and probably served as a symbol of wealth and power for the elite. This proves that ancient Chinese people felt the need to bury objects signifying wealth with the deceased, which suggests a pretty strong belief in an afterlife.

#### **CONTENT:**

The principal decoration on cong of the Liangzhu period was the face pattern, which may refer to spirits or deities. On the square-sectioned pieces, the face pattern is placed across the corners, whereas on the bracelet form it appears in square panels. These faces are derived from a combination of a man-like figure and a mysterious beast.

#### **CONTEXT:**

A group of Neolithic peoples grouped today as the Liangzhu culture lived in the Jiangsu province of China during the third millennium B.C.E. Their jades, ceramics and stone tools were highly sophisticated.

### **INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

#### **ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

Jade is very hard and must be worn down with abrasive sand. They used two distinct types of ritual jade objects: a disc, later known as a bi, and a tube, later known as a cong. The main types of cong have a square outer section around a circular inner part, and a circular hole, though jades of a bracelet shape also display some of the characteristics of cong. They clearly had great significance, but despite the many theories the meaning and purpose of bi and cong remain a mystery. They were buried in large numbers: one tomb alone had 25 bi and 33 cong. Spectacular examples have been found at all the major archaeological sites.

#### **INTERPRETATION:**

Jade is highly valued by the Chinese. It was worth more than gold. The craftsmanship and the highly technical stylization lead researchers to believe that the symbols must reflect power and authority.

### **DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

**TITLE:** Terra cotta warriors      **LOCATION:** mausoleum of the first Qin emperor of China      **DATE:** 221-209 BCE.

**ARTIST:** \_\_\_\_\_ **PERIOD/STYLE:** Qin Dynasty      **PATRON:** Qin Shi Huang Di

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Painted terracotta

**FORM:**

22 Square mile underground burial complex with 8000 life sized terracotta warriors. There is also an unopened tomb inside which Qi Shi Huang Di has been buried under a 140 foot mound of earth. The contents are a mystery but archaeologists believe it to have innumerable treasures including a river of mercury and a gem stone covered ceiling. The art features archaic formalism, simplicity of volume and contour, rigidity, frontality and sharp realism.

**FUNCTION:**

Qin Shi Huangdi did more than defeat rival states and build a unified empire; he also attempted to conquer death. The first emperor believed in an afterlife where people could continue their lives. Obsessed with his quest for immortality, Qin Shi Huangdi ordered over 700,000 workers to construct a subterranean domain that would parallel his worldly existence. This mortuary complex survived his death in 210 BC. Work continued after the emperor died. The project was halted in 209 B.C.E., one year after his death, when uprisings got in the way of doing more work on this incredibly elaborate funerary site. Over 2000 years later, a group of Chinese farmers accidentally discovered the first fragments of the First emperors previously hidden underground world.

**CONTENT:**

Archaeologists have thus far uncovered an army of 8000 life sized terracotta warriors. Stationed in three underground vaults, this vigilant force stands in a precise formation ready to protect the First emperor. Astonishingly, no two warriors are identical. Their shoes, hairstyles, facial features and uniform colors all vary. Archeologists have also unearthed 10 foot long bronze chariots drawn by teams of four bronze horses. The first emperor equipped his soldiers with thousands of bronze weapons including spears, crossbows, and swords. Recent finds also include recreational items such as lifelike bronze waterfowl and agile acrobats ready to entertain the first emperor and his court. Non-military figures have also been found, including dancers, musicians, acrobats, laborers, and officials.

**CONTEXT:**

The ruler who would become China's First Emperor began his royal career as King Zheng, a 13 year old ruler of Qin a state on the northwestern fringe of the Chinese world. The young monarch lived in a chaotic political environment where seven states waged perpetual war against one another. The young but ruthless ruler forged an invincible army that attacked its foes "like stone smashing eggs." By 221 BC the now 35 year old conqueror unified the warring kingdoms into a single empire. King Zheng triumphantly took a new name that better reflected his power and majesty--Qin Shi Huangdi, the first emperor of China. He conquered China with a ferocious army and held it together with a centralized system of government. Qin Shi Huangdi first implemented a uniform system of weights, coins, and measurements. He then built a network of roads to unify the formerly independent parts of his new empire. Finally, he ordered the construction of a Great Wall to protect the Empire's northern border from marauding nomads.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

The First Emperor is known for stunning innovations that consolidated his rule through modernization. During his reign, he introduced the standardization of currency, writing, measurements and more. He connected cities and states with advanced systems of roads and canals. He is also credited with continuing the construction of the Great Wall, which is perhaps the most widely-known symbol still associated with China to this day. We also see the first assembly-line style production in the creation of his terracotta warriors, horses and chariots. One of the most extraordinary features of the terracotta warriors is that each appears to have distinct features—an incredible feat of craftsmanship and production. Despite the custom construction of these figures, studies of their proportions reveal that their frames were created using an assembly production system that paved the way for advances in mass production and commerce.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

The production of this unprecedented number of figures demanded massive manpower and complex organization. Workers had to be fed, clothed, and housed. Kilns required a steady supply of firewood and a sticky red clay strong enough to support large figures. Archaeologists have discovered 87 different names stamped on the terracotta warriors. They believe that a team comprised of one master craftsman and ten apprentices could produce about a dozen individualized warriors a year. When multiplied by 87 teams, this process could fabricate about 1000 warriors a year. Although the figures are mainly the grey color of the clay from which they are made, there are remnants of paint on them that indicate they were once brightly colored. Excavation also revealed other mysterious findings, like strangely high levels of mercury and evidence that the poisonous substance coursed through an intricate system of underground troughs, replicating the topography of the actual rivers and seas carving the surrounding landscape.

**INTERPRETATION:**

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

Shi Huangdi is known for burying alive thousands of Confucian scholars.

**TITLE:** Funeral banner of Lady Dai **LOCATION:** China **DATE:** 180 BCE.

---

**ARTIST:** \_\_\_\_\_ **PERIOD/STYLE:** Han Dynasty **PATRON:** Li Cang

---

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Painted silk

**FORM:**

The over 6 foot long and 3 foot wide T shaped banner uses three horizontal registers, or panels, to illustrate Lady Dai's ascent to the heavenly realm as a sequential journey. The imagery is inspired by an ancient Chinese origin story about the ten suns of DiJun (The emperor of the Eastern Heavens and his wife XiHe the goddess of the sun.)

**FUNCTION:**

Although scholars still debate the function of these banners, we know they had some connection with the afterlife. They may be "name banners" used to identify the dead during the mourning ceremonies, or they may have been burial shrouds intended to aid the soul in its passage to the afterlife. Lady Dai's banner is important for two primary reasons. It is an early example of pictorial (representing naturalistic scenes not just abstract shapes) art in China. Secondly, the banner features the earliest known portrait in Chinese painting.

**CONTENT:**

The next earthly scene features a recognizable portrait of Lady Dai leaning on a cane found inside her tomb. The artist positions her as the central figure in a departure scene located near the center of the banner. Three maids attend Lady Dai as she bids farewell to two kneeling figures. Some scholars believe that the two kneeling figures may be emissaries from the heavenly realm. Dragons are mythical creatures that play an important role in Chinese art. According to Chinese legends, dragons can freely move between heaven and earth. The two intertwined dragons help unify the central register. Their long tails pass through a round bi disk, a traditional symbol representing the heavens. This visual motif links the mourning and departure scenes while reinforcing the idea that the dragons will help Lady Dai ascend to the heavenly realm. Her quest for immortality ends in a heavenly realm shown in a wide register across the T's horizontal crossbar. Two deities known as the Greater and Lesser Lords of Fate guard the entrance to the heavenly realm. The gods hold records detailing Lady Dai's life. Fortunately, she passes on the wings of the dragon. The sun and moon are represented with allegorical figures of cranes or crows as the sun, and the toad for the moon.

**CONTEXT:**

In 1972, Chinese archaeologists excavated three tombs buried beneath a small hill on the outskirts of present day Changsa. This Lady Dai's birth name was Xin Zhui; she was married to the Marquis of Dai, whose name was Li Cang, and they had one son. All three of them were buried together in an opulent tomb with many luxury objects to accompany them in the next life. Lady Dai was buried in not one but four coffins. Lady Dai's perfectly preserved corpse lay within the innermost of four nested coffins. The T shaped silk banner covered her innermost coffin. This elaborate banner is an early masterpiece of Chinese pictorial art offering important insights into Han Dynasty ideas about the afterlife. During the Han Dynasty, the ideas of Confucius really took hold throughout Chinese culture. Confucius was an advocate of family loyalty, ancestor worship, and the respect of elders by their children. The fact that Lady Dai and her entire family received such an opulent burial could be connected in part to the tenets of Confucianism.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

There are two important things to remember about this banner: First, it represents one of the earlier examples of pictorial art in China. Before this, artists had mostly painted abstract shapes and patterns, so the whole plant motif was a nice change. Second, the banner is also the earliest known example of portraiture in Chinese art. Lady Dai appears both living and deceased on the banner. The 10 inch tall image of Lady Dai is the earliest known painted portrait of a specific person in Chinese art. It bears a very close correspondence to Lady Dai's actual corpse. Thick layers of charcoal and clay insulated Lady Dai's body from the decaying effects of oxygen and bacteria. As a result, her remarkably well preserved facial features are easily identifiable. In the mourning scene, we can also appreciate the importance of Lady Dai's banner for understanding how artists began to represent depth and space in early Chinese painting. They made efforts to indicate depth through the use of the overlapping bodies of the mourners. They also made objects in the foreground larger, and objects in the background smaller, to create the illusion of space in the mourning hall.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

The Han artist uses the mourner's overlapping bodies to convey a sense of depth. In addition, the artist creates an illusion of space by drawing the ritual vessels in the foreground larger than those in the background. The artist also uses continuous narrative as a storytelling device. The artist uses allegory as well in the representation of the heavens as animals figures. This banner also embodies references to another early Chinese philosophy, Daoism. The part of the banner that relates to heaven has three components. The left panel shows yin elements (like the crescent moon), the right panel shows yang elements (like the sun with the crow in front of it), and the imagery in the center reflects the mixture of yin and yang together.

**INTERPRETATION:**

Her path to immortality begins with an underworld portrayed in the lowest register. The bottom panel is a place where souls undergo their first metamorphosis. The subterranean world is a watery realm inhabited by serpents and turtles. A muscular central figure stands on the backs of fish and serpents as he supports a white rectangle thought to represent the earth. Her soul then rises to an earthly realm where it becomes the centerpiece of mourning and departure rituals. The first of two rituals is the mourning hall scene, where five men in two opposing rows face an object placed on a low stand. Many scholars believe that the soft, round object represents Lady Dai's body wrapped in the layers of silk cloth that covered her corpse. The mourners fulfill their ritual duty by offering Lady Dai's spirit food and wine. The top register depicts the heavenly Land of the immortals, where Lady Dai will reside for eternity. Red is the color of immortality.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

Silk comes from the cocoons of silkworms. Farmers grow mulberry trees as the sole food source of the worms. Very fine liquid from their bodies is extruded as filament to create their cocoons. It solidifies in the air as silk thread, that is weaved on looms to make fabric.

**TITLE:** Longmen caves      **LOCATION:** Luoyang, China      **DATE:** 493-1127

---

**ARTIST:** \_\_\_\_\_ **PERIOD/STYLE:** Tang & Northern Wei Dynasties      **PATRON:** Gaozong, Wu Zetian and others

---

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Limestone

**FORM:**

The Longmen caves are carved into limestone mountains on both sides of the Yi river about 10 miles south of the ancient Chinese capital of Luoyang. The complex includes 2,345 caves, shrines and niches. These contain almost 110,000 stone statues depicting the Buddha in sizes ranging from a few inches to larger than a 5-story building. The Fengxian Temple complex is Longmen's largest and most important sculptural group. Mixed in with the figure statues, the site features close to 2500 stelae and inscriptions. Because of the many monoliths at the site, it is also sometimes known as the "Forest of Ancient Stelae."

**FUNCTION:**

The Fengxian Temple (AKA Ancestor Worshiping Cave) is more than an artistic achievement it is also a sophisticated example of how art can be used as political propaganda. The sculptors may have deliberately based their portrait of the Vairocana Buddha upon the Empress Wu Zeitan. The wily Empress became China's preeminent ruler after her husband suffered a debilitating stroke. Wu's generous financial support for the Fengxian Temple may have had a political motive. The image of Buddha as a supreme deity surrounded by a loyal Court provided a model that legitimized her own position in the Tang government.

**CONTENT:**

The Tang Empress Wu Zetian commissioned the Fengxian temple in 672. Completed just three years later the semicircular complex contains eight sculptural figures grouped around a central 56 foot high statue of a seated Buddha. A symmetrical arrangement includes a pair of disciples, bodhisattvas, Heavenly Kings, and guardian figures. The saintly disciples and bodhisattvas encouraged worshippers to seek Enlightenment, while the fierce Heavenly Kings and guardian figures stand ready to protect the Buddha and his attendants.

**CONTEXT:**

As Buddhism spread across the Silk Road from India to China its followers develop new ways of representing Buddha. The early Shakyamuni Buddha stressed how the historical Buddha's life and teachings helped individuals achieve enlightenment. In contrast the Vairocana Buddha is not a man who actually lived. He is instead a merciful god-like figure who could help the entire human race achieve salvation. The central Vairocana Buddha (more than 55 feet high including its pedestal) is flanked on either side by a bodhisattva, a heavenly king, and a thunderbolt holder (vajrapani). Vairocana represents the primordial Buddha who generates and presides over all the Buddhas of the infinite universes that form Buddhist cosmology. This idea—of the power of one supreme deity over all the others—resonated in the vast Tang Empire which was dominated by the Emperor at its summit and supported by his subordinate officials. These monumental sculptures intentionally mirrored the political situation. The dignity and imposing presence of Buddha and the sumptuous appearance of his attendant bodhisattvas is significant in this context.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

The carving of the grottoes and the sculptures that populate them happened in four distinct phases that spanned several dynasties and many centuries. The first phase was during the Northern Wei dynasty (493–534 C.E.) during which approximately 30% of the work was completed. The second phase was rather slow because there was a lot of strife in the area at the time, and it's hard to make art in times of strife. Still, carving started to pick up again during the Sui Dynasty (581–618 C.E.) and the early years of the Tang Dynasty (618–907 C.E.). The third phase was the most ambitious of all, as this was the high point of the Tang Dynasty, when Chinese Buddhism flourished. There was a major surge of cave making and statue carving from 626 C.E. until the middle of the 8th century that accounts for 60% of the carvings at the site. The fourth and final phase began during the end of the Tang dynasty and merged into the Northern Song dynasty. Finally, after six centuries of artistic endeavor, the carving of caves and Buddha sculptures came to an end.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

Buddhism is an "iconic" religion, meaning that figural representations of revered teachers like the Buddha play a big role in its art. The figures at Longmen are extremely intricate and varied, exhibiting an elegance and gracefulness of form that is consistent throughout the entire array. Many different artists were involved, some whose names are known and others whose names aren't. It comes as no surprise that the sculptures at Longmen caves have come to be viewed by later generations of historians as examples of the epitome of Chinese Buddhist art.

**INTERPRETATION:**

The size and iconography of the Fengxian Temple statue of the vairocana Buddha reflect Buddha's status as a Celestial being. The statues colossal size is designed to impress upon visitors that they are in the presence of a Divine being. Buddha's lotus pose and calm demeanor encourage meditation. His topknot or ushnisha, symbolizes the spiritual power of the Buddha's Enlightenment. Buddha's elongated earlobes signal his ability to hear and compassionately respond to human suffering.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

**TITLE:** Gold and jade crown      **LOCATION:** Silla Kingdom, Korea      **DATE:** Fifth to sixth century C.E.

**ARTIST:** \_\_\_\_\_ **PERIOD/STYLE:** Three kingdoms Period/Silla **PATRON:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Metalwork

**FORM:**

The 11 inch high Crown contains a number of distinctive features. A group of three tree like vertical projections dominates its center. Two antler shaped projections extend on either side of the central group. Silla's legendary craftsman further embellish the crown by adding comma shaped Jade ornaments.

**FUNCTION:**

The royal crown's thin gold bands are very fragile. At first, scholars concluded that the crown functioned as a burial ornament because it could not withstand repeated use. However ancient records indicate that the Silla kings and queens played the role of a shaman or spiritual leader. When worn on ceremonial occasions the Golden Crown symbolized the rulers responsibility to ensure a favorable relationship with the spiritual World.

**CONTENT:**

Silla crowns became increasingly lavish with more ornamentation and additional, increasingly elongated branch-like protrusions. In this crown, three tree-shaped vertical elements evoke the sacred tree that once stood in the ritual precinct of Gyeongju. This sacred tree was conceived of as a "world tree," or an axis mundi that connected heaven and earth. Two additional antler-shaped protrusions may refer to the reindeer that were native to the Eurasian steppe that lies to the north of the peninsula. Attached to the branch-like features of the crown are tiny gold discs and jade ornaments called gogok. These jade ornaments symbolize ripe fruits hanging from tree branches, representing fertility and abundance. With sunlight falling on its golden discs, the crown must have been a luminous sight indeed.

**CONTEXT:**

The Silla Kingdom ruled Southeastern Korea during the three Kingdom. From 57 BCE to 688 CE the kingdom's kings and queens rules for their capital city at Gyeongju. The Royal courts glittering wealth awed visiting Chinese emissaries, who described Gyeongju as "the city of gold". Modern archaeological excavations have uncovered treasures that more than just ruling monarchs. Silla's ruling elite believed that death marked the beginning of a new afterlife. They therefore buried their kings and queens in royal tombs covered by an impenetrable layer of heavy river boulders and massive mounds of dirt. These mounds protect their golden treasures from grave robbers. Archaeologists uncovered the crown inside a massive double tomb containing the remains of a Silla king and queen. Known as Cheonmachong (Heavenly horse) tomb in Gyeongju (the City of Gold). The king's tomb contained weapons and a silver and gilded crown. Contrary to expectations, the Queen's tomb contained a richly decorated gold and Jade Crown.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

Chinese Buddhist monks brought Buddhist religious ideas to Silla. In 527 Silla adopted Buddhism as its state religion. This decision had a significant impact upon burial practices and art. Cremation replaced burial tombs while Buddhist temples sprang up across the kingdom. As a result, the era of golden burials ended as craftsman turned their attention to meeting the growing demand for images of the Buddha and his Bodhisattvas. The sophisticated metalwork exhibited in the manufacture of these crowns indicates that whoever made them knew something about the techniques of goldsmithing. This advanced knowledge may have come to Korea from the Greeks or the Etruscans. In fact, there is evidence of beads and glassware from as far away as the Mediterranean Sea in the tombs where the crowns were found. It's entirely possible that the technological know-how needed to make cut-gold crowns came along with the beads and other luxury items.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

**INTERPRETATION:**

The Axis Mundi is a point of connection between Heaven and Earth. Many cultures have sacred objects to express this concept. The branch-like projections on the Silla Crown represent the idea of a world tree connecting the celestial and terrestrial worlds. The vertical elements symbolize stylized trees and antler forms to represent life and supernatural power. The tree shape is referred to as "Daegwan", as it refers to the sacred tree. The tiny gold discs and jade ornaments are called "gogok". They symbolize fertility and abundance.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

The three kingdoms were Goguryeo, Baekje, and Silla.



**TITLE:** Travelers among Mountains and Streams **LOCATION:** China **DATE:** 1000 C.E.

**ARTIST:** Fan Kuan **PERIOD/STYLE:** Northern Song (Song) Dynasty **PATRON:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** ink and colors on silk

**FORM:**

Travelers among mountains and streams gives a visual expression to Fan Kuan's Daoist ideals. The scrolls long length invites you to go on a visual Journey where mountains and water coexist in harmony. The Journey begins in a foreground comprised of a low-lying group of boulders. Although the boulders are realistically drawn they are not in color. Like other Chinese landscape artists, Fan Quan forgoes color pigments in favor of the demanding medium of ink monochrome on silk. He deftly varies the thickness and wetness of his brushes to create an astonishing array of textures that portray the nuances of nature.

**FUNCTION:**

Fan Kuan's landscape epitomizes the early Northern Song monumental style of landscape painting. Nearly seven feet in height, the hanging scroll composition presents universal creation in its totality, and does so with the most economic of means. His paintings are tributes to nature, not representations of unique rock or tree formations.

**CONTENT:**

Our visual Journey Begins along a path in the lower right corner where two barely visible men lead a mule train laden with wood. The path guides our eyes to the left where a tiny traveler crosses over a bridge spanning a waterfall. The figure is following a path leading to a half concealed temple nestled on the side of a wooded knoll. A majestic mountain in the background dwarfs the diminutive human figures, suggesting the permanence of nature and the impermanence of human actions. Fan Quan reinforces the Daoist view of the relationship between humans and the natural world by tucking his own signature in the foliage above the mule train. Fan Quan uses mist to veil the transition from the temple to the towering mountain dominating the background. The mist and mountain convey a sense of timeless grandeur. A long slender waterfall further emphasizes the mountains awesome presents. Fan Kuan demonstrates his deft use of shifting perspective by slanting the mountaintop shrubbery toward the viewer. This unique perspective adds visual variety and depth to the mountain's craggy face. It is a journey facilitated by shifting perspective points.

**CONTEXT:**

During Fan Kuan's lifetime Song Dynasty philosophers restored Confucian ideas about social harmony. Known as neo-confucianism this beliefs places great emphasis upon Li a concept expressing the search for underlying patterns and order. Fan Kuan and his contemporaries are lauded as being the first masters if the recording of light, shade, distance, and texture. When society was just recovering from the chaos of dynastic collapse, Fan's image reflects a profound belief in the capacity of nature to serve as the model for human society. Like an enthroned emperor surrounded by his ministers of state and subjects the towering central peak presides over a carefully ordered landscape.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

Monumental landscape painting emerged as China's premier art form during the early Song Dynasty. Travelers Among Mountains and Streams is an iconic work by Fan Quan, a recognized master of the genre known as shan shui hua or "Mountain Water painting". The work utilizes a monochromatic palette and shifting perspective to create a harmonious composition filled with intricate and meaningful details. Many art historians rank the nearly seven foot hanging scroll as one of the greatest works in Chinese art. Fan Quan believed that nature was too vast to be viewed at one time or from one point of view. Rather than combine his viewers to a single fixed view-point, he used a technique called shifting perspective to provide multiple vantage points. This technique encourages a visual Journey that embraced the works overall composition and it's many intricate details. The painting exhibits three zones typical of Chinese landscape painting: the near zone, where humans go about their business; the middle, which is filled with atmosphere, water, and trees; and the far zone, the lofty reaches of the mountain tops, which people can only visit in their thoughts.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

Fan Kuan rejected urban life and a career working as a court painter. Instead he preferred retreating to the rugged landscape surrounding Mount Hua, a natural setting where he could closely observe streams cascading over rocks, clouds drifting across the sky, and mists forming in a valley. Fan Kuan's spiritual communion with nature reflects his strong commitment to Daoist principles. Daoism is an ancient Chinese philosophy based upon following the path known as the dao or "way". For Fan Kuan and other Daoists following the dao meant submitting to the enduring and unchanging principles of nature. Like other Daoist Fan Quan spurned fame, riches, and power. He spent his later years living in remote mountain temples where he found a deeper spiritual reality by seeking harmony with the rhythms of nature. Fan Kuan's painting is a vertical presentation that utilizes ink monochrome and shifting perspectives to create a natural world where nature overwhelms the insignificant impact of minuscule humans.

**INTERPRETATION:**

Travelers Among Mountains and Streams provides viewers with more than a Daoist landscape it also deepens the neo-confucian search for Li. Influenced by the neo-confucian idea Fan Quan did not depict a specific mountain. Instead he creates a harmonious natural setting expressing the essence of mountains. His orderly image of the timeless relationship between mountains, foothills and streams captures the neo-confucian idea of a harmonious natural order. When applied to human society Fan Kuan's landscape implies that an equally harmonious relationship should also exist between an emperor and his subjects. Similarly Fan Quan's image of a central mountain flanked by two lesser peaks references the neo-confucian notion of an emperor supported by his loyal ministers.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

This work has a balance of Li and Qi. Two ideas of neo-confucianism. Li=the principles of the thing such as a landscape and the elements of design that make it visible. Qi=the matter or energy which occupies space. Like Yin and Yang. Fan Kuan lived as a recluse and was one of many poets and artists of the time who were disenchanted with human affairs. He turned away from the world to seek spiritual enlightenment. Through his painting Travelers by Streams and Mountains, Fan Kuan expressed a cosmic vision of man's harmonious existence in a vast but orderly universe. The Neo-Confucian search for absolute truth in nature as well as self-cultivation reached its climax in the 11th century and is demonstrated in this work.

**TITLE:** The David Vases      **LOCATION:** China      **DATE:** 1351 C.E.

---

**ARTIST:** Imperial Kilns in Jingdezhen      **PERIOD/STYLE:** Yuan Dynasty.      **PATRON:** Zhang Wenjin

---

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** White porcelain with cobalt-blue underglaze

**FORM:**

Dragons decorate the body of the vases, the handles are elephants and once featured bronze rings which have been broken off, and the borders are decorated with bands of floral motifs.

**FUNCTION:**

They were made for the altar of a Daoist temple and their importance lies in the dated inscriptions on one side of their necks, above the bands of dragons. The long dedication is the earliest known on Chinese blue-and-white wares. The David vases are an artistic consequence of what historians call the Pax mongolica or “Mongolian Peace”. Each of the 2.5 foot tall vases contains a lengthy inscription filled with precise historic details. For example we learn that a man named Zhang Wenjin dedicated the vases on Tuesday May 13, 1351. He offered them as a donation to a Daoist Temple. The vases are intended to honor a revered 13th century Chinese general who had recently become recognized as a god. Zhang Wenjin expressed his hope that the new God will protect and bless his whole family. The original set, as presented by Wenjin to the temple, included a matching incense burner.

**CONTENT:**

The David vases feature two key mythological beasts, a dragon and the Phoenix. The artist- craftsman Jingdezhen wrapped an elongated dragon around the center of each vase. As China’s traditional symbol for the emperor the dragon represent high rank, power and good fortune. In Chinese mythology a dragon symbolizes abundance because of its ability to bring rain to parched lands. The blue clouds trailing each dragon may be a reference to this creature’s miraculous power. The artist-craftsman placed a phoenix along the bottom portion of each vases neck. Known as the “king of birds” the phoenix symbolizes good fortune because it only appears in times of peace and prosperity. The phoenix is also a symbol of the empress. Each vase pairs a phoenix with a dragon. Taken together these auspicious symbols stand for a perfect marriage.

**CONTEXT:**

Clay for making pottery fired below 1000 degrees Celsius can be found in most countries. However Chinese ceramics quickly became the most advanced in the world. China is especially rich in deposits of kaolin the key ingredient when porcelain is fired at about 1350 degrees Celsius. Porcelain is whiter, more translucent and more glass-like than pottery fired at lower temperatures. During the early to mid 14th century skilled ceramicist working at Imperial Kilns in Jingdezhen learned how to create a pure white translucent porcelain. This provided an ideal surface for a brilliant cobalt blue pigment that had to be imported from Persia. But reaching Persia required a long and sometimes dangerous journey that made cobalt a coveted commodity, with a value about twice that of gold. Ruthless Mongol armies led by Genghis Khan and his sons played an unexpected role in promoting China’s production of blue and white porcelain. Between 1206 and 1279 the Mongols successfully conquered, terrorized and unified a vast empire stretching from China to Persia. Paradoxically these destructive conquests promoted economic prosperity by ensuring a long period of peace and stability along the Silk Road connecting China and Persia. As a result Persian cobalt could reach Chinese kilns in Jingdezhen where skilled ceramicists used it to produce blue and white porcelain.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

Blue and white porcelain is one of China’s most celebrated innovations. The David vases are among the world’s best-known and most important examples of this prized ceramic product. The two vases are named for Sir Percival David, a British collector of rare Chinese ceramics. They are key links in a fascinating story that connects Mongol conquerors, Chinese ceramicist and Persian Cobalt mines. Cobalt was imported from Iran which was part of the Mogal empire. In the west, potters did not perfect the production process of porcelain until the 18th century.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

One reason porcelain is so prized is because, once it has been fired, it’s impermeable to water. Other types of ceramic, which are made from clay that is of a lesser quality or clay that hasn’t been fired at such a high temperature, requires additional glazing to be made impermeable. Impurities in lesser clay also mean that the final pieces are structurally weaker, requiring that vessels and other pieces be made with thicker walls. Porcelain is stronger and can be made into thin-walled, delicate forms with relative ease. The ability to transform ordinary clay into beautiful objects with a glassy, hard surface has captivated the imagination of people throughout history and across the globe. Chinese porcelain, by far the most advanced in the world, was made for the aristocracy, the domestic market, and for foreign export.

**INTERPRETATION:**

The dragons represent the emperor and empress (yang, masculine energy). The Phoenix represents yin (masculine energy). The vases are important records in the history of blue-and-white production because they are dated and dedicated to a Daoist temple in Jingdezhen. This helps art historians verify that such wares were being produced in 1351 C.E. in that place. It’s not often that such information is literally written out, after all, so it’s much celebrated when it happens.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

While differing in appearance, the two vases and the 100 million sunflower seeds made by Ai Weiwei’s crew share two striking similarities both were made out of porcelain by skilled ceramicists working in Jingdezhen. Ai Weiwei recognized Jingdezhen’s historic importance as the center of Chinese porcelain production. He chose to employ artisans and small-scale workshops to underscore their link with a great tradition of Chinese porcelain production.

**TITLE:** Portrait of Sin Sukju      **LOCATION:** Korea      **DATE:** C. 15th century C.E

**ARTIST:** Imperial Bureau of Painting      **PERIOD/STYLE:** Joseon Dynasty      **PATRON:**

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Hanging scroll (ink and colors on silk)

**FORM:**

Portraits of meritorious citizens (gongsin) were worshiped in family shrines (yeongdang). Conventions of gongsin portraiture: 3/4 view, official robes, and silk black hat. He also wears embroidered rank badge that shows his power and authority. Peacocks were considered to be high-ranking birds, and they, along with the fact that they are embroidered with gold thread, would have marked Sukju as an aristocrat and high official. Rendered in the format of a hanging scroll, this painting likely hung within the family shrine to guide the soul in the practice of ancestral worship.

**FUNCTION:**

Meritorious subjects such as Sin Sukju received a number of prized awards. For example Sin Sukju's award included a quantity of gold and silk and the distinction of having his name and services engraved on a great bell. In addition Sin Sukju received an even more coveted honor, sitting for a full length silk portrait. Sin Sukju's portrait represented a great personal achievement. It performed a number of important functions for the Joseon Dynasty and Sin Sukju's family. The Joseon kings used portraits to reward loyalty, underscoring the connection between scholar-officials and the crown. When displayed in a shrine, a long line of portrait scrolls provided an impressive visual image of fantastic continuity. The portraits that served as a form of political propaganda, expressing the unity of the country and the power of the Royal Court. Filial piety demanded that the living respect their ancestors.

**CONTENT:**

This painting shows Sin Sukju dressed in his official robes with a black silk hat on his head. In accordance with Korean portraiture conventions, court artists pictured subjects like Sin Sukju seated in a full-length view, often with their heads turned slightly and only one ear showing. Crisp, angular lines and subtle gradations of color characterize the folds of his gown. Here, the subject is seated in a folding chair with cabriole-style arms, where the upper part is convex and the bottom part is concave. Leather shoes adorn his feet, which rest on an intricately carved wooden footstool. In proper decorum, his hands are folded neatly and concealed within his sleeves. He wears a rank badge on his chest. Here, Sin Sukju's rank badge shows a pair of peacocks amongst flowering plants and clouds. It is an auspicious scene suiting a civic official, and especially luminous with the use of gold embroidery. Crafted in sets, rank badges were worn on both the front and back of the official overcoat.

**CONTEXT:**

In 1392 a line of Korean rulers ended the mongol domination by establishing the Joseon or "Fresh Dawn" Dynasty. The first Joseon kings more than lived up to their name. They purged corrupt practices, expanded the Kingdom's northern border and fostered a cultural Renaissance. Sin Sukju served the Joseon dynasty kings with great distinction. The monarchs rewarded the royal scholar-official by declaring him a meritorious subject who deserved an official portrait. Sin Sukju's portrait fills a 5.5 foot long and 3.7 foot wide scroll. The portrait does more than capture Sin Sukju's likeness, it also provides valuable insights into Korean artistic conventions and cultural practices. The Joseon kings used neo-confucian principles to promote a harmonious society. Neo-confucianism stressed the importance of rulers who practice virtuous living and performed complex rituals. In return, law-abiding subjects demonstrated loyalty to their kings. Neo-confucianism also placed great emphasis upon filial piety, the honor and respect owed to one's elders and ancestors. The Joseon kings actively promoted an elite class of scholar officials who exemplified the neo-confucian code of behavior. Sin Sukju's career thrived in this merit-based system. He quickly established himself as an eminent scholar who contributed commentaries on the royal painting collection and an accomplished linguist who helped create a Korean phonetic alphabet known as Hangul.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

A talented but unknown artist working for the prestigious Imperial Bureau of painting, painted the portrait of Sin Sukju. The artist followed conventional practice by depicting Sin Sukju in a chair. He wears an official robe, a black silk hat and leather shoes resting on a footstool. At the same time, the artist followed a strict requirement to portray his models exactly as they are. A team of critics closely evaluated the portrait to ensure a high standard of representation. In contrast to the idealized Roman Imperial statue of Augustus Prima Porta Sin Sukju's portrait presents a serious and experienced senior official. Sin Sukju's resplendent official robe features a distinctive gold embroidered rank badge. The Joseon court used a hierarchy of highly visible status symbols. For example the king's badge featured to five-clawed dragon. Sin Sukju's insignia displayed a pair of peacocks, a symbol of authority reserved for a civil official of the first rank.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

The meticulous brushwork on Sin Sukju's face is even more striking in comparison with the solid, undulating lines and bold blocks of color that define his attire. Highly skilled artists at the court may have collaborated on portraits, such that one artist may have painted the robes according to the prescribed rank or title, while another may have painted the face in great detail. Later portraits developed this interest in the face even further with the use of Western painting techniques introduced to Korea by Jesuit missionaries in China in the eighteenth century.

**INTERPRETATION:**

Both Korean and Roman cultures stress the role of portraits in honoring esteemed ancestors. Trade played a major role in the development of Asian art and culture. There was trade occurring between Asia and Europe, and there was also plenty of trade between cultures within Asia itself. Luxury goods were imported, such as the silk that serves as the foundation for this painting, and ideas came with them. During this time in Korea, there was a resurgence of Chinese Confucianism, which placed a strong emphasis on family loyalty, ancestor worship, and respect for elders. Although this portrait of Sin Sukju is more about status and it is about family, it reflects the spread of Chinese Confucianism in Korea by presenting the Prime Minister in a manner demands the viewer's respect.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

Sin Sukju became a powerful politician who served as the first state counselor from 1461 to 1466 and from 1471 to his death in 1475. Hung in the family shrine, Sin Sukju's portrait insured everlasting respect while serving as a focus of continuing ancestor rituals. Because of this vital function modern Korean families are reluctant to allow treasured family portraits to participate in museum exhibits. He was King Sejong's personal language expert, and he was even involved in creating the Korean alphabet known in modern times as Hangul.



**TITLE:** Forbidden City **LOCATION:** Beijing, China **DATE:** 15th Century. C.E. and later  
**ARTIST:** **PERIOD/STYLE:** Ming Dynasty **PATRON:** Emperor Zhu Di  
(AKA Perpetual Happiness)

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Stone masonry, marble brick, wood, and ceramic tile

**FORM:**

1 million workers and 100,000 skilled engineers and artisans built the Forbidden City in just 14 years. A rectangular moat with a high wall separated the 250-acre compound from the bustling city outside. Conceived on a grand scale, the Forbidden City contained 90 palaces, 980 buildings, and according to Legend, 9999 rooms, one less than the Supreme deity's palace. Zhu Di's architects used time-honored traditions to appease the gods and ensure good fortune. They arranged the main entrance gates and imperial halls along a long axis running north to south. All the buildings face south, the direction from which benevolent spirits come. The crimson color of the buildings symbolizes the light of the north star, while the yellow tiled roofs take their color from the sun.

**FUNCTION:**

The Chinese believed that a Supreme Being lived in a 10,000 room palace in the sky as the son of Heaven. The Chinese emperor was more than just immortal ruler, he was also a divine being whose presence formed a link between the earthly and celestial worlds. Zhu Di's grand new imperial hub served as both a political and religious center of the Ming Empire and the axis of the universe where earth and sky meet. The audience chamber inside the hall of supreme Harmony served as the Empire's symbolic Center. Gold and jade bells rang as the emperor ascended his gilded dragon throne. Wearing a yellow silk dragon robe, the emperor commanded the Imperial armies, presided over royal weddings, and supervised New Year's Day activities. As he performed his official duties, the emperor sat at the center of the universe, ruling all under Heaven. The Forbidden City was the Chinese imperial palace from the Ming to the Qing Dynasties: that is, from 1420 until 1912 C.E. The palace was considered both the metaphorical realm of a Celestial Emperor, and the literal realm of his terrestrial counterpart, the emperor on earth. The emperors of China lived here with their families and entire households. Combined, these two realms served as the ceremonial and political centers of Chinese government for nearly 500 years.

**CONTENT:**

The Forbidden City consisted of an outer court, dominated by the hall of supreme Harmony, and an inner court, where the Imperial family lived. The inner court included a large array of palaces, pavilions, courtyards, and even a spacious Imperial garden. Hundreds of concubines and thousands of eunuchs worked and lived in the inner Court.

**CONTEXT:**

In 1404 the new Ming Emperor Zhu Di moved the Chinese capital from Nanjing (Southern Capital) to Beijing (Northern Capital). 2 years later the ruthless but gifted Emperor marshaled enormous resources to build a massive complex of palaces, administrative buildings, and residences. During the next five centuries, 24 Chinese Emperors called the Great city-within-a-city their home. But the palaces forbidding moat and high walls excluded almost all the emperor's subjects. They called Zhu Di's grande palace the "Forbidden City". The Forbidden City was the political and ritual center of China for over 500 years. After its completion in 1420, the Forbidden City was home to 24 emperors, their families and servants during the Ming (1368–1644) and the Qing (1644–1911) dynasties. The last occupant (who was also the last emperor of imperial China), Puyi (1906–67), was expelled in 1925 when the precinct was transformed into the Palace Museum. Although it is no longer an imperial precinct, it remains one of the most important cultural heritage sites and the most visited museum in the People's Republic of China, with an average of eighty thousand visitors every day.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

The Hall of supreme Harmony dominated the Forbidden City's great north south axis. Imperial Architects spared no expense to create a magnificent building that awed visitors. The Hall of Supreme Harmony stood high atop a white marble terrace overlooking a 600 foot wide courtyard. Carpenters shaped the long and sturdy trunks of Nanmu evergreen trees into massive columns that supported the huge roof. It required 4 years to transport the 100 foot tall trees from mountain forests 1000 miles south of Beijing. The architectural style also reflects a sense of hierarchy. Each structure was designed in accordance with the Treatise on Architectural Methods or State Building Standards (Yingzao fashi), an eleventh-century manual that specified particular designs for buildings of different ranks in Chinese social structure.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

The Chinese attach great significance to special numbers. For example, they considered 9 a particularly auspicious number, because of a similar sound to their word for Eternal. Given this favorable connection, artisans carefully placed a row of 9 fanciful earthenware creatures on rooftops where they can ward off malevolent spirits. The row always included a dragon as a beneficial creature symbolizing the emperor and bringing much-needed rain. Since the Forbidden City is a ceremonial, ritual and living space, the architects who designed its layout followed the ideal cosmic order in Confucian ideology that had held Chinese social structure together for centuries. This layout ensured that all activities within this micro-city were conducted in the manner appropriate to the participants' social and familial roles. All activities, such as imperial court ceremonies or life-cycle rituals, would take place in sophisticated palaces depending on the events' characteristics. Similarly, the court determined the occupants of the Forbidden City strictly according to their positions in the imperial family.

**INTERPRETATION:**

The design of the Forbidden City—from the overall layout to the smallest decorative detail—is intended to reflect a whole array of philosophical and religious principles. First and foremost, the palace is meant to express imperial majesty and power, which it does through its sheer scale. The multitude of architectural structures on the site includes gates, palaces, and other smaller buildings. These structures were given wonderful and evocative names that link them to the philosophical and religious ideas they are meant to express. For example, visitors to the Forbidden City can explore the Gate (and the Hall) of Supreme Harmony, the Palace of Tranquility and Longevity, the Palace of Heavenly Purity, and the Hall of Mental Cultivation, just to name a few.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

The Forbidden City has high walls and auspicious symbols could not stop the waves of revolutionary change sweeping across China. In 1911, the Nationalist People's Party led by Sun Yat-sen overthrew the last Qing Emperor. 13 years later China's new leaders transformed the Forbidden City into a public museum. With over 15 million people visiting at each year the Palace Museum is now China's most popular tourist destination. Today, the site is known in Chinese as Gugong, which means the "Former Palace."

**TITLE:**Chairman Mao en Route to Anyuan **LOCATION:** China **DATE:** 1969

**ARTIST:** Artist Unknown based on painting by Liu Chunhua **PERIOD/STYLE:** Socialist Realism **PATRON:** Sponsors of a Mao exhibit

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Color Lithograph

**FORM:**

This lithographic poster is based on an oil painting by an artist named Liu Chunhua. It shows a young Mao Zedong, or Chairman Mao, the leader of the Chinese Communist party. Mao is wearing a long robe, holding an old-fashioned umbrella, and walking along a misty path through the mountains. He is on his way to the city of Anyuan to lead a miner's strike. An example of Socialist realism. Designed to improve the public perception of Mao in the 60s after a tough political season following the "Great Leap Forward." (1958-1961). The work is a departure from traditional ink wash painting of earlier generations and is far more emotionally inspiring and realistic.

**FUNCTION:**

Liu achieved his goal of creating an indelible image of the heroic spirit of Chairman Mao in his youth. Party officials quickly recognized the work's importance as a tool for shaping public opinion. Painted at the dawn of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. They used color lithography to produce an estimated nine hundred million copies of a ubiquitous image that became the cultural revolution's most iconic work of art. Propaganda is the deliberate use of biased information to promote a particular individual, political cause, or point of view. Varvara Stepanova's Illustrations from the Results of the First Five-Year Plan closely parallels Liu's Chairman Mao on route to Anyuan. Both works use propagandistic techniques to glorify totalitarian rulers. Designed to illustrate the success of Stalin's First Five-Year Plan, Stepanova's photo montage includes an oversized image of Vladimir Lenin, the founder of the Soviet Union. Like Liu, Stepanova ignores the use of violence and terror to promote communist ideology.

**CONTENT:**

Mao Zedong was a Chinese Communist Revolutionary, founding father of the People's Republic of China, and leader from 1949-1976. Liu focused particular attention on Mao's facial expression. Although he faces a daunting challenge, Mao projects an aura of confidence and determination. Liu later explained that he strove "for an expression of Chairman Mao's broad proletarian outlook, his youthful vigor, his complete dedication to the Affairs of the country." He is portrayed in a traditional Chinese gown rather than Western attire, which is more commonly seen in portraits of Mao created during the cultural revolution. This artist also chooses to use a cool color palette rather than the traditional warm colors of other Mao paintings.

**CONTEXT:**

Mao Zedong stands as one of the most important leaders of the 20th century. His long list of accomplishments includes organizing the Chinese Communist Party, founding the People's Republic of China, and governing the new country as chairman of the Communist Party of China from 1949 until his death in 1976. But Mao also pursued misguided policies that produced calamitous consequences for the Chinese people. In 1966 he launched the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, urging China's youth to "learn Revolution by making Revolution". Millions of high school and college students responded by forming military like units called red guards. Armed with Chairman Mao's thoughts, the red guards aimed to purge old customs and traditional ideas from Chinese Society. They demonstrated their revolutionary zeal by denouncing professors, government officials, factory managers, and even their own parents. The red guards did not limit their actions to verbal tirades. Their job was to get rid of the "four olds," which were old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits. This wasn't a peaceful endeavor, and a fair amount of blood was shed in the process.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

The cultural revolution motivated artists to create Mao paintings glorifying the legendary party leader. Like other artists, Liu turned to socialist realism, an artistic style pioneered in the Soviet Union. Socialist realist artists focused upon painting positive portraits of youthful heroes overcoming obstacles to build a classless society. The bold new oil-on-canvas works marked a departure from traditional Chinese ink on silk hanging scrolls, such as fan kuan's Travelers Among Mountains and Streams. The cultural revolution deliberately and often destructively rejected Chinese artistic traditions. As an ardent member of the red guards Liu did not view Chairman Mao on Route to Anyuan as a traditional artistic vehicle to promote meditation. Instead he created it to inspire veneration for a great Chinese leader.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

Mao's call for revolutionary change inspired Liu Chinhua, a 24 year old Red Guard studying at the central Academy of industrial arts in Beijing. Liu "longed to use my paints and brushes to portray our great leader". His opportunity came when the sponsors of a Mao art exhibit called upon Liu to create an oil painting depicting Mao on his way to inspire a strike at the famous Anyuan coal mines. Although he had never been taught oil painting, Liu enthusiastically embraced his excitement. Liu deliberately placed a youthful and idealized image of Mao in the center of his painting. Mao advances toward the viewer like a rising sun bringing hope to the people. This heroic image reinforced Mao's most admired qualities. His clenched left fist provides a vivid reminder of Mao's iron will. The old umbrella under his right arm emphasized Mao's plain living and willingness to endure adverse weather conditions as he traveled great distances to promote the Revolutionary cause.

**INTERPRETATION:**

Liu understood the historic importance of the Anyuan on strike. Inspired and organized by Mao another Chinese Communist Party leaders, 20,000 miners and 1500 Railway workers walked off their jobs on September 14, 1922. They demanded higher wages, better working conditions, and above all recognition for their workers, club or union. Management capitulated just five days later, producing a landmark victory for the workers and the newly-formed Chinese Communist Party.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

Chairman Mao en Route to Anyuan presents a paradox. On the one hand the painting was reproduced an astounding 900 million times making it the most duplicated image in human history. On the other hand, the painting and it's artist, Liu Chinhua are almost unknown outside of China. However, a close inspection of the work yield surprising insights into Chinese history and the uses of art.