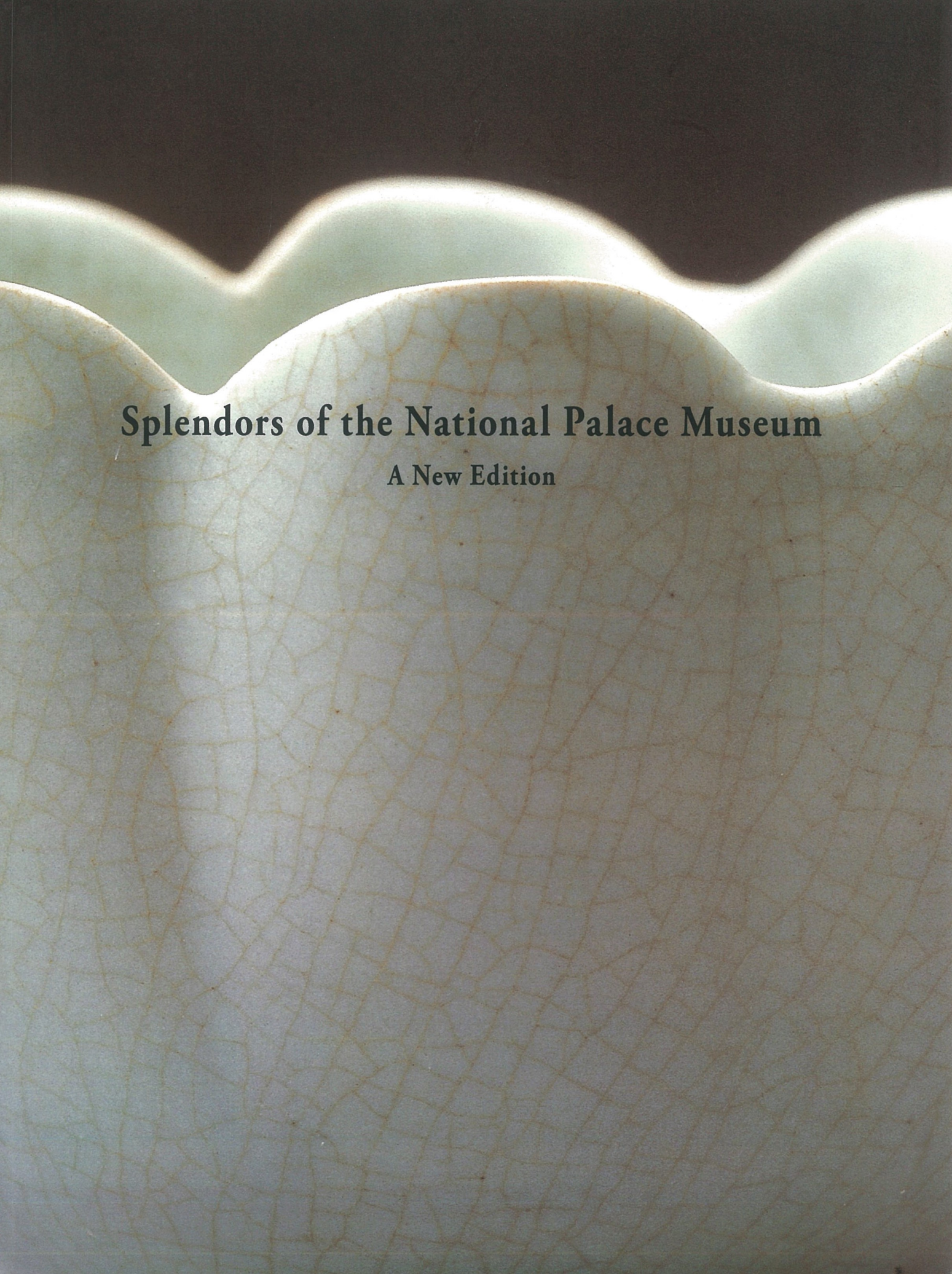

Splendors of the National Palace Museum

A New Edition

Splendors of the National Palace Museum

A New Edition

Edited by Feng Ming-Chu

國立故宮博物院
NATIONAL PALACE MUSEUM

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Director's Preface

The National Palace Museum's rich treasures originate from the imperial Qing court in a long tradition of dynastic China's royal collections. Facing the threat of war after the 918 Incident (1931), a best selection was ready to leave the Forbidden City (1933) and to evacuate south. The first stop was at Shanghai (1934), and then on to the Republic's capital Nanjing, where a Preparatory Office was set up in 1936 for the proposed National Central Museum. From there, 3,824 crates again went to Taiwan in 1948 and stayed in Baigou, Taizhong County until in 1965 a museum complex was completed at Wishuangxi, Taipei. The national treasures that had been on the move for many years finally settled in the new home and under proper care. More than four decades later and after unceasing effort in conservation, research, exhibition, and education, as well as additional acquisitions through donation, purchase, and entrusting, the National Palace Museum (NPM) is now an internationally-acclaimed institution for its prominent collections of Chinese art and artifacts.

As the custodian of the national treasures, the Museum safeguards on behalf of all people in Taiwan an eight-millennia cultural asset, which is also a common heritage for all mankind. In the space of nearly half a century the treasured collections have closely woven into the veins of local life, and with the times are becoming an inspiring source for creativity in everyday life. In the new decade of the 21st century, the Museum would in the spirit of professionalism and service further work toward the goal of creating new and added values with diversified operations.

In addition to enhancing the core functions in conservation, research, exhibition and education, the Museum aims to actively expand our social responsibility and image. We look forward to, by partnership with external resources and through the use of business management and marketing concepts, offering first-rate exhibitions and programs to the public, for everyone to enjoy the betterment in artistic literacy and quality of life.

The fast technological advances have also brought the Museum into an age of information digitization. A sophisticated knowledge system and environment based on the "U-Museum" concept is currently being implemented, and computer technology is widely used in our preservation and education programs. The NPM website provides an online portal for the public to a wealth of information and services.

The National Palace Museum has always been honored as the "Treasury of Chinese Culture". To make its collections more accessible to the public, a series of youth-

oriented activities are designed. In addition, the Museum opens its plaza on Saturday nights as an outdoor stage for performances by groups of young artists, featuring music, dance, folk arts, comedian shows, and so on. The lecture hall Wenhuitang is also reconfigured into a proper theatrical setting, where traditional operas or modern plays themed on the Museum's art works treat the audience to fascinating experiences more diverse than ever.

The Museum's treasures have been sources nourishing Chinese heritage culture; they are also inspirations for the present-day cultural and creative industries. Our vast collection of 650,000 plus items is the rich soil from which creative industry workers could extract ideas and elements for their creative expressions in image, form, design, or narrative. We also offer Cultural Creative Workshop Programs and invite worldwide professionals as coaches to develop young talents in the field of design and creativity, with our treasured heritage as the central inspiring fountain. The outstanding works of design from the programs are recommended to the industries for overall enhancement of product quality and our national image.

The Museum will continue to promote international exchanges and cooperation, exhibiting masterpieces from museums abroad to the domestic audience as well as sharing professional knowledge and experience with these renowned institutions. Such activities can offer new perspectives and expand horizons for the Museum staff, at the same time introducing the unique beauty of Chinese culture to more people around the world.

Splendors of the National Palace Museum, a new edition was first published in 2009 as a public guidebook to the Museum and its collections, when the institution itself was entering a new milestone phase of reorganization and further professionalism. Looking ahead to the challenging tasks in every aspect of delivering an ever younger, modernized, and globalized Museum which specializes in Chinese cultural assets, we would continuously work to give our best and strive for the best.

Feng Ming-Chu

Director of the National Palace Museum
November, 2012

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THE HERITAGE: FROM INHERITANCE TO INNOVATION
A Brief History of the National Palace Museum

Unveiling a New Heritage – Dynastic Treasures Now of the People

The National Palace Museum (NPM) 國立故宮博物院 inherits its rich collections from a long heritage accumulated over a thousand years spanning four consecutive imperial courts (Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing), whereas the history of the museum is closely linked with the changes and development of modern China. At the founding of the Republic in 1912, all the palace treasures were retained inside the Forbidden City where the last Emperor of Qing dynasty, Puyi 溥儀, was allowed to stay on with his tiny court of retinues, until 13 years later. During the interval, on various pretexts (gifts, auctions, pawns, loans, etc) , he schemed to remove a vast amount of valuable objects out of their palace home, leading to a rapid cultural dispersal of art works and artifacts. In 1914, the government transferred the antique articles originally at the former Rehe Summer Palace as well as Shenyang Old Palace to the outer court of the Forbidden City, and set up an Exhibition Office of Ancient Artifacts there open to public viewing. Then in 1924, Fen Yuxiang's 馮玉祥 troops entered Peking (Beijing) and evicted Puyi from the palace, ending the last imperial vestige and pseudo-"extraterritoriality". In November, Li Yuying 李煜瀛 (a.k.a. Shizeng, 1881-1973) was appointed as Chairman to head a task force the "Committee for the Disposition of Qing Imperial Possessions"; its first task was to take a complete inventory of court assets. A decision was also made to establish a public museum to house the imperial treasures that had hitherto belonged to one single person; hence the birth of the National Palace Museum.

The Museum was formally inaugurated on October 10th, 1925, the National Day of the Republic. The dynastic possessions for a millennium years hidden in the palace from the populace has since become the common heritage of, by, and for all Chinese people. The Forbidden were now unforbidden; everybody was free to come and go and appreciate the treasures of the Nation. In these early days, the Museum comprised two departments, one of Antiquities, and the other of Books and Documents. In June 1928, the Nationalist forces claimed Peking; the republican China was at last unified under one central government, which in October promulgated a new regulation order specifying the responsibilities of the Palace Museum and restructuring the organization into three departments (Antiquities, Books, and Documents). Yi Peiji 易培基 (1880-1937) was named the first Director. The Museum was to continue its tasks of inventory taking and cataloguing, with additional facilities for exhibits and new emphasis on publishing. It was the golden era of the Museum during its Peking days.

In Defense of the National Treasures - The Long Journey over Thousands of Miles

On the eve of her 20th anniversary (1931), the young Republic faced serious threats from the Japanese invasion and their subsequent occupation of Northeastern China after the Mukden (Shenyang) Incident. The imminence of war loomed over Northern China. In anticipation of the worst, the Museum packed select items of its best collections, ready for an evacuation south. January 1933, the Japanese troops entered thru the major Gate of the Great Wall; on January 31st, the Museum started its massive relocation operation of 19,557 crates on five different routes, including 6,066 crates from the Exhibition Office of Ancient Artifacts, Yihe Garden, and National Academy. February 1934, the government passed a provisional order of organization for the Museum and had it report to the Executive Yuan. Ma Heng 馬衡 (1991-1955) was made the new Director, in charge of verifying the items that had gone to Shanghai and those remaining in Peking. In 1935, a selection of the Shanghai articles went to London for the "International Exhibition of Chinese Art". December 1936, the newly-established Nanjing (Nanking) branch of the Museum received into its repository facility at Chaotian Palace the treasures that had tentatively parked in Shanghai.

The Marco Polo Bridge incident on July 7th, 1937 began Japan's full-scale invasion of China, and launched another long-journeyed migration for the Museum collections in Nanjing in three separate routes (southern, middle, and northern) far into the interior. The first group was shipped on trucks through Wuhan, Changsha,

Guiyang and Anshun, finally to Ba County of Sichuan Province, four provinces later and 80 crates in all, most of which were the fine items back from the London exhibition. The Middle route of 9,331 crates via the inland waterway (Yangtze River) passed through Hankou, Yichang, Chongqing, and Yibin before reaching its destination at Leshan of Sichuan Province. The northern group of 7,287 crates took the railway and a roundabout route first north to Xuzhou then onto Baoji, Hanzhong, Chengdu, at last arriving at Emei of Sichuan.

During the eight hard years while China was fighting Japan, despite its chief wartime responsibility of safeguarding the treasure, the Museum still managed to hold quite a number of exhibitions. July 1939 from the Anshun articles, one hundred items were selected and sent to Moscow for the "Exhibition of Chinese Art", consisting of 10 Shang-Zhou bronzes, 40 jades, 48 paintings and calligraphic works, kesi textiles (Song and Yuan dynasties one each). December 1942, the Moscow items on their return were showed to the home front in the "Third National Exhibition of Fine Arts" at Chongqing. December 1943, the Anshun articles again participated in the painting and calligraphy exhibition held by the National Central Library at Chongqing, and another show held by the Guizhou Art Museum at Guiyang.

On the foundation of the Exhibition Office of Ancient Artifacts, the Preparatory Office of the Central Museum was established in 1933 at Nanjing, which formed another important source to the present Museum as an institution. The Office, initially headed by the director of the Institute of History and Philology at Academia Sinica Fu Sinian 傅斯年 (1896-1950), then by Li Ji 李濟 (1896-1979) starting next year, comprised three departments (Natures, Humanities, and Arts). November 1937, the Office also moved via waterways its artifacts west to the wartime capital Chongqing in Sichuan, then in 1939 again to Kunming, Leshan, and finally settling in Nanxi. During the war, Li Ji led his team conducting a series of field surveys, serving the country with their study as a scholar's patriotic battle against Japan. The projects ranged wide and achieved outstanding results, for example, the survey of Moxie people at Lijiang (Li Lincan 李霖燦, 1913-1999), the traditional handicrafts of Sichuan (Dan Tanjiong 譚旦冏, 1906-1996), the archaeological survey in the Northwestern Region (Xian Da 向達, Lao Gan 勞幹, Shi Zhangru 石璋如, et al.), the study and excavation of Pengshan Tomb (Wu Jinding 吳金鼎, Xia Nai 夏鼐, Gao Quxun 高去尋, Chen Mingda 陳明達), as well as research on the ancient buildings (Liang Sicheng 梁思成, 1901-1972) and bronzes (Li Ji, Zeng Zhaoyu 曾昭燏, Guo Baojun 郭寶鈞).

August 1945, Japan surrendered. All that had previously moved to the rear part of China through all kinds of hardship were once again on the move. This time for a return trip, the national treasures traveled thousands of miles over the mountains and waters, with no less difficulty, finally and entirely back at Nanjing, the capital.

To Taiwan: A New Building and a Reopening

Fall 1948, the raging civil war worsened. In view of the situation the central government decided to select best items from the collections of the Palace Museum and the Preparatory Office of the Central Museum, and to relocate them across the strait to Taiwan. At the end of the year, the first batch on board a Navy ship sailed off Nanjing and arrived in Jilong (Keelung). Two more followed in the next year. All amounted to 2,972 crates, 22% of the original shipments that had left the Forbidden City 11 years ago, plus 852 crates from the Preparatory Office. The quantity was relatively small, but the quality was of the finest.

While in Taizhong, the staff and artifacts of the three institutions (the Preparatory Office, the Central Library, and the National Palace Museum) were merged and jointly managed under one single office, headed by Hang Liwu 杭立武 (1902-1991), reporting to the Ministry of Education. A site was also chosen at Beigou, Wufeng County for bomb shelter storage. While the construction was underway, the collections were put in order; sample inspection, inventory taking, and cataloguing continued and a book series on Chinese Artifacts 中華文物集成 was published. In 1957, the Beigou gallery formally opened to the public. In 1961, 253 sets of fine items under the title "Chinese Art Treasures" toured five American cities for one full year: Washington D.C., New York, Boston, Chicago, and San Francisco; 50 sets went to show in New York's World's Fair.

In 1965, a new and present home was erected in Taipei, at Wishuangxi, for the National Palace Museum's collections, along with a new statute for the governance committee of the institution, chaired by Wang Yunwu 王雲五 (1999-1979). Jiang Fucong 蔣復璁 (1898-1990) was appointed Director. The new building

complex, christened "Zhongshan Museum" in memory of the Republic's founding Father Dr. Sun Yat-Sen, grand-opened on his 100th birthday in November of the year.

The Foundation and Expansion Years

Fine collections make up the core of a fine museum, but it requires fine facilities and adequate preservation to make it sustainable, and top research fellows and curators to make it educational. After the Museum reopened in Wishuangxi 外雙溪, it has gone through more than once reorganization and five phases of expansion to accommodate its role of being a modern museum as well as home to the nation's treasures.

After so many years of turmoil, when the Museum finally settled and reopened in 1965, many things had to start or restart from the scratch. The new complex boasted 16 exhibition halls and 8 galleries, showing calligraphy, paintings, bronzes, porcelains, jades, curios, textiles, rare books and archival documents to visitors. Next year (1966) saw the publication of two Museum periodicals: the English *NPM Bimonthly* 故宮通訊 and the Chinese *NPM Quarterly* 故宮季刊. January 1967, a memorial arch of Tian-Xia-Wei-Gong 天下爲公 (All Is of the Public) and two monumental pillars were erected at the central pathway; at the end of the same year, two wings were added to the new building (first phase of expansion). The old organization structure could no longer supported the functions of the Museum that were ever expanding; in 1968, the institution was once again reorganized into three core departments of Antiques, Calligraphy and Painting, and Books and Documents, and three support offices of exhibiting, publishing, and registering. Various programs and activities were launched, including inventory checking, cataloguing, academic exchange with other institutions, and so on. In the same year, the NPM library opened to the public; in 1970, a new preservation lab of latest scientific techniques and equipment was added. The operational and research infrastructure of a modern Museum was at last in place and complete. The second phase of the building expansion was done in 1971.

During the first 17 years of the NPM at Taipei, Director Jiang led it through two expansion projects, twice restructured its organization, and overall laid a grand and solid foundation for the Museum to grow into a modern institution. Every function or activity relevant to a contemporary museum was launched under his directorship: various publications (journals, monographs, catalogues, hanging scrolls, handscrolls); participation in international conferences and workshops; sending staff to overseas training and exchange. The 1970 World's Fair in Osaka and the International Symposium on Ancient Chinese Painting both enhanced the exposure and reputation of the Museum. On the education front, with the assistance of the Museum, Taiwan University installed a Chinese Art History program in its Graduate School of History (1971), a first in Taiwan and a way for the Museum fellows to pass on their learned knowledge to new generations. Last but not the least, through the joint effort by the Museum and Academia Historica, an annotated and collated *Draft Edition of the History of Qing* 清史稿校註 was completed in 1978 and published 12 years later in 1990 by the latter.

Carrying on the Heritage and Going International

January 1983, Qin Hsiaoyi 秦孝儀 (1921-2007) became the new director when the 84-year-old Jiang resigned due to health reasons. Qin, a member on the governance committee for many years, was very familiar with the operations of the Museum and went into immediate action shortly after taking office. He launched the *NPM Monthly of Chinese Art* 故宮文物月刊 and the *NPM Research Quarterly* 故宮學術季刊, co-published with the Taiwan Commercial Press the *Wenyuan Pavilion Si-Ku Chuan-Shu* 文淵閣四庫全書 (the Complete Collection of Four Categories), and received several important donations, including Song scholar Zhu Xi's 朱熹 calligraphic work, the Yi Xi Ci 易繫辭 (Commentary in the Book of Changes) , donated by a overseas Chinese in Japan, Mr. Lin Zongyi 林宗毅 (1923-2007), and final residence of the great contemporary painter Zhang Daqian 張大千, the "Maya Vihara" 摩耶精舍. He also instituted the rules of "Restricted Retrieval" and "Restricted Showing" for rare and fragile items. The next year saw the completion of the third phase of expansion: a new Administration Building; the exhibition space was accordinly increased. He further set up a controlled environment of constant temperature and humidity, fire-resistant, moisture-resistant, and quake-proof, as well as a 24-hour security system. In 1985, the introduction of a new exhibition narrative, the "Relationship of Chinese Culture with the World Culture", facilitated the understanding of the East versus the West on the part of the visitor. Many

other initiatives were introduced during his tenure, such as new technologies, multi-media screening facilities, a series of academic workshops celebrating the 60th anniversary of the Museum, and community outreach programs including daily guided tours to 500 middle and grade school students and children's learning camps. He advocated a cultured and refined lifestyle: opening the classic Sanxitang (Three Rarities Room) teahouse that incorporated art into life, placing two gardens of classic design modeled after Song and Ming on the east and west of the maing building, and another back garden out of an odd lot to the right of the building. Indoor landscaping was also installed at the atrium of the main exhibition hall.

A new statute was issued in 1987 by the government. From now on the directorship of the Museum would be a ministry-level position of special appointment by the Executive Yuan. July 1989, another round of all-collection inventory checking started and took almost two years to complete in May 1991. The same year saw a Steering Committee replacing the original "Governance Committee". August 1995, a standalone library building (phase 4) was inaugurated. It not only provided a bright, spacious, and modern facility for the library and research, but added additional floor space of approximately 1,322 square meters for exhibition use. The grand opening was celebrated by a special on-loan exhibit from the Musee du Louvre; 71 masterpieces of landscape paintings of the 16th and 17th centuries attracted countless art lovers and caused quite a sensation at the time. At the end of the same year audio guide systems in Chinese, English, and Japanese were first introduced with a Jade exhibition of private collections, followed by a series of on-loan shows: a private sculpture collection (1997), the Western Painting and Sculpture, Picasso (both in 1998), the San-Xing-Dui Legend, the Han Dynasty exhibition (both in 1999). The cultural exchange went both directions; the Museum collections also shone on the international stage. March 1996, under the name "Possessing the Past - Treasures from the National Palace Museum, Taipei", 425 sets of fine items toured four major metropolitan cities in the U.S. October 1998, another 344 sets traveled to Paris, France and showed at the Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais, for the "Memoire d'Empire - Tresors du Musee National du Palais, Taipei". January 1999, upon invitation an exhibition of fine replicates toured seven friend countries in Central and South Americas.

In short, under the leadership of two directors Jiang and Qin, the National Palace Museum grew and transformed into a renowned modern institution, and has since frequently counted as one of the four great museums of the world.

Localization and Innovation

May 2000, Du Zhengsheng 杜正勝, an honorable academic of Academia Sinica, was named the director of the Museum. The appointment aimed to steer the institution with a stronger local emphasis. Under the guidance of the new director, an exhibition titled "Formosa: the Emergence of Taiwan on the World Scene in the 17th Century" was held in March 2003, stirring a vigorous discussion among visitors. As a historian, Du preferred a chronological view of the Museum collections; the fifth phase of expansion project provided the timely opportunity. The exhibition narratives were totally reconstructed, no longer by subject and material, into a new nine-segment format in accordance with the timeline of Chinese History, starting with "The Neolithic Age: The Beginning of Civilization", "Classical Civilization: The Bronze Age", "From Classic to Tradition: Qin and Han Dynasties", "Transitions and Convergences: Sui, Tang, and Six Dynasties" to "Prototypes of Modern Styles: Song and Yuan", "The New Era of Ornamentation: Early Ming", "The Contest of Craft: Later Ming", "Treasures from an Age of Prosperity: The Reigns of Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong", and "Toward Modernity: late Qing Dynasty". He also updated the staffing requirements and procedures by introducing a new set of standard guidelines, and adopted business management concepts and practices such as setting up endowment funds for art and culture, rolling out the Friends of the NPM membership card and the Museum-sponsored credit card.

Shi Shuoqian 石守謙 succeeded Du in 2005. Before then, he had been Deputy Director for four years, assisting Director Du in promoting academic research. As the founder of the graduate program in Art History at Taiwan University, he specialized in the study of painting. He personally curated the major cross-departmental exhibition of year 2001: "Age of the Great Khan - Pluralism in Chinese Art and Culture under the Mongols", and conducted a symposium on the subject. Two years later, he supervised "Emperor Qianlong's Grand Cultural Enterprise", and planned the exhibition and symposium for "Grand View: Painting and Calligraphy of the North Song" in

celebration of the 80th anniversary of the Museum. Originally scheduled for 2005, both activities were postponed and did not take place until 2006 due to the delayed completion of the renovation. By then, Shi had already left the post, but his brain child the "Grand View" remained the event of the year for the Museum as well as for the academic circle of Chinese art history. Another contribution of his was that seeing most world-class museums featuring a top restaurant, he made a courageous and firm decision of transforming the staff cafeteria into a BOT project, giving birth to the Silks Palace restaurant at the NPM, opening in June 2008.

Between 2002 and 2004, three major projects were underway to bring the facility of the Museum up to date: the space renovation of the Main Building, the reinforcement of the earthquake proofing of the Main Building, and construction of a new Southern Branch. The first two projects were completed in 2007; the third was to balance the distribution of resources between the South and North in accordance with the government policy. A site of 70 hectares in Jiayi County has been set aside for the purpose, currently under construction. The new branch will focus on the Asian art as a whole and feature a landscaping-themed park. So far two "Overture" exhibitions of preview have been held in Jiayi.

Lin Manli 林曼麗 in 2006 became the director in another round of cabinet reshuffle. During her two-year tenure, Lin advocated a "fashionable" NPM where "Old is New", launching the Museum into the orbit and business of Cultural and Creative Industries. A new page was turned for the Museum's branding and merchandise development. Via franchise and authorization, the Museum partnered with many renowned brand names such as internationally Sanrio of Japan, Alessi of Italy, domestically Franz porcelain and Imei Foods, bringing diverse variety to the Museum souvenir shop.

Restructured for a New and Promising Era

On May 20th 2008, sworn-in with other cabinet members of the newly elected government, Chou Kung-shin 周功鑫 took the helm of the Museum, where she had had previously a 29-year stint, first as the executive assistant to two former directors Jiang and Qin, later heading the Exhibition Office for 16 years. After retiring from the Museum, she went on to found the graduate program in Museum Studies for Fu-Jen University. An all-around and experienced expert, upon returning to the Museum in May, she put a decisive stop to the ill-devised organization structure hastily put in place in last January that mixed up unrelated functions in one group and spread overlapping functions across many. She scraped the plan and re-reorganized the Museum into eight departments (Antiquities, Calligraphy & Painting, Books & Documents, Preservation & Registry, Cultural, Creative & Marketing, Education, Exhibition & Information, Security Management, Southern Branch) and four supporting offices, totaling 42 working units, thus restoring the management and operation to an updated professional division of labor yet at the same time a coherent whole, ready for the next phase of new development.

Chou's mission statement for the NPM is "Revitalizing the Heritage and Creating New Values", leading the Museum to a professionalism-centric, youth-friendly, technology-driven, and cultural-creative-industrialization-oriented operation. Professionalism means back to the basics: 1) that the Antique Articles exhibits have to theme on types and materials, the same way Calligraphy and Painting has always been, to highlight the intrinsic nature of the Museum collection as an imperial one, 2) that departments joint forces to roll out a major inter-department exhibition annually, 3) Conducting an all-item inventory rechecking, 4) Implementing best practices in preservation and security, 5) Advancing academic research, 6) Promoting comprehensive educational programs. Youth-Friendliness aims to appeal to and engage the young generation in the Museum activities, the "When Young People Meet the NPM: Saturday Night at the Museum" being a case in point. Technologies take advantage of the latest media and platforms, incorporated into the exhibits and educational programs. And last but not the least, to think in the terms of cultural and creative Industries: a proposed "industrial" park at a nearby location, a series of incubation courses on creative design, which has formally started in summer, 2009. With all these initiatives, the Museum is entering a new and promising era, promptly within the first year of Director Chou's arrival.

ANTIQUITIES

Epitomizing a Culture by "Artifacts to Carry Logos"

A question such as "*how Chinese culture is different from others*" could be approached from various perspectives and answered in a number of ways. Yet one particular answer presents itself conspicuously when visitors to the National Palace Museum stroll through its many galleries: the vast amount of ancient artifacts as exhibited in this magnificent treasure hall of Chinese art and culture.

By "ancient artifacts", or antiquities, we neither refer to all works or arts sculpted or fashioned in the round, nor the Buddhist figurative art. The use of the term here is restricted to man-made objects and wares that have been produced in the past for utilitarian, displaying, or ornamental purposes.

A great amount of fine objects had been created with utmost attention and care throughout the past many thousand years of development in Chinese culture. They came in all kinds of shapes, patterns, hues, and very often inscribed with symbols or writings. These vessels, wares, or objets d'art used to serve a diverse range of functions in the distant times, but there was also one implicit aspect inherent in all, most significant back then yet hardest to comprehend now: "Artifacts to Carry Logos", i.e. these man-made objects were made to connect to the Way of Nature, or namely *Dao* 道.

Without this concept, the occidental sculpture works of art "in the round" tend to feature mainly deities, humans, or animals, and accordingly such works comprise the majority of the items featured in most Western museums. As for other fine objects enjoyed by the rich and powerful of the West, they are often relegated to the category of "decorative arts".

Pursuing Eternity via "Artifacts imitating Nature" and "Kindred Empathy"

Among the manifold ancient artifacts, the most important ones belonged in the category of *li* 禮 (ritual), the original meaning of the character signifying "paying homage to deities with jade".

The struggle with nature for survival taught the ancient people that the brilliant sun in the sky was the master of all lives on the earth. In making stone implements, they discovered one particular kind of beautiful yet hard stone which, after some grinding and polishing, would exude a glistening sheen just like the springtime sunshine. They called it *yu* 玉 (jade) and believed that it was imbued with *jin* 精 (spirit, or essence). Another substance that was also considered high in *jin* was *bo* 帛 (silk), also because of its glitter. Thus both jade and silk were used as ritual articles in the worship of deities, and *qi* 氣 (air or flow) or *jingqi* 精氣 (energy of spirit) in the ancient Chinese vocabulary approximated to what we call energy or vitality today.

From observing the seasonal altitudes of the sun, as well as its daily paths across the sky, the ancients devised a system of firmament configurations based on the zodiac concept: *qi-heng* 七衡 (seven concentric circles), from which the jade *bi* 璧, a disc with a hole in the center, was derived. The shape of *bi*, a circle, represented that of the zodiac in the cosmos and the very path orbited along by the sun itself. Therefore "the heaven's way is a round way", and the commonly known phrase *tien-yuan-di-fang* 天圓地方 (heaven being round, earth being square) does not refer to the physical forms of these two celestial bodies. Instead, it signifies the flow, or qi, of *yin* and *yang* circulating in the universe. Jade *bi* and *cong* 琮 were the two ritual articles specifically dedicated to the worship of Heaven and Earth. It was not an arbitrary choice - they not only possessed thru their sheen the necessary *jin* that was "kindred" to the celestial bodies, but also derived a power of associative "Kindred Empathy" from their forms which resembled the celestial orbits.

The patterns and inscriptions were also elements capable of empathetic powers through "association". So the prehistoric east-China clans who idolatrized black birds of a certain mythical kind rendered their beautiful jade in representational and abstract avian images, such as the famous jade pendant in the shape of hooked clouds from Hongshan Culture and the jade tablet with eagle décor from Longshan Culture, Shandong Province. Into East Zhou, Qin, and Han dynasties, patterns of double-bodied animals often adorned the surface of jade discs, because people then believed that the hole in the center of a *bi* corresponded to where *taichi* was, i.e. the eternal motionless center of the universe. Following the same logic, when the high-ranking nobility of West and East Han dynasties went to their final resting places completely wrapped in a mesh-mail suit sewn of various pieces of jade, the one piece for the apex of the head was always a *bi*. It was believed that the soul of the deceased would pass through that head *bi*'s center hole, the gate to the heaven, and henceforth spent the afterlife in eternal immortality.

Instituting Social Order through the "Ritual Gold and Graceful Jade"

Starting in the 19th century, B.C.E., the advancement of human knowledge and skills in mastering natural resources ushered in a new era of copper mining and smelting as well as bronze alloy casting. Bronzes freshly out of their casts glittered like gold and were considered as the "Ritual Gold", gradually replacing pottery as the designated *li* vessels exclusively for aristocracy's use. Mythical animal figures from the spiritual world were depicted on the bronzes so that they might assist shamans to mediate between humans and deities. While the bronze *li* articles at the time were made mostly for offering sacrifices, or serving the functions of ceremonial cleansing or as musical instruments, the singular power of invoking the presence

of deities and spirits still remained the prerogative of jade. However by this time *cong* had yielded its esteemed status as a member in the most elevated pair of jade *li* articles to *gui* 圭 (tablet). The latter had progressed into a new status symbol from earthly weaponry such as battle axes and halberds.

Li, or rites, begun as a set of prescribed code for communion between the human being and the Supreme Being, over the time developed into a system of institutions governing human affairs. In a society where shamanism maintained law and order, one's position in a given hierarchy was subject to how closely, or remotely, one was related to the common deity-ancestry of the clan group. The origin or the fount of the life in the clan lineage, it was believed, came from the very Supreme One up the rungs of natural deity ladder: *Di* (the Ultimate God). When the ancestors left the human world, they were actually returning to *Di* and taking up the role of intermediary agents for their descendents. So the remove of a certain individual from his principal lineal descent dictated his station in the clan hierarchy of ancestral worship, and accordingly, his membership in the social hierarchy, as well as the sizes and amount of *li* articles of jade and bronze he was allowed to use in this life and the next. Likewise, symbols on jade items or inscriptions on bronzes were both meant for dialogues with Heaven. Bronze inscriptions further served the functions of glorifying the nobility and documenting contracts or treaties. For example, the jade album used in the worshipping ceremony of Land Deity recorded the praises, prayers, and oaths uttered by temporal rulers to the all-divining heaven and earth and deities. Two such imperial albums in the National Palace Museum collections, one from Tang dynasty, the other from Song, are the two only surviving specimens of the ancient *Feng-Chan* institution and among the most treasured possessions of the nation.

There were still more categories of *li* articles in that remote past than the Ritual Gold and Graceful Jade. Yet the two had a most everlasting impact and resonated through thousands of years down into the recent era of dynastic China. The bronze *ding* 鼎 (cauldron) , which used to serve the sacrificial offerings, gradually evolved into a symbol of the legitimate mandate to rule. When the emperors of later eras commissioned *li* articles, such as Zhengho Cauldron in North Song, they were in fact modeling after the ancient ritual tradition and reenacting it. Porcelain emulation of ancient jade or bronze *li* articles was also quite often; examples included the celadon-glazed porcelain *cong* vessel and *gui* 簋 (bowl) made by *Guan* 官 (official) Kiln in South Song, and the incense burner in the shape of *gui* bowl from Ming dynasty.

Seals, or chops, have been made since the times of Shang and Zhou dynasties, the chosen materials again being jade and bronze. The Ya-Qin seal from late-Shang held in the National Palace Museum is the earliest Shang seal extant today. As the Bronze Age was nearing its end during the Warring States period, a new concept of the "Hereditary State Seal of Jade" came into being, which replaced *ding* the cauldron as the reigning symbol for the legitimate mandate to rule. Common folklore believed such Hereditary Seal had been rendered from the legendary jade *bi* of He, perhaps in some way having to do with the *tian-dao* 天道 (the Logos, or Way, Law, of Heaven) thought. The National Palace Museum has in its collections quite a few jade seals of the Qing Emperor Qianlong, among which the most unusual one features on its impress side both a circle and a square, signifying *yin* and *yang* respectively, while the seal body is shaped as a *gui* tablet, covered with carvings of stars, clouds, mountains, seas, and *chi* 螭 dragons.

A Long-Standing Civilization of Assimilation and Originality

The millennia-long history of Chinese ancient artifacts bespeaks a culture that is not only long standing, but also highly adaptive as well as original.

In the remote prehistoric obscurity when human beings had to struggle against nature for survival, animals that could fly, swim, or gallop became the objects of idol worship. The *li* articles of ancient shamanism were thus often carved or cast with animal figures possessing "non-human" power in varieties of shapes and forms: transformed, composite, or sometimes exaggerated. The Chinese dragon and phoenix, mythical creatures of a mix between the reptilian and avian kinds, are two most renowned products of the "extraction and reassembly" process.

We are not sure when people started to pile up clams or stones into the shape of the dragon, but we do know that as far back as more than five thousand years ago the Neolithic culture sites at Lingjiaotan and Hongshan had made recognizable carvings of dragon-looking or bird-like images on their jade stones. The avian motif at the time for the religious purpose depicted for the most part the ferocious birds of prey such as eagles, hawks, or owls, and sometimes tinier and gentler kinds including doves and swallows. The graceful feathers engraved on the jade tablet with eagle décor from Longshan Culture might very well have been the burgeoning of the later full-blown phoenix image.

The coiling dragon and the long-tailed phoenix went on to become prevalent motifs decorating the surfaces of jade and bronze *li* articles made in Shang, Zhou, and Han dynasties. The subsequent medieval China was a time of great cultural transitions and changes; yet the dragon-and-phoenix pattern remained a fixture, getting ever more popular and eventually transformed into a noblest symbol and exclusive crest for the royal house. The Emperor alone could sit on the dragon throne, and again His Majesty

alone could dress in garb ornamented with dragon motifs of highest grade. At times, under stricter rules, the vessels, wares, implements, or any articles when decorated in the dragon-and-phoenix décor were absolutely reserved for the use of the imperial family and the like only. In the National Palace Museum collections, the jade plate with dragon décor from Liao dynasty, the jade brush wash with a phoenix-shaped handle from Yuan dynasty, and the underglaze-blue porcelain celestial-globe vase with dragon décor as well as the large lacquer round box with the incised color dragon-longevity pattern from Ming dynasty, are all paragons representative of the respective dynastic arts illustrating the said motif.

Over the expanse of Eurasian landmass, exchanges between the East and the West have existed since the time of antiquity. While West Han dynasty advanced westward, opening up the routes from the Yellow River region to Central Asia and beyond, the art motifs of mythical winged beasts and horn-shaped cups prevalent in the Western Asia spread eastward reaching China. The Han people were very fond of these imported forms and fashioned their jade accordingly. The finished products were further endowed with magical power of warding off evils and bringing about felicity.

During Han and Tang periods, from Ancient Persia the Arsacid and Sasanian dynasties, as well as Sogdiana located in Central Asia, successively gave China their floral-styled gold and silverware. After a coalescent and acculturative process, the plant motif evolved into the soft forms and understated glaze tones of Chinese porcelains featuring flowers, foliage, gourds, and fruits. A transplanted foreign motif to begin with, it has become identified by the world as "typical" of Chinese design.

Beginning in the 11th century, both the overland and maritime trade routes thrived. The blue-and-white pottery of Islam and the enameling craft of East Europe arrived in China, again transforming respectively into the famed underglaze-blue porcelain and enamelware of unique Chinese style. The imported glassware also helped develop the Chinese glass craft and eventually in the Eighteenth century under the patronage of Qing emperors pigments made from enamel frits were applied to porcelains, Yixin tea-service pottery, and glassware. The stunning, elegant *falangtsai* 琺瑯彩 (enamel-color) arts were born.

Overall, since the age of medieval China, patterns of flowers, foliage, gourds, and fruits gradually turned mainstream décor and went to decorate and shape many articles or wares. Pictures of human figures, birds and animals, mountains and waters, storied-houses and pavilions, boats and carriages also provided frequent themes, presented in either refined literati tastes or with colorful, auspicious extravagance. In addition to porcelains, enamels, and glass, there were various other objects made of all kinds of materials: lacquer ware, carvings (bamboo, wood, ivory, and rhinoceros horn), scholars' stationery (brushes, ink sticks, and ink stones), jewels, ornaments, clothing, and religious implements, all having joined to enrich the Chinese arts and crafts. In order to store some little gems of these curio items, the Qing Palace even made quite a number of no less beautiful, sometimes so very ingenious multi-compartment boxes or cases.

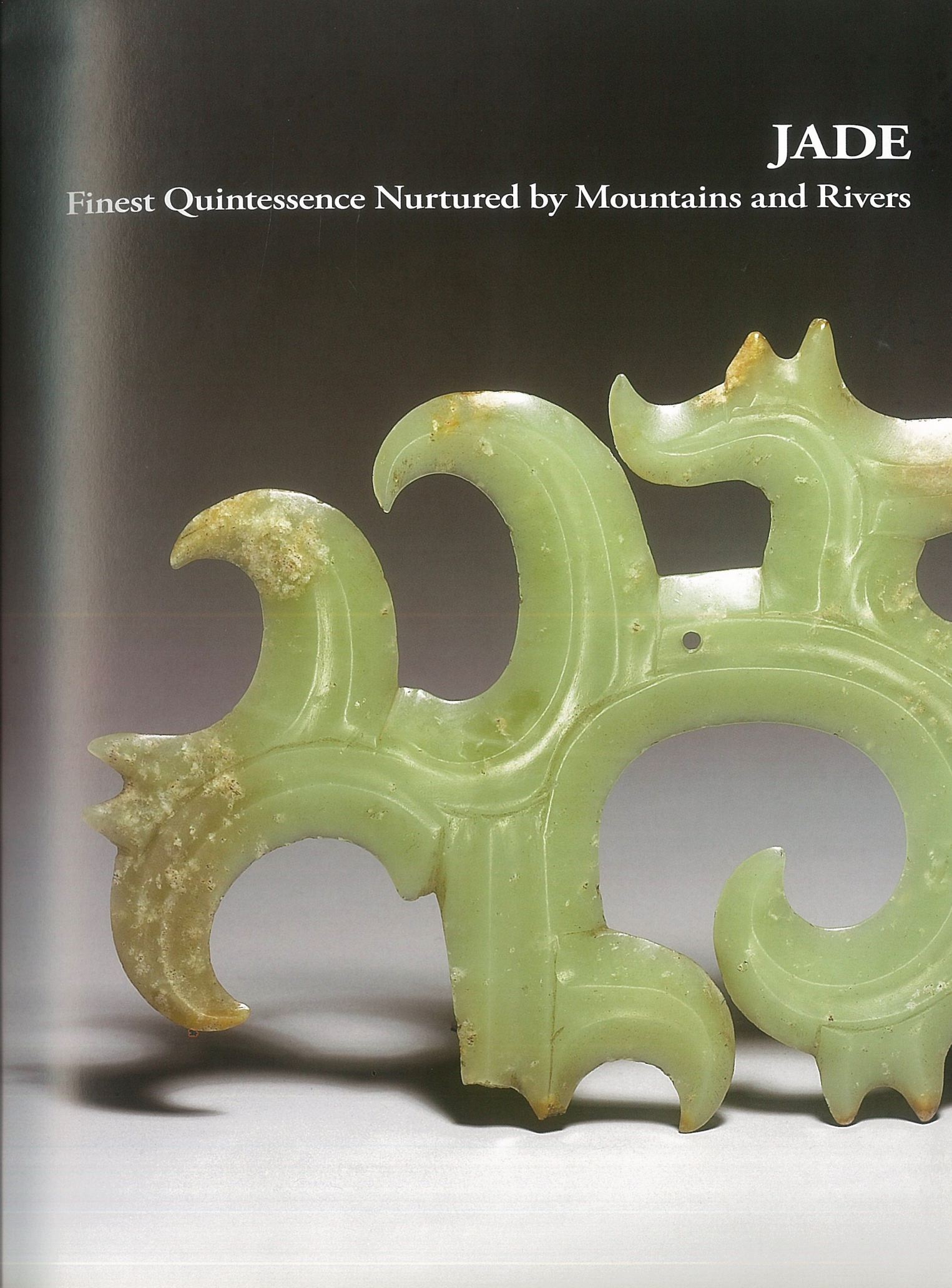
Among the nearly seventy thousand ancient articles in the Museum's antique collections, the oldest ones are a set of 28 slender jade tubes and a pair of jade earrings unearthed from the seven-thousand-year-old site of Xinglongwa Culture. Starting with this primitive yet seminal work of ancient handicraft, visitors to the Museum are to witness a development spanning thousands of years. During this long period of evolving and assimilation, the Chinese artifacts' appearances and functions might have undergone unceasing changes at confluent waves of various imported elements, but the ancient native notion of "kindred empathy", the intrinsic affiliation of a given man-made object with Nature, stayed forever deeply rooted in the Chinese mind despite all outer alterations. It over the time evolved into a rich repertoire of auspicious leitmotifs almost ubiquitous in the Chinese arts and crafts.

By that time, the kindred association had gone beyond visual elements such as shapes and forms, patterns and designs, words and phrases. The contextual effect of Auspiciousness and Felicity was also achieved aurally via homophones. Examples include *bian-fu* (bat) where *fu* is homophonous with *fu* (felicity). Often when bats appear together with *shou-tao* (longevity bun in the shape of a peach) , the pair symbolizes a life both felicitous and longevous. The sumptuous oblong box from Qing dynasty, gilt-engraved with a festive scene, provides another example of auspicious associations through such happy word play: it uses three ornamental patterns, *deng* (lamp), *qing* (chime), and *ruyi* (as-you-wish piece) as metaphors which jointly signify "bountiful harvests of all corps, auspicious and joyous as you wish", where is a homophone of the character for bountiful, and *qing* joyous.

In summary, the art of Chinese artifacts is unique in its inherent qualities, based on a heritage that has evolved over many thousand years. From the philosophy of "Artifacts imitating Nature" and "Artifacts to Carry Logos" of the remote antiquity, to the guiding principle of "Images always Connotative, Connotations always Auspicious" of the Modern Era, it is a story bespeaking the resilient vitality of Chinese culture and cheerful optimism in her national character.

JADE

Finest Quintessence Nurtured by Mountains and Rivers



Jade Tube

4,500 to 4,200 years ago, Langzhu Culture that had emerged around the Tai Lake region used jade *congs* as a vehicle to mediate between Heaven and Earth. Their elegant pillar forms, decorated with simple yet precise patterns, are more than just feasts for eye but keys to exploring the esoteric dialogue exchanges by humanity and divinities in that distant antiquity.

The *cong* housed in the Museum, a recognized national treasure specimen, manifests to the fullest extent the beauty of a Liangzhu jade *cong*. The 7 cm x 7 cm square tube rises to as tall as 47.2 cm without giving any impression of dull or tiresome repetition. The secret lies in its masterly and slightly downward tapering body, which is evenly divided into seventeen segments lengthwise. The four edges of the pillar corners unexpectedly form four thematic axes, across which "small-eye mask patterns" symbolic of ancestral deities spread symmetrically, four per segment totaling sixty eight, imbuing a strong mystic sense that "multitude makes beauty". A cylindrical hole runs through the pillar from the top to the base, embodying the channeling medium for communication as well as a mature lithic technology. The most intriguing aspect about this jade *cong* is that near the top on each of its four walls is carved shallowly a symbol barely visible unless lighted from a certain exact angle. It seems that the indistinct presence, so contrary to the pronounced manner in which the mask carvings are executed, is not meant for human perception, but serving as some hidden codes only intelligible to shamans and ancestral deities for their cryptic communication.

Jade Tube
玉琮
yu-cong
Neolithic Age, late Liangzhu Culture
(circa 2500 - 2200 B.C.E.)
h. 47.2 cm, upper w. 7.7-7.8 cm, lower w. 6.8 cm,
cylinder mouth diam. 4.2-4.3 cm
(yu-498, guyu-02037)

Jade Tablet

with eagle décor and a wood stand

玉鷹紋圭附木座

yu ying-wen gui

Neolithic Age, Longshan Culture,

Shandong Province

(circa 2600 - 2000 B.C.E.)

l. 30.5 cm, w. 7.2 cm, t. 1.1 cm

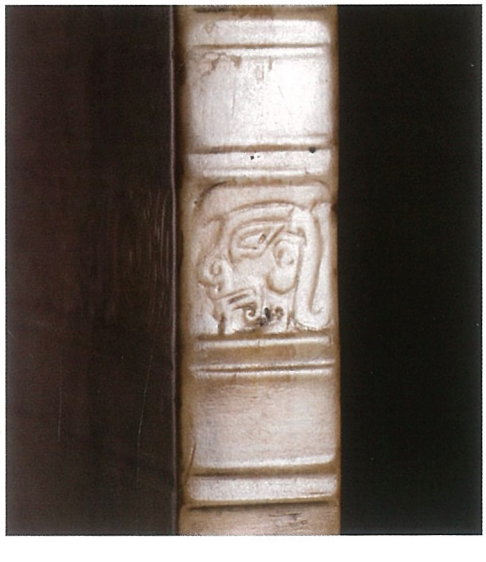
(lu-501-9, guyu-01856)

Jade Tablet with eagle décor and a wood stand

That since very early on Chinese culture had developed into a Jade culture was not an arbitrary incident. The choice and love of jade shows a precocious, perceptive mind which was both intuitively imaginative and analytically discerning. From a wide range of lithic formations, our ancestors singled out jade, a stone type possessing both beauty and hardness. The wise decision could only have been reached after an elaborate hands-on comparison and field survey, which also explains why and how the forms and shapes of some jade ritual vessels actually stemmed from practical articles such as tools or weaponry.

One of the national treasure items housed by the Museum is a jade tablet from the four-thousand-year-old site of ancient Longshan Culture, in today's Shandong Province. The narrower end of the long tablet is sharpened in the style of a shovel blade, indicative of its pragmatic origin. Carved patterns in relief decorate the middle section; the lines of incisions are flowing, graceful, yet precise: a soaring bird of prey on one side, and a mystic marking on the other, resembling a plume-crowned ancestral facial mask. Both reflect the tribal cult of avian worship practiced by the *Dongyi* 東夷 (East) clan. Most amazingly, along one side edge within a tiny, narrow space about 1 cm x 1 cm is carved a human face in profile, with combed long hair fully in view. Such detailed elaboration shows that the importance of the tablet must have transcended ordinary use and approached the status of a ritual item.

The tablet came into the Qing court's possession in the 18th century and per Emperor Qianlong's order was graced with His Majesty's poetry and royal seal, plus a wood stand. For some unknown reasons and to the much puzzlement of modern viewers, however, the inscriptions were placed counter to the orientation of the existing ancient patterns.



世代商周者莫雄鷹熊刻珮擬
英雄爾時尚述三王法喻意何
開五霸風孔康月圓淡雲白浸
来日射曉霞紅物之聚也必於
好好古徵漸訓召公
乾隆丙午季春御題

Jade Pendant in the shape of hooked clouds

Eight thousand years ago, the Xinglongwa Culture in the north of the Yan Mountains and west of the Liao River had started to use nephrite for ornaments. Two to three thousand years later the Hongshan Culture from the same region produced this beautiful jade pendant that still dazzles us today.

The unusual piece is a composite of several claw forms of various sizes, often referred to as "hooked clouds". What the forms actually signified is still academically open to debate, the conjectured answers ranging from birds, clouds, dragons, phoenixes, even to roses. The mystic shape is intriguing enough for speculation, yet more astonishing is that the piece will hang perfectly level on a string through the small hole at the center, despite its entirely unbalanced asymmetry in look. How did the Hongshan people 5,500 to 5,000 years ago manage to achieve such a graceful yet dynamic design full of rhythm, aesthetically as well as mathematically? The wonder lingers as we appreciate this powerful masterpiece full of expressive rhythm.

Jade Pendant

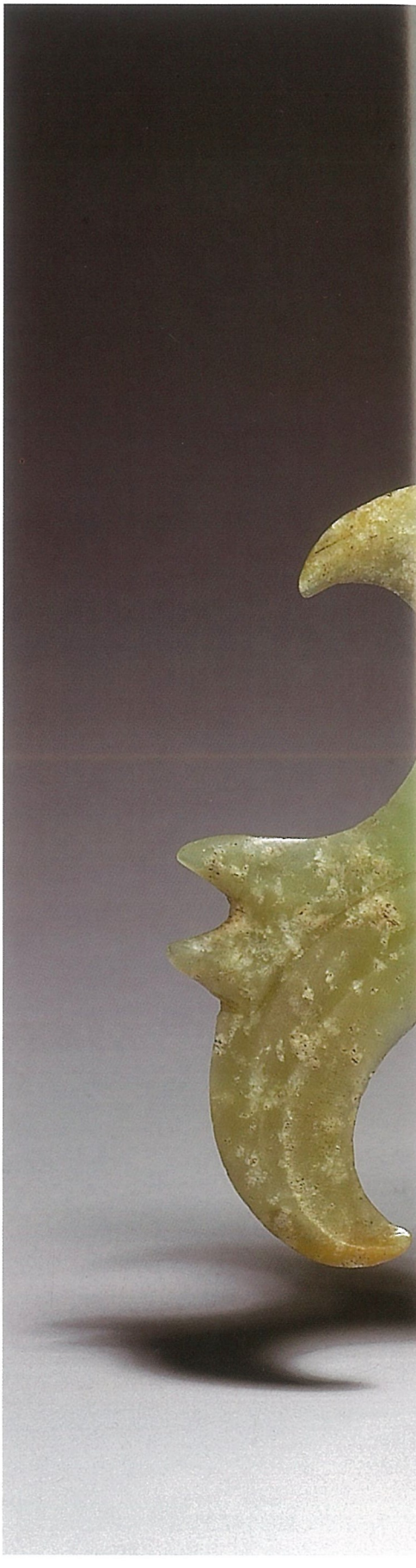
in the shape of hooked clouds

玉勾雲形佩

yu gou-yun-xing pei

Neolithic Age, late Hongshan Culture

(circa 3500 - 3000 B.C.E.)

h. 14.2 cm, w. 19.1cm, max. t. 0.55 cm

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