12: Chinese and Korean Art Before 1279 CE
12.1: The Middle Kingdom

12.1.1: Art of the Middle Kingdom

The art of China, once known as the Middle Kingdom, arguably has the oldest continuous tradition in the world.

Learning Objective

Discuss the painting, sculpture, pottery, and decorative arts of the Middle Kingdom

Key Points

- The decorative arts are extremely important in Chinese culture, and much of the finest work was produced in large workshops or factories by essentially unknown artists.
- Most of the best ceramics and textiles were produced by Imperial factories and distributed on a massive scale to demonstrate the wealth and power of the emperors.
- The two main techniques in Chinese painting are Gong-bi (meaning "meticulous" and using highly detailed brushstrokes for precise details) and ink and wash painting (watercolor or brush painting).
- Artists from the Han (202 BCE) to the Tang (618–906 CE) dynasties primarily painted the human figure, while the time from the Five Dynasties period to the Northern Song period (907–1128 CE) is known as the great age of Chinese landscape.
- Chinese ritual bronzes from the Shang and Western Zhou Dynasties still exert an influence over Chinese art.
- Large religious sculpture is primarily Buddhist, dating from the 4th to the 14th century.

Key Terms

Silk Road

An extensive interconnected network of trade routes across Asia, North and Northeast Africa, and Europe, historically used by silk traders.

Confucius

Western name of Kong Qiu (孔), an influential Chinese philosopher who lived from 551 – 479 BCE.

zoomorphic

Having the shape, form, or likeness of an animal.

Overview: Art in China

In China, the group of states in the central plain was commonly called Zhōngguó (中) and Zhōnghuá (中).
In the 19th century the term meaning "Middle Kingdom" emerged as the formal name of the country. The Chinese were not unique in regarding their country as "central", as many civilizations have had this view.

Chinese art has arguably the oldest continuous tradition in the world, marked by an unusual degree of continuity within and consciousness of that tradition. This is a departure from the Western collapse and gradual recovery of classical styles. The decorative arts are extremely important in China, and much of the finest work was produced in large workshops or factories by essentially unknown artists. Much of the best work in ceramics, textiles, and other techniques was produced over a long period by the various Imperial factories or workshops, which was used by the court as well as distributed internally and abroad on a massive scale to demonstrate the wealth and power of the Emperors. In contrast, ink wash painting developed aesthetic values depending on the imagination of the artist, similar to and predating the art traditions of the West.

**Painting**

Traditional Chinese painting involves similar techniques to calligraphy, using a brush dipped in black or colored ink painted on paper or silk. The finished work can be mounted on hanging scrolls or handscrolls. Traditional painting was also done on album sheets, walls, lacquerware, folding screens, and other media.

**Techniques**

The two main techniques in Chinese painting are Gong-bi (meaning "meticulous" and using highly detailed brushstrokes that delimit details very precisely) and ink and wash painting (watercolor or brush painting). Artists from the Han (202 BCE) to the Tang (618–906 CE) dynasties primarily painted the human figure. Much known of early Chinese figure painting comes from burial sites, where paintings were preserved on silk banners, lacquered objects, and tomb walls. Early tomb paintings were meant to protect the dead or help their souls get to paradise; others illustrated the teachings of Confucius or depicted scenes of daily life.

The Five Dynasties period to the Northern Song period (907–1128 CE) is known as the "great age of Chinese landscape". In the north, artists such as Jing Hao, Li Cheng, Fan Kuan, and Guo Xi painted pictures of towering mountains using strong black lines, ink wash, and sharp, dotted brushstrokes to suggest rough stone. In the south, Dong Yuan, Juran, and other artists painted the rolling hills and rivers of their native countryside in peaceful scenes with softer, rubbed brushwork. These became the classical styles of Chinese landscape painting.

**Dong Yuan, Xiao and Xiang Rivers. 10th century**

Dong Yuan painted the rolling hills and rivers of his native countryside using soft, rubbed brushwork.
A Solitary Temple Amid Clearing Peaks (晴), Li Cheng (c. 919 - c. 967 CE)

Li Cheng was among the great landscape painters from northern China.

Sculpture

Chinese ritual bronzes from the Shang and Western Zhou Dynasties still exert an influence over Chinese art. Many are cast with complex patterned and zoomorphic decoration. The spectacular Terracotta Army was assembled for the tomb of Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor of a unified China from 221–210 BCE, to enable the deceased to enjoy the same lifestyle in the afterlife. Smaller figures in pottery or wood were
placed in tombs for centuries afterwards, peaking in quality in the Tang Dynasty.

Crossbow men from the Terracotta Army, interred by 210 BCE, Qin Dynasty

The spectacular Terracotta Army was assembled for the tomb of Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor of a unified China from 221–210 BCE.

Attributions

- Art of the Middle Kingdom
12.2: The Neolithic Age

12.2.1: Ceramics in Neolithic China

Painted pottery emerged during the Neolithic period of the Yangshao and Longshan cultures.

Learning Objective

Compare and contrast the pottery of the Yangshao and Longshan cultures of the Neolithic era

Key Points

- Ceramics began in China during the New Stone Age in the period of the Yangshao and Longshan cultures.
- The earliest earthenware of the Yangshao culture was molded by hand. The potter's wheel was invented much later during the Longshan culture.
- Yangshao artisans created fine white, red, and black painted pottery with human facial, animal, and geometric designs.
- The Longshan culture was known for its polished black pottery created with excellent skill.

Key Term

Neolithic

Also known as the New Stone Age, a period in the development of human technology beginning from 10,200-8500 BCE and ending around between 4500 and 2000 BCE, depending on the part of the world.

Background

The invention of pottery and ceramics marked the advent of the New Stone Age in China around 6,000 years ago. The earliest earthenware was molded with clay by hand and fired at a temperature of about 500-600 degrees Celsius. Painted pottery emerged during the Yangshao and Longshan cultures.

Yangshao

The Yangshao was a Neolithic culture that existed extensively along the central Yellow River in China from around 5000 BCE to 3000 BCE. These people flourished mainly in the provinces of Henan, Shaanxi, and Shanxi.

Yangshao artisans created fine white, red, and black painted pottery with human faces, animals, and
geometric designs. Unlike the later Longshan culture, the Yangshao culture did not use pottery wheels. Excavations found the bodies of children buried in painted pottery jars.

**Yangshao Bowl**

Human-faced fish decoration bowl, 5000-4000 BCE, from Banpo Village, Shaanxi.

**Longshan**

The Longshan were a late Neolithic culture in China, centered in the central and lower Yellow River. They existed just after the Yangshao culture, from about 3000 BCE to 2000 BCE.

The Longshan culture was distinguished by its advanced pottery skills, including the use of pottery wheels. This culture's most noted creation is highly polished, black pottery, also known as eggshell pottery because of its thin walls. Eggshell pottery has also been discovered in the Yangzi River valley and as far as the southeastern coast of modern China, a clear indication that Neolithic agricultural subgroups of the greater Longshan culture spread across the ancient boundaries of China.
Longshan Pottery

Black eggshell pottery of the Longshan culture.

The Neolithic population in China reached its peak during the Longshan culture. Toward the end of the era, the population decreased sharply; this was matched by the disappearance of high-quality black pottery in ritual burials.

12.2.2: Jade in Neolithic China

Jade has been used in virtually all periods of Chinese history. The earliest jades of the Neolithic Period were often quite simple and without ornamentation.

Learning Objective

Describe the jade work and religious architecture of the Liangzhu culture

Key Points

- During Neolithic times, the known sources of nephrite jade in China were the Ningshao area in the
Yangtze River Delta (during the Liangzhu culture, 3400–2250 BCE) and in the Liaoning province in Inner Mongolia (during the Hongshan culture, 4700–2200 BCE).

- Jade was used to create many utilitarian and ceremonial objects from indoor decorative items to jade burial suits, reflecting the ancient Chinese belief that jades would confer immortality or prolong life and prevent decay.
- The bi (a circular disc with a hole) and cong (a vessel that is square on the outside and circular on the inside) are only found in jade from early periods and are thought to have had religious or cosmic significance.
- The Liangzhu culture was the last Neolithic jade culture in the Yangtze River Delta of China. Liangzhu jade is characterized by large, finely worked ritual jades, commonly incised with the taotie motif.

**Key Term**

**Taotie**

A motif commonly found on Chinese ritual bronze vessels from the Shang and Zhou Dynasties, typically consisting of a frontal, bilaterally symmetrical zoomorphic mask with a pair of raised eyes and no lower jaw area.

Jade has been used in virtually all periods of Chinese history and generally accords with the characteristic decorative style of each period. The earliest jades of the Neolithic Period are often quite simple and unornamented, used as ritual or decorative versions of the tools and weapons in ordinary use. These are presumed to have been symbols of political power or possibly religious authority.

**Sources of Jade**

During Neolithic times, the known sources of nephrite jade in China for utilitarian and ceremonial items were the now-depleted deposits in the Ningshao area in the Yangtze River Delta (during the Liangzhu culture, 3400–2250 BCE) and in an area of the Liaoning province in Inner Mongolia (during the Hongshan culture, 4700–2200 BCE). As early as 6000 BCE, Dushan Jade, a jade substitute found near Mount Du, has also been mined. In the Yin Ruins of the Shang Dynasty in Anyang, Dushan Jade ornaments were unearthed in the tombs of the Shang kings.

**Jade Objects**

Jade was used to create utilitarian and ceremonial objects ranging from indoor decorative items to jade burial suits, reflecting the ancient Chinese belief that jades would confer immortality or prolong life and prevent decay. The bi and cong are objects only found in jade in early periods, thought to have had religious or cosmic significance. The bi is a circular disk with a hole, originally plain but increasingly decorated over time, and the cong is a vessel that's square on the outside but circular on the inside. In later literature, the cong represents the earth and the bi represents the sky.
Neolithic *cong*, 3rd millennium BCE

The cong is a Chinese jade vessel, square on the outside but circular on the inside.

**Jade in the Liangzhu Culture**

The Liangzhu culture (3400-2250 BCE) was the last Neolithic jade culture in the Yangtze River Delta of China. Its influence extended from around Lake Tai north to Nanjing and the Chang Jiang, east to Shanghai and the sea, and south to Hangzhou. The culture was highly stratified, as jade, silk, ivory, and lacquer artifacts were found exclusively in elite burials, while simple pottery was more commonly found in the plots of common individuals. The site at Liangzhu was discovered in Yuhang County, Zhejiang, and initially excavated by Shi Xingeng in 1936.

**Liangzhu Jade**

The jade from this culture is characterized by large, finely worked ritual jades, commonly incised with the *taotie* motif. The most exemplary artifacts from the culture were its *cong* (cylinders, the largest of which weighs 3.5 kg), *bi* (discs) and *Yue axes* (ceremonial axes). Jade pendants found were engraved with representations of small birds, turtles, and fish. Many Liangzhu jade artifacts had a white, milky, bone-like aspect due to their tremolite rock origin and the influence of water-based fluids at burial sites, although jade
made from actinolite and serpentine were also common.

### Liangzhu Jade Bi

Jade bi from the Liangzhu culture; the ritual object is a symbol of wealth and military power.

#### Attributions

- **Ceramics in Neolithic China**
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12.3: The Bronze Age

12.3.1: Ceramics and Bronze in the Shang Dynasty

The artwork of the Shang dynasty, notably bronze pieces, has been discovered through archaeological excavations.

Learning Objective

Describe the advancements of bronze casting and pottery during the Shang dynasty

Key Points

- The Shang Dynasty ruled in the Yellow River Valley during the second millennium BCE.
- Tens of thousands of bronze, jade, stone, bone, and ceramic artifacts have been obtained from the Ruins of Yin and other excavation sites, providing a great deal of insight into Shang culture and artwork.
- While many Shang royal tombs have been raided, bronze vessels, stoneware and pottery vessels, bronze weapons, jade figures, hair combs, and bone hair pins were found at the intact Tomb 5 at Yinxu.
- Chinese bronze casting and pottery both advanced during the Shang dynasty, with bronze commonly used for art rather than weapons.
- As far back as 1500 BCE, the early Shang Dynasty engaged in large-scale production of bronze vessels and weapons.

Key Terms

bronze

A natural or man-made alloy of copper, usually of tin with one or more other metals.

piece-mold

A method of casting in which the object is first designed as a model and then enclosed in a clay mold that can be cut into pieces for removal from the model.

oracle bones

Pieces of ox scapula or turtle plastron used for pyromancy – a form of divination – in ancient China, mainly during the late Shang dynasty.

Overview: Shang Dynasty

The Shang Dynasty, also known as the Yin Dynasty according to traditional historiography, ruled in the
Yellow River valley in the second millennium BCE. The Shang are estimated to have succeeded the previous Xia Dynasty from circa 1766-1556 BCE and ruled until the following Zhou Dynasty circa 1122-1046 BCE.

**Artifacts from the Shang Dynasty**

The artwork of the Shang Dynasty has been discovered through numerous archaeological digs. In particular, excavation work at the Ruins of Yin, identified as the last Shang capital, uncovered eleven major Yin royal tombs and the foundations of palaces and ritual sites containing weapons of war and the remains from animal and human sacrifices. Tens of thousands of bronze, jade, stone, bone, and ceramic artifacts have been obtained. The workmanship on the bronze attests to a high level of civilization.

Many Shang royal tombs were ravaged by grave robbers in ancient times; however, in the spring of 1976, the discovery of Tomb 5 at Yinxu revealed a tomb that was not only undisturbed, but one of the most richly furnished Shang tombs ever discovered. With more than 200 bronze ritual vessels and 109 inscriptions of Lady Fu Hao's name, archaeologists realized they had stumbled across the tomb of the militant consort to King Wu Ding, as described in 170 to 180 Shang oracle bones. Bronze vessels, stoneware and pottery vessels, bronze weapons, jade figures, hair combs, and bone hairpins were found.

**Tomb of Fu Hao**

With more than 200 bronze ritual vessels and 109 inscriptions of Lady Fu Hao's name, archaeologists realized they had stumbled across the tomb of the militant consort to King Wu Ding, as described in 170 to 180 Shang oracle bones.

**Ceramic and Bronze Work**

Chinese bronze casting and pottery greatly advanced during the Shang dynasty, with bronze often used for art as well as for weapons. Shang-era ceramics grew more detailed during this era as technical skill advanced, though they did not yet reach the skill of the following Han Dynasty. Various excavations have
yielded pottery fragments containing short sequences of symbols, suggesting early forms of writing that differed across regions. The Shang had a fully developed system of writing preserved on bronze inscriptions and a small number of writings on pottery, jade, horn, and oracle bones.

White pottery pot with geometric design

Shang dynasty (1600–1100 BC)

As far back as circa 1500 BCE, the early Shang Dynasty engaged in large-scale production of bronzeware vessels and weapons. This required a large labor force that could handle the mining, refining, and transportation of the necessary copper, tin, and lead ores, as well as official managers to oversee both hard laborers and skilled artisans.

The Shang royal court and aristocrats required a vast amount of bronze vessels for various ceremonial purposes and events of religious divination. Official rules even decreed how many bronze containers of each type a nobleman or noblewoman of a certain rank could own. Bronze was also used for the fittings of spoke-wheeled chariots, which appeared in China around 1200 BCE.
The Shang royal court and aristocrats required a vast amount of different bronze vessels for various ceremonial purposes and events of religious divination.

With the increased amount of bronze available, the army could also better equip itself with an assortment of bronze weaponry. Bronze and stones weapons were an integral part of Shang society, and Shang infantry were armed with máo (矛) spears, yuè (鉞) pole-axes, gē (戈) pole-based dagger-axes, composite bows, and bronze or leather helmets.
A bronze axe of the Shang dynasty

Bronze weapons were an integral part of Shang society, and Shang infantry were armed with a variety of stone and bronze weaponry.

12.3.2: Bronze under the Zhou Dynasty

The art of the Zhou Dynasty was characterized by the introduction of iron and the refinement of elaborate bronzework.

Learning Objective

Discuss the advancements and cultural adaptations of the Zhou Dynasty, including bronze and ironware

Key Points

- The Zhou Dynasty (1046–256 BCE) was a Chinese dynasty that followed the Shang Dynasty and preceded the Qin Dynasty.
- Though iron was introduced to China during the Zhou Dynasty, this period produced what many consider the zenith of Chinese bronzeware.
- Zhou bronzework borrowed heavily from the earlier Shang Dynasty, as demonstrated by the practice of casting inscriptions in bronze vessels and the design of the vessels themselves.
- Many large bronzes bear cast inscriptions. These comprise the bulk of surviving early Chinese writing and have helped historians and archaeologists piece together the history of China.
- Chinese bronze artifacts are generally either utilitarian, such as spear points and other tools or weapons, or ceremonial/ritual, such as more elaborate versions of everyday vessels in precious materials.
Key Terms

taotie

A motif common on Chinese ritual bronze vessels from the Shang and Zhou dynasties. The design typically consists of a frontal, bilaterally symmetrical zoomorphic mask with a pair of raised eyes and no lower jaw area.

Oracle bones

Pieces of shell or bone, normally from ox scapulae or turtle plastrons, used for scapulimancy – a form of divination – in ancient China, mainly during the late Shang dynasty.

The Zhou Dynasty (1046–256 BCE) was a Chinese dynasty that followed the Shang Dynasty and preceded the Qin Dynasty. Although the Zhou Dynasty lasted longer than any other dynasty in Chinese history, the actual political and military control of China by the Ji family lasted only until 771 BCE, a period known as the Western Zhou. Though iron was introduced to China during the Zhou Dynasty, this period of produced what many consider the zenith of Chinese bronzeware.

Cultural Influences

Cultural Influences

The archaeological record suggests that the Zhou were cultural opportunists. They were quick to adopt the material culture of the Shang, perhaps as a way of establishing their legitimacy. Zhou art also borrowed heavily from the Shang, illustrated by the casting of inscriptions in bronze vessels and the design of the vessels themselves.

Bronze Inscriptions

Many large bronzes bear cast inscriptions. These comprise the bulk of surviving early Chinese writing and have helped historians and archaeologists piece together the history of China, especially during the Zhou Dynasty. The bronzes of the Western Zhou Dynasty document large portions of history not found in the surviving texts of the time, and the medium of cast bronze lends the record a permanence not enjoyed by manuscripts. These inscriptions are commonly subdivided into four parts: a reference to the date and place, the naming of the event commemorated, the list of gifts given to the artisan in exchange for the bronze, and a dedication. These reference points have enabled historians to place most of the vessels within a certain time frame of the Western Zhou period and trace the evolution of the vessels and the events they record.

Uses and Types of Bronze

Chinese bronze artifacts are generally either utilitarian, such as spear points and other tools or weapons, or ceremonial/ritual, such as more elaborate versions in precious materials of everyday vessels. The majority of surviving Chinese ancient bronze artifacts are ritual forms rather than the practical equivalents. Weapons
such as daggers and axes had a sacrificial meaning, symbolizing the heavenly power of the ruler. The strong religious associations of bronze objects led to a development of a great number of vessel types and shapes, which became regarded as classic and totemic and were copied in other periods of Chinese art, often in other media such as porcelain.

Zhou Dynasty bronze sword

An Eastern-Zhou bronze sword excavated from Changsa, Hunan Province

Examples of ritual bronze vessels include the numerous large sacrificial tripods known as dings and other distinct shapes such as gui and zun. Dings are prehistoric ancient Chinese cauldrons, standing upon legs with a lid and two facing handles. They are one of the most important Chinese ritual bronzes and were generally made in two shapes: round vessels with three legs and rectangular vessels with four, the latter often called fanding. They were used for cooking, storage, and ritual offerings to the gods or to ancestors. Gui are bowl-shaped ancient Chinese ritual bronze vessels used to hold offerings of food and for ancestral tombs. Zun are wine and sacrificial vessels characterized by a tall cylindrical shape with no handles or legs and a mouth slightly broader than the body. In the late Zhōu Dynasty, this type of vessel became exceedingly elaborate, often taking the shape of animals and abandoning the traditional shape.
Zhou Bronze

A Western Zhou bronze gui vessel, c. 1000 BC.

The ritual books of China during the Zhou Dynasty describe who was allowed to use what kinds of sacrificial vessels. The king of Zhou, for example, used 9dings and 8 gui vessels; a duke was allowed to use 7 dings and 6 guis; a baron could use 5 dings and 3 guis; and a nobleman was allowed to use 3 dings and 2 guis. Surviving identified Chinese ritual bronzes from the Zhou Dynasty tend to be highly decorated, often with the taotie motif with highly stylized animal faces including demons, symbolic animals, and abstract symbols.

Attributions

- Ceramics and Bronze in the Shang Dynasty
Bronze under the Zhou Dynasty

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12.4: The Qin Dynasty

12.4.1: The Qin Dynasty

The Qin Dynasty (221-206 BCE), though short-lived, is remembered for its military strength and its unification of China.

Learning Objective

Describe the establishment of the first imperial dynasty of China and the architecture, literature, weaponry, and sculpture it produced

Key Points

- In the mid and late 3rd century BCE, the Qin accomplished a series of swift conquests, eventually gaining control over the whole of China and creating a unified nation.
- During its reign, the Qin Dynasty achieved increased trade, improved agriculture, and revolutionary developments in military tactics, transportation, and weaponry, such as the sword and crossbow.
- The Dynasty is known for several impressive feats in architecture, sculpture, and other art, such as the beginnings of the Great Wall of China, the construction of the Terracotta Army, and the standardization of the writing system.

Key Terms

Qin Shihuang

The self-proclaimed first Emperor of the Qin Dynasty.

legalism

A philosophy of focusing on the text of written law to the exclusion of the intent of law, elevating strict adherence to law over justice, mercy, grace and common sense.

Warring States Period

A period in ancient China following the Spring and Autumn period and concluding with the victory of the state of Qin in 221 BCE, creating a unified China under the Qin Dynasty.

History: The Qin Dynasty

The Qin Dynasty was the first imperial dynasty of China, lasting only 15 years from 221 to 206 BCE. The strength of the Qin state was greatly increased by the legalist reforms of Shang Yang in the 4th century BCE, during the Warring States Period. Legalism is a philosophy of focusing on the text of written law to
the exclusion of the intent of law, elevating strict adherence to law over justice, mercy, grace, and common sense. In the mid and late 3rd century BCE, the Qin accomplished a series of swift conquests, first ending the powerless Zhou Dynasty and eventually destroying the remaining six of the major states, thus gaining control over the whole of China. This resulted in the first-ever unified China.

Map of the Qin Empire, 210 BCE

The territories marked with red dots show the approximate extent of Qin political control at the death of Qin Shi Huang in 210 BCE.

Accomplishments of the Qin Dynasty

During its reign over China, the Qin Dynasty achieved increased trade, improved agriculture, and revolutionary developments in military tactics, transportation, and weaponry. Qin Shihuang, the self-proclaimed first Emperor of the Qin Dynasty, made vast improvements to the military, which used the most advanced weaponry of its time. The sword was invented during the previous Warring States Period, first made of bronze and later of iron. The crossbow had been introduced in the 5th century BCE and was more powerful and accurate than the composite bows used earlier; it could also be rendered ineffective by removing two pins, which prevented enemies from capturing a working crossbow.
The crossbow was introduced in the 5th century BC and was more powerful and accurate than the composite bows used earlier.

The long, sturdy crossbow bolts are shown lined up next to a pile of smaller Arcuballista bolts.

The Dynasty is also known for many impressive feats in architecture, sculpture, and other art, such as the beginnings of the Great Wall of China, the construction of the Terracotta Army, and the standardization of the writing system.

Decline of the Dynasty

Despite its military strength, however, the Dynasty did not last long. When Qin Shihuang died in 210 BCE, his son was placed on the throne by two of the previous emperor's advisers, who attempted to influence and control the administration of the entire dynasty through him. The advisers fought among themselves, however, which resulted in both their deaths and that of the second Qin emperor. Popular revolt broke out a few years later, and the weakened empire soon fell to a Chu lieutenant, who went on to found the Han Dynasty. Despite its rapid end, the Qin Dynasty influenced future Chinese empires, particularly the Han, and the European name for China is thought to be derived from it.

12.4.2: Architecture of the Qin Dynasty

Qin architecture is characterized by defensive structures and elements that conveyed authority and power, as exemplified by the early beginnings of the Great Wall.
Learning Objective

Examine the characteristics of architecture created under the Qin Dynasty

Key Points

- Architecture from the previous Warring States Period had several definitive aspects which carried into the Qin Dynasty.
- City walls used for defense were made longer, and secondary walls were often built to separate the different districts.
- Versatility in federal structures was emphasized to create a sense of authority and absolute power, conveyed by architectural elements such as high towers, pillar gates, terraces, and high buildings.
- Qin Shihuang, the self-proclaimed first Emperor, is responsible for the initial construction of what later became the Great Wall of China, which he built along the northern border to protect his empire against the Mongols.

Key Terms

Great Wall of China

A series of fortifications made of stone, brick, tamped earth, wood, and other materials, generally built along an east-to-west line across the historical northern borders of China to protect the Chinese states and empires against the raids and invasions of the nomadic groups of the Eurasian Steppe.

Qin Shihuang

The self-proclaimed first Emperor of the Qin Dynasty.

The Qin Dynasty was the first imperial dynasty of China, lasting from 221 to 206 BCE. The Dynasty followed the Warring States Period and resulted in the unification of China, ending 15 years later with the introduction of the Han Dynasty.

Architecture from the Warring States Period had several definitive aspects which carried into the Qin Dynasty. City walls used for defense were made longer, and secondary walls were often built to separate the different districts. Versatility in federal structures was emphasized to create a sense of authority and absolute power, conveyed by architectural elements such as high towers, pillar gates, terraces, and high buildings.

The Beginnings of the Great Wall

During its reign over China, the Qin sought to create an imperial state unified by highly structured political power and a stable economy able to support a large military. The Qin central government minimized the role of aristocrats and landowners to have direct administrative control over the peasantry, who comprised the overwhelming majority of the population and thus made up a large labor force. This allowed for the construction of ambitious projects such as the wall on the northern border now known as the Great Wall of China.

Qin Shihuang, the first self-proclaimed emperor of the Qin Dynasty, developed plans to fortify the northern border against the nomadic Mongols. The result was the initial construction of what later became the Great
Wall of China, built by joining and strengthening the walls made by the feudal lords. These were expanded and rebuilt multiple times by later dynasties, also in response to threats from the north.

![The Great Wall of China at Jinshanling](image)

**The Great Wall of China at Jinshanling**

The initial construction of what would become the Great Wall of China began under Qin Shihuang during the Qin Dynasty.

**12.4.3: Literature of the Qin Dynasty**

Under the Qin Dynasty, a standardized system of Chinese writing was created. This unified Chinese culture for thousands of years.

**Learning Objective**

Discuss the goals of literature produced during the Qin Dynasty

**Key Points**

- Prime Minister Li Si standardized the writing system across the whole country. This unified Chinese culture for thousands of years.
- Li Si is credited with creating the "lesser-seal" style of calligraphy, also known as small seal script. This served as a basis for the modern Chinese writing system and is still used in cards, posters, and advertising today.
- In 221 BC, Qin Shihuang, the first Qin emperor, conquered all of the Chinese states and governed with a single philosophy known as legalism. This encouraged severe punishments, particularly when the emperor was disobeyed.
- An attempt to purge all traces of the old dynasties and their philosophies led to the infamous burning of books and burying of scholars incident in 213 BCE.
- In an attempt to consolidate power, Qin Shihuang ordered the burning of all books on non-legalist philosophical viewpoints and intellectual subjects; scholars who refused to submit their books were executed.
Key Terms

legalism

A philosophy focusing on the text of written law to the exclusion of the intent of law, elevating strict adherence to law over justice, mercy, grace, and common sense.

logographic

A writing system based on characters that represent a word or phrase, such as Chinese characters, Japanese kanji, and some Egyptian hieroglyphs.

Li Si and the Standardization of Writing

The written language of the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BCE) was logographic like that of the Zhu; each written character represented a word or phrase, as opposed to letters as in the English alphabet. As one of his most influential achievements, prime minister Li Si of the Qin Dynasty standardized the writing system to be of uniform size and shape across the whole country. This had a unifying effect on Chinese culture that lasted thousands of years. Li Si is also credited with creating the "lesser-seal" style of calligraphy, also known as small seal script. This served as a basis for the modern Chinese writing system and is still used in cards, posters, and advertising today.

Before the Qin conquest of the last six of the Warring States of Zhou China, local styles of characters evolved independently for centuries, producing what are called the "Scripts of the Six States" or "Great Seal Script". Under one unified government however, the diversity was deemed undesirable as it hindered timely communication, trade, taxation, and transportation. In addition, independent scripts could express dissenting political ideas.

As a result, coaches, roads, currency, laws, weights, measures, and writing were systematically unified under the Qin. Characters different than those found in Qin were discarded, and Li Si's small seal characters became the standard for all regions within the empire. This policy came into effect around 220 BCE, the year after Qin's unification of the Chinese states, and was introduced by Li Si and two ministers.

Small Seal Script

Small seal script is an archaic form of Chinese calligraphy standardized and promulgated as a national standard by Li Si, prime minister under the Qin Dynasty.
The Burning of Books

During the previous Warring States period, the Hundred Schools of Thought comprised many philosophies proposed by Chinese scholars, including Confucianism. In 221 BC, Qin Shihuang, the first Qin emperor, conquered all of the Chinese states and governed with a single philosophy known as legalism. This encouraged severe punishments, particularly when the emperor was disobeyed. Individuals' rights were devalued when they conflicted with the government's or the ruler's wishes, and merchants and scholars were considered unproductive and fit for elimination. During the dynasty, Confucianism—along with all other non-legalist philosophies—was suppressed by the First Emperor.

A Consolidation of Power

One of the more drastic measures to eradicate the old schools of thought during the Qin Dynasty was the infamous burning of books and burying of scholars incident. This decree, passed in 213 BCE, almost single-handedly gave the Qin Dynasty a bad reputation in history. In an attempt to consolidate power, Qin Shihuang ordered the burning of all books on non-legalist philosophical viewpoints and intellectual subjects. All scholars who refused to submit their books were executed. As a result, only texts considered productive by the legalists (largely discussing pragmatic subjects such as agriculture, divination, and medicine) were preserved. One of the more drastic measures to eradicate the old schools of thought during the Qin Dynasty was the infamous burning of books and burying of scholars incident. This decree, passed in 213 BCE, almost single-handedly gave the Qin Dynasty a bad reputation in history. In an attempt to consolidate power, Qin Shihuang ordered the burning of all books on non-legalist philosophical viewpoints and intellectual subjects. All scholars who refused to submit their books were executed. As a result, only texts considered productive by the legalists (largely discussing pragmatic subjects such as agriculture, divination, and medicine) were preserved.
Killing the Scholars and Burning the Books (18th century Chinese painting)

In 213 BCE, Qin Shihuang ordered the burning of all books on non-legalist philosophical viewpoints and intellectual subjects. All scholars who refused to submit their books were executed.

12.4.4: Sculpture of the Qin Dynasty

The Qin Dynasty is perhaps best known for the impressive Terracotta Army, built to protect Qin Shihuang in the afterlife.

Learning Objective

Evaluate the sculpture of the Qin Dynasty

Key Points

- The Qin, under the leadership of emperor Qin Shihuang, accomplished a series of swift conquests and gained control over all of China, unifying it as a country for the first time.
- The Qin made many advancements in sculpture during their short reign, building on techniques practiced by the previous Zhou Dynasty.
- The most famous example of sculpture under the Qin Dynasty was a project commissioned during Qin Shihuang's rule known as the Terracotta Army, intended to protect the emperor after his death.
- The Terracotta Army consists of more than 7,000 life-size terracotta figures of warriors and horses, buried with Qin Shihuang after his death in 210–209 BCE.
- Originally, the figures were painted with bright pigments of pink, red, green, blue, black, brown, white, and lilac; however, much of the color coating flaked off or faded.
- The figures were constructed in several poses, including standing infantry, kneeling archers, and charioteers with horses.

Key Terms

Qin Shihuang

The self-proclaimed first Emperor of the Qin Dynasty.

terracotta

A type of earthenware, clay-based unglazed or glazed ceramic, in which the fired body is porous.

The Qin Dynasty was the first imperial dynasty of China, lasting from 221 to 206 BCE. The Dynasty followed the Warring States Period and ended after only 15 years with the Han Dynasty. The Qin, under the leadership of its first self-proclaimed emperor Qin Shihuang, accomplished a series of swift conquests, first ending the powerless Zhou Dynasty and eventually destroying the remaining six of the major states and gaining control of all of China. Under the Qin, it was unified as a country for the first time. The Qin made many advancements in sculpture during their short reign, building on techniques practiced by the previous Zhou Dynasty.
The Terracotta Army

The most famous example of sculpture under the Qin Dynasty was a project commissioned during Qin Shihuang’s rule known as the Terracotta Army, intended to protect the emperor after his death. The Terracotta Army was inconspicuous due to its underground location and thus not discovered until 1974. The "army" of sculptures consists of more than 7,000 life-size terracotta figures of warriors and horses that were buried with Qin Shihuang after his death in 210–209 BCE. The three pits containing the Terracotta Army were estimated in 2007 to hold more than 8,000 soldiers, 130 chariots with 520 horses, and 150 cavalry horses, the majority of which remained buried in the pits nearby Qin Shi Huang's mausoleum. Non-military terracotta figures were found in other pits, including officials, acrobats, strongmen, and musicians.

Style of the Figures

The figures were painted in bright pigments before they were placed in the vault, and the original colors of pink, red, green, blue, black, brown, white, and lilac were visible when the pieces were first unearthed. However, exposure to air has caused the pigments to fade and flake off, revealing their natural terracotta color. The figures were constructed in several poses, including standing infantry, kneeling archers, and charioteers with horses. They vary in height according to their roles, with the generals tallest, and each figure's head appears to be unique, with a variety of facial features, expressions, and hair styles. Along with the colored lacquer finish, the individual facial features would have given the figures a realistic feel.

The Terracotta Army

The Terracotta Army consists of more than 7,000 life-size terracotta figures of warriors and horses, buried with the first Emperor of Qin in 210 BCE.

A photo of part of the tomb, showing three rows of terracotta figures.

Construction
The terracotta army figures were manufactured in workshops by government laborers and local craftsmen using local materials. Heads, arms, legs, and torsos were created separately and then assembled. Eight face molds were most likely used, with clay added after assembly to provide individual facial features. It is believed that the legs were made using the same process used for terracotta drainage pipes. This would classify the process as assembly line production, with specific parts manufactured and assembled after being fired, as opposed to being crafted from one solid piece and subsequently fired. In those times of tight imperial control, each workshop was required to inscribe its name on items produced to ensure quality control.

Attributions

- The Qin Dynasty

- Architecture of the Qin Dynasty

- Literature of the Qin Dynasty

- Sculpture of the Qin Dynasty
12.5: The Han Dynasty

12.5.1: Philosophy and Art of the Han Dynasty

Spanning more than four centuries, the Han Dynasty period is considered a golden age in Chinese history. This period was strongly influenced by Confucianism.

Learning Objective

Discuss the influence of Han philosophy and art on this golden age in Chinese history

Key Points

- The Han Dynasty was an imperial dynasty of China, preceded by the Qin Dynasty (221–207 BCE) and succeeded by the Three Kingdoms (220–280 CE).
- The Dynasty is separated into two periods: the Western Han (206 BCE – 9 CE) and the Eastern Han (25–220 CE).
- The early Western Han court simultaneously accepted the philosophical teachings of Legalism, Huang-Lao Daoism, and Confucianism in making state decisions and shaping government policy.
- However, the Han court under Emperor Wu gave Confucianism exclusive patronage. In 136 BCE, he abolished all academic chairs not associated with the Confucian Five Classics and encouraged officials to receive a Confucian-based education at the Imperial University that established in 124 BCE.
- Han Dynasty poetry was dominated by the fu genre, intermediary pieces between poetry and prose in which a place, object, feeling, or other subject is described in detail and from as many angles as possible.

Key Terms

Confucianism

An ethical and philosophical system developed from the teachings of the Chinese philosopher by the same name (551–479 BCE). It emphasizes the ethics of filial piety, harmonious relationships, ritual, and righteousness.

Legalism

A utilitarian political and realist reform-oriented philosophy meant to strengthen government and reinforce adherence to the law, stressing a strict system of punishments and rewards to maintain law and order.

Overview: The Han Dynasty
The Han Dynasty was an imperial dynasty of China, preceded by the Qin Dynasty (221–207 BCE) and succeeded by the Three Kingdoms (220–280 CE). It was founded by the rebel leader Liu Bang, known posthumously as Emperor Gaozu of Han. It was briefly interrupted by the Xin Dynasty (9–23 CE) of the former regent Wang Mang, an interim that separates the Han into two periods: the Western Han (206 BCE – 9 CE) and the Eastern Han (25–220 CE). Spanning more than four centuries, the Han Dynasty is considered a golden age in Chinese history. To this day, China's majority ethnic group refers to itself as the "Han people," and Chinese characters are referred to as "Han characters."

Map of the Han dynasty in 100 BC

The Han Dynasty (seen shaded in purple) was an imperial dynasty of China, preceded by the Qin Dynasty (221–207 BCE) and succeeded by the Three Kingdoms (220–280 CE).

Han Philosophy

The early Western Han court simultaneously accepted the philosophical teachings of Legalism, Huang-Lao Daoism, and Confucianism in making state decisions and shaping government policy. However, the Han court under Emperor Wu gave Confucianism exclusive patronage.

Confucianism

Confucianism is an ethical and philosophical system developed from the teachings of the Chinese philosopher Confucious (551–479 BCE). Confucianism originated as an "ethical-sociopolitical teaching" during the Spring and Autumn Periods, but during the Han Dynasty it developed metaphysical and cosmological elements. At the core of Confucian ethics were the virtues of filial piety, harmonious relationships, ritual, and righteousness.
Unlike the original ideology espoused by Confucius, Han Confucianism in Emperor Wu's reign was the creation of Dong Zhongshu (179–104 BCE). Dong was a scholar and minor official who aggregated the ethical Confucian ideas of ritual, filial piety, and harmonious relationships with the five phases (the natural cycles that governed Heaven, Earth, and Man) and yin-yang cosmologies. Dong's synthesis justified the imperial system of government within the natural order of the universe.

**Education**

In 136 BCE, Emperor Wu abolished all academic chairs (boshi 博士) not dealing with the Confucian Five Classics and encouraged nominees for office to receive a Confucian-based education at the Imperial University that he established in 124 BCE. The Imperial University grew in importance as the student body grew to over 30,000 by the 2nd century CE. A Confucian-based education was also made available at commander-level schools, and private schools opened in small towns where teachers earned respectable incomes from tuition payments.

**Notable Texts**

Some important texts were created and studied by scholars during this time. Philosophical works written by Yang Xiong (53 BCE – 18 CE), Huan Tan (43 BCE – 28 CE), Wang Chong (27–100 CE), and Wang Fu (78–163 CE) questioned whether human nature was innately good or evil and posed challenges to Dong's universal order. *The Records of the Grand Historian* by Sima Tan (d. 110 BCE) and his son Sima Qian (145–86 BCE) established the standard model for all of imperial China's Standard Histories, such as the *Book of Han* written by Ban Biao (3–54 CE), his son Ban Gu (32–92 CE), and his daughter Ban Zhao (45–116 CE). There were dictionaries such as the *Shuowen Jiezi* by Xu Shen (c. 58 – c. 147 CE) and the *Fangyan* by Yang Xiong. Biographies on important figures were written by various gentrymen.

Han dynasty poetry was dominated by the fu genre, which achieved its greatest prominence during the reign of Emperor Wu. Fu are intermediary pieces between poetry and prose in which a place, object, feeling, or other subject is described and rhapsodized in exhaustive detail and from as many angles as possible. Classical fu composers attempted to use an extensive vocabulary and included many rare and archaic terms in their compositions. Fu poems employ alternating rhyme and prose, varying line length, close alliteration, onomatopoeia, loose parallelism, and extensive cataloging of their topics.

**12.5.2: Burial Goods of the Han Dynasty**

The Han Dynasty is considered a golden age in Chinese history in which a great deal of art was produced, including burial goods.

**Learning Objective**

Describe the materials individuals were buried with during the Han Dynasty

**Key Points**

- One of the most well-known styles of art during the Han Dynasty was burial art, which evolved between the Western and Eastern Han periods.
During the Western Han period, burial goods were usually wares and pieces of art that had been used by the tomb occupant during life.

During the Eastern Han period, stylistic goods, wares, and artwork found in tombs were usually made exclusively for burial.

Common items used for burial during the Eastern Han period included miniature models of ceramic towers, querns, water wells, pigsties, pestling shops, and farm fields with pottery pigs, dogs, sheep, chickens, and ducks.

Although many items placed in tombs were commonly used wares and utensils, it was considered taboo to bring objects specified for burial into living quarters or the imperial palace.

The Han Dynasty was known for jade burial suits, ceremonial suits made of pieces of jade in which members of the royalty were buried.

One of the earliest known depictions of a landscape in Chinese art comes from a pair of hollow-tile door panels from a Western Han Dynasty tomb near Zhengzhou, dated 60 BCE.

### Key Term

**jade**

An ornamental rock used for hardstone carving since prehistoric periods.

### Overview: The Han Dynasty

The period of the Han Dynasty spanned more than four centuries and is considered a golden age in Chinese history during which a great deal of art was produced. The dynasty has been divided into the Western Han (206 BCE – 9 CE) and the Eastern Han (25–220 CE) periods. One of the most well-known legacies of the Han Dynasty is burial art, which evolved between the Western and Eastern Han periods.

### Art of the Han Dynasty

#### Burial Goods

During the Western Han period, burial goods consisted of wares and pieces of art used by the tomb occupant when he or she was alive. During the Eastern Han period, however, stylistic goods, wares, and artwork found in tombs were usually made exclusively for burial and not previously used by the deceased.

Common items for burial during the Eastern Han period included miniature ceramic towers—usually watchtowers and urban residential towers—which provide historians with clues about lost wooden architecture. In addition to towers, there were also miniature models of querns (hand mills for grinding grain), water wells, pigsties, pestling shops, and farm fields with pottery pigs, dogs, sheep, chickens, and ducks. Although many items placed in tombs were commonly used wares and utensils, it was taboo to bring objects specified for burial into living quarters or the imperial palace. This ban was lifted once the objects were properly announced at funeral ceremonies, where they became known as mingqi (明/冥, "fearsome artifacts," "objects for the dead," or "brilliant artifacts").
Model of Han ceramic tomb

A model of a Han ceramic tomb of a multiple-story residential tower with a first-floor gatehouse and courtyard, mid-floor balcony, windows, and clearly distinguished support brackets.

Other Tomb Art

The Han Dynasty was known for jade burial suits, ceremonial suits made of pieces of jade in which members of royalty were buried. One of the earliest known landscape depictions in Chinese art comes from a pair of hollow-tile door panels from a Western Han Dynasty tomb near Zhengzhou, dated 60 BCE. A scene of continuous depth recession is conveyed by the zigzag of lines representing roads and garden walls, giving the impression that one is looking down from the top of a hill. This scene was made by the repeated impression of stamps on the clay while it was still soft, before firing. The oldest known classically painted Chinese landscape is a work by Zhan Ziqian of the later Sui Dynasty (581–618 CE).
A Han Dynasty Jade burial suit

A Jade burial suit is a ceremonial suit made of pieces of jade in which royal members in Han Dynasty were buried.

12.5.3: Architecture of the Han Dynasty

Remains of Han Dynasty architecture include ruins of brick and rammed earth walls, rammed earth platforms, and funerary stone pillar gates.

Learning Objective

Describe the building materials, layout, and architectural characteristics of Han palace halls, towers, tombs, and other abodes

Key Points

- Surviving architecture from the Han Dynasty includes ruins of brick and rammed earth walls (including above-ground city walls and underground tomb walls), rammed earth platforms for terraced altars and halls, funerary stone or brick pillar-gates, and scattered ceramic roof tiles. Timber was the chief building material in Han architecture, used for grand palace halls, multi-story towers, multi-story residential halls, and humble abodes.
- Walls of frontier towns and forts in Inner Mongolia were typically constructed with stamped clay bricks instead of rammed earth. Thatched or tiled roofs were supported by wooden pillars, since the addition of brick, rammed earth, or mud walls did not actually support the roof. Stone and plaster were also used for domestic architecture.
- Valuable clues about Han architecture can be found in burial artwork of ceramic models, paintings, and carved or stamped bricks discovered in tombs and other sites.

Key Terms
rammed earth

A construction material made by compressing dirt.

dougong

A unique structural element of interlocking wooden brackets, one of the most important elements in traditional Chinese architecture.

crenellations

The battlements of a castle or other building.

pillar

A large post, often used as supporting architecture.

Surviving architecture from the Han Dynasty includes ruins of brick and rammed earth walls (including above-ground city walls and underground tomb walls), rammed earth platforms for terraced altars and halls, funerary stone or brick pillar-gates, and scattered ceramic roof tiles that once adorned timber halls. Sections of the Han-era rammed earth Great Wall still exist in Gansu province, along with the frontier ruins of thirty beacon towers and two fortified castles with crenellations.

Building Materials

Timber was the chief building material in Han Dynasty architecture, used for grand palace halls, multi-story towers, multi-story residential halls, and humble abodes. However, due to the rapid decay of wood over time and its susceptibility to fire, the oldest wooden buildings found in China (which include several temple halls of Mount Wutai) date no earlier than the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE).

Walls of frontier towns and forts in Inner Mongolia were typically constructed with stamped clay bricks instead of rammed earth. Thatched or tiled roofs were supported by wooden pillars, since the addition of brick, rammed earth, or mud walls did not support the roof. Stone and plaster were used for domestic architecture. Tiled eaves projecting outward were built to distance falling rainwater from the walls; they were supported by dougong brackets that were sometimes elaborately decorated. Molded designs usually decorated the ends of roof tiles, as seen in artistic models of buildings and in surviving tile pieces.
The Gaoyi Que, a stone-carved pillar-gate (que)

A stone-carved pillar-gate, or que (闕), 6 m (20 ft) in total height, located at the tomb of Gao Yi in Ya'an, Sichuan province, was built during the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220 CE). Notice the stone-carved decorations of roof tile eaves, despite the fact that Han Dynasty stone que (part of the walled structures around tomb entrances) lacked wooden or ceramic components (but often imitated wooden buildings with ceramic roof tiles).

Styles of Architecture

Tombs and Houses

Valuable clues about Han architecture can be found in an artwork of ceramic models, paintings, and carved or stamped bricks discovered in tombs and other sites. Han tombs were laid out like underground houses, comparable to the scenes of courtyard houses found on tomb bricks and in three-dimensional models. Han homes had a courtyard area (some had multiple courtyards), with slightly elevated halls connected by stairways. Multi-story buildings included the main colonnaded residence halls built around the courtyards as well as watchtowers. The halls were built with intersecting crossbeams and rafters usually carved with decorations; stairways and walls were plastered over to produce a smooth surface and then painted.
Tower Architecture

There are Han-era literary references to tall towers in the capital cities. They often served as watchtowers, astronomical observatories, and religious establishments meant to attract the favor of immortals. It is unknown whether miniature ceramic models of residential towers and watchtowers found in Han Dynasty tombs are faithful representations of such timber towers; nevertheless, they reveal vital clues about lost timber architecture.

Only a handful of ceramic models of multi-story towers exist from the pre-Han and Western Han eras, though hundreds of existing models were made during the Eastern Han period. Model towers could be fired as one piece in the kiln or assembled from several different ceramic pieces. Each model is unique, yet they share common features such as a walled courtyard at the bottom, a balcony with balustrades and windows for every floor, and roof tiles capping and concealing the ceiling rafters. There were also door knockers, human figures peering out of the windows or standing on the balconies, and model pets such as dogs in the courtyard. Perhaps the most direct evidence to suggest that miniature ceramic towers represent real-life Han timber towers are the tile patterns. Artistic patterns found on the circular tiles that cap the eave-ends on the miniature models are exact matches of patterns found on roof tiles excavated at sites such as the royal palaces in Chang’an and Luoyang.

Other Types of Buildings

Other ceramic models from the Han burial sites reveal a variety of building types. These include multi-story storehouses such as granaries, courtyard houses with multi-story halls, kiosks, walled gate towers, mills, factories and workshops, animal pens, outhouses, and water wells. Even models of single-story farmhouses show great detail, including tiled roofs and courtyards. Models of granaries and storehouses had tiled rooftops, dougong brackets, windows, and stilt supports raising them above ground level. Han models of water wells sometimes feature tiny tiled roofs supported by beams that house the rope pulley used for lifting a bucket.

Attributions

- Philosophy and Art of the Han Dynasty

- Burial Goods of the Han Dynasty
Wikipedia GNU FDL.


- Architecture of the Han Dynasty
12.6: The Six Dynasties Period

12.6.1: Painting during the Six Dynasties Period

During the Six Dynasties period (220–589 CE), people began to write about art and appreciate painting for its own beauty.

Learning Objective

Summarize the Six Principles of painting according to Xie He and draw a timeline of the eras within the Six Dynasties

Key Points

- The Six Dynasties period takes its name from the six ruling dynasties of the era: the Eastern Wu (222–280), Jin Dynasty (265–420), Liu Song (420–479), Southern Qi (479–502), Liang (502–557), and Chen (557–589) Dynasties.
- Individual artists began to rise to attention, such as Gu Kaizhi. Many illustrated Confucian moral themes—such as the preferred behavior of a wife to her husband or of children to their parents—with gracefully drawn figures.
- Xie He—a writer, art historian, and critic in 5th century China—is most famous for outlining six points to consider when judging a painting, taken from the preface to his book, *The Record of the Classification of Old Painters*.
- Xie He's six elements include: 1) Spirit Resonance, 2) Bone Method, 3) Correspondence to the Object, 4) Suitability to Type, 5) Division and Planning, and 6) Transmission by Copying.

Key Terms

vitality

Energy or vigor.

Confucian

One who follows the teachings of Confucius.

The Six Dynasties period (220–589 CE) takes its name from the six ruling dynasties of the era: the Eastern Wu Dynasty (222–280), Jin Dynasty (265–420), Liu Song Dynasty (420–479), Southern Qi Dynasty (479–502), Liang Dynasty (502–557), and Chen Dynasty (557–589). During the Six Dynasties period, people began to write about art and appreciate painting for its own beauty. Individual artists began to rise to attention, such as Gu Kaizhi. Many illustrated Confucian moral themes—such as the preferred behavior of a wife to her husband or of children to their parents—with gracefully drawn figures.
**Luoshenfu, Gu Kaizhi (344-406 CE)**

The painting *Luoshenfu* by artist Gu Kaizhi, painted during the Six Dynasties Period.

Three horizontal panels, each depicting a different scene.

**The Six Principles**

Xie He—a writer, art historian, and critic in 5th century China—is most famous for outlining six points to consider when judging a painting. These were taken from the preface to his book, *The Record of the Classification of Old Painters*, written circa 550 CE. According to him, the six elements that define a painting are:

1. *Spirit Resonance*, or vitality, which refers to the flow of energy that encompasses theme, work, and artist. Xie He said that without Spirit Resonance, there was no need to explore a painting further.
2. *Bone Method*, or the way of using the brush, which refers not only to texture and brush strokes, but also to the close link between handwriting and personality. In his day, the art of calligraphy was inseparable from that of painting.
3. *Correspondence to the Object*, or the depicting of form, which includes shapes and lines.
4. *Suitability to Type*, or the application of color, which includes layers, value, and tone.
5. *Division and Planning*, or placing and arrangement, which corresponds to composition, space, and depth.
6. *Transmission by Copying*, or the copying of models, which means not only from life but also from works of antiquity.

**Tomb mural**
Murals from a tomb of the Six Dynasties period (550-577 CE) in Jiuyuangang, Xinzhou, showing a rural hunting scene on horseback.

12.6.2: Calligraphy during the Six Dynasties Period

The calligraphic tradition of East Asia originated in China and greatly advanced during the Six Dynasties period.

Learning Objective

Describe the evolution of Chinese calligraphy from ancient China to the Six Dynasties

Key Points

- Chinese calligraphy is an artistic writing form widely practiced and revered in the Sinosphere, which includes China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam.
- The various styles of calligraphy adhere to general standards. Chinese calligraphy and ink and wash painting are closely related, accomplished using similar tools and techniques.
- In ancient China, painting and calligraphy were the most highly appreciated arts in court circles. They were done almost exclusively by amateurs, aristocrats, and scholar-officials who had the leisure to perfect the technique.
- Invented in the 1st century, paper gradually replaced silk as the backdrop for calligraphy. Original writings by famous calligraphers have been highly valued throughout China's history and are mounted on scrolls and hung on walls like paintings.
- Some of the most famous Chinese calligraphers, including Wang Xizhi, lived during the Six Dynasties period.
- Wang Xizhi's most famous work is the Lanting Xu, the preface to a collection of poems written by a number of poets who gathered at Lan Ting, near the town of Shaoxing in Zhejiang province.

Key Terms

ink and wash painting

An East Asian type of brush painting of Chinese origin that uses the same black ink as in East Asian calligraphy; also known as literati painting.

soot

Fine black or dull brown particles of amorphous carbon and tar produced by the incomplete combustion of coal or oil.

sinosphere

Areas and countries that have been heavily influenced by Chinese culture.

literati

A person who engages in critical study, thought, and reflection about the reality of society.
Background: Calligraphy and Ancient China

Calligraphy, a visual art related to writing, is the design and execution of lettering with a broad tip brush or other instrument. The calligraphic tradition of East Asia originated in China and is widely practiced and revered in the Sinosphere (a designation that often includes China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam). The various styles of calligraphy in the tradition adhere to a general standards. Chinese calligraphy and ink and wash painting are closely related, as they are accomplished using similar tools and techniques. Chinese painting and calligraphy are distinguished from other cultural arts because they emphasize motion and tend to be charged with dynamic life.

In ancient China, painting and calligraphy were the most highly appreciated arts in court circles; they were done almost exclusively by amateurs, aristocrats, and scholar-officials who had the leisure to perfect the technique and sensibility necessary for great brushwork. Calligraphy was considered the purest form of painting. The implements included the brush pen made of animal hair and black inks made from pine soot and animal glue. Writing and painting were done on silk, gradually replaced after the invention of paper in the 1st century. Original writings by famous calligraphers have been valued throughout China's history; they are mounted on scrolls and hung on walls as paintings are.

Palace Lady detail from Admonitions of the Instructress to the Palace Ladies

In ancient China, painting and calligraphy were the most highly appreciated arts in court circles; they were done almost exclusively by amateurs, aristocrats, and scholar-officials who had the leisure to perfect the technique and sensibility necessary for great brushwork.

Calligraphy during the Six Dynasties

Some of the most famous Chinese calligraphers lived during the Six Dynasties period. The Six Dynasties refers to the dynasties during the periods of the Eastern Wu Dynasty (222–280), Jin Dynasty (265–420), Liu Song Dynasty (420–479), Southern Qi Dynasty (479–502), Liang Dynasty (502–557), and Chen Dynasty
Wang Xizhi and the *Lanting Xu*

One of these famous calligraphers was Wang Xizhi, who lived during the 4th century CE in the middle of the Jin Dynasty. His most famous work is the *Lanting Xu*, the preface to a collection of poems written by a number of poets who gathered at Lan Ting near the town of Shaoxing in Zhejiang province. Wang Xizhi was traditionally referred to as the Sage of Calligraphy and is considered one of the most esteemed Chinese calligraphers of all time and a master of all forms, especially the running script. The Emperor Taizong admired his works greatly. In addition to the Wang Xizhi's esteem in China, he has been and remains influential in Japanese calligraphy.

The *Lantingji Xu* is a famous work of calligraphy by Wang Xizhi composed in the year 353 CE. Written in semi-cursive script, it is among the best-known pieces of calligraphy in Chinese history and is often copied. This work began as the preface to a seminal collection of Chinese nature poetry but developed a life of its own. The preface describes an event during that year's Spring Purification Festival in which 42 literati, including Xie An and Sun Chuo, were present at a gathering at the Orchid Pavilion near Shaoxing, Zhejiang, at which they composed poems, played music, and enjoyed wine. The preface consists of 324 Chinese characters in 28 lines. The character zhī (之) appears 20 times, but no two appearances look the same, a feature that constitutes calligraphic excellence. This celebrated work of literature flows rhythmically and gave rise to several Chinese idioms.

Main text of a Tang Dynasty copy of Wang Xizhi's *Lantingji Xu*, by Feng Chengsu.

Throughout Chinese history, many copies were made of the Lantingji Xu, which described the beauty of the landscape around the Orchid Pavilion and the get-together of Wang Xizhi and his friends. The original is lost; however, some believe it was buried in the mausoleum of Emperor Taizong of Tang. This Tang copy made between 627-650 CE is considered the best of the copies that has survived.

12.6.3: Architecture during the Six Dynasties Period

The Six Dynasties (220-589 CE) in Chinese history was a time of great advancements in architecture.

Learning Objective

Characterize the architecture and art of the Six Dynasties.
Key Points

- The Six Dynasties generally includes the periods of the Three Kingdoms (220–280 CE), the Jin Dynasty (265–420 CE), and the Southern and Northern Dynasties (420–589 CE).
- By the 6th century, Buddhism had spread with tremendous momentum throughout China and dramatically influenced Chinese architecture.
- Although multiple-story towers such as guard towers and residential apartments existed in previous periods, it was during this time that the Chinese transformed the rounded earthen mound of the stupa into the towering pagoda to house the sacred buried relics of Buddha at its core.
- The Songyue Pagoda, built in 523, is the oldest extant pagoda in China; its unique many-sided shape may represent an early attempt to merge the Chinese architecture of straight edges with the circular style of Buddhism from the Indian subcontinent.
- Although mostly only ruins of brick and rammed earth walls and towers from the Six Dynasties have survived, information on ancient Chinese architecture can be discerned from realistic clay models of buildings created as funerary items.
- The Jin Dynasty was particularly known for miniature models of buildings used to decorate the tops of "soul vases" and for its celadon porcelain wares.

Key Terms

ensemble

A group of separate things that contribute to a coordinated whole.

celadon

Ceramic ware with a pale green glaze.

Background: The Six Dynasties

The Six Dynasties is a collective term for six Chinese dynasties during the periods of the Three Kingdoms (220–280 CE; also known as the Eastern Wu or the Cao Wei), the Jin Dynasty (265–420 CE), and the Southern and Northern Dynasties (420–589 CE), which included the Liu Song, Southern Qi, Liang, and Chen Dynasties. During this time, the Chinese people made great advancements in architecture.

Architecture in the Six Dynasties

By the 6th century, Buddhism had spread with tremendous momentum throughout China, and Chinese culture was adjusting and adapting its traditions to include Buddhism worship. This also had a profound influence on architecture. Although multiple-story towers such as guard towers and residential apartments existed in previous periods, the distinct Chinese pagoda tower (used for storing Buddhist scriptures) evolved during the Six Dynasties period from the stupa, which came from Buddhist traditions of protecting sutras in ancient India. The Chinese transformed the rounded earthen mound of the stupa into the towering pagoda to house the sacred buried relics of Buddha at its core.

The Songyue Pagoda, built in 523, is the oldest extant pagoda in China, enduring primarily because it was constructed from brick instead of wood. The unique many-sided shape of the Songyue Pagoda may
represent an early attempt to merge the Chinese architecture of straight edges with the circular style of Buddhism from the Indian subcontinent. The perimeter of the pagoda decreases as it rises, as seen in Indian and Central Asian Buddhist cave temple pillars and the later round pagodas in China.

Songyue Pagoda

A circular-based stone-constructed Buddhist pagoda built in 523 CE during the Southern and Northern Dynasties period of the Six Dynasties. It is the oldest existent stone Chinese pagoda. Earlier wooden Chinese pagodas have not survived.

Funerary Models

Tombs of members of the ruling Xiao family, with sculptural ensembles in various states of preservation, are located near Nanjing. The best surviving example of a monumental statuary from the Liang Dynasty is the ensemble of the Tomb of Xiao Xiu (475–518 CE), a brother of Emperor Wu, located in Qixia District east of Nanjing.

Although mostly only ruins of brick and rammed earth walls and towers from the Six Dynasties have survived, information on ancient Chinese architecture (especially wooden architecture) can be discerned from realistic clay models of buildings created as funerary items. These depicted miniature versions of Six Dynasties architecture. Throughout the Six Dynasties, miniature models of buildings or entire architectural ensembles were made to decorate the tops of "soul vases" (hunping) found in many tombs of that period. In
addition to illustrating architecture, jar designs often incorporated animal and Buddhist figures.

Eastern Wu artwork depicting architecture

A green-glaze ceramic jar from the Three Kingdoms (or Eastern Wu) period with human figures, birds, and architecture, on display in the Nanjing Museum.
Jar of the Western Jin

Jar designs of the Jin Dynasty often incorporated architectural designs as well as animal and Buddhist figures.

Advances in Technology

Technology advanced significantly during the relatively short Three Kingdoms (220-280 CE) period, including in the realm of architecture. Shu chancellor Zhuge Liang invented the wooden ox, an early form of the wheelbarrow, and improved on the repeating crossbow. Wei mechanical engineer Ma Jun is considered the equal of his predecessor Zhang Heng. He invented a hydraulic-powered mechanical puppet theater for Emperor Ming of Wei; square-pallet chain pumps for irrigation of gardens in Luoyang; and the ingenious design of the South Pointing Chariot, a non-magnetic directional compass operated by differential
gears.

Pottery Palace

Though from the Han Dynasty (c. 2nd century BCE - 2nd century CE), this pottery palace provides a good example of pottery created for elite burial that illustrates the architecture of the time.

Attributions

- Painting during the Six Dynasties Period
- Calligraphy during the Six Dynasties Period
- Architecture during the Six Dynasties Period
12.7: The Tang Dynasty

12.7.1: Architecture during the Tang Dynasty

Since the Tang Dynasty, Chinese architecture has had a major influence on the architectural styles of Korea, Vietnam, and Japan.

Learning Objective

Describe the influence of architecture from the Tang dynasty on Korea, Vietnam, and Japan

Key Points

- Chinese culture flourished and further matured during the Tang Dynasty, considered an age of great advancements of architecture, poetry, and other arts.
- From the Tang Dynasty (618–907) onward, brick and stone architecture gradually became more common and replaced wooden edifices.
- The earliest examples of this transition can be seen in building projects such as the Zhaozhou Bridge of 605 or the Xumi Pagoda of 636, though stone and brick architecture was used in subterranean tomb architecture of earlier dynasties.
- The tombs and mausoleums of imperial family members are counted as part of the imperial tradition in architecture. These above-ground earthen mounds and pyramids had subterranean shaft-and-vault structures lined with brick walls.
- Nanchan Temple in Shanxi Province was built in 782 CE, and its Great Buddha Hall is currently China's oldest preserved timber building.
- Chang'an was the capital city of the Tang Dynasty, as in the earlier Han and Jin dynasties, and was made famous for its checkerboard pattern of main roads with walled and gated districts.

Key Terms

Qianling Mausoleum

Tomb site located in Shaanxi province, China, built by 684 (with additional construction until 706); the tombs house the remains of various members of the royal Li family.

shaft

In architecture, the body of a column; the cylindrical pillar between the capital and base.

Background: The Tang Dynasty

The Sui Dynasty (589–618 CE) was a short-lived Imperial Chinese dynasty. Preceded by the Southern and Northern Dynasties, it unified China for the first time after over a century of north-south division. The Sui
Dynasty was followed by the Tang Dynasty, which ruled from June 18, 618 until June 1, 907 CE, when the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms Period began.

The Tang Dynasty was founded by the Li family, who seized power during the decline and collapse of the Sui Empire. The first half of the Tang Dynasty's rule was largely a period of progress and stability until the An Lushan Rebellion and subsequent decline of central authority in the later half of the dynasty. The dynasty was interrupted briefly by the Second Zhou Dynasty (October 8, 690 – March 3, 705), when Empress Wu Zetian seized the throne, becoming the only Chinese empress to reign in her own right. Chinese culture flourished and further matured during the Tang era, considered the greatest age for Chinese poetry. Architecture also greatly advanced during this time.

**Architecture of the Tang Dynasty**

**Brick and Stone**

Beginning in the Tang Dynasty, Chinese architecture has had a major influence on the architectural styles of Korea, Vietnam, and Japan. From the Tang Dynasty onward, brick and stone architecture gradually became more common and replaced wooden edifices. The earliest examples of this transition can be seen in building projects such as the Zhaozhou Bridge (completed in 605) or the Xumi Pagoda (built in 636). However, stone and brick architecture was used in the subterranean tomb architecture of earlier dynasties.
The Xumi Pagoda

This square-base stone and brick pagoda was built in the year 636 CE during the reign of Emperor Taizong of the Tang Dynasty (618-907). It stands at a height of 48 m (157 ft) and has been well preserved since its initial construction. The monastery that once surrounded the pagoda, however, has largely been destroyed, with the exception of a few structures.

In the realm of structural engineering and technical Chinese architecture, government standard building codes were outlined in the early Tang book of the *Yingshan Ling* (National Building Law). Fragments of this book have survived in the *Tang Lü* (The Tang Code), while the Song dynasty architectural manual of the *Yingzao Fashi* (State Building Standards) by Li Jie in 1103 is the oldest existing technical treatise on Chinese architecture that has survived in full. During the reign of Emperor Xuanzong of Tang (712–756), 34,850 registered craftsmen served the state, managed by the Agency of Palace Buildings (Jingzuo Jian).

Tombs and Mausoleums

The tombs and mausoleums of imperial family members, such as the 8th century Tang Dynasty tombs at the Qianling Mausoleum, are counted as part of the imperial tradition in architecture. These above-ground earthen mounds and pyramids had subterranean shaft-and-vault structures lined with brick walls since at least the Warring States (481–221 BCE) period.

Temple Architecture

Buddhist temples were also commonplace in the Tang Dynasty, such as the Nanchan Temple near the town of Doucun on Wutaishan, in Shanxi Province. The temple was built in 782 CE, and its Great Buddha Hall is currently China's oldest preserved timber building extant, as wooden buildings are prone to fire and destruction. Not only is Nanchan Temple an important architectural site, it also contains an original set of artistically important Tang sculptures dating from the period of its construction. Seventeen sculptures share the hall's interior space with a small stone pagoda.
Nanchan Temple

Nanchan Temple, built during the late 8th century

As the oldest extant timber-frame building in China, The Great Buddha Hall is key to understanding Chinese architectural history. The humble building is a three-bay square hall 10 meters deep and 11.75 meters across the front. The roof is supported by twelve pillars implanted directly into a brick foundation, and the hip-gable roof is supported by brackets. The hall does not contain interior columns or a ceiling, nor are there struts supporting the roof in between the columns, which indicates that this is a low-status structure. The hall contains several features of Tang Dynasty halls, including its longer central front bay and the use of camel-hump braces.

Chang'an

Chang'an was the capital city of the Tang Dynasty as in the earlier Han and Jin dynasties. The roughly square city was built with six miles of outer walls running east to west and more than five miles of outer walls running north to south. The royal palace, the Taiji Palace, stood north of the city's central axis. From the large Mingde Gates located mid-center of the main southern wall, a wide city avenue stretched all the way north to the central administrative city, behind which was the Chentian Gate of the royal palace, or Imperial City. Intersecting this were numerous streets running east to west and north to south. These main intersecting roads formed 108 rectangular wards with walls and four gates each, each filled with multiple city blocks. The city was made famous for this checkerboard pattern of main roads with walled and gated districts.

Of these 108 wards in Chang'an, two (each the size of two regular city wards) were designated as government-supervised markets, and other spaces were reserved for temples, gardens, and ponds. Throughout the entire city, there were 111 Buddhist monasteries, 41 Daoist abbeys, 38 family shrines, two official temples, seven churches of foreign religions, 10 city wards with provincial transmission offices, 12 major inns, and six graveyards. Some city wards were filled with open public playing fields or the backyards of lavish mansions for playing horse polo and cuju football. In 662, Emperor Gaozong moved the imperial court to the Daming Palace, which became the political center of the empire and served as the royal residence of the Tang emperors for more than 220 years.

12.7.2: Painting during the Tang Dynasty

The Tang Dynasty is considered a golden age in Chinese civilization, and Chinese figure painting developed dramatically during this time.

Learning Objective

Describe the advancements of the "painting of people" style, the shuimohua style, the shan-shui style, and painting on architectural structures that occurred during the Tang Dynasty

Key Points

- Figure painting reached the height of elegant realism in the art of the court of Southern Tang (937-975).
• Buddhist painting and court painting—including paintings of the Buddha, monks, and nobles—played a major role in the development of painting.
• The landscape (shan-shui) painting technique developed quickly in this period and reached its first maturation.
• The painting of people also peaked. The outstanding master in this field is Wu Daozi, referred to as the "Sage of Painting."

**Key Terms**

Wang Wei

(699-759) A Tang Dynasty poet, musician, painter, and statesman; one of the most famous men of arts and letters of his time.

Wu Daozi


During the Tang Dynasty, considered a golden age in Chinese civilization, Chinese painting developed dramatically both in subject matter and technique. The advances that characterized Tang Dynasty painting had a lasting influence in the art of other countries, especially in East Asia (including Korea, Japan, and Vietnam) and central Asia.

**Developments in Painting**

During the early Tang period, the painting style was mainly inherited from the previous Sui Dynasty. The "painting of people" developed greatly during the Tang Dynasty, primarily due to paintings of the Buddha, monks, and nobles known as court paintings. Figure painting reached the height of elegant realism in the art of the court of Southern Tang (937-975). The theory of painting also developed during this time as Buddhism, Taoism, and traditional literature influenced the art form. Paintings on architectural structures, such as murals, ceiling paintings, cave paintings, and tomb paintings, were very popular, exemplified in the paintings of the Mogao Caves in Xinjiang.

**Painting of People**

Brothers Yan Liben and Yan Lide were among the most prolific painters of this period. Yan Liben was the personal portraitist to the Emperor Taizong, and his most notable works include the *Thirteen Emperors Scroll*. 
Yan Liben, Thirteen Emperors Scroll (detail)

Yan Liben was the personal portraitist to the Emperor Taizong.

The outstanding master in this field is Wu Daozi, referred to as the "Sage of Painting". Wu's works include *God Sending a Son* and *The Teaching Confucius*, and he created a new technique of drawing known as "Drawing of Water Shield." Most Tang artists outlined figures with fine black lines and used brilliant colors and elaborate detail. However, Wu Daozi used only black ink and freely painted brushstrokes to create ink paintings that were so exciting, crowds gathered to watch him work. Ink paintings were no longer preliminary sketches or outlines to be filled in with color; instead, they were valued as finished works of art.
Wu Daozi, The Teaching Confucius (685-758)

The painting of people peaked under the Tang Dynasty.

Landscapes

The great poet Wang Wei first created the brush and ink painting of shan-shui, literally "mountains and waters." He also combined literature, especially poetry, with painting. The use of line in painting became much more calligraphic than in the early period. Li Sixun and Li Zhaodao (father and son) were the most famous painters of shan-shui. In these landscapes, which were monochromatic and sparse (a style that is collectively called shuimohua), the purpose was not to reproduce exactly the appearance of nature (the technique of realism) but rather to grasp an emotion or atmosphere so as to catch the "rhythm" of nature.

Attributions
Architecture during the Tang Dynasty


Painting during the Tang Dynasty

12.8: The Song Dynasty

12.8.1: The Song Dynasty

The Song Dynasty was highly influenced by Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism, which were reflected in its art.

Learning Objective

Discuss the significance of Neo-Confucianism and literature on the art of the Song dynasty

Key Points

- Advances in landscape and portrait painting heightened the visual arts during the Song Dynasty.
- The elite engaged in the arts as accepted pastimes of the cultured scholar-official, including painting, composing poetry, and writing calligraphy.
- Emperor Huizong was a renowned artist as well as a patron of the arts, and his court entourage included painters, calligraphers, poets, and storytellers.
- In philosophy, Chinese Buddhism had waned in influence, but it retained its hold on the arts and the charities of monasteries.
- Buddhism had a profound influence upon the budding movement of Neo-Confucianism, led by Cheng Yi (1033–1107) and Zhu Xi (1130–1200), which strongly influenced the art of the time.
- Different clothing styles distinguished peasants, soldiers, artisans, merchants, scholars, and officials.

Key Terms

calligraphy
The art of writing letters and words with decorative strokes.

Neo-Confucianism
A moral, ethical, and metaphysical Chinese philosophy that originated with Han Yu and Li Ao (772-841) in the Tang Dynasty and became prominent during the Song and Ming dynasties.

Buddhism
The religion and philosophy founded by the Indian teacher Gautama Buddha.

The Song Dynasty ruled China between 960 and 1279 CE and is divided into two distinct periods, Northern and Southern. During the Northern Song (960–1127), the capital was in the northern city of Bianjing (now Kaifeng) and the dynasty controlled most of what is now Eastern China. The Southern Song (1127–1279) refers to the period after the Song lost control of its northern half to the Jurchen Jin dynasty in the Jin-Song Wars.

The Song dynasty restored unity and became the richest, most skilled, and most populous country on earth.
The population doubled in size during the 10th and 11th centuries, growth made possible by expanded rice cultivation in central and southern Song, the use of early-ripening rice from southeast and southern Asia, and widespread food surplus. The Song was the first government in world history to issue banknotes or paper money and the first Chinese government to establish a permanent navy.

The Proliferation of Art

Social life during the Song Dynasty was vibrant. Citizens gathered to view and trade precious artworks, the populace intermingled at public festivals and private clubs, and cities had lively entertainment quarters. The spread of literature and knowledge was enhanced by the rapid expansion of woodblock printing and the 11th-century invention of movable-type printing. Technology, science, philosophy, mathematics, and engineering flourished over the course of the Song. Philosophers such as Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi reinvigorated Confucianism with new commentary, infused with Buddhist ideals and emphasized a new organization of classic texts that brought out the core doctrine of Neo-Confucianism. The visual arts were heightened by new developments such as advances in landscape and portrait painting, and the elite engaged in the arts as accepted pastimes of the cultured scholar-official, including painting, composing poetry, and writing calligraphy.

The imperial courts of the emperor's palace were filled with his entourage of court painters, calligraphers, poets, and storytellers. Emperor Huizong was a renowned artist as well as a patron of the arts. One venerated court painter was Zhang Zeduan (1085–1145), who painted an enormous panoramic painting, Along the River During the Qingming Festival. Emperor Gaozong initiated a massive art project during his reign, known as the Eighteen Songs of a Nomad Flute, from the life story of Cai Wenji (b. 177).

The Significance of Literature in Art

Poet and statesman Su Shi and his associate Mi Fu were highly influential in the development of literature during the Song era. Poetry and literature profited from the rising popularity and development of the ci form, a type of lyric poetry. Enormous encyclopedic volumes were compiled, such as works of historiography and treatises on technical subjects. Chinese travel literature also became popular with the writings of geographer Fan Chengda (1126–1193) and Su Shi, the latter of whom wrote the daytrip essay known as Record of Stone Bell Mountain that used persuasive writing to argue a philosophical point. Although an early form of the local geographic gazetteer existed in China since the 1st century, the matured form known as "treatise on a place,, or fangzhi, replaced the old "map guide", or tujing, during the Song Dynasty.

The Influence of Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism

In philosophy, Chinese Buddhism had waned in influence, but it retained its hold on the arts and on the charities of monasteries. Buddhism also had a profound influence upon the budding movement of Neo-Confucianism, led by Cheng Yi (1033–1107) and Zhu Xi (1130–1200). Neo-Confucianism was an attempt to create a more rationalist and secular form of Confucianism by rejecting superstitious and mystical
elements of Taoism and Buddhism that influenced the philosophy during and after the Han Dynasty. Although the Neo-Confucianists were critical of Taoism and Buddhism, the two did have an influence on the philosophy, and the Neo-Confucianists borrowed terms and concepts from both. However, unlike the Buddhists and Taoists, who saw metaphysics as a catalyst for spiritual development, religious enlightenment, and immortality, the Neo-Confucianists used metaphysics to develop a rationalist ethical philosophy.

Mahayana Buddhism influenced Fan Zhongyan and Wang Anshi through its concept of ethical universalism, while Buddhist metaphysics had a deep impact upon the pre-Neo-Confucian doctrine of Cheng Yi. The philosophical work of Cheng Yi in turn influenced Zhu Xi. Although his contemporary peers did not accept his writings, Zhu's commentary and emphasis upon the Confucian classics of the Four Books as an introductory corpus to Confucian learning formed the basis of the Neo-Confucian doctrine. By the year 1241, under the sponsorship of Emperor Lizong, Zhu Xi's Four Books and his commentary became standard requirements of study for those attempting to pass the civil service examinations.

Wood Bodhisattva

A wooden and gilded statue of the Buddha (bodhisattva) from the Chinese Song Dynasty (960-1279), from the Shanghai Museum.

The influence of both Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism can be seen in much of the artwork at the time, including the painted artwork of Lin Tinggui's *Luohan Laundering*. A well-known Neo-Confucian motif includes paintings of Confucius, Buddha, and Lao Tzu all drinking out of the same vinegar jar, associated with the slogan “The three teachings are one!” However, the ideology of Buddhism was highly criticized and even scorned by some. The statesman and historian Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072) called the religion a "curse" that could only be remedied by uprooting it from Chinese culture and replacing it with Confucian discourse. Buddhism would not see a true revival in Chinese society until the Mongol rule of the Yuan Dynasty, with Kublai Khan's sponsorship of Tibetan Buddhism and Drogön Chögyal Phagpa as the leading lama. The Christian sect of Nestorianism—which entered China in the Tang era—was also revived in China under Mongol rule.
The Art of Clothing

Clothing was made of hemp or cotton cloths in either black and white. Trousers were acceptable for peasants, soldiers, artisans, and merchants, although wealthy merchants might choose to wear more ornate clothing and male blouses that came below the waist. Acceptable apparel for scholar-officials was rigidly defined by social ranking system. Each official was able to display his status by wearing different-colored traditional silken robes that hung to the ground around his feet, specific types of headgear, and even specific styles of girdles that displayed his graded-rank of officialdom. However, as time went on this rule of rank-graded apparel for officials was not as strictly enforced.

Women wore long dresses, blouses that came down to the knee, skirts, and jackets with long or short sleeves, while women from wealthy families could wear purple scarves around their shoulders. The main difference in women's apparel from that of men was that it was fastened on the left, not on the right.

12.8.2: Painting under the Song Dynasty
Painting during the Song Dynasty (960–1279) reached a new level of sophistication with further development of landscape painting.

Learning Objective

Compare and contrast the Northern and Southern Song styles of painting

Key Points

- The shan shui style painting—"shan" meaning mountain, and "shui" meaning river—became prominent in Chinese landscape art. Distant mountain peaks rise out of high clouds and mist, while streaming rivers run from afar into the foreground.
- The Northern Song period (960–1127) was characterized by large, sweeping landscapes, influenced by political ideals of bringing order to large societal issues.
- In contrast, the Southern Song period (1127–1279) was more interested in reforming society from the bottom up and on a much smaller scale, and their paintings reflected this in smaller, more intimate scenes.
- The imperial courts of the emperor's palace were filled with his entourage of court painters, calligraphers, poets, and storytellers. One of the greatest landscape painters of the court was Zhang Zeduan, who painted the original Along the River During Qingming Festival scroll.

Key Terms

Neo-Confucian

A moral, ethical, and metaphysical Chinese philosophy that originated with Han Yu and Li Ao (772-841) in the Tang Dynasty and became prominent during the Song and Ming dynasties.

Zhang Zeduan

(1085–1145) A famous Chinese painter of the Song Dynasty, who lived during the transitional period from the Northern Song to the Southern Song and was instrumental in the early history of the Chinese landscape art style known as shan shui.

Taoism

A Chinese mystical philosophy traditionally founded by Lao-tzu in the 6th century BCE that teaches conformity to the tao by unassertive action and simplicity.

Introduction

Painting during the Song Dynasty (960–1279) reached a new level of sophistication with further development of landscape painting. The shan shui style painting—"shan" meaning mountain and "shui" meaning river—became prominent in Chinese landscape art. The emphasis on landscape painting in the Song period was grounded in Chinese philosophy. Taoism stressed that humans were but tiny specks among vast and greater cosmos, while Neo-Confucianist writers often pursued the discovery of patterns and principles that they believed caused all social and natural phenomena. While the painting of portraits and closely viewed objects such as birds on branches were held in high esteem by the Song Chinese, landscape
painting was paramount.

**Techniques**

Artists of the time mastered the formula of intricate and realistic scenes in the foreground and vast open space in the background. Distant mountain peaks rise out of high clouds and mist, while streaming rivers run from afar into the foreground. Immeasurable distances are conveyed through blurred outlines and impressionistic treatment of natural phenomena.

**Northern and Southern Song**

There was a significant difference in painting trends between the Northern Song period (960–1127) and Southern Song period (1127–1279). The paintings of Northern Song officials were influenced by their political ideals of bringing order to the world and tackling the largest issues affecting the whole of their society; as such, their paintings often depict huge, sweeping landscapes. On the other hand, Southern Song officials were more interested in reforming society from the bottom up and on a much smaller scale, a method they believed had a better chance for success. Their paintings often focus on smaller, more intimate scenes, while the background is bereft of detail as a realm without substance or concern for the artist or viewer.
**Snow Mountains** by Guo Xi, located in the Shanghai Museum.

Guo Xi, a representative landscape painter in the Northern Song dynasty, is known for depicting mountains, rivers, and forests in winter. This piece shows a deep and serene mountain valley covered with snow and several old trees struggling to survive on precipitous cliffs. This masterpiece uses light ink and magnificent composition to express his open artistic conception.

This change in attitude from one era to the next stemmed from the rising influence of Neo-Confucian philosophy. Adherents to Neo-Confucianism focused on reforming society from the bottom up, not the top down, which can be seen in their efforts to promote small private academies during the Southern Song instead of the large state-controlled academies seen in the Northern Song era.
Ma Lin, Listening to the Wind (1246)

Southern Song officials were interested in reforming society from the bottom up and on a small scale. Hence, their paintings often focused on small, visually closer, and more intimate scenes, while the background was often depicted as bereft of detail as a realm without substance or concern for the artist or viewer.

Influential Painters

Ma Yuan and Xia Gui

Ma Yuan was a Southern Song painter of the Song Dynasty. His works and those of Xia Gui formed the basis of the so-called Ma-Xia school of painting and are considered among the finest from the period. Although a very versatile painter, Ma is known today primarily for his landscape scrolls. A characteristic feature of his paintings is the so-called “one-corner” composition, in which the actual subjects of the painting are pushed to a corner or a side, leaving vast open spaces. As court painters, Ma Yuan and Xia Gui used strong black brushstrokes to sketch trees and rocks and pale washes to suggest misty space.
Ma Yuan was one of the most prominent Chinese painters of the Song Dynasty.

Su Shi and Mi Fu

Painting became an art of high sophistication, associated with the gentry class as one of their main artistic pastimes along with calligraphy and poetry. During the Song Dynasty, avid art collectors often met in groups to discuss their own paintings and rate those of colleagues and friends. The poet and statesman Su Shi (1037–1101) and his accomplice Mi Fu (1051–1107) often partook in these affairs, borrowing art pieces to study, copy, or exchange. They created a new kind of art that used their skills in calligraphy to make ink paintings. From this time onward, many painters strove to freely express their feelings and capture the inner spirit of their subject instead of depicting its outward appearance. The small round paintings popular in the Southern Song were often collected into albums, with poets creating compositions on the side to match the theme and mood of the painting.

Zhang Zeduan, Yi Yuanji, and Other Court Painters

The imperial courts of the emperor's palace were filled with his entourage of court painters, calligraphers, poets, and storytellers. One of the greatest landscape painters given patronage by the Song court was Zhang Zeduan (1085–1145), who painted the original Along the River During Qingming Festival scroll, one of the most well-known masterpieces of Chinese visual art. Emperor Gaozong of Song (1127–1162) commissioned an art project of numerous paintings for the Eighteen Songs of a Nomad Flute, based on the poet Cai Wenji (177–250 AD) of the earlier Han Dynasty. Yi Yuanji achieved a high degree of realism painting animals, in particular monkeys and gibbons.
Detail of the original "Along the River during Qingming Festival" by Zhang Zeduan, early 12th century

Zhang Zeduan was instrumental in the early history of the Chinese landscape art style known as shan shui. Zhang's original painting of the Along the River During the Qingming Festival reveals much about life in China during the 11th-12th century. Its depiction of different people interacting with one another reveals the nuances of class structure and the many hardships of urban life. It also displays accurate depictions of technological practices found in Song China.

12.8.3: Ceramics under the Song Dynasty

Ceramics from the Southern Song dynasty focused primarily on small, intimate scenes.

Learning Objective

Distinguish the characteristics of painting and ceramics in the Southern Song style from its counterpart in the North

Key Points

- The Song Dynasty (960–1279 CE) was a culturally rich and sophisticated age for China. Great advancements were made in the ceramics, painting, and other visual arts.
- In 1004, Emperor Zhenzong established the city of Jingdezhen as the main production hub for imperial porcelain; during the Song and following Yuan dynasties, porcelain made in the city and other southern Chinese kiln sites used crushed and refined pottery stones alone.
- The making of glazed and translucent porcelain and celadon wares with complex use of enamel was highly developed during the Song period. Longquan celadon wares were particularly popular.
- Black and red lacquerwares of the Song period featured beautifully carved artwork of miniature nature scenes, landscapes, or decorative motifs.
- Trends in illustration styles among the gentry shifted from the Northern (960–1127) to Southern
Song (1127–1279) periods, influenced in part by the gradual embrace of the Neo-Confucian political ideology at court.

Key Terms

Neo-Confucianism

A moral, ethical, and metaphysical Chinese philosophy that originated with Han Yu and Li Ao (772-841) in the Tang Dynasty and became prominent during the Song and Ming dynasties.

shan shui style

A style of Chinese painting that depicts scenery or natural landscapes such as mountains, rivers, and waterfalls, using brush and ink rather than conventional paints.

celadon

A term for ceramics denoting both wares glazed in the jade green color (also known as greenware) and a type of transparent glaze, often with small cracks, that was first used on greenware but later used on other porcelains.

The Song Dynasty (960–1279 CE) was a culturally rich and sophisticated age for China. Great advancements were made in the visual arts, music, literature, and philosophy. Officials of the ruling bureaucracy reached new heights of education in Chinese society, while general culture was enhanced by widespread printing, growing literacy, and various arts.

Advances in Ceramics

Appreciation of the arts among the gentry flourished during the Song Dynasty, especially in painting and ceramics. The city of Jingdezhen (also Jingde Zhen) has been a central place of production of ceramics since the early Han dynasty; in 1004, Emperor Zhenzong established the city as the main production hub for imperial porcelain. During the Song and following Yuan dynasties, porcelain made in the city and other southern Chinese kiln sites used crushed and refined pottery stones.
Porcelains from the Song Dynasty

**Left item:** A Northern Song qingbai-ware vase with a transparent blue-toned ceramic glaze, from Jingdezhen, 11th century. **Center item:** A Northern or Southern Song qingbai-ware bowl with incised lotus decorations, a metal rim, and a transparent blue-toned glaze, from Jingdezhen, 12th or 13th century; **Right item:** A Southern Song miniature model of a granary with removable top lid and doorway, qingbai porcelain with transparent blue-toned glaze, Jingdezhen, 13th century.

Longquan Celadon

The making of glazed translucent porcelain and celadon wares with complex use of enamels became highly developed during the Song period. Longquan celadon wares were particularly popular. These were produced in kilns in the city of Longquan, located in Lishui prefecture in southwestern Zhejiang Province. More than 200 kiln sites have been discovered in Longquan, comprising one of the largest historical ceramic producing areas in China. Southern Song celadons display a great variety of shape and glaze color, and Japanese tea masters and collectors have treasured examples with a distinctive bluish glaze termed *kinutaseiji*. Chinese collectors have noted a greater variety of Longquan ware and devised a special vocabulary to describe them, such as *meizi ching* or “plum green” celadon. After the end of the Southern Song period, Longquan celadon experienced expanded production and lessened quality.
Longquan celadon ware vase

A Longquan ware celadon vase, Song Dynasty, 13th century, from the Nantoyōsō Collection, Japan.

Illustrations

Black and red lacquerwares of the Song period featured beautifully carved artwork of miniature nature scenes, landscapes, or decorative motifs. Trends in illustration styles among the gentry shifted from the Northern (960–1127) to Southern Song (1127–1279) periods, influenced in part by the gradual embrace of the Neo-Confucian political ideology at court. Even though intricate ceramics and lacquerware, often painted with closely-viewed objects like birds on branches, were held in high esteem by the Song Chinese, landscape painting was paramount during this era.
Song Dynasty ding ware porcelain bottle, 11th century

The making of glazed and translucent porcelain and celadon wares with complex use of enamels was developed further during the Song period.

Attributions

- The Song Dynasty

- Painting under the Song Dynasty


Ceramics under the Song Dynasty


12.9: Korea

12.9.1: Three Kingdoms Period

The Three Kingdoms of Korea included the Goguryeo, Baekje, and Silla Kingdoms from roughly the first century BCE to the 7th century CE.

**Learning Objective**

Outline the Goguryeo, Baekje, and Silla periods that made up Korea's Three Kingdoms

**Key Points**

- The concept of the Three Kingdoms of Korea refers to the kingdoms of Goguryeo (37 BCE – 668 CE), Baekje (18 BCE – 660 CE), and Silla (57 BCE – 935 CE).
- The Baekje and Silla Kingdoms dominated the southern part of the peninsula, while the Goguryeo Kingdom controlled the Liaodong Peninsula, Manchuria, and the northern half of the Korean Peninsula.
- The spread of Buddhism inspired the Goguryeo kings to commission art and architecture dedicated to the Buddha.
- Baekje Buddhist sculpture is characterized by its naturalness, warmth, and harmonious proportions that exhibit a unique Korean style.
- In the 7th century, allied with China under Tang dynasty, Silla unified the Korean Peninsula for the first time in Korean history, forming a national identity.

**Key Terms**

archaic

Of or characterized by antiquity; old-fashioned, quaint, antiquated.

Silk Road

An ancient network of trade routes which for centuries were central to cultural interaction through regions of the Asian continent, connecting the West and East from China to the Mediterranean Sea.

The concept of the Three Kingdoms of Korea refers to Goguryeo (37 BCE – 668 CE; later known as Goryeo, from which the name Korea is derived), Baekje (18 BCE – 660 CE), and Silla (57 BCE – 935 CE). The three kingdoms occupied parts of Manchuria, present-day China and Russia, and the Korean Peninsula. The Baekje and Silla Kingdoms dominated the southern part of the peninsula while the Goguryeo Kingdom controlled the Liaodong Peninsula, Manchuria, and the northern half of the Korean Peninsula. In the 7th century, allied with China under Tang dynasty, Silla unified the Korean Peninsula for the first time in Korean history, forming a national identity.

After the fall of Goguryeo and Baekje, the Tang dynasty established a short-lived military government to administer parts of the Korean peninsula. However, as a result of the Silla-Tang Wars (670–676 CE), Silla
forces expelled the Protectorate armies from the peninsula in 676. All three kingdoms shared a similar culture and language. Their original religions were shamanistic, but were increasingly influenced by Chinese culture, particularly Confucianism and Taoism. In the 4th century, Buddhism was introduced to the peninsula and spread rapidly, briefly becoming the official religion of all three kingdoms.

**Goguryeo**

Goguryeo was located in the northern and central parts of the Korean Peninsula and the southern and central parts of inner and outer Manchuria. The Kingdom was an active participant in the power struggle for control of the Korean peninsula and was also associated with the foreign affairs of neighboring polities in China and Japan. Goguryeo was a powerful empire and one of the great powers in East Asia until it was defeated by a Silla–Tang China alliance in 668. After its fall, its territory was divided among the states of Later Silla, Balhae, and Tang China.

**Art in Goguryeo**

Buddhism was introduced to Goguryeo in 372 CE because of its proximity to the northern Chinese states such as the Northern Wei. Buddhism inspired the Goguryeo kings to commission art and architecture dedicated to the Buddha. Notable aspects of Goguryeo art include tomb murals that vividly depict everyday aspects of life in the ancient kingdom as well as its culture. Goguryeo painting was influential in East Asia, including Japan, as seen in the wall murals of Horyu-ji. Mural painting spread to the Baekje and Silla kingdoms as well. The murals portray Buddhist themes and provide valuable insight into the kingdom, such as knowledge about architecture and clothing. These murals also marked the early beginnings of Korean landscape paintings and portraiture.

**Goguryeo Moon**

A Goguryeo tomb mural.

Painting depicts a woman with a snake’s body holding a circular object on her head.
**Baekje**

Baekje, located in southwest Korea, alternately battled and allied with Goguryeo and Silla as the three kingdoms expanded control over the peninsula. At its peak in the 4th century, Baekje controlled most of the western Korean peninsula, expanded as far north as Pyongyang, and may have even held territories in China. It became a significant regional sea power with political and trade relations with China and Japan.

**Art in Baekje**

Baekje is considered the kingdom with the greatest art among the three states; it also introduced a significant Korean influence into the art of Japan. Baekje Buddhist sculpture is characterized by its naturalness, warmth, and harmonious proportions that exhibit a unique Korean style. Another example of Korean influence is the use of the distinctive “Baekje smile,” a mysterious expression found on many Baekje statutes. While there are no surviving examples of wooden architecture, the Mireuksa site holds the foundation stones of a destroyed temple and two surviving granite pagodas, suggesting what Baekje architecture may have looked like. The tomb of King Muryeong also held a number of artifacts preserved from the Baekje era, including flame-like gold pins, gilt-bronze shoes, gold girdles (a symbol of royalty), and swords with gold hilts decorated with dragons and phoehixes.

**Silla**

The Silla Kingdom was the most isolated from the Korean peninsula because it was situated in the southeast; the kingdom was also the last to adopt Buddhism and foreign cultural influences. Silla eventually conquered the other two kingdoms, Baekje in 660 and Goguryeo in 668. Thereafter, Unified Silla (or Later Silla) occupied most of the Korean Peninsula, while the northern part re-emerged as Balhae, a successor-state of Goguryeo. After nearly 1,000 years of rule, Silla fragmented into the brief Later Three Kingdoms, Silla, Hubaekje, and Taebong, handing over power to its successor dynasty Goryeo in 935.

**Art in Silla**

The Silla Kingdom tombs were mostly inaccessible to looters, so many examples of Korean art have been preserved. The Silla craftsmen were famed for their gold-crafting ability, which has similarities to Etruscan and Greek techniques as exemplified by gold earrings and crowns. Silla crowns were made from pure gold and had tree and antler-like adornments, suggesting a shamanistic tradition. Because Silla gold artifacts bear similarities to European techniques and glass and beads depicting blue-eyed people were found in royal tombs, many believe the Silk Road extended all the way to Korea.

**12.9.2: Architecture and Art in the Unified Silla Period**

The Silla craftsmen were famed for their gold-crafting ability and Buddhist architecture.
Learning Objective

Describe the gold-crafting, Seokguram grotto, and Bulguksa temple of the Unified Silla Period

Key Points

- The Silla craftsmen were famed for their gold-crafting ability, which shares similarities with Etruscan and Greek techniques as exemplified by gold earrings and crowns.
- The most notable objects of Silla art are its crowns made from pure gold. They have tree and antler-like adornments, suggesting a shamanistic tradition.
- Unified Silla was a time of great artistic output in Korea, especially in Buddhist art. Famous examples include the Seokguram grotto and the Bulguksa temple.
- Bulguksa is a head temple of the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism in the North Gyeongsang province in South Korea, home to seven national treasures.
- The Seokguram Grotto is a hermitage and part of the Bulguksa temple complex, exemplifying some of the best Buddhist sculptures in the world.

Key Term

hermitage

A house or dwelling where a hermit lives.

The Silla Kingdom was the most isolated of the Three Kingdoms Period because it was situated in the southeast part of the peninsula. As such, the kingdom was the last to adopt Buddhism and foreign cultural influences. Silla eventually conquered the other two kingdoms, Baekje in 660 and Goguryeo in 668; thereafter, Unified Silla occupied most of the Korean Peninsula for close to 1,000 years.

Unified Silla Art

Unified Silla was a time of great artistic output in Korea, especially in Buddhist art. Because Silla Kingdom tombs were mostly inaccessible to looters, many examples of Korean art have survived from this era. The Silla craftsmen were famed for their gold-crafting ability, which shares similarities with Etruscan and Greek techniques as exemplified by gold earrings and crowns. Silla gold crows were made from pure gold and had tree and antler-like adornments, suggesting a shamanistic tradition. Because Silla gold artifacts bear similarities to European techniques—and because glass and beads depicting blue-eyed people were found in royal tombs—many believe that the Silk Road extended all the way to Korea.

Examples of Unified Silla art include the Seokguram grotto and the Bulguksa temple. Two pagodas on the ground, the Seokgatap and Dabotap, are also unique examples of Silla masonry and artistry. Craftsmen created massive temple bells, reliquaries, and statues. The capital city of Unified Silla was nicknamed the "city of gold" because of the use of gold in many objects of art.

Bulguksa Temple

Bulguksa is a head temple of the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism in the North Gyeongsang province in South Korea. It is home to seven national treasures, including the Dabotap and Seokgatap stone pagodas,
Cheongun-gyo (Blue Cloud Bridge), and two gilt-bronze statues of Buddha. The temple is classified as Historic and Scenic Site No. 1 by the South Korean government, and in 1995, Bulguksa was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List together with the Seokguram Grotto.

The entrance to the temple, Sokgyemun, has a double-sectioned staircase and bridge that leads to the inside of the temple compound. The stairway is 33 steps high, corresponding to the 33 steps to enlightenment. There are two pagodas on the temple site, which is unusual. The three-story Seokgatap (Sakyamuni Pagoda), which stands at 8.2 meters, is a traditional Korean-style stone pagoda with simple lines and minimal detailing. Dabotap (Many Treasure Pagoda) is 10.4 meters tall and dedicated to the Many Treasures Buddha mentioned in the Lotus Sutra. In contrast to Seokgatap, Dabotap is known for its highly ornate structure.

Daeungjeon, the Hall of Great Enlightenment, is the main hall, which enshrines the Sakyamuni Buddha and was first built in 681. Behind the main hall stands Museoljeon, the Hall of No Words, which gets its name from the belief that Buddha's teachings could not be taught by words alone. It is one of the oldest buildings in the complex and was probably first built in 670. The Gwaneumjeon (Avalokitesvara's Shrine) houses an image of the Avalokitesvara, the Bodhisattva of Perfect Compassion, and stands at the highest point of the complex.

Bulguksa Temple

Together with the Seokguram Grotto, the Bulguksa Temple was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1995.

Seokguram Grotto

The Seokguram Grotto is a hermitage and part of the Bulguksa temple complex. It lies four kilometers east of the Bulguksa temple on Mt. Tohamsan, in Gyeongju, South Korea. The grotto overlooks the East Sea (Sea of Japan) and rests 750 meters above sea level. It is classified as National Treasure No. 24 by the South Korean government, and in 1995 it was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List together with the Bulguksa Temple. It exemplifies some of the best Buddhist sculptures in the world.

An India tradition of carving the image of Buddha in stone and stupas in cliff walls and natural caves spread
to China and Korea. The geology of the Korean Peninsula, which contains an abundance of hard granite, is not conducive to carving stone images into cliff walls, and so Seokguram is an artificial grotto made from granite and is unique in design. The small size of the grotto indicates that it was probably used exclusively by the Silla royalty.

The grotto is symbolic of a spiritual journey into Nirvana. Pilgrims were to start at Bulguksa or at the foot of Mt. Tohamsan, a holy mountain to the Silla. There was a fountain at the entrance of the shrine where pilgrims could refresh themselves. Inside the grotto, the antechamber and corridor represented the earth while the rotunda represented heaven. The grotto is shaped by hundreds of granite stones; no mortar was used and the structure was held together instead by stone rivets. The construction of the grotto also utilized natural ventilation.

The basic layout of the grotto includes an arched entrance which leads into a rectangular antechamber and then a narrow corridor lined with bas-reliefs leading into the main rotunda. The centerpiece of the granite sanctuary is a Buddha statue seated on a lotus throne with legs crossed. The Buddha has a serene expression of meditation; it is surrounded by fifteen panels of bodhisattvas, arhats, and ancient Indian gods and accompanied by ten statues in niches along the rotunda wall. The grotto also contains 40 different figures representing Buddhist principles and teachings; the grotto itself was built around these statues in order to protect them from weathering. The ceiling of the grotto is decorated with half moons, and the top is decorated with a lotus flower. Silla architects used symmetry and employed the concept of the golden rectangle.

Seokguram Buddha
Buddha at Seokguram in South Korea, World Heritage picture.

12.9.3: The Gorguryeo Tombs

Notable aspects of Goguryeo art can be found in tomb murals that vividly depict everyday aspects of life in the ancient kingdom.

Learning Objective

Describe the famous tomb murals of the Goryeo Dynasty

Key Points

- The Goguryeo Kingdom, which ruled from 37 BCE–668 CE, spanned much of Manchuria and the northern half of Korea.
- Because of its proximity to the northern Chinese states such as the Northern Wei, Buddhism was first introduced to the Goguryeo Kingdom in 372 CE. Buddhism inspired the Goguryeo kings to commission art and architecture dedicated to the Buddha.
- Notable aspects of art from this kingdom can be found in the Complex of Goguryeo Tombs, which was designated as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.
- It is thought that the complex was used as a burial site for kings, queens, and other members of the royal family.
- Tomb murals vividly depict everyday aspects of life and culture in the ancient kingdom, and Goguryeo painting was highly influential to other art throughout East Asia, including the wall murals of Horyu-ji in Japan.
- Goguryeo tomb paintings are noted for their vigor, imagery, detail, and originality.

Key Term

artifact

An object such as a tool, weapon or ornament of archaeological or historical interest, especially such an object found at an archaeological excavation.

Background: The Goguryeo Kingdom

The Goguryeo Kingdom, which ruled from 37 BCE–668 CE, spanned much of Manchuria and the northern half of Korea. Goguryeo was an active participant in the power struggle for control of the Korean peninsula and was also associated with the foreign affairs of neighboring polities in China and Japan. Goguryeo was a powerful empire and one of the great powers in East Asia until it was defeated by a Silla–Tang China alliance in 668. After its fall, the territory was divided among the states of Later Silla, Balhae and Tang China.

Because of its proximity to the northern Chinese states such as the Northern Wei, Buddhism was first introduced to the Goguryeo Kingdom in 372 CE. Buddhism inspired the Goguryeo kings to commission art and architecture dedicated to the Buddha.
Goguryeo Tombs

Notable aspects of art from this kingdom can be found in the Complex of Goguryeo Tombs, designated as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. It is thought the complex was used as a burial site for kings, queens and other members of the royal family. Tomb murals vividly depict everyday aspects of life and culture in the ancient kingdom, and Goguryeo painting was highly influential to other art throughout East Asia, including the wall murals of Horyu-ji in Japan. Goguryeo tomb paintings are noted for their vigor, imagery, detail, and originality.

While looting of the tombs has left little physical evidence of the kingdom, the murals portray varied Buddhist themes and provide valuable insight into the kingdom, including details such as its architecture and clothing. These murals also illustrate the early beginnings of Korean landscape paintings and portraiture. The murals are strongly colored and depict people of Goguryeo dancing, wearing elaborate white dresses, enjoying festivities such as the annual Dongmaeng Festival (held in October to worship the gods and ancestors), and hunting. Religious practices, from Buddhism to traditional mythologies, are also illustrated. The people of Goguryeo worshiped ancestors and considered mythical beasts and animals to be sacred, frequently depicting them in tomb paintings. The phoenix and dragon were both worshiped, while the Samjogo, the three-legged crow that represented the sun, was considered the most powerful of the three.

Goguryeo Mural Art

The murals of Goguryeo are strongly colored and show daily life and Korean mythologies of the time.

Attributions

- Three Kingdoms Period
Architecture and Art in the Unified Silla Period


The Goguryeo Tombs