

## THE CHINESE EXHIBITION IN LONDON

BY CHARLES FABENS KELLEY

TEN O'CLOCK of the evening of March 7th, 1936, saw the close of one of the most significant art events ever to have taken place in our modern western world, for then were the doors shut upon the great exhibition of Chinese Art held at Burlington House, the seat of the Royal Academy in London. The history of this exhibition is astonishing, for apparently insuperable obstacles had been surmounted, one by one, and the response of the public, always problematic, had exceeded all expectations. The show had received marvellous advertising, for months before it opened the London Art Magazines, the illustrated weeklies, and even the daily papers had carried articles subtly calculated to arouse interest. The British railroads had made special excursion rates, and "special facilities" were offered to visitors from abroad. Had it not been for the death of King George there is no doubt that all attendance records would have been shattered. Nevertheless, between November 27th, 1935, and March 7th, 1936, over 422,000 people attended the exhibition. Countless excursions of school children were organized all over the island, and sizeable excursions came from many continental countries. If one were a serious student of things Chinese the chances were that he met there in the galleries everyone he had corresponded with, heard of, or known, of similar interests from the remotest corners of the globe. For this sort of thing London seems to be the true center of the world.

An enterprise of such magnitude provoked all sorts of opinions, reasoned and otherwise, but regardless of final verdicts as to quality, it is amazing that such an exhibition could have been organized at all, and the real reason for its taking place was without doubt the almost fanatical energy and persistence of Sir Percival David.

A committee of four, Sir Percival David, director of the exhibition, R. L. Hobson, connoisseur extraordinary of Chinese porce-

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### BRONZE CEREMONIAL WINE VESSEL, WITH INSCRIPTION

Possibly before the 12th Century B. C. Lent by the Chinese Government. Elephant's heads may be noticed on the shoulders of the vessel. It is now known that elephants were kept at the Chinese capital before that date. A few years ago these would have been considered an anachronism.

lains and keeper of the British Museum collections, George Eumorphopoulos, perhaps the most outstanding of collectors of Chinese art, and Oscar Raphael, honorary curator of the Fitzwilliam Museum at Cambridge University, a volunteer on the staff of the British

Museum, and one of the world's most discriminating Orientalists, traveled together around the world to invite collectors, museums, and governments to lend their choicest objects. They went to India, China, Japan, and America, and after their return to London, Mr. Eumorfopoulos journeyed to Moscow and obtained some very rare things from the Soviet Government. There were also advisory committees in other European countries.

The exhibition was almost too large to be crowded into galleries of such modest dimensions, but special cases of ingenious design with interior illumination showed the bronzes and porcelains to advantage.

The bronzes were probably the major attraction, for here was shown a larger number of fine pieces than had ever been gathered together before in the western hemisphere, and one could study a bronze not only as a single piece, but for its relationship to the family of ceremonial bronzes as a whole. Inevitably one found that the majority consisted of variations upon types, and the very number of the bronzes shown gave some hope of a far more logical classification than has hitherto been achieved. Indeed an attempt was made to introduce a different chronological grouping. The Chinese government was very generous in the number of bronzes sent, but great disappointment was expressed that none of the pieces excavated at Anyang was shown, for they date without doubt from the Shang Dynasty, before 1200 B. C. and are certain to prove to be another Rosetta stone for the untangling of the chronology of Chinese bronzes. It was said that the Academia Sinica, not having had sufficient time to study these finds, felt it impossible to release them for the exhibition, although a fragment of sculpture from the excavations was shown.

A great variety of patination of the bronzes was noted, and there was a rather sharp differentiation between the bronzes from the Chinese government and those from the European and American collections. The first were almost all of a dull, lusterless color, ranging from blackish brown to a leadlike, brownish grey. Most of the other pieces were strongly patinated with malachite green or azurite blue, products of chemical change, and the surfaces frequently were lustrous. This naturally raised the question whether the Chinese government had restricted the loans to certain types of



**BLACK JADE HORSE, 9TH CENTURY A. D.**

Lent by Oscar Raphael, London. This is a masterpiece of compact carving, and was long in the Imperial Collection, for it was brought to Peking in 1422 A. D. by the Emperor Yung-lo.



MYTHICAL ANIMAL OF BRONZE

Period of the Warring States (481-221 B. C.). Lent by H. J. Oppenheim, London.



HORSE'S HEAD AND SHOULDERS IN GREY-GREEN JADE

Han Dynasty (206 B. C.—A. D. 220). Lent by the Victoria and Albert Museum (Eumorfopoulos Collection). This piece is famous for its texture and surface as well as for its sculptural quality.

bronzes, or whether the taste of occidental and oriental collectors differs as regards the choicest examples. One thing was made quite clear—that the type called tentatively Ts'in or Huai, with intricately interlaced decorative patterns of great precision and delicacy, must have extended over a far longer period than had been thought.

There was a brilliant display of bronzes inlaid with gold and silver of the Han Dynasty (206 B. C.—A. D. 221), or possibly earlier, which were marvels of virtuosity. These came from all over the world. For example, one fine halberd handle was lent by the Tokyo Academy of Fine Arts; another similar type came from the Eumorfopoulos collection, and an exquisite belt-hook in the form of a white jade dragon surrounded by a coiled bronze hydra, inlaid in silver and gold, came from the Buckingham Collection of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Some of the world's most notable jades were there, among the finest of them those from the collection of Oscar Raphael of London. One of these was a large recumbent buffalo, weighing about sixty-six pounds, and believed to have been carved in the Han Dynasty. In form it is very compact, retaining the shape of the boulder from which it was fashioned. Whether or not it is a Han piece, it has a fine pedigree, for an inscription on the base records that in 1422 the Ming Emperor, Yung Lo, took it to Peiping with him. It is a far cry from this massive, heavy, subtle animal to the ornate and often over-elaborated work of the Chi'en Lung period (1736-1795), of which perhaps too many examples were shown, though among them were some very fine pieces.

In table cases were the tomb jades, mostly small pieces of ceremonial type dating from the Chou Dynasty (1122—255 B. C.). These were very well represented and came from sources as far apart as China and America, for one of the finest examples, an intricate pierced pendant, came from the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art, Kansas City. Many of the little pieces were pierced with tiny holes so that they could be sewed to garments, and long burial had often produced exquisite effects of color, patination and sheen.

Sculpture is very difficult to borrow for exhibition purposes on account of its weight and the many difficulties of packing and transportation, yet several noted pieces were there, the largest, and



PAINTED STUCCO FIGURE FROM ASTANA

Seventh Century A. D. Lent by the Government of India. (Stein Collection).





TWO WOMEN IN POTTERY

Six Dynasties (220-589 B. C.). Lent by H. R. H., The Crown Prince of Sweden.



STONEWARE DUCK

Glazed in light greyish-blue, K'ang-Hsi Period (1662-1722). Lent by Dr. Robert Von Klemperer, Berlin.

one of the best being a standing Amitabha, the Buddha of boundless light, over eighteen feet high. This colossal limestone figure stood in the central hall, calm, dignified, imposing. The sculptor had been able to infuse into its huge bulk a serenity and timelessness which made it definitely impressive. The Buddha was lent by C. T. Loo of Paris, who was very active in assisting the organizers of the exhibition, and contributed the rough hemp wall coverings which served as a charming background. Two of the finest sculptures came from the University of Pennsylvania Museum—one a huge stone slab carved in high relief with one of the battle chargers, "Autumn Dew," of the Emperor T'ai Tsung, who ruled from 627 to 649. The groom is shown removing an arrow from the docile little beast: it is great sculpture, solid, sincere, and well organized, and is perhaps the most famous slab outside of China. The other object is a life-sized seated Buddhist mystic (Lohan) in glazed pottery, but should really be considered as sculpture because of its plastic strength. Strangely enough the British Museum owns an equally fine Lohan, and possesses a first-class replica of the battle charger, but a curious law prevented their removal from the British Museum building, so at great expense the others were brought from America.

When human beings and animals are modeled in clay and baked it is extremely difficult to say whether they should be considered as pottery or sculpture. Perhaps only those which far transcend the routine performance of the potter's craft are entitled to be called sculpture. After all it is the dominating purpose rather than the material which should be the determining factor, and by these canons many of the small figurines of the T'ang Dynasty (618-907) and the immediately preceding period are truly sculptural. There were some charming small pottery figures which could not fail to remind classical scholars of the Tanagra figurines. Two little maidens, modeled in one piece, and only a few inches high came from the Crown Prince of Sweden, and were very popular with the visitors, but close competitors for honors were the decidedly matronly pair, only a little larger, which had come from Chicago, from the Potter Palmer Collection.

Some of the smaller sculptures might have been classified as bronzes, but their exquisite modeling and spirited, purposeful, exe-

cution raised them above the so-called minor arts. Among these were two magnificent gilt bronze altar groups, loaned by Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., of New York City. These, with her famous limestone statue of a Bodhisattva occupied one of the positions of honor, and a dry lacquer figure of a seated Lohan of the Sung Dynasty (960-1279) can hardly be surpassed. While the large limestone figure was one of the most beautiful of all the sculptures it seemed less typically Chinese than the others, for in spite of its undoubted authenticity it seems in a class by itself, unrelated to its contemporaries.

Some of the most interesting things of all were loaned by the government of India and among them were some of the fruits of Sir Aurel Stein's excavations in Chinese Turkestan as well as earlier things from Lou-lan, a Han site. These constituted a really remarkable exposition of designs and weaves of the early centuries from Han to T'ang, and showed a great variety of technique from pile carpet through silk damask and formally figured silks and silk tissue. These were of course in fragments, often badly faded, but of extreme importance to serious students of textiles.

Among the Indian loans, easily understood and liked by everyone, were a sweet little maiden, a fichu crossed surplice-wise upon her breast, standing with bowed head and clasped hands in an attitude of shy simplicity, and another figure in a broad hat sitting astride a horse. These were in stucco, only a few inches tall, and highly colored. The little maid's skirt was striped vertically in dark red and blue, and her waist was cool green, her hair black, and her cheeks decidedly pink. The freshness and realism of these figures, over 1000 years old, made history a vital and living thing to the public, while the contemporary textile fragments appealed, of course, only to the specialists.

But some of the most interesting paintings, fragmentary too, alas, came also from the Indian Government. The remains of two silk friezes which originally must have represented court ladies and attendants in a garden, if we may hazard a guess from the relics, were astonishing in the directness of the painting, the brilliancy and clarity of the colors and the general air of sophistication. The salvaging and remounting of these fragments was a true triumph of the restorer's art in the best sense of the word for there was



### STONEWARE PILLOW

Decorated in black on white slip. Tz'u Chou ware Sung Dynasty (960-1279). From the British Museum (Eumorfopoulos Collection).



BRONZE WINE VESSEL (KUANG)

Cover with ladle; partitioned interior with inscription. Early Chou Dynasty (112-249 B. C.).  
Lent by Oscar Raphael, London.



### STONEWARE JAR

With relief decoration on a green glazed ground. Ming Dynasty (1568-1644). Loaned by the University of Oxford (Ashmolean Museum). This jar has long been in England for it was once owned by John Tradescant (d. 1627) and was presented to Elias Ashmole in 1637

no repainting, and indeed a foreign touch would have been immediately apparent.

The majority of the paintings came from the Chinese government and varied greatly in date, quality, and subject matter. Two superb paintings were scrolls on paper, one of herons, mandarin ducks, and lotus, bearing the dashing signature of the Emperor Hui Tsung (d. A. D. 1135) that patron saint of Sung artists, and the other an autumn scene of deer in a forest, which I should not hesitate to place ahead of any other animal painting I have seen. If no other paintings than these had been shown China would have been worthily represented so far as quality is concerned. The majority of the earlier paintings have turned very dark from age, and were so installed that they were very difficult to see. The Chinese government sent many paintings of the Ming (1638-1644) and Ching (1644-1912) Dynasties well worthy of study, and more easily visible on account of better preservation, but the two paintings above referred to were in a class by themselves.

The Honolulu Academy of Arts sent a wonderful scroll in ink called the Hundred Geese, but it looked as if there must have been a thousand. Everything that geese know about themselves was revealed to the masterly painter of this splendid scroll. The Detroit Museum sent a fine scroll in colors on paper, of frogs on lotus leaves with dragonflies and other insects darting over their heads—a fine work of the Yüan Dynasty, called "Early Autumn." A beautiful landscape scroll in ink on silk and ascribed to Hsia Kuei of the Sung Dynasty was among the many noteworthy contributions of the Nelson Gallery of Kansas City.

Only a few paintings came from Japan, but they were among the best, the favorite perhaps being the ink painting of two sparrows on a bamboo spray by Mu Chi (thirteenth century) from the Nedzu Collection in Tokyo.

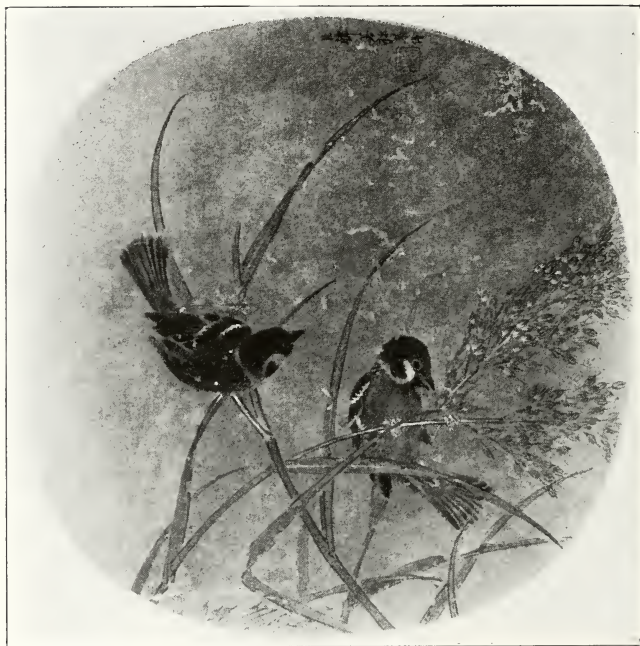
Perhaps we should mention here the meticulous copies of paintings in the silk tapestry weave (Ko'ssu) which the public could hardly believe were woven instead of painted. Many were fine in color and composition, and were excellent examples of what the Chinese can do as expert craftsmen. Certainly those loaned by the Chinese Government were finer than had been seen before by westerners.





PAINTING IN COLOR ON PAPER

Sung or Yuan Dynasty (14th Century?). Lent by the Government of the Soviet Union. The colors are very simple and pleasing; a plum-colored robe with red sash, and hands and face a flat, flesh-color.



### SPARROWS AND RICE STALKS

Album painting on paper with traces of color. Signed Han Jo-cho. Sung Dynasty (960-1279).  
Lent by the German Stat Museums, Berlin.



SILK TAPESTRY (K'Ō SSU)

Lent by the Chinese Government. These meticulously woven panels were often copied from paintings with such keen regard for the form and color that they could easily be mistaken for true paintings. This ascribed to the Sung Dynasty (960-1279) but is probably later.



## TWO HORSEMEN

A small painting in color on paper, probably 7th Century A. D. Lent by Musee du Louvre, Paris (Pelliot Collection). This is in astonishing preservation and a very lively thing.

From the point of view of the public it might be said that too large a proportion of the space was devoted to ceramic wares. But it must be remembered that China has always been distinguished for its preëminence in pottery and porcelain, and much more progress has been made in their study and classification than in any other of the branches of artistic expression. It was therefore possible to have a more completely representative showing of ceramics than of anything else, and it would have been a great mistake to curtail the space devoted to ceramics to any considerable degree. Yet even in this magnificent showing the earlier works were distinctly slighted. The emphasis was by no means even, nor were the different classifications as well represented as might have been the case. But thanks to the coöperation of the Chinese Government and the western collectors (principally English, and more principally Sir Percival David) a collection of Sung wares was shown that has never been dreamed of before and can probably never be duplicated. There were fine examples of Ting, Chün, celadon; rarest specimens of those two almost indistinguishable brothers, Ko and Kuan ware; and, it was fondly believed, typical examples of the finally isolated Ju ware (pronounced Ru). These appealed to the public at large by their sober beauty, but dazzled the collectors with their subtle charm and qualities perceptible only to the initiated. The display of Temmoku, or Chien ware was disappointing, for much finer pieces existed in London collections than were shown.

As hinted above it was in the field of Sung pottery that the astonishing quality of Sir Percival David's collection was so easily apparent. It was known that he had acquired some sixty-six Sung pieces formerly in the Imperial Collections as a nucleus for his collection a few years ago, but the quality throughout was exceptional, and he showed a number of rare types in superb examples.

The English have been collecting Ming porcelains from the very time of the Ming Dynasty, and this exhibition brought many pieces from seclusion to join specimens of great rarity sent by the Chinese Government. Here Turkey collaborated to great effect, for in the fifteenth century the Turks had been keen purchasers of Chinese porcelains. The Topkapu Museum of Istanbul sent some fine specimens, particularly blues and whites of the Hsüan Te reign (1426-



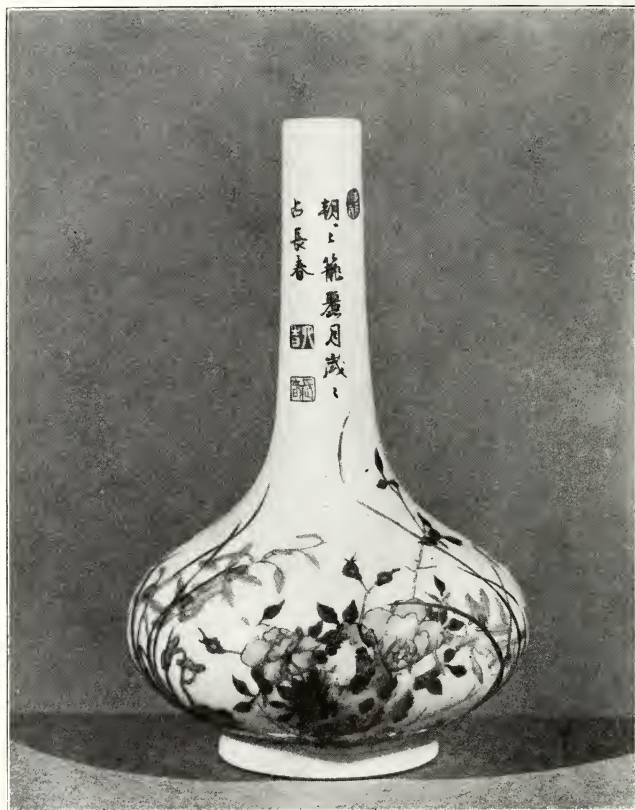
PIGEON ON PEAR TREE

A painting on paper by Ch'ien Hsuan (1255-a. c. 1290). Lent by Kaichiro Nedzu, Tokyo.



### A HERD OF DEER IN A FOREST

Detail of a painting in color on silk. Five Dynasties? (907-960). Lent by the Chinese Government.  
The drawing of the animals, only a few inches high, is masterly.



BOTTLE OF EGGSHELL PORCELAIN

Decorated in *famille rose* enamels. Ch'ien-Lung Period. Lent by Sir Percival David, Bt., London.





BLUE AND WHITE PORCELAIN VASE

15th Century A. D. Lent by the Topkapu Saray Museum, Istanbul. This was probably exported to Turkey shortly after its manufacture.



COVERED BOWL OF YELLOW CANTON ENAMEL

Decorated with pink blossoms. Ch'ien Lung Period (1736-1795). Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Clark, Iver Heath, Bucks, England.

1435). The fascinating history of blue and white porcelain could be traced in this exhibition as never before.

The variety of Ming wares which were exhibited was amazing. A brilliant Hsüan Te ruby red had more depth and richness than any of the K'ang Hi (1662-1722) oxbloods, of which the finest example came from the Morgan collection. This ruby red jug, glowing in color, was anything but beautiful in form and was credited with being made in the shape of a priest's hat. In reality it is an imperfectly understood copy of a European syrup jug, for the thumb-lever with which all users of steins are familiar was not attached to the movable lid, but appears, an exact copy in porcelain, attached firmly to the handle as a perfectly useless ornament. It is thus an extraordinarily interesting document, as are many other of the exhibits. It proves again that the Chinese have always been susceptible to outside influences.

In addition to the brilliant Ming reds and yellows and blues with foliated patterns, not common in America, and striking rather than subtle in design, were delicate cups and bowls of exquisite thinness and delicacy of color and decorative motif. One was impressed with the tremendous creative activity of an exuberant period.

There was some fine K'ang Hsi porcelain. Of the late wares the type known as Ku Yüeh Hsüan, painted with microscopic skill in enamel colors on thin white porcelain or white opaque glass, which was loaned by the Chinese Government, caused the greatest comment.

The exhibition was an outstanding success. Not only did it reflect the vast culture of China, but also appreciation of its high qualities by the nations of the world. Without international coöperation such a fine exhibit could never have been held. Europe seems to have the finest porcelains outside China, with American collections stronger in the earlier wares. The finest bronzes shown came from European, American, and Japanese collections. As for the paintings it is safe to say that very few in the European collections came up to the high standards of the best Japanese and American collections.