

Colorful Lanterns at Shanyuan

上元燈彩圖

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### The Project - Introduction

The digitization of the Chinese scroll 'Colorful Lanterns at Shangyuan' on an educational CD aims at combining historical and art historical considerations for the study of Chinese genre scroll paintings of cityscapes. It is a great opportunity to have this treasure which today is housed in the Hsu collection in Taipei come to live again on a new medium for a new generation of admirers.

This scroll represents a rich source of information regarding the economic situation and sociological structure of cities. This category of painting originated in the Song Dynasty (960-1279) and was further developed in the subsequent dynasties. Since the Song dynasty, cities had evolved from administrative centers representing government authority to economic entrepôts. The system of walled wards and mighty curfews had been abandoned for a street-oriented structure with markets and shops lining the streets and offering their goods day and night. This economic revolution challenged the definition of cities as ritual and administrative centers. The changes in the role of the city are vividly captured in handscrolls depicting scenes of urban life, merchant and artisan activities, and entertainment. Considered to have been mostly commissioned by wealthy merchants who patronized commercial artisans, this category of painting represents a unique source commemorating specific features of the depicted cities.

The painting presented here is from the brush of an anonymous painter from the mid to late Ming dynasty (1368-1644). It depicts a street in the southern capital of Ming China, Nanjing, on the occasion of the Lantern Festival. This public display of colorful lanterns that compete in size and design concludes the celebrations welcoming the New Year and continues even today. In Ming Nanjing the festival was accompanied by activities that were designed to delight everybody. In the painting we find scholar-officials and wealthy citizens who meet in restaurants for tea, wine, food, and female company. Others stroll across the market where they indulge in their passion for collecting. Books, paintings, musical instruments, furniture for the house, potted plants and landscapes for the studio or garden, and animals for the park are for sale in the market. The painting shows all the 'must have' items described in the manuals of taste and style popular at the time. People interested in more mundane entertainments are shown while betting and

gambling, listening to storytellers, or observing the attempts of players to balance a football or shuttlecock in the air. There are wrestlers and fortune tellers, toy vendors and servants leading horses through the street. This painting documents the enjoyments of the festival in a more lively way than any other medium including plays, songs, poems, sculptures, carvings or embroidery.

### Cityscapes as a painting genre

Cityscapes represent a unique genre among handscrolls. Most examples of the limited number of cityscapes that are still extant seem to have been commissions given to professional painters or artisans. The earliest surviving example, which is regarded as the parent scroll of the genre, is the "Qingming shanghe tu" ('Going up the river at Qingming [Festival]') by Zhang Zeduan (fl. 12th century). The painting today belongs to the collection of the Palace Museum in Beijing and has attracted enormous scholarly attention since it was rediscovered in 1958. All known cityscapes follow its model to a certain extent.

In the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing Dynasties (1644-1912) this parent scroll became so popular that a series of copies of very different quality was produced. Some of these follow-up versions borrowed the title of the painting without showing the Qingming borough of the Song capital Kaifeng at all. When the later paintings were produced severe floods had buried Kaifeng under meters of loess soil. The fame of the 'Qingming shanghe' tu as well as nostalgia for the former capital may have inspired patrons to commission productions of new paintings of the genre showing prosperous cities. All these cities were, with the exception of Beijing, predominantly located in the Lower Yangzi region. Among the cities favored for depiction were Suzhou, Nanjing, and Yangzhou.

In the Qing, the categories of landscape handscrolls and cityscapes were merged in some remarkable scrolls. The Manchu emperors Kangxi and Qianlong, ordered their respective 'Southern Inspection Tours' to be recorded in sets of handscrolls which described the highlights of their visits to the productive and prosperous south of the realm. Today, these scrolls are dispersed among the museums of the world.

### The handscroll as a medium

The format of the handscroll was first used in the recording of

Buddhist texts. This process involved pasting together sheets of paper inscribed with vertically arranged lines of characters in a consecutive way. Large amounts of text were accumulated in a format that served the process of memorization and facilitated easy transportation. Paintings produced in this format shared these same obvious practical advantages. Additionally, they also offered a new way of art appreciation. In China hanging scrolls were often enjoyed in the company of friends on certain occasions. Instead of permanently adorning a wall in the living room of the house as it is common in the West, hanging scrolls were taken from the shelf and viewed with the assistance of servants who had to hold them up with a long pole to which a hook was attached. When the scroll was suspended from the pole the art lovers would examine its style and content. There are famous examples of paintings showing such "elegant gatherings", of gentlemen jointly contemplating a scroll.

The handscroll was different from the hanging scroll since it could be viewed by a single viewer without assistance. While textscrolls usually showed a continuous flow of characters, the visual structure of a painted handscroll of landscapes and cityscapes may be compared to a film in its visual advancement or to a musical composition with regard to its dramatic composition of alternating depictions of scenes of tranquility and activity. The narrative told in the original handscroll as well as in this digitized version can be enjoyed at an individual pace. The viewer travels through the landscape by letting her or his eyes wander from scene to scene, resting on a specific detail or accelerating the speed of viewing at personal preference. The movable sides of the scroll form a dynamic frame that can be widened or narrowed when unrolling the painting in order to view a scene in its totality or closely inspect the intriguing charm of refined details. The viewer may shift at will between the perspectives of panoramic overview or a view with intimate insights into the private activities, the clothing, even the mood expressed on the faces of the depicted individuals.

These qualities are preserved when presenting a narrative handscroll on an electronic medium. In addition, a multitude of new practical as well as aesthetic pleasures are opened by storing a painting on a CD or website: The painting can be viewed by many without raising conservatory concerns. It can be seen in its entire dimensions which is not always possible in a museum display. In one aspect the digitized image even surpasses the original: the clarity of the depiction cannot be

matched by the original.

### **The design of the CD**

The digitization of the scroll Lantern Festival at Shangyuan makes a unique work of art accessible for a wide audience. The interactive CD is designed to allow studying the painting in its complete length. After the scanning process was completed the painting has undergone a process of meticulous electronic cleaning which made details visible that are unrecognizable in the original. The details of the painting can be read like paragraphs of a text. This approach insures an uninhibited perception of the painting on a level of exploration which is of great importance in introducing this work to first-time viewers.

The digitized version contains a great variety of 'hotspots' or details of special interest that are related to a series of selected topics distributed over the scroll. These 'hotspots' glow when a mouse pointer passes over them. Clicking on these 'hotspots' opens up a window that contains detailed background information related to the particular item selected from the scroll. The windows of information can be accessed by the user at any time during the progressive contemplation of the painting. Any sector of the scroll can be selected and zoomed. This allows scrutinizing of even minute details which are impossible to detect with the bare eye when looking at the original painting.

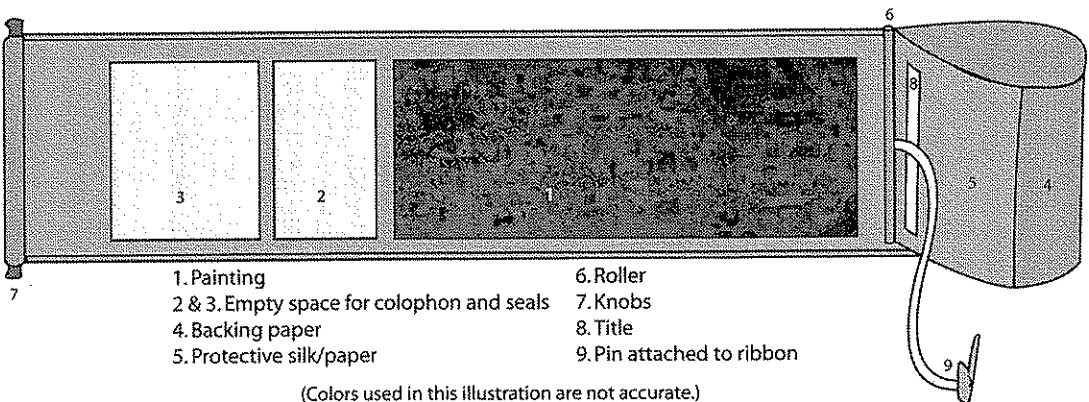
The CD can be used in individual study as well as in classroom presentations. The multilayered structure allows for accessing a wealth of additional information stored beyond the surface. The background information accessible in pull down menus cover the political history and social conditions at the time, and the level of economic development conveyed by the panoramic view of shops, services, entertainment facilities, transportation, public buildings, customs and costumes featured in the scroll.

## **The Painting 'Colorful Lanterns at Shangyuan'**



The handscroll 'Colorful Lanterns at Shangyuan' is from the brush of an anonymous painter. There is no colophon or inscription giving his name. The eight seals that are found in the beginning and end of

the scroll cannot be associated with a particular painter. We have to assume that it is a work by a commercial artist that was commissioned by a wealthy patron. The density of the figures in the painting and the meticulous execution of overlapping details suggest that the painting is



- |   |                           |
|---|---------------------------|
| 1. Painting                               | 6. Roller                 |
| 2 & 3. Empty space for colophon and seals | 7. Knobs                  |
| 4. Backing paper                          | 8. Title                  |
| 5. Protective silk/paper                  | 9. Pin attached to ribbon |

(Colors used in this illustration are not accurate.)

from one hand though the outline drawing of architectural structures could sometimes be executed by a different person.

Usually cityscapes or narrative paintings were first sketched as a draft of outline drawings (*fenben*), in this case on silk. Then the painter used ink and colors to execute the painting. Originally the painting may have had slightly different dimensions than the 25.5 cm in width and 266.6 cm in length that we measure today. The digital cleaning allows for magnification of the upper edge of the painting which is not only irregular but reveals traces of a formerly wider rim and of manipulations. The upper edge has been trimmed probably during a previous remounting of the painting. Trimming of the edges happens quite frequently when a painting is remounted because the old mounting strips that frame the painting have to be removed and new strips are then attached. In this process utmost care is essential but once the edge has been damaged the drawing on the rim is lost.

An attempt was made by someone to repair the details that were damaged during the mounting process. These repairs were undertaken with good intentions but were unskillfully executed. In addition, the electronic wash brought to light several damaged areas in the silk and revealed eight faces of persons that have been amateurishly re-painted with white paint.

The schematic drawing below shows the common mounting of a handscroll. The entire painting is backed by a long strip of paper that is wider than the painting (1). The ends of the backing paper are needed to stabilize the fragile painting medium made of paper or silk. The ends also hold blank paper or silk which contain the collectors' comments and seals (2) as well as one or more colophons (3). Handscrolls are opened by holding the slender rod on the right around which the backing paper is attached (4) and unrolling the painting with the left hand. The initial front part of the scroll on the right side (5) serves to protect the painting when it is rolled up again. It is therefore reinforced on both sides, the outside with heavy brocade, and the inside with light silk. The left end of the scroll consists of a roller (6) adorned with knobs at both ends (7). These knobs can be made of wood, ivory, or jade and can be decorated. When the scroll is rolled up for storage, a silk band is wound around it to keep the layers firmly in place to prevent damage from irregular tension or insects.

(The drawing follows van Gulik, 1993, 67).

Yang Xin, senior curator of the Palace Museum in Beijing, has dated the Shangyuan dengcai scroll to the reign periods Wanli to Tianqi (1573-1627) of the mid to late Ming dynasty (1368-1644). The painting belongs to the genre of narrative scrolls depicting customs (*fengsu hua*) and human activities (*renwu hua*).

There are several criteria that help to date the painting. The first criterion is fashion. The headgear worn by the officials in the painting was a common part of the attire of Ming officials indicating their position. In addition, we find a few celebrities of rank who are wearing red shoes, a trend that has been criticized by Ming writers as a decadent custom. Red shoes belonged to the wardrobe of women and originally were associated with the attractions related to bound lotus feet. Men, especially those of high standing, transgressed this border of gendered fashion. Many late Ming paintings document that officials including

abouts and emperors came to enjoy wearing red shoes.

The second criterion is eyeglasses. We see two men wearing spectacles and a monocle respectively. Spectacles had been invented in Italy around 1290 and had first appeared in China by the mid fifteenth century. They had first been imported as tribute gifts from Persia to the imperial court. It took about one hundred years until they became a more widely available yet costly commodity. The city of Hangzhou on the southeastern coast became the center of production and export of spectacles, mostly to Japan, when the technology of cutting lenses had been developed and refined in China in the late Ming.

## The Lantern Festival

The Lantern Festival concludes the festivities of the New Year celebrations in China. It is celebrated since the Han dynasty (260 B.C.E. - 220 C.E.) and centers around the fifteenth day of the first month of the lunar calendar, the first full moon, called Shangyuan, of the New Year. The festival's origins are believed to be related to guiding the souls of the ancestors, who had been invited for a visit to their descendants' families on New Years, to return to their own abode by the light of the lanterns.

The title given to the painting has a double meaning. It can be translated as 'Colorful Lanterns at the Festival of Shangyuan Day', where the word Shangyuan means the first full moon of the year. At the same time it can be read as 'Colorful Lanterns at Shangyuan', where the word Shangyuan means the municipal district of the southern capital, Nanjing. In Nanjing lanterns were hung up on the evening of the eighth day of the first lunar month and were taken down on the seventeenth day, which was celebrated as the 'Festival of Lowering the Lanterns'. During the Lantern Festival, fairs were held in public. These fairs are still held today. People gather in the streets to enjoy the sight of a myriad of differently shaped lanterns that illuminate the streets. Entertainment for men, women, and children of all ages was provided: betting, gambling, fireworks, riddle guessing contests, and catching goldfish from a basin with a paper net. Last but not least, a special treat sweetened the celebrations, the *yuanxiao*. These round dumplings made from glutinous rice and have a sweet or salty filling.

The dumplings are prepared and offered to family members and guests. Their shape, which resembles the full moon, symbolizes family unity and completeness.

All entertaining activities traditionally associated with the festival can be found in the painting introduced here: firecrackers are for sale, children are carrying home the goldfish they caught in bowls of translucent glass, men are betting and wrestling, and the *yuanxiao*-dumplings are produced by the flying hands of a cook and his apprentice. Most important are of course the lanterns that are ubiquitous in the street market and illuminate the scene. They take all shapes imaginable: animals including horses, cranes, crabs, elephants, and fish; mythical beasts like dragons, phoenix, and qilin, the Chinese unicorn; plants such as beautiful chrysanthemums, peonies, or pomegranates; human beings like officials or legendary figures like the famous demagogue Zhong Kui, and geometric shapes are adorned with painted scenes or riddles written on them that the viewers try to solve. The symbolism of many lanterns refers to puns in which the pronunciation of the lantern name is homophonous with the pronunciation of a blessing. One example is the fish, which is depicted in the painting. Fish is pronounced *yú*, exactly like the word for surplus, *yú*. Therefore the fish symbolizes the wish that there be no lack of food or other necessities in the New Year but a surplus instead. Another example is the chrysanthemum, pronounced *ju* which is homophonous with *ju* in *juguan* = to hold an official post. This word is used to express the wish for successful career as an official, the most celebrated goal for a young man in society at the time. The centerpiece of the lantern show in Nanjing was an artificial landscape set up in the street. It was illuminated by hundreds of lights and was named the Aoshan Lantern. Aoshan is the mountain symbolizing the world. It was thought to be situated on the mythological Penglai Isles, the residence of the Immortals in the Eastern Sea. The name of the landscape lantern refers to the shape of this mountain.

What makes the lantern celebrations shown in the present handscroll so special is that the fair is not an ordinary market but an antique market. In fact, it is the only street antique market documented in a painting. Antique markets are described in written documents to have been held only in the Ming dynasty capitals Beijing and Nanjing. There are several contemporary sources that describe the antique market in Beijing, but the 'Colorful Lanterns at Shangyuan' scroll is the only documentation of the antique market held in Nanjing. The antique market

is a generic description of a market for all collectibles that delighted the scholars and were prominent in their competition in the display of taste and style. These collectibles included rare antiquities like ritual vessels made of bronze, fine porcelain vessels and decorative objects, old finely cut and engraved jades, lacquer wares, old books, calligraphies and paintings from venerated artists.

The quality of the objects were discussed in manuals of style, printed guides that also informed about how display the objects in an elegant composition and how to distinguish genuine from fake objects. The manuals also describe the quality of replicas which, very different from Western concepts of an original work of art, were considered plausible alternatives when original objects were not available because they were scarce or simply unaffordable.

Collectibles shown in the market also include religious art objects, like Buddha statues, and musical instruments, as well as precious furniture for the study and the house. Very important were potted landscapes, well known in the West by their Japanese name, *bonsai*. In the scroll we find a great variety of *bonsai* compositions with miniature trees and rocks as well as blooming flowers in containers of multiple shapes and colors. Cages are set up from which common and exotic animals for the mansion and the park can be selected. In addition to their qualities as pets, many of the animals carry a symbolic meaning that enhances their appreciation. Cranes for example are symbols of longevity. Deer are kept as a wish for a good official position. The word for deer, pronounced *lu*, is pronounced exactly like the term for emolument.

During the Lantern Festival all members of the family, including the women, left the house to roam the streets, admire the festive sight of the myriad of lanterns and enjoy the company of family members and friends. Usually on the sixteenth day of the first month, men and women gathered for a procession that was called 'walking off the hundred illnesses'. The purpose of this procession was to walk off potential ailments and stay healthy in the New Year. Our painting shows comparatively few women but from written records and from contemporary literary sources we know that women greatly enjoyed themselves on this festival occasion.

## The Ming Dynasty (1368-1644)

### 1. Politics and economy

'Ming' means bright, clear, and enlightened - the qualities with which the founding emperor of the Ming dynasty, Zhu Yuanzhang (1328-1398) wanted his dynasty to be associated. He had defeated the Mongol Yuan dynasty (1279-1368) with the intention of re-establishing law and order under a Chinese government based on a value system derived from Chinese traditions. Comparing his government and jurisdiction regulations with those introduced under the Mongol rule reveals that he kept quite a few practices that appeared useful to him but in general his rule held a bias against things foreign. The Ming truly came to be remembered for its excellence which was driven by an unmatched commercial revolution and by technological achievements in agriculture, printing, medicine, the arts, and craftsmanship. At the time Zhu Yuanzhang could not have anticipated that he had founded the last Chinese dynasty ever to rule from the dragon throne.

The Ming dynasty has been roughly divided into three periods: an era of power consolidation and expansion (1368 - ca. 1450), an era of political and economic changes and defense against internal and external upheaval (ca. 1450 - ca. 1520), and concluded by a series of political and economic crises (ca. 1520 - 1644) that led to the downfall of Ming rule.

#### Founding and expansion of the empire

The first phase comprises the reigns of the two strongest emperors of the Ming: the founder Zhu Yuanzhang, Emperor Hongwu (r. 1368-1398), and the rule of his son, Zhu Di, Emperor Yongle (r. 1403-1424). Zhu Yuanzhang first abolished the social segregation institutionalized by the Mongols. The Mongols, to the dismay of the Chinese population, had divided society into four classes. The Mongols occupied the highest class level. Foreign administrators and their families who came from neighboring countries constituted the next tier. This group was entrusted with leading administrative jobs in the Chinese bureaucracy. The third level included the Northern Chinese. The Southern Chinese resided at the lowest level and were particularly distrusted by the Mongols. The Mongol's distrust of the Southern Chinese stemmed from the fierce wars they had waged against southern armies loyal to the imperial family of the Song dynasty.

About seventy years after the Mongols had founded dynastic rule in China, rebellions against their rule began on a scale that threatened their dominance. Many of the rebellious movements were religiously inspired and were signs of discontent not only with the exploitation of the Han Chinese by the Mongol administration but also with the arrogant Tibetan clergy who dominated Chinese Buddhist institutions at the time.

Another cause for peasant rebellions was the repeated severe flooding of the Yellow River, the 'sorrow of China'. The flooding resulted in unimaginable damage to harvests and land, and large losses of life and possessions. In addition to loosing their property and livelihood peasants were forcibly recruited to carry out the subsequent massive repair works. The harsh conditions of the corvée labor provided the fertile ground in which rebel movements flourished. One of the revolts was headed by Zhu Yuanzhang became the founder of the Ming dynasty.

### **Social structures**

Zhu came from a poor peasant family and as a young orphan had joined a Buddhist monastery for several years to avoid starvation.

When he first came to power, his concern was to consolidate agriculture as a reliable foundation for the state. Zhu did this by restoring irrigation, instituting reforestation of large areas for timber and food supply, promoting internal migration to depopulated and deserted parts of the country, and redistributing land according to newly established population registers. Taxes were kept low and a system of well-distributed and stocked granaries was maintained for famine relief.

Families were grouped in self-supporting units that were mutually responsible for sharing tax burdens and corvée labor. The equity and the reliability of the census lists did not last throughout the dynasty. Soon a rural elite of landholders dominated tenant farmers and wandering peasants. The landowners often took over administrative functions from the set number of officials who were responsible for the administration of a rapidly increasing population. The population of China more than doubled between the beginning of the Ming and its end (1368: ca. 60 – 80 million, 1644: ca. 150 – 200 million). Due to enhanced agronomic technologies, the growing need for food could be met most of the time.

The state created military colonies with a structure similar to the organization of peasant families. Three out of ten men in these units

served as soldiers. Seven out of ten of the colonists provided the necessary supplies for the soldiers, the soldiers' families, and their own kin. These colonies were established at the borders, in the northern and southwestern provinces, in the capitals, and along the Grand Canal where they controlled the grain transports. The military colonies slowly deteriorated as colonists deserted when wealthy landowners bought the land that had originally been allocated to the army families.

Artisans were the third group whose profession was hereditary. Their elite resided in workshops that produced high quality objects for imperial use. In addition to these craftsmen who worked for the palace on a permanent basis, there were artisans who were called to the official workshops regularly for a certain period of several months every year or every few years. Their conscription in the imperial workshops disrupted their work life in their home business. However, this situation improved considerably in 1562. At this time the compulsory services as well as all taxes in kind were officially converted into payments in silver.

### **Silver**

Silver was originally mined in the southwestern provinces of Guizhou and Yunnan, and even more silver was imported from Japan. Silver became the standard medium of payment in China in the fifteenth century. At this time, Spain and Portugal began to develop the silver mines in Mexico, Bolivia, and Peru. Both European countries financed the imports of tea, porcelain, and silk from China to their homelands with silver.

Silver remained the most important currency in China until the twentieth century. After 1405, tribute gifts from the provinces to the emperor were no longer sent as payments in kind but as silver. Salt taxes were paid in silver in 1475, and most compulsory labor was replaced by a payment in silver after 1485.

### **Administration**

The central administration underwent remarkable changes during the Ming. Power was concentrated in the hands of the emperor. Zhu Yuanzhang neither supported the eunuchs, nor did he trust the officials deeply.

The eunuchs traditionally served the imperial household and thus were intimately familiar with all aspects of life inside the palace which was concealed from the outside world. They gained trust and prominence under later emperors and at the end of the Ming became so powerful that

they dominated the officials.

The officials were a class of highly educated intellectuals who gained their positions after years of rigorous study and passing through an extremely competitive and selective examination system. Although he came from a poor family, the emperor was an avid learner who worked hard to acquire the knowledge necessary to rule China. He demonstrated great ability in avoiding situations in which the officials might make decisions without conferring with him. Because of his own background of poverty he greatly stressed education for his male subjects.

Following his directions, the administration was changed to gain a maximum level of control by eliminating the position of the Chancellor or Prime Minister. The Chancellor formerly had been the counterweight to the emperor in government decisions and had even had the right to criticize the emperor. In addition, the Grand Secretariat was abolished and the emperor now directly supervised the ministries of Finances, Rites, War, Justice, Public Administration, and Public Works. The emperor also created a new general law code with strict regulations. Eventually the position of Grand Secretary was reinstated because some emperors of the late Ming were not as eager as the founder of the dynasty to oversee all aspects of central government. Instead, they delegated power to the Palace Secretaries who were selected from the ranks of eunuchs. Eunuchs in this position were notorious for their ruthless abuse of power.

### **Trade**

The second Ming emperor ruled briefly until his uncle, Zhu Di, replaced him in a military coup. Different from his father and his nephew, Zhu Di, better known as the Yongle Emperor, emphasized trade. This was contrary to the disdain for commerce in the Confucian tradition that was shared by the majority of the officials. The largest maritime expeditions ever started from China were initiated under Yongle's rule. China had engaged in maritime trade since the eleventh century and Chinese carpenters were masters in the construction of large seagoing vessels used in their overseas trade. However, the seven expeditions organized and headed between 1405 and 1433 by the Muslim Admiral Zheng He (1371-1433), a eunuch of Central Asian origin, were spectacular enterprises. Each voyage lasted two years as the fleets depended on favorable Monsoon winds to leave and return to China. And each of

the expeditions transported up to 27,000 men to Southeast Asia, India, and as far as Mozambique to demonstrate China's intimidating power, establish diplomatic ties, and enhance trade exchange. More than 1,600 ships were built, the largest of which were called 'Treasure Ships'. They were about 400 feet long and 160 feet wide, about five times larger than Columbus' Santa Maria. Their construction used up the timber grown during the reforestation project initiated by the founding emperor of the Ming. The ships carried goods for trade and supplies, but some were also equipped with cannons to serve as war ships.

### **The role of the eunuchs**

The sudden official ban on international maritime trade after 1433 as well as the ban on trade across the northwestern border must be linked to the complex competition between eunuchs and officials at the palace. The eunuchs had supervised the sea expeditions and the distribution of those profits. They had filled their coffers instead of compensating the state for expenses of equipping the expeditions. The officials reprimanded the emperor that the expeditions fostered greed for luxuries and superfluous commodities instead of supporting state finances. While the founding emperor had tried to limit the influence of the eunuchs by keeping them illiterate and threatening to punish them with the death penalty if they interfered in government affairs, the Yongle Emperor made extensive use of the eunuchs. In addition to their tasks as servants to the emperor and the imperial family, he had entrusted them with the supervision of the palace guards, the control of the workshops producing luxury goods for the imperial household, as well as the control of tribute gifts sent by the provinces and foreign envoys to the capital. Their number increased to 70,000 by the late Ming, 10,000 of whom worked in the capital. They gained military power, accumulated great personal wealth, and even influenced the appointments and promotions or demotions of officials. Under later Ming rulers, eunuchs were even dispatched to supervise mining and tax collection in the provinces, much to the dismay of local officials.

### **Defense against Mongol attacks**

In 1421, the Yongle Emperor moved the capital from Nanjing, situated in the heart of the intellectual and commercial center in the south, to Beijing to gain better control of the northern border. Between 1411 and 1415, the Grand Canal was restored to secure a steady flow of



supplies for the capital. To this day, this canal links the rice-producing south with the political center in the north. During this time, the imperial palace was built in Beijing. The new palace used the palace in Nanjing as a model. The space layout and buildings of the former Yuan palace were redesigned on an enlarged scale.

Repeated Mongol attacks at the northern border forced the Chinese to withdraw further south and to fortify the border. They reinforced the Great Wall and even created a second, and in some areas even a third defense line. At the same time, the coastline was subject to constant attacks by pirates, many of them from Japan. As a result, diplomatic embassies from Japan to China were strictly regulated. After 1432, only three ships with a total of 300 persons were allowed to come to the China coast on trade missions during a period of ten years. The era of expansion was over.

### **New crops for China**

Despite the ban on trade and attempts to resettle the population living in coastal settlements further inland, trade continued on a more or less strictly controlled unofficial level. Given its profits, the government could not stop trade anymore. The traditional structures of the agrarian economy as it had been re-established by the founding Ming emperor declined as large capital investments flowed into commerce and artisan production instead of land. The agricultural sector was further transformed by new crops that made their way to China and changed the use of land and the diet: sweet potatoes, peanuts, tobacco, and later maize became important cash crops imported from the Americas.

### **Urbanization**

A new middle class emerged due to the social mobility propelled by trade. Wealthy merchants often became patrons of the arts. Many of them were successful in exporting porcelain and silk, others made a fortune as suppliers of the army with salt, rice, and cloth for uniforms. Artisans started their own enterprises in book printing with illustrations in three or four colors, in weaving complicated silk brocades and fine cotton clothing, and in the production of exquisite porcelain. Local industries developed specializing in the production of the finest painting brushes, ink sticks, lacquerware, furniture and other commodities favored by the urban citizens. Standards reached a quality unseen before. The 'Colorful Lanterns at Shangyuan' painting is a vivid documenta-

tion of these objects desired by a well-to-do urban class.

### **The decline of the Ming**

Major crises occurred when late sixteenth century rebellions erupted in several parts of the empire. In 1592 the Mongols revolted in Ningxia as did ethnic minorities in Guizhou. One year later, the Ming sent military aid to Korea which had been invaded by the Japanese shogun Hideyoshi Toyomi. The support for Korea led to a sharp financial deficit in the Chinese imperial household. The government then raised taxes on agricultural products, mining, and commerce. This led to massive opposition from the population since the court was still spending lavishly on the consumption of luxuries.

In the beginning of the seventeenth century, a 'small ice-age' caused famine since vegetation periods were shortened and harvests diminished. The granary system had deteriorated and the state proved incapable of providing relief measures. Tax increases and epidemics further weakened the population and the number of bandits and rebels increased. In addition, Japan had expelled the Portuguese who had supplied China with silver. Shortly after that, the second major source of silver dried up when 20,000 Chinese were killed in Manila in the wake of fights with Spanish traders. Several rebellions threatened to overthrow the financially and morally bankrupt Ming dynasty. The most successful group of rebels was headed by Li Zicheng who in April 1644 had brought Beijing under his control and proclaimed the new dynasty of Da Shun. Facing the defeat of the Ming army headed by General Wu Sangui, who had been in charge of the defense of the capital against Li, the last Ming emperor was left in despair. He committed suicide by strangling himself. Yet Li Zicheng's triumph was of short duration. Only one month after the emperor's suicide, Li was driven out of Beijing by General Wu Sangui who had turned to the Manchu general Dorgon for support. Given such easy access to the Chinese throne, the Manchu entered Beijing and founded the Qing dynasty (1644-1911).

### **2. Intellectual and cultural trends**

During the Ming, the government institutionalized Neo-Confucian philosophy as the state ideology which had developed during the Song dynasty (980-1279) prior to the Mongol occupation. At the same time, an interest in the introspective withdrawal practiced in Chan (=Zen)

Buddhism grew increasingly stronger and new philosophical ideals challenged the state orthodoxy. One of these trends claimed that action and knowledge were inseparable. Students of this school strove to gain insights into the innate principle that orders nature and culture, society and the universe, and then put that knowledge into practice. Intellectual independence in philosophical thinking was increasingly accepted and often promoted in private academies. These academies increased in numbers. They were located in mountainous areas, remote from state control in the urban centers and became popular places for study. Academies were not only places of study with their own libraries but centers where literati gathered for learned philosophical discussions, safe venues in which scholars could express political dissent among like-minded friends. Technological advances in printing which made possible the fast publication of books on a wide range of topics also fostered the diffusion of ideas and independent thinking. Books on studies of the Classics were published on a scale unseen before. There was a steady demand for books from the candidates who needed to prepare for the examinations which could open the door to an official post, the most desired career for a man with aspirations. Literary publications increased on an even larger scale. Literacy rose fast and when books became more readily available reading was no longer exclusively associated with study, an official career or administrative tasks, but became a source of entertainment. Soon novels and short stories written in colloquial language and adorned with illustrations were in high demand. To this day the humorous fantasy novel *Journey to the West* (published ca. 1570) and the portrait of a merchant from Shandong titled *Golden Lotus* (published 1619) are famous even among readers in the West.

Ming publications further reflect an intensified interest in practical knowledge and a wide array of applications far beyond the classical disciplines of philosophy and philology. Publications on technological topics such as hydraulics, irrigation and pest control, geography and geology, as well as medical and pharmaceutical texts devoted to acupuncture and moxibustion, hygiene, gynaecology, and dietetics circulated among the learned.

Theater had become a popular pastime under Mongol rule. A growing number of authors produced plays, that enjoyed large public and private audiences in the Ming. Since the scripts were readily available in printed form, many theater troupes could specialize in a genre of plays customers could choose from when hiring the troupe.

### Women and literature

In general, the values of women were largely dominated by a cult of chastity upheld by traditional Confucian morality. But when education became more widely available for women, a small but influential percentage of elite women began to walk on new paths. Elite women read, wrote, edited, and published literature. They exchanged letters discussing literary criticism, created associations devoted to mutual assistance, painted and engaged in their own poetic circles. And since they also traveled, their networks could extend well outside the immediate family and the limits of its inner chambers. Some women worked as educators. The skilled and unskilled work women contributed in family enterprises to meet the demands of the tax collectors especially in the urban centers south of the Yangzi River cannot yet be adequately quantified. Courtesans were linked in their own networks which often shared the public world of the male gentry.

### Encounters with the West

The sixteenth century was also the time when European trade in an aggressive pursuit of the riches of Asia brought Portuguese, Spanish, and Dutch ships to China, Japan, and Southeast Asia. The impact of the import of silver into the Chinese economy has been mentioned above. But contact with Europeans also brought new intellectual challenges when the Jesuit missionaries attempted to convert the literati to their religious beliefs. Their success in proselytizing remained limited. More appealing to the literati than a new religion that hardly respected the ancestral cult and -even more suspicious and bewildering- paid homage to a convicted criminal who had been sentenced to death by the Roman authorities-, was the Jesuits' profound knowledge of mathematics, astronomy, and cartography. Since the Jesuits studied Chinese with great dedication and even mastered the Classics that formed the base of knowledge shared by all Chinese literati, they could be consulted as translators and interpreters. The analogy of moral ideals expressed in the Chinese Classics and the Christian doctrine convinced only a few close acquaintances of the Jesuits to become Christian converts. Among them were three outstanding Chinese scholars who supported the Jesuits by composing and translating scientific as well as theological texts. The most famous of these men is Xu Guangqi (1562-1633), christened Paul Xu. He was commissioned by the Wanli Emperor (r. 1573-1619)

to participate in establishing a new calendar in collaboration with the Jesuits. He translated manuals on trigonometry, geography, astronomy, and hydraulics as well as Euclid's Elements in collaboration with the Jesuit fathers Matteo Ricci and Niccolò Longobardo. He also wrote the most important work on agriculture of the time. Even today his family estate and library can be visited in Shanghai.

### The Arts

The Ming gentry celebrated a refined lifestyle and exclusive etiquette that remained unmatched in Chinese history. The complex requirements for this cultural refinement were described in manuals of style that furthered commercial markets for the production of works of art and craftsmanship and even for forgeries of masterpieces.

Gentry art collectors focused on acquiring books, rubbings, paintings, bronzes, and lacquerware in their private collections. They also loved to cultivate gardens in which they planted rare trees and flowers, placed strangely shaped rocks that could be manually 'improved' to resemble landscapes associated with the tales of the abode of Daoist immortals, and kept exotic animals

The commercial availability of art and the necessity for some painters to support themselves through their art when times got tough diluted the strict division drawn by art critics between the professional artisan and the gentleman painter. Artwork by professionals had been looked down upon as decorative while the works by amateur-scholars were praised as genuine expressions of true creativity, the intuitive expression by philosophical minds. Perhaps the most famous painter who painted commissioned works for a living was Qiu Ying (ca. 1494 – ca. 1552). His main patron was a wealthy merchant. This merchant was not the only one who appreciated Qiu Ying's style, Qiu's paintings were highly praised and often copied! They may have inspired his daughter and his son-in-law who also worked as professional painters to dare support themselves and their family with their paintings.

The most valued of the decorative arts were complex brocade weavings, textile embroidery, porcelain—especially fine white porcelain painted with delicate motifs in cobalt blue—as well as carved lacquer with rich floral or pictorial designs. Because they were highly desired export commodities in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, many today form the precious possessions of museums dedicated to the collecting of Chinese art.

## CD topics

### Animals

#### Horses

Horses were highly cherished animals in China and equestrian culture was developed on a high level. Horses were used in the military, for transporting messengers and goods, as companions in sports, and for entertainment. Chinese art is a testimony to the appreciation that horses enjoyed throughout history: The famous terracotta army of Qin Shi Huangdi, the first emperor of China, included horses drawing carriages. Horses from Ferghana were considered especially precious because they were very fast runners. One Han emperor even sent out envoys to bring back the famous 'blood-sweating' horses.

Horses were companions of emperors who commemorated them by commissioning sculptures bas-reliefs and paintings of their favored horses whose names we know in many cases even today. Horses could be trained for hunting and for playing polo. They were also taught to dance according to music while balancing a cup with water between their lips. Since China was often short of horses for its cavalry they were not only important tribute gifts but were also traded for tea and silk on a large scale.

In paintings horses were depicted for their elegance but often also took on a sophisticated symbolic political meaning. A famous painting shows a skinny horse which reflects the fate of a loyalist to the Song dynasty who despised to live under Mongol rule after the downfall of the Song. In the Ming, a new category of horse painting was created showing a censor on an investigation tour. These high officials were sometimes approached to bring documents to the imperial court by petitioners who lived in fear of corrupt officials or eunuchs and therefore did not dare to send in their petitions following official procedures.

The ponies in the street of the 'Colorful Lanterns' scroll are small horses whose riders are officials. Only officials were allowed to ride within the city gates, but when approaching the palace precincts in the capitals, they also had to demount and leave their horses in especially assigned spaces, the parking lots of imperial China. Some horses are led by groomers while the owners stroll across the market. Horses

were mostly used for riding, while donkeys and mules served as pack animals, like the mule of the toy vendor that carries a chest and a huge double gourd.

### **Dog**

Dogs were appreciated as watch dogs and pets in Late Imperial China, and some men also enjoyed their meat because they believed to eat dog meat could increase their virility. In our painting two pet dogs, a sight hound and a Pekinese, are exploring the street without their owners. Can you find them?

### **Falcon**

With their sharp vision, the predatory falcons are emblems of boldness. They adorn screens, panels, tableware etc.

### **Parrot**

The parrot symbolizes a young woman working in the entertainment quarters. In the Buddhist context the parrot is often shown as a companion of the bodhisattva Guanyin.

### **Caged roosters**

The roosters in the cage were raised for cockfighting. Different from other cultures cockfighting had no religious implications in China but was a mere entertainment shared by men from all ranks of society.

### **Caged birds and game**

The caged cranes, the peacock, the pheasant, and the pair of deer in the market are for sale. They supposedly will be released in the park of a wealthy family who will enjoy the presence of such auspicious beings in their premises.

The singing birds try in vain to escape from the potential buyer who leans over their cage. Until today it is a popular pastime to train birds to sing. In the early morning a visitor to a Chinese park can observe the owners of singing birds as they hang their birdcages in the trees and wait for the concert of their feathered companions to begin as the day dawns.

### **Antiquarianism**

An affluent class of merchants and artisans emerged due to the economic revolution of the mid and late Ming. Many members of this class emulated the cultivated lifestyle of scholar-officials and nobility who revered antiquities as witnesses of an ideal society in the ancient past. Collecting antiquities, calligraphies, paintings, rare books, exquisite furniture, fine decorative wares from official kilns, and unique curios was therefore considered a noble pastime and a personal link to the splendor of the past.

Ideals of elegant style and taste were promoted in manuals available in bookstores. They helped propel the production of artwork and of forgeries that were made to meet the increasing demand in these status symbols.

As practical knowledge about shape, size, material, and quality of objects circulated, for experts and self-declared experts the examination of art works became a pursuit of passion. The Shangyuan dengcai scroll vividly shows the dedication of scholars comparing and discussing the quality of objects displayed in the antique market.

This dedication to collecting itself became a prominent topic in Ming paintings by famous artists. They reflect the trend in the mid and late Ming to make the knowledge about the objects and the acquired taste for their aesthetics a criterion for judging one's level of sophistication in the perception of precious objects. The competition among the collectors and the increasing demand for high quality objects supported the work of a growing number of professional artists and artisans in this period.

### **Buddhism**

Emperor Hongwu (r. 1368-1398), the founding emperor of the Ming Dynasty, had been a Buddhist monk in Huangjue Temple in Anhui province as a young man and became a patron of Buddhism after he ascended the throne. Different from the Mongol emperors of the previous Yuan dynasty (1279-1368) who had favored the esoteric school of Tibetan Buddhism for political and strategic reasons, Emperor Hongwu supported the sinicized Mahayana schools of Buddhism dominant in China. Most emperors who followed Hongwu in office became supporters of Buddhism, with the exception of the Chenghua (1465-1487)

and Jiajing (1522-1566) emperors, who turned their favor to Daoism.

Characteristic of Buddhism in the late Ming was a harmonization of its important schools of Pure Land and Chan, better known in the West by its Japanese name, Zen. The emphasis of Chan Buddhism lay on the practice of meditation as the way to achieve enlightenment. The Chan school teaches that everyone has the inherent capability for enlightenment. An intuitive and spontaneous mind can become enlightened in meditation without incessant analysis and memorization of religious texts. Recitation of sutras and voiced or silent incantation of Buddha's name was prescribed by the Pure Land School, the second important sect of Buddhism at the time. A combination of both practices came to be common in Ming monasteries.

The harmonization of the schools was attempted by several famous Buddhist teachers, the most eminent of whom was Yunqi Zhuhong (1535-1615), the abbot of a monastery on Mount Yunqi near Hangzhou. Through a vigorous revival of monastic rules and discipline which had been neglected since the Song dynasty (960-1279) and by supporting the renewed popularity of Buddhist lay associations, he initiated a revitalization of Buddhism. One of the reasons Buddhist lay associations received special recognition and enjoyed great popularity was that members could follow a religious life without having to renounce the family and secular obligations. Confucian Chinese society had always been highly critical of Buddhist institutions because of the demand that monks and nuns leave their families and because Buddhist clerics were exempt from corvée labor and tax paying. Therefore the state tried to limit the numbers of monks and nuns. The ordination certificates required to be registered at a monastery or convent were limited in number and had to be bought from state authorities. The state thus also made some revenue with this registration.

A synthesis of religious and philosophical concepts from the various schools of Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism evolved. This synthesis was called the "Three Teachings in One" and received wide acclaim in the late Ming. Compassion and filial piety were of concern to both Buddhism and Confucianism and both teachings encouraged acts of charity and generosity. Many people were drawn to practices of self-cultivation based on a combination of Buddhist and Confucian values. During this age of philosophical syncretism, many of the elite grew less interested in maintaining the distinctions between the schools of thought than in exploring new paths to spiritual self-cultivation.

The syncretism of thought included Daoist ideas as well. The Buddhist concept of karma, the personal responsibility of individuals for their actions and thus for their own fate, also resonated in the Daoist system of merits and demerits that could be earned during a lifetime. Zhuhong perfected this credit system that honored meritorious and punished non-meritorious deeds. He set up a classification scheme assigning credit points to various deeds. Meritorious activities earned points and demerits resulted in deductions from a life-time 'account' set up to accrue as many points as possible. The classification scheme honored dedication to helping and supporting others, or saving the life of a sentient being. At the same time it set specified amounts of demerit points for various forms of misconduct and crime. Though this system found wide acceptance, it was criticized for instilling a craving for winning merit points among believers and thus could distort the genuine quality of acts of compassion, generosity, and grace.

Buddhism was also criticized by the Jesuit missionaries who had established their first Christian communities and built their first churches in China in the sixteenth century. In order to convince members of the literati class of the Christian faith they participated in intellectual debates on philosophical and metaphysical questions which were popular among intellectuals at the time. Especially Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), who was well versed in colloquial and classical Chinese, engaged in these discussions with brilliant rhetoric. He tried to prove that certain Buddhist concepts, especially the related ideas of reincarnation and vegetarianism, could not be trusted because they were illogical. In reply Zhuhong had authored an essay criticizing Ricci's objections. He also accused the Jesuits of bribing their followers instead of convincing them because they presented each convert with a gift of three taels of silver. Someone replied to Zhuhong's accusations in Ricci's name although Ricci had died five years prior to the publication of this reply. Soon after the letter to Zhuhong circulated among the literati, Zhuhong died. His supporters believed that his death was caused by the humiliation he had suffered from the Jesuits. Therefore they were expelled from China in 1616/17. They were later allowed to return.

While a new religious zeal for Buddhism emerged among influential, wealthy, and philanthropic gentry elite members and within the general population in the populous urban centers, Buddhism also spread to areas where the faith had no roots yet. With travel increasing during the Ming, Buddhist monks migrated to unexplored lands in southwest-

ern China and established temples and monasteries in the most remote and hostile environments. They often opened guesthouses at temples and thus facilitated further travel. When the Ming was brought to its downfall by the Manchu invasion, these Buddhist monasteries became a refuge for many officials who had fled from the approaching troops to remote destinations.

In the 'Colorful Lanterns at Shangyuan' scroll there are four Buddhist statues for sale in the antique market indicating that religious images were available as commodities for altars in private residences but also for decorative display in the home.

### **Clothing**

In the Ming dynasty the components of correct attire were prescribed in sartorial regulations recorded in a chapter of the Annals of the Ming Dynasty titled 'Carriages and Clothes'. Regulations distinguishing the clothing of emperor and empress, of the imperial clan members and imperial consorts, of civil and military officials and their wives, of scholars and commoners, peasants, merchants, dancers, actors, soldiers, servants, foreigners, as well as Buddhist and Daoist clerics were all listed.

Garments and headgear, their material and cut, color and adornments as worn in public were described in this chapter. Thus, in the early days of the Ming a person's social position could easily be identified. But by the sixteenth and seventeenth century the regulations were hardly enforced. Social mobility had diluted the class distinctions and the visible order of society had been replaced by a prospect of fashion desires. Those who could afford to dress in precious embroidered silk followed their taste, and those who had been passed by the economic revolution wore the modest garments they could produce.

In the depiction of class distinction the painter of the Shangyuan dengcai scroll has used the categories of headdress and outer garment as distinguishing markers: Officials can be identified by their headgear and by their formal robes with long sleeves made of lavish brocades while commoners are dressed with less extravagance.

The painter shows details in headgear and footwear, but in his depiction of the outer garments he neglected colors in favor of cut and décor. In the application of colors he concentrates on the lanterns. Yet the viewer can easily recognize scholars and servants, commoners and

monks. In the depiction of children the painter made an exception. Their festive coats and jackets are made of auspicious red fabric, playfully decorated with embroidery.

### **Furniture**

The selection of furniture for sale on this market is very rich and could furnish stately households. A canopy bed, couch beds, armchairs with a high or a round back, folding armchairs, reclining chairs, and chairs made from root wood which were very popular in the Ming, are on display. The visitor can choose from stools made from porcelain—cool in the summer and elegant in the garden—or wood. Cabinets for the studio in which a collection of curios and antiques find place, book cases, and painting tables draw the attention of scholars. Elegant coffers, clothes chests, cupboards and lampstands are available. A large variety of screens on display show the multiple function of this category of furniture.

### **Gardens and container landscapes**

Parks and gardens were appreciated in China at all ages. They were used as hunting grounds and designed to grow timber and fruit trees. Gardens were also created as artificial mirror images of the cosmos, aiming to resemble the paradise where the immortals are believed to dwell. The last emperor of the Northern Song dynasty created a park in the northeastern corner of the capital Kaifeng. This park is said to have been equipped with an exquisite variety of plants and trees, with exotic animals, and with strangely shaped rocks that had been brought from all provinces of the realm.

While city residences by the Ming were left with limited space for gardens, wealthy landowners engaged in the construction of garden estates that were elegant reminders of the ideal landscapes of the past. The design of these gardens was carefully planned to achieve a maximum of differently composed views within the premises. Water currents, waterfalls and lakes, bridges and gazebos, rock caves and pavilions were masterly arranged. Every step in any direction presented the visitor with a different image of harmonious nature and could inspire the creation of poetry or soothe the mind to rest in contemplation. A further step of miniaturization of a landscape were container

landscapes (penjing = jap. bonsai). With their miniature plants they had been popular for centuries as symbolic representations of ideal landscapes. In the Ming they became highly appreciated as aesthetic compositions in which nature and culture complemented each other in harmony. For each composition of rock and plant or carefully pruned miniature tree a matching container was selected.

A rather mundane quality of these potted landscapes was their portability. They could adorn an indoor space and are believed to improve the positive fengshui quality of a room. They could also be set up in the garden of a courtyard house and even be moved when an official was appointed to a new post.

### Women

Official etiquette generally limited women's radius of activity to the extended household. From childhood to old age, women were expected to acknowledge the dominant position of men by first obeying their father as filial daughters, then serving their husband as faithful wives, and when widowed by obeying their eldest son. Widows were discouraged from remarrying and were expected to live in celibacy or even follow their husband death. The 'Three Obediences' were complemented by the 'four virtues' of humility, appropriate speech and comportment, obedience, and diligence as recorded by the famous historian and 'teacher of the inner chambers', Ban Zhao (c. 45-116 CE) in her book *Admonitions for Girls*.

The ideals of Confucian doctrine had been upheld ever since they were formulated as didactic teachings, but they can hardly be representative of the complexity of women's lives. Although women's position had always been characterized by subordination, in the Han dynasty (206 BCE - 220 CE) their duties within the family were portrayed as complementary to men's obligations in society. While men tilled the land, women wove cloth and contributed their share to the tax payments the household owed the state. While men followed their business, women were managers of the household. In later times foreign traditions influenced the level of physical activity for women. Tang art for instance shows women riding horses and even playing polo.

The fashion of footbinding that was first practiced by dancers performing for the emperor and then copied in the courtesan quarters to charm the male audience and enchant customers spread among elite women during the 10th century. Ironically, it soon became valued

as a visible expression of female morality because of how it limited women's freedom of movement and was associated with a woman's acceptance of orthodox values.

During the same period, Neo-Confucian thinkers redefined the organization of kinship lineages. One of the consequences was that the male descent line was strengthened and ancestor worship emphasized. For women, this implied that her main obligation was to serve the family of her husband, although a woman's relations with her natal family were still considered important. During the Mongol Yuan dynasty, the concept of female filiality and loyalty towards the native family changed dramatically. With marriage a woman became a full member of her in-law's family and her obligations of filial conduct towards her natal family ceased to exist. Her loyalty was transferred to her husband's family where she had to follow her husband's family regulations. Even if her husband died the woman would continue to live with her new family and serve her in-laws. Women had no other option since the dowry brought into the marriage was no longer her property but belonged to her in-laws. The psychological consequences for the family that brought up a girl as well as for the girl herself must have been tremendous. In practical terms girls became long-term guests within their natal families. Yet they did not enjoy the amenities given a guest but had to work as hard as a slave. In artisan families, they often were not taught the secret family recipes or patterns that made a commodity special because once married out they could have used their knowledge to benefit the in-law family who were possible competitors if working in the same trade. Moreover, the dowry could represent a burden for a girl's natal family. Considering all of these conditions, it becomes more comprehensible why sons were the preferred progeny.

At all times female chastity had been an unquestioned social requirement for women and celibacy after the death of a husband was considered a visible statement of high morals. In the Ming dynasty the state began to renew these wifely sacrifices. A chaste widow who never remarried or a woman who committed suicide to follow her husband in death could be nominated to the magistrate for a reward of honors. A memorial arch would be erected in her town - as a constant reminder of her heroic martyrdom, the glory of which would always shine upon her family.

The historical records of the Ming are filled with examples of women who followed their husbands in death. In addition to the search

for honor, their motivation was often a strong attachment to their husband, or a desperate attempt to escape the humiliation of rape and abuse during times of war and banditry. A 'cult of chastity' developed: Local gazetteers and personal records reveal even extreme cases like the one of a betrothed girl who followed her fiancé in death although the marriage ceremony had not yet been performed. Heroic tales of widows' martyrdom were even recorded in the official history of the Ming. This level of social regulation of women's lives and competition for recognition resembled the scrutiny men had to endure when they prepared for a career as an official in the imperial government. The values women had to uphold originated from the set of values formulated for virtuous men who had to fulfill their duties, if necessary, by sacrificing their own interests.

Yet this image of the victimized chaste and virtuous woman, restricted in her actions by bound feet, controlled by social prescriptions of neo-Confucian ideology and family regulations does not provide a complete image of women's lives. Another side to the story shows how certain elite women were able to develop their own cultural identity and became agents for their own cause. These activities were not congruent with the picture of virtuous female behavior transmitted in historical sources. Women formed domestic and public networks, exchanged letters and poetry in poetry clubs, traveled in groups, attended theater plays and celebrations in public, cross-dressed in public, followed religious creeds without the support and acknowledgement of their families, and engaged in the financial sponsoring of publication projects that at times were devoted to their own publications. Although these activities were not documented in the official records, they were tolerated and often even supported by male family members and patrons.

The 'Colorful Lanterns at Shangyuan' scroll features very few women. Those women whose faces we can see clearly are waitresses or musicians who entertain guests in a restaurant. A few figures at the fair look like women because of their hairstyle, posture or attire. All of them are shown in a three-quarter perspective from their backs, but none of them can unambiguously be identified as a woman. We can only speculate why so few women were included in the festive scenes. The person who commissioned the painting may have been in favor of the official doctrine that limited women's appearance in public - though we know that the Lantern Festival was an occasion when women were 'allowed' to roam the streets. Or the patron may not have been inter-

ested in women at all except for their entertaining or reproductive functions. Whatever the reason, they will remain the painter's secret.

## Symbols of lanterns, other art objects, and selected details

### Symbols

As a monosyllabic tonal language Chinese gives itself to rebuses. Several layers of meanings can be associated with homophonous syllables. When used in puns they reflect commonly shared knowledge about mythology, historical events, and religious concepts prevalent in Chinese culture. They are far more than mere decoration: they represent the grammar components of an intricate iconographical language of material culture. The identical symbols can be used to express wishes for good luck, happiness, a long life, a blessed marriage, a successful career etc. in many different media such as wood, bamboo, ivory, or lacquer carvings; porcelain, woven and embroidered silk for example. With its plethora of objects the 'Lantern Festival' scroll reads like a colorful encyclopedia of symbols.

### Lanterns

Lanterns play an important role in social events and religious festivities. They light the way for guests, including the souls of the ancestors. The souls of ancestors are thought to visit their family at the occasion of the New Year's festival. They are sent off during the Lantern Festival, which concludes the celebrations welcoming the New Year.

The Lantern Festival was an occasion on which families competed for the most exquisite or exceptional lantern. Lanterns could be made in a rich variety of shapes. One type of lantern was mounted on completed structures made of bamboo or wood so it could roll on the ground while the light stayed upright in the middle. Some of these lanterns had rotating fixtures, which were moved by the heated ascending air. Some were shaped like human beings and represent celebrities or deities of worship. Shapes of abstract symbols or animals were equally popular for lanterns.

### Agates

Today agates are still collected in Nanjing. Their Chinese name means



'rain flower stone' and they are said to be the flowers that were strewn by a goddess on a hill site in the southern vicinity of Nanjing. According to the legend, they transformed into agates when they fell to the ground.

#### **Aoshan landscape lantern**

This artificial landscape set up in the center of the street is called Aoshan landscape lantern. It was illuminated by hundreds of lights and was named after the Aoshan mountain. The mountain symbolizes the world and is situated on the mythological Penglai Isles, the residence of the Immortals in the Eastern Sea. The name of the landscape lantern refers to the shape of this mountain.

#### **Banquets**

Banquets were en vogue in the Ming. Hosting guests in a restaurant was very popular during festivals and was an important opportunity for host and guest to fulfill social obligations. They lasted for several hours and could be highly ritualized procedures with the proper etiquette extending to the greetings between host and guests, the seating order, the number and content of courses, rituals of toasting, drinking, and praising the host for his generosity.

#### **Beggars**

The two beggars who may have just asked for some food at the entrance of the restaurant are out of luck – the restaurant owner angrily chases them away. It is significant that the painter included these representatives of the many impoverished people that roamed city streets in the mid and late Ming. Though the painting captures a joyful event in flourishing Nanjing, he wanted to remind us of those not favored by luck. Due to falling prices of land many farmers had to give up their profession when they could no longer pay the ever increasing taxes. The plight of the farmers worsened when access to silver became limited and its price increased due to a slackening supply from Manila after an uprising that left many Chinese merchants dead.

#### **Books (1)**

Books and publishing were an important part of the scholarly world in Nanjing. The city was not only the national center for publishing government documents, but also a great market for philosophical and

literary compositions. Plays and songbooks, instruction manuals for physician's, artisans and shrewd housewives, pharmacopoeia, calendars, religious pamphlets, edifying stories and poems were the products of a large publishing industry. The dynamic book market developed due to technological improvements in printing and an ever increasing readership which included women.

#### **Rare books (2)**

Collecting rare books and comparing various editions was a favorite occupation for many scholars at the time. Just like bibliophiles today they loved to hunt for editions they had not had a chance to acquire at the market.

#### **Buddhist monks**

Monks were not excluded from the appreciation of antiquities and fine art. Here two monks contemplate the quality of large ceramic vessels. Possibly they consider selecting one of the vessels to adorn their temple premises.

#### **Butterfly**

Several layers of meaning are associated with the butterfly. The butterfly is a symbol of joy because the philosopher Zhuangzi once dreamt that he was a butterfly and enjoyed flying happily from one flower to the next. As a young student the philosopher is said to have followed a butterfly into the private garden of a district magistrate when he was a young student. The magistrate's daughter happened to be in the garden when Zhuangzi entered. He was so charmed that he decided to work hard for permission to marry her.

The butterfly can be a symbol for beauty, especially the beauty of a woman. There are several anecdotes in which a deceased woman appears to her husband as a butterfly. Paintings that depict a butterfly in combination with a blossoming plum tree express the wish for a long life and pure beauty.

#### **Canopy Bed**

Canopy beds are platform beds with an awning covering the bed and screen panels or curtains surrounding the bed. Different textile curtains could be used according to the season to insulate this private space from the cold in winter and protected against insects in the summer.

The curtains and cushions decorating the bed were usually richly adorned with auspicious symbols referring to the fertility of the young wife. During the day the curtains would be withdrawn so that the bed could be used as a sitting platform for reading, mending clothes, or working on embroidery. The bed shown here has marble panels which made it very desirable and precious. It was common that the bride brought the bed into the marriage and that it remained her possession.

#### **Carp**

Carp is pronounced li in Chinese, a pun on the character for profit or advantage. Thus the carp is used to express a wish for an advantageous position.

#### **Child with dropped fishbowl**

On this festive day the children are dressed in colorfully decorated jackets. Here they play a game that is still popular today. For a fixed price they catch tiny ornamental fish with a net made of paper. They may keep as many fish as they were able to catch until the paper tears. The little boy had been quite skillful in catching fish, but unfortunately has dropped his fishbowl. This is a twofold misfortune since he lost the fish and the bowl when clear transparent glassware was a precious possession.

#### **Child with firecracker**

Different from many popular paintings of children the 'Lantern Festival' scroll depicts children not in their symbolic function as a wish for progeny but as visitors to the festival. The painter has created lively scenes around the children. He paid special attention to them by depicting their festive clothes in color. The children we see enjoy watching the wrestlers, choose toys from the toy vendor, ride on their fathers back, proudly carry lanterns, play hide and seek, and try out funny masks. This boy is about to light a firecracker among the crowd. Several adults and children press their hands against their ears in anticipation and one man tries to grab the boy to prevent him from fulfilling his plan.

#### **Chime stone**

The chime stone is an emblem for sincerity, a just and upright life, as well as affluence. It is one of the eight symbols of a scholar.

#### **Chrysanthemum**

The chrysanthemum symbolizes late summer and autumn in the yearly cycle and stands for generosity and retirement from office. It belongs to the four noble virtues symbolized by plants: bamboo is associated with strength, because it can bend without breaking like a hardworking official. The plum flower stands for vitality since it is the first flower that will bloom after winter. The delicate orchid symbolizes refinement, and the chrysanthemum pleasure.

#### **Coral**

Coral was an expensive luxury imported from Sri Lanka and Persia. Since it was thought to represent a tree, it was called tieshu, iron tree, a mythical tree said to grow at the bottom of the sea and flower only once in a century.

#### **Crab**

The crab is thought to have the power to repel evil since the Chinese pronunciation xie is identical with the pronunciation for evil.

This pronunciation is also similar to the word for those who have passed the first imperial examination and thus is a symbol of achievement.

#### **Crane**

The crane is a symbol for longevity and wisdom. It is said to live for more than 600 years. Cranes can appear with different colored feathers including black, yellow, white, or blue. The black crane is said to live the longest. If a crane is depicted together with a rock and a pine tree or a peach, the wish for a long life is emphasized. These objects are also symbols of longevity.

#### **Cricket**

Bred and raised for combat fighting crickets are emblems of courage and subject of heavy gambling. They also symbolize summer, the season when they are first heard chirping.

#### **Deer**

The Chinese pronunciation of the word deer, lu, is homophonous with the term for emolument. The deer therefore is the symbol for a success-

ful official career. In addition it is an emblem for longevity and is here shown as it accompanies the Deity of Long Life on his travels. The deer is a symbol of longevity because it is said to be capable of finding the fungus of immortality.

The soft internal substance of deer antlers is dried, pounded into a powder, and used to make pills. Because these pills contain large quantities of lime phosphate they are an expensive medicine used to treat rickets. Dissolved in alcohol the powder is prescribed as an aphrodisiac.

### **Dragon**

In China the dragon evokes positive connotations. Ever since the Neolithic Period more than 6,000 years ago, the dragon has been a mythical animal of divine nature symbolizing strength and benevolence. It also embodies change since it is able to make itself invisible or morph its shape from a huge animal to one as small as a tiny snake. The dragon is the chief animal among the species of scaly reptiles such as fish, snakes and lizards. Its features are composed of those adapted from other species: the head reminds one of a camel, the horns resemble those of a deer, it has the scales of a carp and the claws of a hawk, and the ears look like that of a cow, though the dragon is said to be deaf.

Different kinds of dragons are said to live in different habitats: Some live in the sky, they are the most powerful kind. Others dwell in the ocean. These dragons do not have horns. A third species is said to live in marshes and mountain caves.

In many depictions two dragons playfully compete for a pearl. This pearl is interpreted in many different ways. It can symbolize wisdom or potentiality or thunder, which produces rain. The dragon is associated with the creative forces of spring and symbolizes the East.

Since the beginning of the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.E.), the five-clawed dragon has been emblem of imperial power. It adorned imperial robes, tableware, furniture, and architecture. Dragons with four claws express the lower rank of the imperial princes. High officials of the imperial bureaucracy were only allowed to wear robes that show dragons with three claws.

While the dragon is the symbol of the emperor and the male force in nature, the phoenix stands for the empress and symbolizes the female. Their complementary qualities are expressed in many works of art.

### **Drum**

Hand drum or taogu, sanskr. damaru, originally used in ritual music, is a rattle drum with a handle passing through the body. This drum has two balls suspended by strings from each side of the barrel; when the drum is twirled they strike against the skin covered head.

### **Large Drums**

Drums, like the large barrel drum and the kettle drum, and gongs were used as rhythm instruments but also as signals when announcing the arrival of an official, or in funeral processions, and in warfare.

### **Duck**

Mandarin ducks are symbols of felicity and conjugal fidelity. They are often depicted with a lotus blossom held by one duck and a lotus fruit held by its partner to symbolize the wish for marital bliss through the birth of a son. Mandarin ducks adorn cushions and quilts used in the bedroom, and they are also frequently used in the decoration of porcelain.

### **Elephant**

Elephants were native to southern China but are now extinct as a native species.

In general the elephant symbolizes sagacity and strength since together with lion, leopard, and tiger it is one of the four animals of power.

In association with Buddhism elephants became important emblems in Chinese art. The white elephant is especially revered because it is said to have entered the right side of Buddha's mother, Maya. Bodhisattva Samantabhadra, the Bodhisattva of Universal Virtue, is often shown riding an elephant. The phrase 'riding an elephant' is pronounced qixiang, which can stand for the expression jixiang which means happiness. The pronunciation xiang for elephant can also be exchanged for the character of 'Prime Minister' as a wish for an important career.

### **Fan**

In ancient China round fans made from the leaves of a southern palm tree (pukui, *Livistonia chinensis*) were popular. Round fans were also made of silk, paper, and feathers. Folding fans came to China from Japan via Korea in the 10th or 11th century. Their frames were made of sandalwood, horn, bone, or ivory. They could have lacquered frames,

or may be adorned with mother-of-pearl inlays. The fashion of the day dictated that fans for women have more ribs (preferably no less than 30) than fans for men (between 9 and 24). Fan is pronounced shan in Chinese, homophonous with the word for 'good'; presenting a fan as a token of affection to a leaving guest is therefore a positive gesture. The fan became a popular painting medium beginning in the Song dynasty (960-1279).

When Ming Emperor Yongle (r. 1403-1424) used fans as gifts to his officials they became popular as farewell presents, especially when they were decorated with a personal poetic or painted dedication. In the Ming dynasty artisans' workshops specialized in the production of precious fans which could be made from sandalwood, lacquered wood, or ivory.

Fans were not only used for their cooling effect – important in Nanjing with its extreme summer heat, but also served as a device for non-verbal communication. They were used to indicate exhaustion, absent-mindedness, or excitement. They could also be used to hide from the gaze of others or to avoid a conversation very much like we observe among modern cell phone users.

### **Fish**

Rice and fish form the principle staple food in China. Therefore it is no wonder that the similarity of the pronunciation for 'fish' and for 'rest' or 'surplus' is used to wish for abundance for many years to come. It is also a symbol of harmony for its reproductive capacity. A pair of fish symbolizes conjugal bliss.

### **Flower Basket**

As an adornment in New Year celebrations a flower basket symbolizes the wish for abundance in the coming year.

### **Flute**

The traverse bamboo flute was the symbol of scholars and poets. As an iconographical element it is used to express melancholy and solitude.

### **Football**

While the partners in this demonstration may not be trained and mature enough to participate in the Super Bowl, this kind of small scale football was highly entertaining to the crowd and even caught impe-

rial attention. A painting from the Song dynasty (960-1279) depicts an emperor practicing his balancing skills in this game.

### **Four corner square cap**

This hat was called 'four corner square cap' and became a fashionable headdress for men in the Ming. It was considered to be highly elegant.

### **Glasses**

Eyewear was still a luxury commodity as increasing numbers of glasses came to China with growing coastal trade and with the advent of the Jesuits. Hangzhou became the earliest center of Chinese lens production and export in the mid-seventeenth century.

The first spectacles had arrived in China as tribute gifts from Persia.

### **Gong**

Gongs are used in processions to chase away evil spirits. They were also used to announce the outbreak of a fire, or the arrival of an official with his entourage.

### **Gourd**

Gourds are used to keep liquid medicines. The gourd symbolizes mystery when presented as an emblem of Li Tieguai, one of the Eight Immortals, a group of famous Daoist saints. Li is often depicted with a gourd from which smoke ascends. Lanterns in the shape of a gourd are used to ward off pernicious influences. Believed to contain a magic potion, double gourds such as the one standing on the mat next to the Daoist fortune teller are often attributes of Daoist saints.

### **Halberd**

Halberd is pronounced ji in Chinese, just like the character for luck and rank. It is therefore used to symbolize the wish for good fortune and a professional career.

### **Hanshan: Painting of Hanshan and Shide**

The two Chan (=Zen) Buddhist monks Hanshan and Shide are the paragons of friendship in Chinese and Japanese tradition. Shide is usually depicted with a broom indicating his work in the kitchen of Guoqing Monastery.

Hanshan which means 'Cold Mountain' is the sobriquet of a hermit

and poet from the Tang Dynasty (618-709). He is said to have lived at Cold Mountain some time between the sixth and ninth century. Cold Mountain is part of the Tiantai Mountain range in Zhejiang province in southeastern China. Whenever Hanshan visited his friend Shide at Guoqing Monastery, Shide gave him some food from the kitchen. The two friends are always depicted as eccentric and joyful figures, who cared little about their outward appearance.

Today a temple near the scenic city of Suzhou is named after Hanshan.

#### **Hare**

The hare is believed to live a thousand years. After 500 years its fur turns white. Since before the Han Dynasty, people believed that a hare lives on the moon. It is employed by immortals to pound the bark of an ever-growing Cassia tree for the elixir of immortality.

#### **Headscarf for traveling**

During travel, especially on horseback, this scarf protected the traveler from dust, sand, and cold wind.

#### **Horse**

A horse symbolizes speed and perseverance. If depicted with a heavy load and a rider, this composition expresses the wish for the appointment to an official position. When a horse is shown with a monkey (pronounced hou) on its back this means that the owner of the painting may be promoted to a high ranking official position like that of a duke (hou).

#### **Leopard and tiger skins**

Different from the impression gained in many museums with exhibitions of Chinese furniture collections, tables and chairs were often adorned or covered with textiles. Upholstery was unknown except for a certain kind of matting. Therefore chairs were often draped with covers or with precious skins. The 'Lantern Festival' scroll shows a leopard and a tiger skin for sale in this store. We can also find skins being used as chair covers in the upstairs section of the restaurant depicted further to the left.

Leopard and Tiger symbolize strength and energy. Therefore images of both animals adorned Mandarin squares, the rank badges of military officials in the early Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

#### **Lion**

The lion is not native to China but became an important emblem with the advent of Buddhism. As symbols of power lions guard the entrance of temples and later were used to protect public buildings, private mansions, and tombs. While the male lion holds a ball under one front paw, the female lion is shown protecting her cub in a similar pose.

#### **Lotus**

The lotus flower is an important emblem in Buddhism. It stands for purity since it grows in muddy waters but keeps its beauty. The pronunciation is lian, which means 'to connect', or he which means unity; it is therefore used to symbolize harmony (he).

#### **Mask of the God of Health and Longevity**

This child tries to put on a mask of Shou, the God of Health and Longevity characterized by a very big head. The deity belongs to the trinity of star gods. The other gods are Lu, the god for affluence and high rank and Fu who represents wealth and happiness.

#### **Monkey**

Monkey is a popular figure from the novel Journey to the West by Wu Cheng'en which was based on the historical journey of the famous monk Xuanzang (602-664) to India where he collected Buddhist sutras. The clever and comiving Monkey king could transform himself into seventy-two different shapes, including animals, plants, and even strangely shaped rocks. When the monk Xuanzang rescued Monkey from captivity, he became a faithful disciple. As a result monkey and his friends escorted the monk on the dangerous travel through the desert to India.

#### **Narcissus**

If the narcissus blooms during the New Year festival, this is seen to indicate good fortune for the entire year.

#### **Peach Blossom**

The peach blossom is the flower of the second month. It is said to avert evil and is a symbol of longevity.

**Peony**

The peony is called the flower of wealth and honor (*fugui hua*) but also the flower of parting because it was customary to give a peony to a friend who was going away. Because of its multiple layers of petals it is a symbol of prosperity. It is also an emblem of female beauty and when depicted in company of a lotus (the marker of spring or summer), a plum flower (the winter blossom), and the chrysanthemum (an autumn flower), the peony symbolizes summer.

**Pheasant**

The pheasant was a symbol of imperial authority. Pheasants adorned the robes of the emperor and the rank badges of civil officials in the Ming and Qing dynasty. They were also kept in parks.

**Phoenix**

The phoenix is a mythical animal like the dragon. It symbolizes the empress as the counterpart to the emperor.

**Pine tree**

Dwarf pines are popular plants in container landscapes since the pine represents such qualities as longevity and self-discipline. Because they remain green throughout the cold season, pine tree, bamboo, and plum tree are called the three friends of winter.

**Plum**

Plum tree blossoms indicate that spring is coming because it is the first tree to bloom each year. Plum trees, pine trees, and bamboo are the friends of winter, since they all survive the cold.

**Pomegranate**

Because of its plentiful seeds the pomegranate is a symbol of fertility. It is depicted as a lantern in paintings and as decoration on porcelain or clothing. Such portrayals were thought to bring the owner a large progeny.

**Pipa**

The pipa is a four-stringed lute. Its name is derived from the two-finger technique of plucking the strings forward and back. This courtesan is

educated in entertaining her guests by playing the pipa. Some courtesans were so skilled that they could pluck the strings while holding the instrument behind their back as we know from literary descriptions and paintings. This was a special attraction in restaurants with courtesan entertainment.

**Qilin**

The qilin is sometimes called the Chinese unicorn although this is not quite correct since only the male unicorn has a horn. The appearance of a qilin is associated with the benevolence of a ruler. It is a symbol of virtue and happiness, longevity and successful offspring and it is described as having a most gentle nature. The qilin is one of the four mythical beasts and its body is a composition of parts from other animals: it has hooves like a horse, a tail like an ox, a deer's body with scales in five colors and backward antlers. In the Ming and Qing dynasties a qilin adorned the rank badge of robes of high military officials but it can also be found as a decorative motif on objects made of porcelain, lacquerware and other materials as well.

**Red shoes**

In accordance with the latest fashion this official is wearing red shoes. Originally red shoes were worn by women. They skillfully decorated their shoes with intricate embroidery in their personal style. The auspicious color and fine decorations should emphasize the small size of their lotus feet when gazed at by men. Because of this connotation with female sexual attraction one conservative critic sharply criticized the fad of men wearing red shoes. He considered it a form of inappropriate cross-dressing. But when we carefully examine portraits of officials, Buddhist abbots, and even emperors from the late Ming, we have to consider the critics' view as essentially neglected and therefore outdated.

**Ritual Vessels**

Ritual vessels made of bronze were produced with the highest quality and refinement during the first Chinese dynasties. Because of their old age and distinguished function they were highly appreciated collectibles in the Ming. Since only a limited number of these revered antique vessels still existed, they were reproduced in large numbers and even copied in materials other than bronze. As a result, there are porcelain

and lacquer vessels that imitate the old shapes prominent in antiquity.

### **Rooster**

The rooster embodies the male element yang. It is associated with many virtues: the crown on its head is a sign of its literary mind. The spurs on its feet are symbols of his fearless fighting spirit. The rooster is seen as benevolent since it clucks for hens when scratching up grain. Additionally his time-telling crow is seen as a symbol of faith as well as protection against fire.

### **Root wood chair**

As documented in paintings root wood furniture was used as early as the Tang dynasty (618 – 907 CE) when Buddhist monks used tables and chairs made of wood left in its organic natural shape. The rustic contorted wood was a symbol of the appreciation of natural beauty in contrast to the refined artificiality of stylish furniture. In the Ming and Qing dynasty root wood furniture was popular among collectors, scholars, and clerics alike.

### **Screens**

These large folding screens were designed to shield parts of a room or to furnish the reception hall of a house. In the Ming screens became important status symbols and were therefore selected with great care. The painter uses the screens to create an effect that shows a 'painting within a painting': Some of the screens are painted with landscapes, some show flower and bird paintings, and yet others are filled with slabs of colored marble. The marble's veins and texture also resemble a landscape painting.

In depicting screens and large lanterns the painter proves how well he mastered all different genres of Chinese painting. While the 'Lantern Festival' scroll itself is a painting from nature, the artist also demonstrates skill in the disciplines of painting landscapes, portraits, and flowers and birds.

### **Sedanchair**

Officials of high rank were transported in sedanchairs. Two runners with long bamboo sticks clear the way for the sedanchair bearers. Here the group has stopped to facilitate the conversation between their passenger and a maid who may belong to his household sent to him with a

message from home.

### **Shuttlecock**

These two gentlemen try to balance a shuttlecock in the air. The game is said to have originated in China in the fifth century and may have been the precursor of badminton and football. Other sources claim that the game originated in Greece about 2000 years ago and was brought to China via the Silk Road.

### **Shide (see Hanshan)**

### **Strange Rocks**

Rocks in gardens and miniature landscapes symbolize mountains, the dwelling place of immortals and deities. In container landscape compositions they can be complemented with bamboo or orchids, sweet flag or peonies. They represent the male, yang, element of the miniaturized cosmos.

### **String instruments and drums**

String instruments render pure emotions, while drums evoke the allusion to war.

The lute, qin, was played by men and women and is appreciated for the versatility of emotions and qualities that can be expressed: Happiness and melancholy, softness and strength, elegance and subtlety come alive with the qin. Scholars were expected to be able to play the lute to soothe their mind and find concentration.

Drums, like the large barrel drum and the kettle drum, and gongs were used as rhythm instruments but also as signals announcing the arrival of an official, in funeral processions, and in warfare.

### **Water field Robe**

Water field robe is the name for a Buddhist priests' vestment that was composed of many squares of different colored silk. The garment received its name because this patchwork design resembled a landscape of rice paddies.

The design originated in the attempt to avoid the impression of ostentatious living. Donors who presented precious robes to monks ordered them to be made from high quality fabric. But in accordance with their

rules Buddhist monks were supposed to live humbly and wear modest attire which they should collect from donations. They were expected to clean the worn clothes, mend them, and sew together the patches. Therefore donors who wanted to honor a monk and could afford to bestow him with a precious robe had it tailored from silk patches. The result merely resembled what the regulations had intended but it became an accepted way of support for clerics. By the Ming, waterfield robes had become a fashion among well-to-do men and women, just like the gentleman shown here scrutinizing antiques for his studio.

#### **Wrestling**

Wrestling is said to have been popular in China for more than 2000 years. Performances at festivals were very common and tournament competitions at festivals drew large crowds who cheered for their favorite wrestler.

#### **Yuanxiao - dumpling restaurant**

A special treat was prepared for the Lantern Festival celebration, the yuanxiao. These round dumplings are made from glutinous rice and have a salty or sweet filling. At home the dumplings are offered to family members and guests but they can also be ordered in a restaurant as depicted in the scroll. Their shape, which resembles the full moon, symbolizes family unity and completeness.

#### **Zhong Kui**

During the Tang dynasty Emperor Xuanzong (r. 712-756 CE) fell ill with malaria. One night he observed in his dream how a little demon stole his favorite bamboo flute and his concubine's perfume bag. A large demon detected the theft, caught the little demon and devoured him.

When the emperor asked him for his name, he introduced himself a Zhong Kui. Many decades earlier Zhong Kui had committed suicide by dashing his forehead on the palace steps after he learned that he had not passed the palace examination. When the emperor had heard this he honored Zhong Kui posthumously. Out of gratitude Zhong Kui, who by this time was dwelling in the netherworld, decided to protect the living from evil demons. When the emperor woke up he was miraculously cured of his malaria.

He ordered portraits of Zhong Kui to be painted which he distributed among his officials. Thus the tradition was born of hanging up Zhong Kui's portrait on New Years eve to ward off evil spirits.



## CD-Project 'Colorful Lanterns at Shangyuan'

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