

Arts of Asia Lecture Series Fall 2012
The Culture and Arts of China: From the Neolithic Age Through the Tang Dynasty
 Sponsored by The Society for Asian Art

Time of Disorder: the Northern and Southern Dynasties

I. Chronology and Historical Context

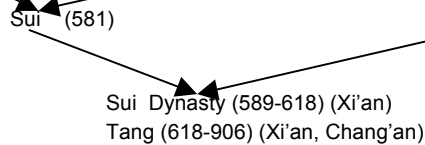
Han dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE)
 Three Kingdoms (*Shu Han* 221-263; *Wei* 220-264; *Wu* 222-280)
 Western Jin (265-317)

NORTH

Sixteen Kingdoms (304-439)
 N. Wei (386-535) (Datong and Luoyang)
 W. Wei (535-557) (Xi'an) E. Wei (534-550) (Ye)
 N. Zhou (551-581) (Xi'an) N. Qi (550-577) (Ye, Taiyuan)

SOUTH

E. Jin (317-420) (Nanjing)
 Liu Song (420-479)
 So. Qi (479-502)
 Liang (502-557)
 Chen (551-587)



After the catastrophic collapse of the Han Empire, China was divided into Three Kingdoms. One warlord briefly reunified the country under the Jin dynasty, attempting to re-establish the glory of the Han. The nomadic tribes to the north, however, sensing China's weakness, invaded. Remnants of the ruling house fled south establishing a new capital and court in south China at Nanjing. The nomads were too disorganized to breach the mountainous ramparts along the Yangzi River which protected the south. The series of Southern dynasties ruling from Nanjing became the standard bearers of the Han and preservers of traditional culture. With its remaining Chinese population, the north was left to the control of nomadic Xianbei or Toba Xianbei rulers, who exhibited varying degrees of ambivalence to traditional Chinese culture. The Northern and Southern dynasties remained divided by the Yangzi River for some three hundred years, almost splitting China into two cultures with strongly regional but related identities. Despite the geographic split and the tensions between nomadic and Chinese rulers, art flourished achieving new levels of sophistication in aesthetic theory and practice, both literary and artistic, and in calligraphy, painting, ceramics, and sculpture.

II. Impact of Archaeology in Reshaping Scholarship

Over at least the last two decades, the period of the Northern and Southern Dynasties has generated a considerable body of scholarship as well as a number of small and large exhibitions in the United States, Europe, and Asia. Spurred by the outpouring of often extraordinary new archaeological material, this intense scholarly focus has significantly shifted our perception of this "time of disorder," particularly of the nomad-controlled North. Given the greater availability of stone in the North, far more material culture has survived from the Northern Dynasties. Now, once referred to as the "black hole," this span of centuries has finally been recognized as a pivotal link in the historical timeline between empires of the Han and Tang, an era which nurtured a dynamic period of innovation in the history of Chinese art.

III. Thematic Exploration: Separate but Interconnected

Through the prism of the Northern Dynasties, selected major artistic developments will be explored in the North and related to the art of the Southern Dynasties.

Buddhist Art and West Asia

1. Northern Wei (Mid to late 5th c.) and the Central Asia-Gansu –Shanxi Connection (early N. Wei , Mid-late 5th c.): Cave Temples of Jintasi and Wenshushan (Gansu), Yungang (Shanxi)
2. Northern Wei and the "Chinese aesthetic" (First quarter of 6th c.): Cave Temples of Longmen and Gongxian (Henan), Wanfosi (near Chengdu, Sichuan)

3. Northern Zhou and Northern Qi (Mid to late 6th c.) and Reinvigoration of Indian, Central and Southeast Asia influences: Wanzi Village (eastern suburb of Xi'an, Shaanxi), and Qingzhou hoard (Shandong) and Wanfosi (Sichuan)

Tomb Art and Burial Practices: Intersection of Traditional, Foreign and Nomadic Elements

1a. Northern tombs: Lou Rui (d. 570) and Xu Xianxiu (d. 571), Taiyuan; tomb plan, wall paintings, and contents of tomb, ranging from traditional *mingqi* to imported jewelry, metalwork and glass.

1b. Northern tombs: stone mortuary beds or sarcophagi commissioned by foreigners (Sogdians/Turks) and Chinese; mortuary beds from tombs of An Jia (Sogdian d. 571, Xi'an), Kang Ye (Sogdian? d. 571, Xi'an) and stone slabs from incomplete bed in Miho Museum, Japan, and sarcophagus of Shi Jun (Sogdian, d.580, Xi'an).

2. Southern tombs with pair of stamped-brick murals (Xishanqiao, Nanjing, late 5th early 6th) and molded bricks with impressed or molded decoration showing extensive evidence of color (Dengxian, late 5th – early 6th) and *mingqi*.

Pictorial Art : Figure and Landscape Painting

1. After Gu Kaizhi (344-406?), handscroll illustrating "The Admonitions of the Court Instructress to the Court Ladies," (Tang?), British Museum, London; lacquer screen of filial sons and virtuous women of antiquity, from tomb of Sima Jinlong (d. 484, N. Wei) from Datong, Shanxi; clay molded tile from Dengxian, Henan (e. 6th c.?), scene of filial son Guo Ju and Four Sages; Filial Piety stories engraved on a stone sarcophagus, N. Wei, ca. 525 CE, The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City; detail from stone mortuary bed of Kang Ye (d. 571, Xi'an).

2. Riders, detail of wall painting from tomb of Lou Rui (d. 570) and "portrait" of Xu Xianxiu painted on wall (d. 571), Taiyuan, Shanxi.

Metalwork and gold

1. Northern tombs: Feng Hetu (d. 501, Datong, Shanxi), gilt silver plate hunting scene (l.3rd early 4th c.); Li Xian (d. 569) Guyuan, Ningxia, gilt silver ewer depicting the Trojan War cycle?

2. Northern tombs: Ruru princess (d. 550, Hebei) ornamental gold plaque with pearls, amber, stone inlay; Lou Rui (d. 570, Taiyuan, Shanxi), ornamental gold plaque with turquoise, amber, pearls, and glass; Xu Xianxiu (d. 571, Taiyuan, Shanxi), gold ring with carved stone, unidentified source?

Ceramics: Green Wares

1. Southern green stonewares (celadons?), a uniform glaze bonded to vitrified body, developed in the regions of Yue (Zhejiang and Jiangsu); from miscellaneous sites across the two provinces and dating from the 3rd through 6th century; forms of the 3-4th wares share a delightful playfulness incorporating animals.

2. Northern glazed earthenwares, greenwares, flasks, jars, ewers, largely dating from the 6th century; most have been found in Hebei and to a lesser extent Shanxi ; preference for appliqué decoration is considered western influence.

Suggested Readings:

Juliano, Annette L. *Unearthed , Recent Archaeological Discoveries from Northern China*. Sterling and Francis Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Distributed by Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2012. Historical context and burial practice, pp. 27-66.

_____. *Buddhist Sculpture from China: Selections from the Xi'an Beilin Museum*. New York: China Institute Gallery, 2007. An overview plus a discussion of the development of Buddhist sculpture, particularly Northern Zhou, pp. 1-23.

Bush, Susan, "Floral Motifs and Vine Scrolls in Chinese Art of the Late Fifth to Early Sixth Centuries, A.D.," *Artibus Asiae* Vol. 38, No.1 (1976), pp. 49-83. Buddhist influence seeping into the traditional non-Buddhist arts.

Juliano, Annette L. and Judith A. Lerner. *Monks and Merchants, Silk Road Treasures from Northwest China*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc with The Asia Society, 2001. Silk Road, Buddhist Art in Northwest China, Importance of Nomads and Merchants.

_____. *Art of the Six Dynasties: Centuries of Change and Innovation*. New York: China House Gallery, China Institute in America, 1975. General historical and cultural overview, pp. 6-20.

Lewis, Mark Edward. *China Between the Empires, The Northern and Southern Dynasties*. Cambridge, MA and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009. A well written, highly informative and substantial history of the transformative changes occurring during Northern and Southern Dynasties.

Valenstein, Suzanne. *Cultural Convergence in the Northern Qi Period: A Flamboyant Chinese Container: a Research Monograph*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2007.