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## 史 CONTENTS

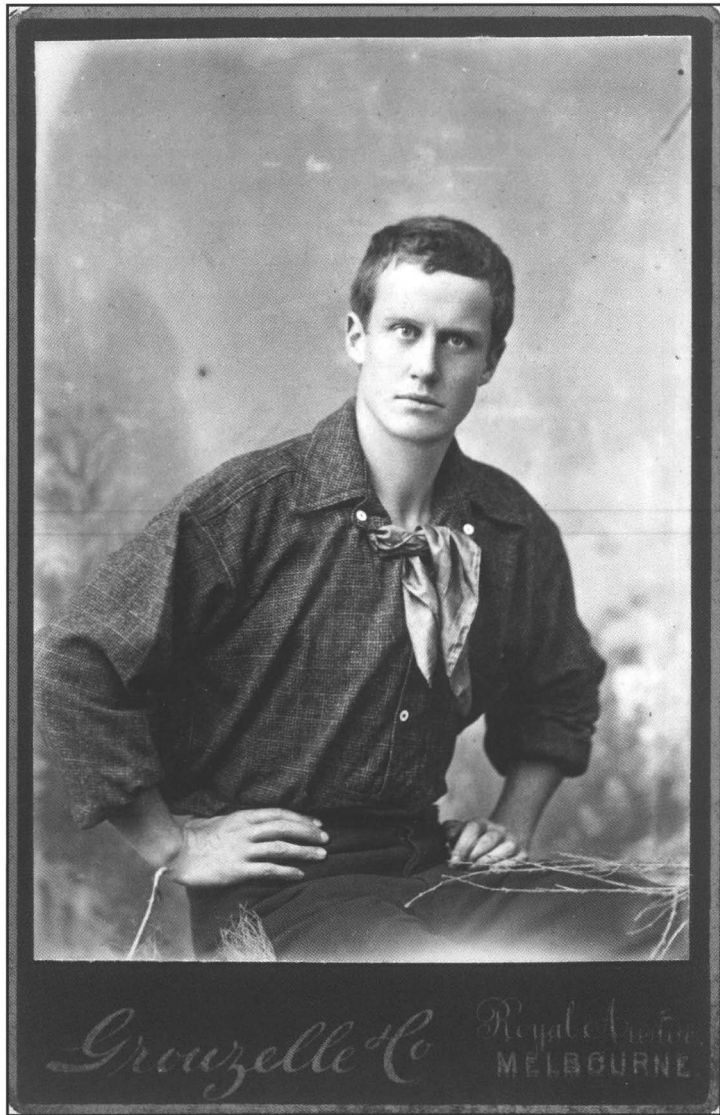
- 1 The Early Days of the Morrison Lecture  
*Benjamin Penny*
- 9 The Objects of the Foundation of the Lectureship, and a Review of Dr Morrison's  
Life in China  
*W.P. Chen*
- 19 Eastern Thought, With More Particular Reference to Confucius  
*William Ab Ket*
- 31 The History and Development of Chinese Art  
*James S. MacDonald*
- 47 The New Culture Movement in China  
*W.P. Chen*
- 61 Reminiscences of George E. Morrison; and Chinese Abroad  
*Wu Lien-Teh*
- 79 China To-day: With Special Reference to Higher Education  
*Chun-Jien Pao*
- 93 The Impact of Western Industrialism on China  
*Aldred F. Barker*
- 113 The Gifts of the Old China to the New  
*S.H. Roberts*
- 117 West China as Seen Through the Eyes of a Westerner  
*Howard Mowll*
- 135 The Min Sheng: A Study in Chinese Democracy  
*W.G. Goddard*
- 155 Lecturers  
*Lindy Shultz*

Cover calligraphy Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿, Tang calligrapher and statesman

Cover image and facing page Morrison aged nineteen

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# THE HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF CHINESE ART

 *James S. MacDonald*  
*Director of the National Art Gallery of New South Wales*

## *Third Morrison Lecture*

The third annual Morrison Lecture on “The History and Development of Chinese Art” was delivered in the Lecture Theatre of the Australian Institute of Anatomy, Canberra, on Tuesday evening, 3rd May, 1934, by Mr. J.S. MacDonald, the distinguished Director of the National Art Gallery of New South Wales.

The Chair was occupied by Sir Colin MacKenzie, KB., M.D., F.R.C.S., Director of the Institute of Anatomy and President of the Royal Society of Australia. Amongst the large and representative gathering present was Dr. W.P. Chen, Consul-General for China, accompanied by Mr. D.Y. Narme, representing the Chinese community of Sydney, New South Wales. Apologies for absence were received from the Honorable Major R. Casey, M.P., Assistant Treasurer to the National Government, who represents Geelong in the Federal Parliament; Mr. Ah Ket, barrister-at-law, Melbourne; and Mr. F.J. Quinlan, Chief Electoral Officer for the Commonwealth of Australia. Regret was expressed at the absence of Mr. W.J.L. Liu, one of the founders of the Lectureship. Mr. Liu is at present in China.

The Lecture was illustrated by very fine lantern slides, some of which had been lent by the British Museum, London. After the address Lady MacKenzie held a reception and supper in honour of the distinguished Lecturer in the Northern Museum of the Institute.

*Address*

In points of age and territory affected Chinese art exceeds all others. It reaches back to days coeval with those of the beginnings of Egyptian and Assyrian art. Like them it began alongside a great stream. Unlike them, it has persisted. They were dead centuries before the Christian era; China's art is still alive; though, I fear, only physically. Their culture flowed toward the Mediterranean, feeding the greater part of Europe, which carried on and developed their tradition. Chinese culture circulated within China. It expanded rather than flowed. It can be compared to a wine stain on a tablecloth which spreads from where the spilt liquid fell first and heaviest; irregular and faint at its edges. Japan in this case would be an isolated splash.

China developed within the loop or elbow of the Hoang Ho. The first of the race who settled there had great vitality, and this, added to favorable position, allowed of their growth to a mighty nation. They expanded. They absorbed whomever came near their boundaries. They gradually conquered and digested the world surrounding them until what we know as the Chinese Empire was brought about; peopled by a race having the same myths, legends, traditions and written language throughout the realm. It was as if their first boundary, the Huang Ho, had flooded east, west and south, inundating with Chinese all the land in those directions, which only ended where the sea, the level jungles, or the unprofitable hills began. When the Mongols conquered China it was the beaten who, as it were, gained and ate the fruit of that victory, and spat out the skin and stone. It is noteworthy, too, that Jenghiz Khan, beginning in 1214 A.D. the campaign which his grandson, Kublai, completed in 1280 with the subjugation of China, attacked first that earliest settled part which lies within the acute angle of the Hoang Ho, the apex of which is where, after running south for 500 miles, it turns sharply at Tung Kwan to flow east and nor'-east for 600 or more miles into the Gulf of Pee-chee-lee. There already in 2704 B.C. we find that Huang-ti "lengthened the official robes"; which shows that certain ceremonial customs had long been in vogue.

Ignoring or discounting much that tradition asserts was accomplished before this date, it is certain that the arts were nevertheless then well advanced. For the satisfaction, however, of all except Sinologists, one may advantageously begin the study of Chinese art with the great Chow Dynasty; for in its duration of 867 years from 1122 B.C. to 255 B.C. the aims and many of the forms of Chinese art were fixed. When this long-lived dynasty broke up a great consolidator, Cheng, known as Shih-Huang-Ti, conquered or annexed and welded together all those feudal States which had not come under the dominion of the Chow and preceding dynasties, whose rule at the most extended over the greater parts of the States of

Shanshi, Shensi, Honan, Shantung and the lesser parts of Kan Suh, Chi-li, Kiang Su and Gan Huy, which together comprised about 255,000 square miles, 55,000 square miles less than the area of New South Wales, or about one-sixth of China proper, i.e., excluding Tibet, Mongolia, Manchuria, and East Turkestan, whose combined area covers half a million square miles more than the whole of Australia. I give these dimensions so that it may be grasped that it was from the very compact kingdom of Chow, which during a period of 867 years had cultivated its arts uninterruptedly and intensively—taking in hand the legacy of a civilization already 1,700 years old, and developing it with wonderful loyalty to its race—that the whole culture of this vast region took its character.

China proper with its culture now becomes the subject of our survey. It is an empire comprising eighteen more or less homogeneous States or provinces having a uniform culture. It already in 225 B.C. has a history (almost verifiable) of nearly 2,000 years, on to which may be tacked a traditional account and tally of its career, which takes it back another 650 years. It has grown in extent from about 27,000 square miles in the very early days to 1,500,000 square miles; from a small population in the southern half of Shanshi to what must have been a substantial one when the whole of the feudal States were amalgamated into one Empire by Shih-Huang-Ti; for, in 165 A.D., in spite of extraordinarily vexed times, a census was taken, showing that the Empire consisted then of 50,000,000 souls!

Up till 618 A.D. there was no capital of China further south than Chang An in Shansi, and it is not until 1127 A.D. that, pressed by the Tartars, it gets pushed (but only temporarily) as far south as Hang-Chow. The creative force keeps in the north, its original home, from which it radiates over south, east and west, and with enough strength to stimulate a wonderful output of art both quantitative and qualitative. This has persisted until to-day.

In Chinese history it is notable that after every collapse and supercession of a weak dynasty art takes fresh strength. For example: The Shang dynasty, which lasted for 644 years—from 1766 B.C. to 1122 B.C.—was ousted by the house of Chow. Under the new rulers art, which had languished, took fresh life. Towards the end of the Chow dynasty art began again to wilt, but regained vitality when Shih-Huang-Ti conquered and knit the whole of the States together in one Empire. He, as it proved, founded no line, but he paved the way for the great Han dynasty, in whose duration of over 400 years (B.C. 206–220 A.D.) fresh vigour quickened art. For 350 years after the decay and extinction of the Han dynasty, art was at the mercy of conditions brought about by internal disturbances. Self-harassed China then produced comparatively trivial art, and did so until re-organized and revived by the intruding Toba Tartars, who formed the dynasty of Wei, and made Buddhism the state religion. Nanking was the



capital of their rivals, the Liang dynasty. United by the Sui, China under the Tangs expanded enormously by conquest, and for nearly 300 years art luxuriated in wonderful style, to droop with the decadence which begot divisions, or from the divisions which bred decadence. This was in 907 A.D.

Fifty-three years of civil warfare and loss of outer acquisitions followed; but were ended in 960 A.D. by the Sung dynasty, who stemmed both the tide of anarchy and the Tartars, and gave China 167 years of peace. There then (in 1260 A.D.) intervened in real earnest in the affairs of China a great force—the Mongols. They followed on the heels of other Mongoloid peoples—the Khitan and Golden Tartars—those invaders who had forced the moving of the capital down to Hang Chow. By 1280 A.D. Kublai had chased them out, subdued the Sungs and established the dynasty of Yuan, which lasted for 88 years.

Owing to the geographical contiguity of the possessions of the various Mongol Khans, during the dominance of China by the Yuans there was great interchange between the west and east of Asia of art notions. Kublai built the Peking Observatory in 1276, and three years later he supplied the astronomical instruments supported by dragons, which are among the world's masterpieces of bronzework. This was nearly 300 years before Galileo was born. He patronized the arts, but so taxed the people to support him and his court in splendour, and to finance his huge campaigns of conquest, that he paralysed some industries, notably the imperial porcelain works at Ching-te-Chien, whose potters fled from that city, not to return until the Mings thrust out the Mongols. Kublai's brother Hulagu sent to Persia, or Kublai caused to be sent to Persia, which Hulagu reigned over, a hundred families of artists, artisans and engineers. Arab trade, which had been established in China in the 8th century, was also greatly stimulated, especially in the importation of enamel work, which resulted in the Chinese themselves beginning the making of it in 1341.

The Mings then arose and drove the Mongols out. They reigned from 1368 to 1644. Under them art objects were produced in immense quantities; literary work was encouraged; intercourse with other countries was indulged in as never before; painting was patronized to an extraordinary extent. However, crushing taxation, court intrigue, corruption and rivalries brought about revolt. Of this the Manchus took advantage. In 1644 they occupied the weakened country, and continued to do so until 1911. They were, however, swallowed, digested and absorbed by the conquered, and made themselves the heirs of Chinese culture. Their dynasty is called Ch'ing. It had nine Emperors, two of whom are greatly celebrated—K'ang-Hsi, who reigned 61 years from 1662 to 1723, and his grandson Ch'ien Lung, who reigned 60 years from 1735 to 1795. Both were great patrons of art and great collectors, particularly Ch'ien Lung, who, in addition to col-

lecting with extraordinary avidity, caused illustrated catalogues of his art collection to be made, which in themselves were things of great beauty.

In speaking of pottery and porcelain we distinguish types by referring to dynasties chiefly, such as Chou, Han, Tang and Ming. The only individuals one mentions in this regard are these two illustrious Ch'ing Emperors, who, after all, were Manchus.

All the foregoing is to acquaint you, if ever so slightly, with the historico-geographical aspect of China, as it is very necessary that you should see something of their art from the point of view of the Chinese, if possible. For it is a very difficult thing to put oneself in another's place; to get under his skin.

In considering the art of any country, race or period there is always present the difficulty of aligning oneself closely with the mentality, the disposition, the tradition of any particular one, and this task is especially difficult in the case of the Chinese, for there has ever been a wide gap between the Orient and the Occident. We must, however, try to get as close as possible. We can at least judge of universal traits such as pre-occupation with, and rendering of, those primordial shapes, contours, curves, profiles, colours, textures, tones, that are common to the world. But, as soon as these are seen, qualified by the racial temperament, perplexity sets in.

In the case of this fascinating, baffling Chinese art, we are confronted by the fact that the painting art which the Chinese now practise is the same as was practised at the very least in Sung times, namely from A.D. 960 to A.D. 1127; from the time in English history of Edgar to that of Henry I. Giotto, the founder of European pictorial art, was not born until 1276–149 years later than the year which ended this dynasty.

However, it is necessary to find out, if we can, something about Chinese character so as to judge better of the work of Chinese artists.

First of all: the Chinese are an indigenous people. They have always been prolific. Above all other peoples they have had a genius for expansion and pervasion. From where they began they spread out irresistibly, halting where the first opportunity offered, digging in, literally, and staying there. It would appear as if racial instinct, disposition, and not conscious volition, held them together, for they have shown little power of combination. They are a race of cultivators, each one tending his own piece of land and minding his own and his family's business. Those of the race who were pushed beyond the edge of the settled and profitably cultivable area developed other traits than those owned by the gardeners—they had to learn at first, if not to combine, to cohere. From time to time they combined and became raiders on a grand scale. The cultivators (and they are the true Chinese) remained in *statu quo*, and never went

far afield. Their circumscribed situation made them interested in near at hand things, their main activities devoted to that which needed immediate attention. They developed a passion for detail, patience and intensiveness. *Minutiæ* absorbed them. The tyranny of the seasons and their inexorable gardeners' calendar developed methodism in them. They became tradition ridden, referring everything to precedent. From all these factors precision was begotten. It excluded wide horizons and long prospects. It induced them to delight in intimate description; to "close-ups," and this may have been why they never depicted cast shadows, or what we call "shading," i.e., modelling. Likewise, their perspective was never scientific, but always isometric; receding lines actually parallel never appearing in their art to converge, but always retaining their literal parallelism. Except in early work they usually eschewed drawing faces in profile, in this respect, and also in respect to the "law of frontality," quite differing from the Egyptians and Assyrians.

The representation of everything portrayable was definitely laid down 2000 years B.C., when pictographic script was turned into Chinese writing by a genius named T'sang Hsieh, and, at the same time, the legends have it, one Shih-Huang, minister to Huang-Ti (the ruler who lengthened the official robes) invented painting. This is enlightening, for it hints at how the minds of the Chinese persistently turned to writing, which, though derived from natural objects, nevertheless became the starting point of pictures, which were always treated as calligraphy. At any rate, truth to reality, as we see it, was with them always subordinate to beauty of line and surety of stroke. The training, too, of Chinese painters differed little from that of those learning to write; in fact, both would-be expert calligraphists and painters had to submit to long and hard apprenticeships, which, in the matter of the technique insisted on, did not very much differ from each other.

Among the Chinese there has never been any question but that painting should be ancillary to writing, and it is a curious fact that Chinese script has in it a strange meaningfulness, due no doubt to its origin, for it is obviously vestigial. Painting, then, was taught by learning to depict component parts in a specific way: pictorial pothooks and hangers, so to speak. There were, and still are, eight regular ways of drawing a nose, to be practised until the pupil is proficient, and more or less as many recognized and sanctioned ways of drawing other features.

These recipes pervade the whole fabric of Chinese art. There are many copybooks of examples of them, showing just what depictively is allowable and what is not; geometrically, in the animal and vegetable kingdoms, together with the combinations that can be made from units of them. Those things for which there is no traditional, canonized recipe are simply left out.

In fact, for at least 2,000 years, observation of objects for pictorial purposes has not been practised; only handwriting. Their pictures, except when illustrative or anecdotal, were composed on a sort of molecular system in which form depended on the number, in groups and disposition, of certain inalterable components severally and collectively approved by the most rigid and revered tradition. The major prescriptions had been written and assented to 20 centuries back, and had the allegiance of 60 generations of Chinese artists and laymen.

The standards having been decided, of what parts a picture should be made and how they should be disposed, resolved the question of picture-worth into one of whether, of certain allowable alternative forms or types, the best had been chosen, and, when this had been decided, whether the calligraphy was up to standard.

Painters were largely relieved from the task of observation, and invention became an exercise of the faculty for making combinations; of converting one's self into a sort of human kaleidoscope, creating a fresh picture with every turn. In other words, once having decided on the scenes and dramatis personae, the picture was written, with the utmost deftness and grace, later to be tinted with equally compulsory colours.

Their art was crystallized 2,000 years ago, before their observation had been fully matured, and, as writing had been such an early development, it had completely won the upper hand. They described with lines, which really served instead of speech. They told their pictures.

This was one reason why the Chinese could dispense with light and shade or shadows. The portraits which, in 1792, Lord Macartney took to the court of Ch'ien Lung as presents from George III, were looked on there as barbarous crudities. The shadows intended to give modelling to the faces were regarded as inexplicably different degrees of tone, or even actual dirtiness of skin—as faults, mistakes, or accidents. The Emperor and his court were shocked and baffled at the absence of a fluent and subtly accented line round the faces and the features of the portraits (probably done by Reynolds). The truth or untruth of the likenesses never naturally concerned or touched them; but what worried them was why one side of a face should be darker than the other.

This inflexibility only appears so to others than the Chinese. Close study shows differences in the work, both of different eras and different artists. Still, the life of Chinese art is so long, and comparatively so uniform, that to the European who is not a close student of it the differences are not at all evident. Yet we talk of Chow and Han, T'ang and Ming, which is proof enough of definite recognized variety.

Generally speaking, one fairly conversant with Chinese art history can recognize the chief great eras on sight; but of only a very few of the individual painters can this be said.

We know, for it is recorded, that as far back as B.C. 2300 signs denoting rank were painted on the robes of priests and court officials, banners, &c., and that as early as B.C. 1150, in the great Wen Wang's time (founder of the Chow line) the inevitable regulations for arrangements and handling of colours were promulgated.

Painting earliest manifested itself in mural decorations illustrating mythological subjects—the phoenix, the dragon and the tiger had become fixed as to form. Tradition reports that in B.C. 517 Confucius admired portraits of legendary Emperors; but his admiration was not aesthetic but for the moral pointed by the aspects the painter had given them, some looking virtuous and the others vicious. But it was for other branches of art than painting that the Chow period was notable. During the life of that dynasty the Chinese became expert in the designing, modelling and casting of all kinds of bronze work. Pottery for all ordinary purposes, including buildings, flourished. This was a carry-over from as far back as the reign of Shun (B.C. 2255), the last of the five first Emperors, and in the eyes of the Chinese the great national patron of all pottery. In Yu's time (B.C. 2205) it is recorded that elaborate bronze work was made, and from written testimony and portrayals we can be fairly sure that the styles of certain vessels made in Chow times must have been similar to those of the more remote days. The originals of most of these do not exist now, but illustrations of them prove that many types date back to the beginning of the Shang dynasty, which lasted from B.C. 1766 to B.C. 1122. For our purpose design and form are, however, of far more importance than identity by inscription or any other means. But most critical writings on Chinese bronzes are of comparatively recent date, and in them the authors take it for granted that, the forms being accepted and fixed for all time, the interest must reside in the inscriptions. We, however, cannot take them for granted, but look at the forms and feel that, in most cases, they are strange to us. We would never have conceived the shapes or combinations of shapes that early seized for good the Chinese mind.

The great number of them are agreeable to us; but, except where their beauty bewitches, distracts or benumbs our faculty for criticizing, our Western taste is conscious of that quality in them which we term "quaint," meaning savouring of the grotesque. The reason for this is that the first representations of man and beasts were not developed, but crystallized and congealed; became, indeed, a kind of hieroglyphs, which time led even further away from nature, as if the Western world were to accept as realistic the animals of heraldry, which failure to refer to nature again has led still further from actuality. Reasoning from their own experience, Western artists would believe that no thought of the original of the depicted objects came into the mind of any but of its creator. As with word characters, there were a multitude of established form components whereof

all designs were made. The beauty of the latter depended on the ability of the artists effectively to choose, arrange, combine and treat the necessary components. Geometric forms were first fixed on and used; next, vegetable forms, they being the earliest of the natural forms employed. Very strangely, next in order of employment comes what a writer calls the Chinese mythological zoology—fabulous monsters, the phoenix, dragons, strange nondescript ogres, tritons, gryphons, unicorns. Much later, the animals from which the monsters were derived were represented. It is hard to get away from the thought that the primitive Chinese were contented with a degree of realism that would never have satisfied the Egyptians or the Assyrians. Very slight graphic hints sufficed them, and with little delay they conventionalized, hardly referring again to the originals. So, just as the landscape and animals of Persia became in time the Persian carpet of peculiar pattern shape, so badly-drawn animals became Chinese monsters, henceforth to be treated calligraphically. Later they rendered animals, and lastly human beings.

Happily for their art, from time to time Mongol and Tartar invasion and conquest, Confucianism and Buddhism added to the aesthetic vocabulary, as it were, a number of words which made the language of art more varied and articulate, and which were readily absorbed. In the main, these conquests made for regeneration and stimulation of activity in the arts. That is why the great literary and art periods are those following on the advent of strong dynasties, which includes the Manchu dynasty of Ch'ing, though in the eyes of some grudging antiquaries it is too near our time to deserve merit.

The new ideas brought in or freed by these conquests, and the new combinations which they made possible, begot an infinite number of additional shapes, compared with which Western shapes are few and simple. The forcible mating of geometrical and natural shapes must always impress us as remarkable—the squaring of trumpet shapes, the geometrical treatment of clouds and waves, the conversion of birds and animals into vessels, handles and spouts tortured into awkward shapes and sections, gourd shapes cubified capriciously, at least in our sight.

Many of their vessels represent animals, just as our ancestors made funny little men into jugs. The difference between their vessels of this type and Toby jugs is that the former were to be taken seriously; the latter were jokes. I find it impossible to regard with the respect with which I know a Chinese would give it, a hollow bronze rhinoceros with a collar round his neck and a lid protruding from his back, so that his interior could be filled with sacrificial wine, which could then be poured out of his mouth. We, of course, have dolphins and fish and turtles in fountains spouting water, and to us they are not comic.

Still, if one cannot “get” the full significance of the rhinoceros, one can very much admire the modelling of it and the respect the sculptor had for his metal, and, to a large extent, that, or something like it, is the attitude we must keep to throughout our study.

One aspect of their bronze work we can easily admire is the ornamentation which they give it and its treatment. In so much Western work it is possible often to say where an intricate bit of ornament was begun and ended. This is because the artist-artisan found his work becoming tedious; his enthusiasm flagged, and this showed in his handling. This is never, so far as I know, shown in Chinese work; but whether it is in some measure due to the artist being relieved of all creative responsibility, I cannot say. I think it must have a considerable bearing on the question.

At any rate, in most cases the recipe design would free him from purely technical effort. This would account for the height to which Chinese handicraft generally rises, and the extraordinary heights it so often wins to in every medium.

Apart from the question of fidelity to nature, Chinese invention in the matter of pattern designs is something at which to marvel. Even though it is often complicated and involved and profuse, and in our eyes grotesque, the main motives are usually extremely taking, and the lesser contributory ones so apposite and harmonious that the luxuriance comes as a secondary, delayed impression.

This plastic exuberance may have been helped by the introduction of Buddhism (A.D. 67), for even in Han times (B.C. 202–A.D. 220) there is not evident that dislike of the empty space which from then on showed as one of the chief Chinese traits. Yet, when one looks on the extremely simple statues of Buddha, so bland and unfretted in form and surface, one feels compelled to look elsewhere for the cause. Theoretically, Buddhism should make for placidity of shape and suavity of line. But so should Confucianism. Whatever was the origin of the Chinese love of floridity, the fact remains that it came at last to be marked. Nothing in the way of ornamental design seems to have been too intricate for them to revel in. To us their execution seems emotionless, the outcome of a sort of impersonal ebullience. Yet, the beauty begotten of it is such that such an assumption must be groundless. Where there is such intensity, such sustained purpose, there must, one would think, be passion.

Whatever were their methods of modelling or carving, those methods served them equally well in handling stone, metal, ivory, wood, jade, lacquer or pottery, from colossi to tiny articles. All sizes, shapes, materials and colours came alike to them. No race can compare with them in precision and deftness. No race ever had such a sense of colour, as colour.

As in the case of form, their colour was far less expressive than with us; but their range of colours far exceeded ours, and so did their combin-

ations. Like us they favoured certain ones more than others; but they had far more auxiliary ones to support the primaries. They graduated their colours, but not significantly, in regard to expressiveness; that is, in its retreat from or emergency into light. Pictorially, light and shade meant little or nothing to them.

In all their glyptic and fictile work they kept turning their work to the light; in writing there was no modelling, only thickening, thinning, curving or angling of lines, and as these arts preponderated, it was natural that, to their common rules, painting had to conform.

Whatever in the way of innovations came into China by sea or land routes was, like human foreign elements, digested and converted into the native idiom. One can, of course, trace influences, especially evident in the images of Buddha—an influence just as strong in Japan—but it is on the Chinese variant of that embodiment of serenity and detachment that one dwells.

In A.D. 166 envoys from Marcus Aurelius came to Canton. In T'ang times there was huge expansion, great conquest, great trade and culture exchange. Overland and oversea intercourse with the Arab world was active. Its influence may be seen in floral arabesques on porcelain, and in the presence of Arab writing. In return the Chinese influenced those countries, particularly Persia, where for a long time the Chinese countenance did duty for Persian faces, and Chinese designs and schemes of colour appeared in painting and tiles. All Chinese enamel work, that is cloisonné, showed Arabic (Persian) derivation, and it is the work least well done by the Chinese.

In porcelain the Chinese far outshine all other peoples. Their genius for shape has every opportunity of manifesting itself in play, and on this most plastic of media they have imposed the greatest imaginable variety of beautiful designs in an infinity of colours and combinations of colours. There seems to be no limit to their design, invention, or their ingenuity and resource in execution. When the art of making porcelain was discovered the Chinese already had an immense number of designs in hand to apply to it, and only a little previous had invented the brushes necessary for their application. In the languages of Europe all porcelain does not bear the name of China for nothing. This is their great art, and in it they found so much more scope for expression.

The great early periods are Han, Wei, T'ang and Sung. In between are Later Chow and Sui. Afterwards came Ming, K'ang Hsi, and Ch'ien Lung. The modern period dates from 1795.

From the Occidentals' point of view, the Chinese genius displays itself to greatest advantage in the applied arts, and in porcelain they recognize it at its highest. The whole attitude of mind of the Chinese artist inclines toward decorating and embellishing objects, and in porcelain it has its



finest opportunity. There is no shape or surface on which he may not exercise all his taste, experience, brains and skill. Realism being negligible, there is no rein to his fancy, and it has flourished in myriad ways.

Porcelain was also made in myriads. In the reign of one of the later Ming Emperors protest was made against the court orders for it. To quote—

“The Court indents were truly conceived on a magnificent scale, one order alone consisting of—

26,350 bowls with  
30,500 saucer dishes to match  
6,000 ewers with  
6,900 wine cups  
680 large garden fish bowls.

This was in 1554, and the indents are still in existence. Ten years earlier orders were given for 1,340 table services of 27 pieces each; 380 to be painted in blue on a white ground with a pair of dragons surrounded by clouds; 160 to be white with dragons engraved in paste under the glaze; 160 coated in monochrome brown of fond laque, or ‘dead leaf’ tint; 160 monochrome turquoise blue; 160 coral or iron-red; 160 enamelled yellow; and 160 enamelled bright green.”

The Ming dynasty declined, and so did its art. In 1644 it fell, and in came the Ch’ing dynasty, the outstanding figures of which are the great Emperors Káng Hsi and Ch’ien Lung.

Their vigour brought about a great revival in art, particularly in porcelain. During the period comprised in the reigns of Káng Hsi, his son Yung Ching, and his grandson Ch’ien Lung, viz., from 1661 to 1795, or 134 years—for the grandfather and grandson each reigned 60 years—the famous “familles” were produced: famille verte, famille rose, famille noire.

Before saying anything about painting, I would like to draw attention to a form of art in which the Chinese indulged and excelled, and I do so because it is what may be called a “link” art. It consists of incrusting a ground of lacquer or wood with carved stone or mother-of-pearl objects. White and green jade, lapis lazuli, quartz, malachite and turquoise are used. The pictures so formed lead one to a conception of how the Chinese regarded pictures. In them the figures have no phenomenal, but only subject and decorative relationship to the trees, rockeries, pavilions and walks of the foreground and middle distance, and all of these have nothing whatever pictorially to do with the background. The artist’s objective was to keep them distinct, and not to relate them. Recession is not attempted, nor envelopment, Uniquely, linear perspective is not absent, but otherwise they resemble Chinese paintings, only differing in the material employed. The like may be said of their screens of wood and coloured

lacs or their woven silk pictures; pictures embroidered on satin. To what degree these are realistic to the Chinese mind I cannot say; but through them we slide, as it were, into paintings, which are only slightly more realistic, if at all. Earlier in this talk I spoke of wall paintings; but, except by repute, little is known about them. The only reproduction I have to show appears to be of singular beauty. It represents a Bodhisattva, and is remarkable chiefly for its colour, which reminds one of the frescoes by Botticelli in the Louvre. It is possible that time has softened it, and been responsible for much of its chromatic delicacy, for it is exquisite. Though inspired by Buddhism, it is quite Chinese in spirit.

It is, however, not particularly early, though that does not impugn its quality, because the earliest paintings by a Chinese known to exist are as competent as anything done since. These are by Ku-Kai-Chih, and he and the writers of his time refer with the greatest respect to the work of painters who preceded him. What became of their work is not known, but Ku-Kai-Chih and others so revered them that they copied, or did paintings "in the manner" of, their predecessors. He flourished in the 4th century, at Nanking, and, according to report, he painted everything equally well. He painted on silk chiefly, and no doubt both his work and that of other Chinese painters gained by the sympathetic toning of that material. His outstanding virtues are composition and line. Otherwise his art, to us, partakes of the nature, of an inventory of forms, the full significance of which is evident only to those acquainted with the story. Outside of this it must rely for appreciation on its tone and colour. A defect, to us, which very likely would not be noticed by the Chinese, is the frequent lack of cohesion in groups, in pictures. There may be twenty individuals in a painting, but not a group. Again, except in rare and modern cases, no linear perspective, except of the isometric kind, is practised. The rail of a verandah receding into the background is as thick at the far end as at the near. The Chinaman projects himself into the picture, and feels the thickness of the wood. It is actually the same thickness all along its length; therefore, why make it taper? In a crowd he can move about and count, talk to, and feel twenty men. To see each one plainly, he turns him, as he would a bowl which he was decorating, to the light. Why shadows, then? In shadow one cannot be sure of a face. As for colours, there are red, blue and yellow, and what may be got by combining them. Why talk of half tones, which are only muddied colour? With them "illusion" had no standing. Painting was, had to be, a form of writing, though in some of their animal paintings tone takes the place, to our great content, of the tedious, looping lines. This tonality is the aspect of Chinese art which directly, or through Japanese paintings and prints, has so influenced European art in the last 80 years. It probably is not so appreciated by the countrymen of those who created it, as that which is less exquisite to us; but they know best what serves them best, and no doubt the art they admire has done

extraordinarily well. No civilization has such a record of its spirit infusing the whole of its art. Its quality and its consistency are such that we can justly call them marvellous. Over a period of 4,000 years there has been no wavering. Now, however, the times are out of joint, and it is at least doubtful whether the principles and formulas that so nobly have served over such an extended term the racial and national spirit of a quarter of the world's people can successfully survive the wrench of change. A reasonable demand is that the most venerable of all nations should be free to make her own decisions.

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*Morrison, soon after he arrived in China*