

Ancient China



This guide will take you on a make-believe journey to China. China is on the continent of Asia. **A continent is a large area of land, and Earth has seven continents. Find them all on this map.**



The galleries of Chinese art are on the lower level of the Museum. Walk down the stairs, turn left, and look for this jar. It is high up, so you might need to stand on your tiptoes.

We are not only taking a trip to China—we are going back in time to look at objects that people made thousands of years ago. As you look at the objects, try to picture how people lived then.



This covered jar is more than 2,000 years old! Think about jars you have at home.

Do you think they would last that long? Why do you think this one has lasted so long?

This jar is still here because it was buried underground.

Chinese, Western Han dynasty (206 B.C.–A.D. 9), *Storage jar*, 1st century B.C. Earthenware with painted decoration, h. with lid 55.0 cm, diam. 37.2 cm. Museum purchase, Fowler McCormick, Class of 1921, Fund (y1986-111 a-b)



Archaeologists learn about the past by digging things up and studying what they find. The archaeologists who found this jar must have been very excited. After archaeologists find an object, they look at it very carefully for clues. Think like an archaeologist while you look at this jar.

What shapes do you see? *(circle the shapes you see)*

Triangles Circles Swirls Rectangles

What colors do you see? *(circle the colors you see)*

Red Blue Tan Green Silver

Look closely at the handles. What do they look like?

People used jars like this one—the handles may have been used to carry the jar. They also placed them in tombs. A tomb is where someone is buried.



Chinese, Western Zhou dynasty (11th century–771 B.C.), *Pouring vessel with dragon-head lid (guang)*, late 11th century B.C. Bronze with matching inscriptions cast in the lid and belly, h. 31.3 × w. 16 × l. 36 cm, 5.3 g. Museum purchase from the C. D. Carter Collection, gift of the Arthur M. Sackler Foundation (y1965-3)

Go to the long case on the far wall and find this imaginary creature with jagged teeth and horns. It was buried in a tomb!

This creature is a vessel—like a pitcher, it can be filled with liquid. We do not know what was put inside it.

Do you have a pitcher at home? What do you put in it?

There’s more than one creature on this vessel. **Can you find the head of a second creature, on the back of the lid?**

Can you find the figures on the sides that look like birds? How many do you see?

We know the name of the person who owned this pitcher, Wen Fu Ding. We know his name because the inscription inside is his name and a character for the sun.

The Chinese language does not use an alphabet like English does. Instead, it has characters that are made up of strokes, like lines or brush marks. In English, letters represent sounds. For instance, the English letter “B” represents the sound “buh.” Chinese characters are not sounds—they are words. Chinese is one of the world’s oldest written languages, but the characters have changed over the 3,000 years since this vessel was made. Today, the Chinese dictionary contains about 50,000 characters.

This character means tiger:



Copy the character for tiger in the space next to it. When you are writing in Chinese, the strokes in a character should be made in order. Be sure to write the strokes in the correct order, from one to eight.

Now let’s learn more about how people lived in ancient China. We started with a jar that was more than 2,000 years old. Now we are going to look at figures and animals from a tomb. They are 1,500 years old. **Look in the middle of this gallery for the rows of tomb figures in two cases (hint: here is one of them).**

People in ancient China believed that a tomb should be like a home for a person’s spirit in the afterlife. Tombs were packed with clay people to serve the spirit, clay animals for food, and personal belongings for comfort and amusement.

How many animals can you find? Write them here.



Chinese, Period of Disunity, Northern Wei dynasty (A.D. 386–535, 220–589), *Tomb guardian*, early 6th century. Gray earthenware with white slip, red and black paint, 24.5 × 10.9 × 17.8 cm. Gift of J. Lionberger Davis, Class of 1900 (y1950-84)



How many musicians can you find? (*hint: look for instruments*)

How many soldiers? (*hint: look for shields*)

Did you find this camel?

Look at what is on his back. See the poles? Those are for tents. The camel also wears large packs, for carrying things. This camel might have traveled on the Silk Road. Merchants in China traveled across the continent of Asia to trade goods and animals. They even traveled in boats across oceans and seas. The network of routes they took was called the Silk Road because China was famous for silk. People all along the Silk Road traded things for silk.

Chinese, Period of Disunity, Northern Wei (220–589), *Tomb Figure: standing camel*, early 6th century. Gray earthenware with cream-colored slip, red paint, 18.5 × 23.7 × 13.1 cm. Gift of J. Lionberger Davis, Class of 1900 (y1950-93)



Can you find two imaginary creatures that were used to protect the tomb? These are called tomb guardians, and they were meant to protect the deceased person and his or her belongings from evil spirits. They are usually found in pairs: one with a beast face and the other with a more human-looking face. Find this pair of tomb guardians in the case at the bottom of the stairs.

How are they similar?

Which one has the beast face? _____

Which one has the more human-looking face? _____

Chinese, Tang dynasty (618–907), *Pair of painted tomb guardians*, ca. mid-8th century. Earthenware with silver, gold, and painted decoration, 60.7 × 30.5 × 17.2 cm (.1 figure), 7.4 × 29.2 × 22.8 cm (.1 base), 60.0 × approx. 31.0 × approx. 21.0 cm (.2 figure), 7.7 × 29.2 × approx. 18.5 cm (.2 base). Museum purchase, Fowler McCormick, Class of 1921, Fund (2001-215.1–2)



Tomb guardians often have features of different animals, such as the antlers of a deer, the claws of an eagle, and the spots of a leopard.

If you were to make a tomb guardian, which animal characteristics would you use?

Draw your tomb guardian in the space below.

The Silk Road and Buddhism

In addition to animals and goods, ideas traveled via the Silk Road. The religion Buddhism started in India and traveled to China with monks and merchants.

Find this large statue sitting on a ledge. This is Guanyin, the Buddhist Bodhisattva of Infinite Compassion. Bodhisattvas are special beings who are very kind and try to help people. Guanyin is especially gentle. Buddhists pray to Guanyin for help with their problems.



Chinese, Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279), *Guanyin seated in Royal-ease pose*, ca. 1250. Wood with traces of blue-green, red, and gold pigments on white clay underlayer with relief designs, 110.0 × approx. 79.0 × approx. 50.0 cm. Museum purchase, Carl Otto von Kienbusch Jr., Memorial Collection (y1950-66)

This statue would have been placed in a temple where Buddhists prayed.

Because Guanyin is such a special being, this Bodhisattva usually wears regal garments, jewelry, and a crown.

Guanyin often sits like this—it is called the pose of royal ease. Try sitting the way Guanyin is sitting. Do you feel comfortable?

Make Your Own Tomb Guardian Mask

You will need:

Cardstock or other sturdy material (this is the base for the mask)

Hole punch

Elastic cord (this is to help the mask stay on)

Materials for decorating (markers, crayons, pipe cleaners, feathers, etc.)

Assembly Directions:

1. To begin, cut out the shape of your mask. Don't forget holes for your eyes. You may want to ask a grown-up for help with this.

2. Use your imagination to create the rest of the mask. You can decorate it any way you want. You might be inspired by the tomb guardians you saw at the Museum.

3. When you are done decorating, use the hole punch to make a hole in each side of the mask. Tie the elastic cord through the holes you made. You may want to ask a grown-up for help again.

4. Now wear your mask and have lots of fun!



Chinese, Tang dynasty (618–907), *One of a pair of tomb guardians: beast-faced figure* (detail), ca. mid 8th century. Earthenware with silver, gold, and painted decoration. Museum purchase, Fowler McCormick, Class of 1921, Fund (2001-215.2 a)

Thank you for joining us today to explore the art of ancient China. Don't forget to stop at the Information Desk to collect a sticker for your **Artful Adventures Passport**. We hope that you enjoyed your visit to the Princeton University Art Museum and that you join us for another Artful Adventure!

Suggested Reading

PICTURE BOOKS

Good Morning China

by Hu Yong Yi

Lin Yi's Lantern: A Moon Festival Tale

by Brenda Williams; illustrations by Benjamin Lacombe

NON-FICTION FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

Favorite Children's Stories from China and Tibet

by Lotta Carswell Hume; illustrations by Koon-Chiu Lo

D is for Dancing Dragon: A China Alphabet

by Carol Crane; illustrations by Zong-Zhou Wang

FICTION FOR OLDER CHILDREN

Beyond the Great Mountains:

A Visual Poem about China

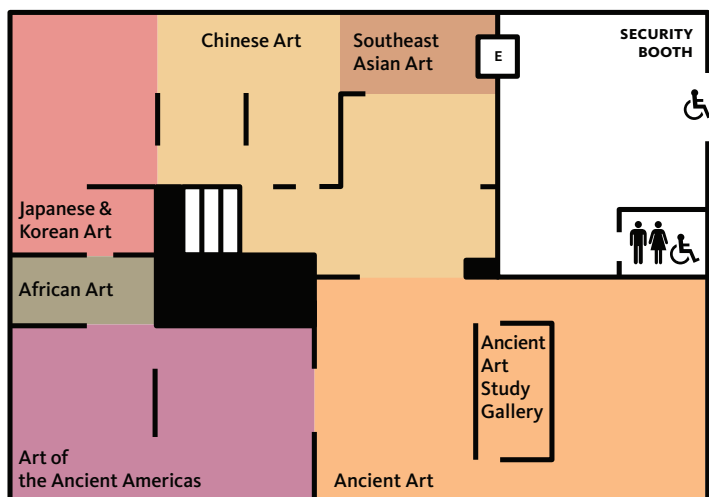
by Ed Young

NON-FICTION FOR OLDER CHILDREN

Kids around the World: We Live in China

by Pascal Pilon and Elisabeth Thomas; illustrations by Sophie Duffet

All of these books can be found in the children's section of the Princeton Public Library



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Front cover: Chinese, Period of Disunity (220–589), *Tomb figure: soldier*, early 6th century. Grey earthenware with cream slip, h. 18.5 cm, w. 5.1 cm, d. 4.2 cm. Gift of J. Lionberger Davis, Class of 1900 (y1950-118). Photo: Ricardo Barros