The Art of Scent

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INTRODUCTION

THE ART OF SCENT

The study of art history necessarily emphasises the material at the expense of the immaterial. In China, this has resulted in the neglect of many significant aspects of her ancient culture, such as music and dance. Scent, the subject of this autumn’s exhibition, is also an area that has hardly been studied, in spite of its numerous references in historical texts and literature.

The character xiang (香) has its prototype in oracle bone inscriptions more than 4000 years old and denotes a pleasant smell, referring specifically to the sweet smell of rice stalks with its associations of a bountiful harvest. Another character found on oracle bones, the prototype to the modern character zi (紫), is drawn as a man holding burning wood stalks. This is defined in the Shuowen jiezi as ‘burning wood in sacrifice to heaven’. As far back as the Neolithic times, the smell from dried mugwort (Artemisia vulgaris), which the ancients used to start fire, was supposed to have medicinal as well as purifying properties. Thus from the earliest records it can be seen that scent was used in China for worship, medicine and pleasure.

Some of the earliest incense excavated in China is a resin-based fragrant substance in a red-lacquer box found in the tomb of the King of Nanyue (approx. 130 BCE)\(^1\). It was also during the Han dynasty that works of art associated with scent begin to be made. Many of the small but valuable lacquer, bronze or jade boxes were probably used to contain the precious perfume (see cat. no. 1). However, in this period, perhaps the most significant development in our story was the appearance of the incense burner.

These burners were often designed as mountain peaks surmounted by elongated fabulous beasts, further enhanced with abstracted swirling clouds. This design was known as the boshanlu or ‘universal mountain brazier’ and was based on Daoist ideas of a many peaked, island paradise. With the incense smoke emanating from between the peaks, it was possible for the viewer to imagine himself floating above these mysterious islands, which were said to dissolve into mist as mortals approached.

\(^1\) Possibly frankincense, see Xi hán Nán yue wàng mù, Beijing Wénwù Chubānshè, 1991, p. 135.
The use of a Daoist design in the burner was probably not accidental. The early Han period saw a proliferation of studies on medicinal herbs and substances as Han Wudi was fascinated with Daoist elixirs. With expanded foreign contacts and increasing trade, many new fragrant spices were introduced to the Chinese.

As a design, the boshanlu represented a break from any previous works in bronze. The radical novelty of the design of the boshanlu also had to do with Han Wudi’s pioneering spirit, which is evident on a magnificent gilt-bronze example excavated in a Han tomb in Shaanxi, dated to the fourth year of Jianyuan (135 BCE), the fifth year after Han Wudi ascended the throne. It bears the inscription Neizhe Weiyang Shangwo, ‘in the care of the Bed Keeper of Weiyang Palace’. The Weiyang Palace was Wudi’s study, so this burner was clearly intended for his personal use. Raised on an imitation-bamboo stem and decorated with four strident dragons around undulating mountain peaks, this censer exemplifies the innovative style favoured by this legendary ruler.

In spite of its Daoist origins, by the 5th century the boshanlu became closely associated with Buddhism, a foreign religion imported from India through Central Asia. It appears carved as a votive offering at the base of Buddhist steles dating to the Northern Wei period (fig. 1). Curiously, they are absent from otherwise similar sculptures of the preceding 16 kingdoms period (fig. 2), suggesting that the use of incense in Buddhist ceremonies was first promulgated in China by the Central Asian Toba Wei aristocracy.

The increasing popularity of Buddhism during the following Sui and Tang dynasties saw the increase in the use of incense, evident from examples on Buddhist paintings and sculpture of the period. Ever expanding trade and prosperity created fertile ground for new styles and innovations, the very rare hand-held incense burner (cat. no. 3) being one such example, combining a confident exuberance with an unexpected practicality.

Not surprisingly, the decorative motifs used on the censers moved away from Daoist imagery and towards a new Buddhist vocabulary. The conical mountain transformed into a lotus bud, while the mythical animals of Daoism were replaced by Buddhist lions. The latter, a guardian of Buddhist teaching, appears on the hand-held censer as well as a cover for the later white-glazed censer from the Five Dynasties (cat. no. 6). Here, the design is especially artful, the lion animated by the breath-like smoke emanating from its mouth.

The cities of the Tang dynasty also saw an expansion of the types of fragrant substances used in China. Plant extracts like camphor and turmeric were in great demand, and were said to have been used in the Tang court to scent the palaces of the concubines before the emperor spent the night there. Exotic fragrant flowers such as patchouli and jasmine were also imported for their scent. Jia Sixie, writing in the 6th century, noted patchouli as an ingredient for making ‘face oil’, a type of facial moisturiser, a practice reflected in the making of ceramic boxes designed especially to contain these precious oils (cat. no. 4).

Since both foreign spice traders and Buddhist missionaries came from the west, it is little wonder that Luohans are often depicted with incense. In the famous Tang painting of luohans by Lu lengjia (fig. 18), the gift of the Central Asian worshipper has often been interpreted to be a rock. However, it is equally likely to be a piece of scented wood. Similarly, in the portrait of a young luohan (cat. no. 5) in the current exhibition, the gnarled tree bark standing in the drum shaped censer probably represents a treasured piece of chenxiangmu (agar).

However, it was during the Song dynasty that the use of incense reached a zenith. In the Song Shi (History of Song Dynasty), it is recorded that:

In the Song economy, apart from tea, salt and alum, xiang is the most profitable, therefore its market is controlled by the government.

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1 Su E, Duyang Zhabian, juan III  
2 Jia Sixie, Qimin Yaoshu, juan 5.  
3 Song Shi, juan 145.
The tax revenue from the trade of xiang liao increased almost four-fold from the beginning of Northern Song to the beginning of Southern Song, a testament to the demand and popularity of this commodity. With such large volumes, the court had to set up an official bureau, Shibosi, to regulate the trade, a precursor to the modern day customs office. Thus, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the import of xiang liao directly resulted in the establishment of the customs office in China.

Although incense was still associated with Buddhism, as seen in the wan-symbol decorated stone censer dating from the Northern Song period (cat. no. 7), it also would have been used in the type of ancestor worship rituals seen in Li Gonglin’s depiction of sacrifice to heaven(fig. 3). Moreover the rise of Neo-Confucianism, with its emphasis on self-cultivation, popularised scholarly activities such as music and calligraphy, the experience of which was enhanced by the use of incense.

For example, the poet Lu You (1125-1210), describes his intimate relationship with incense in the following lines:

The window is bright, the desk is clear;
Leisurely I trace a Tang calligraphy
with incense deep in the precious burner.

Similarly, in the famous painting “listening to the zither” by the Emperor Song Huizong (fig. 5), incense is used to accompany the playing of the qin.

Another poet, Chen Yiyu (1090-1138), delighted in his solitude with no one but the company of burning incense:

Unversed in officialdom others tease me,
Socialising rarely, I am able to hide myself.
When clouds shift I hold on to a walking stick,
Sitting in leisure, only with the incense burning.

Another aspect of Northern Song Neo-Confucianism was the use of antiquity as the standard in identifying and defining things Chinese. The rediscovery and collection of archaic ritual bronzes such as the ding, li and gui also led to their creative reuse, as in fig. 5, where a li is used as a plant container. Before long these bronze forms would become inextricably linked to incense as burners. The publication of illustrated catalogues of ancient bronzes in Imperial and private collections such as Kaogu Tu and Xuanhe Bogu Tu, provided the pattern books for contemporary craftsmen, and copies of these forms in ceramics, jade and bronze soon appeared. The very rare large bronze tripod censer in the current exhibition (cat. no. 8), reflects this newfound taste, and is a very close copy of an example in the Kaogu Tu. Although a censor of such large size would undoubtedly have been used in a large temple or important ancestral shrine, it must have been primarily admired for its air of antiquity, regardless of the context and ceremonies in which it was used, and without overt Buddhist or Daoist motifs.

Thus, scent and the life of the literati became inextricably intertwined from the Song dynasty onwards. It is therefore not surprising that the next golden age of incense was the 17th century, another period in which there was a revival of neo-Confucianism and the rise of the scholar-official.

In the interim, incense had continued to occupy an important place in worship. Important blue and white ceramic censers such as cat. no. 11, were created to be accompanied by matching pairs of candlesticks and vases, to make a set known as wu gong or the five offerings. These would grace the large altar tables that had become fashionable in the 15th century onwards, and which are copied in stone in royal tombs of the period (fig. 4).

However, it was during the 17th century, that we once again see an intimate connection between the use of incense and the scholar. In the biji and guides of taste of the day such as Wen Zhenghen’s Zhangwu zhi (Notes on Superfluous Things), there are extensive references to incense and the types of censers that should be used. For example, he writes:

Ding vessels from the Three Dynasties, Qin and Han, as well as those from the guan, ge, Ding and Longquan kilns are all for appreciation, not to be used. Only use Xuande bronze censers - the larger ones are particularly suitable.5

Like the furniture favoured by the literati of the period, there is a marked fashion for austerity and archaism. The illustrated catalogue

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5 Zhangwu zhi, juan 7.
Xuande Dingyi tulu (Illustrated Catalogue of Xuande Bronze Vessels) published in the late Ming shows the tastes in bronze censers in the 17th century, (rather those of the Xuande reign that it purports to date from). Quite unlike the Song and Yuan bronze examples, where the surfaces are heavily decorated in imitation of archaic pieces, the examples illustrated in this catalogue are usually undecorated, but of exquisite outline. These censers, made with high quality bronze alloy with high zinc content and supposedly copying Song ceramics, form a unique group amongst the cognoscenti of Chinese art as the simply termed Xuanlu – Xuande censers (cat. nos. 14, 15), even though few, if any, of these can be categorically dated to the Xuande period.

At the same period, there were also censers that were decorated with narrative scenes, such as the Chongzhen period blue and white porcelain censer in the current exhibition (cat. no. 20) which illustrates the Peach Blossom Spring, a text written by Tao Yuanming (365-427) in 421 AD as an allegory of a scholar-official’s longing for utopia. This would have been especially meaningful given the political chaos of the day. Interestingly, many of these designs are modelled on designs taken from woodblock illustrations, reflecting the increasing availability of printed books.

The popularity of scent at this time is reflected in the proliferation of the forms in which incense was made as well as the accessories used in its burning. One new innovation was the incense stick and the accompanying bamboo parfumier (cat. no. 12). The latter formed from a section of bamboo, carved and reticulated so that smoke from the burning stick would emanate from within. Other novelties included the use of incense tools, such as shovels and chopsticks-like tongs, to flatten ash and to arrange pieces of incense or wood. These would be held in a small spill vase, which together with the incense box and censer, made up lu, he, ping, a tri-partite set that was essential for every scholar’s desk.

With the return to a strong centralised government and the rise of imperial patronage at the beginning of the Qing dynasty, the intimate feeling of censers of the 17th century gave way to a much grander, more extravagant style. During the Qianlong and Jiaqing period, with the revival of philology and interests in archaeology, censers made in imitation of archaic bronzes again became popular. In the tradition of Xuanhe Bogu tu, the Qianlong Emperor compiled his own catalogue of archaic bronzes, the Xiqing Gujian.

Remarkably accurate Bronzes facsimiles of archaic prototypes were produced, but the Qing taste for rich finishes led to fanciful additions such as the gold-splashed highlights seen on the gui formed censer (cat. no. 22).

Other uses of scent other than incense are also known from this period. Fragrant woods such as sandalwood and aloeswood are used to make accessories for the study and home such as pillows (cat. no. 25) and brush-pots. Crushed and combined with lacquer, they were formed into hairpins and pendants that perfumed the wearer. The strange shapes of the scented wood was admired in themselves and used as decoration in the studio, in a manner similar to scholar’s rocks (cat. no. 23). Scent filled pomanders perfumed wedding beds while fragrant lingzhi was grown as penzai, in order to scent and fumigate rooms.

Today, with the revival of scholarly taste among collectors of Chinese art, incense once again enlivens the gatherings of friends, and accompanies philosophical reflection. Although it is chensiang that forms the basis of most modern Chinese incense, increasing knowledge about the fragrances of the past has led to experimentation among incense makers. As in the past, new forms of censers are introduced, including burners making use of electricity. Thus, it can be seen that this aspect of Chinese culture is still evolving, continuing a tradition that began over 4000 years ago.
引言

儒家文化对佛教

古代中国的文化深受儒家文化的影响，儒家文化的核心是“仁”、“义”、“礼”、“智”、“信”，它强调人与人之间的和谐相处，强调人应该有道德规范来约束自己的行为。佛教文化则强调“因果报应”、“六道轮回”，强调人的行为对自身及他人的影响。儒家文化的“仁”与佛教的“慈”相辅相成，共同构成了中国传统文化的核心价值观。

佛教文化对儒家文化的启示

佛教文化的“缘起性空”、“中观”等思想，对中国传统文化产生了深远的影响。佛教文化强调“缘起性空”，认为万事万物都是因缘和合而生，没有独立存在的实体，这与中国传统文化中的“天人合一”、“道法自然”等思想有异曲同工之妙。佛教文化中“中观”的思想，强调中道，反对极端，这与中国传统文化中的“中庸”之道有相通之处。

儒家文化对佛教的影响

儒家文化对佛教文化的影响，主要表现在佛教的中国化。佛教文化传入中国后，与中国传统文化中的儒家文化、道家文化等进行融合，形成了具有中国特色的佛教文化。如禅宗中的“心性之学”，禅宗强调“直指人心，见性成佛”，这与中国传统文化中的儒家文化、道家文化有异曲同工之妙。佛教文化中的“六道轮回”、“因果报应”等思想，也与中国传统文化中的“仁”、“义”、“礼”、“智”、“信”等思想有相通之处。

综上所述，儒家文化与佛教文化在中国历史上形成了相互影响、相互渗透、相互融合的关系。儒家文化与佛教文化在中国历史上的影响，对当今的中国传统文化有着重要的启示作用。
《宋金博物館》等書的發行，使得此風延續，對後代影響深遠。本展示的史/元、元至大合繡緞後《考古圖》及《宋金博物館》所見的西秦文化，雖然如此的著述當為禁區，相當於著作上的所著的書，但它是沒有任何人

自《文心雕龍》開始，李鶴之人的生活與不可分，未觸觸領，整理與文化史盛行《宋金博物館》所著的書，只見，資料與宗教的關係也不會改變，如此次展示的藝術品多反映清代合繡緞，參與或在時局、宗教一起，被供

香在大內中，成為「五佛」，是十世紀後常見的形式，並有不少的同步

在這些圖像僅有著關的關係。又驚豔的《長物志》也詳細地記載

三代合繡緞之、及宋、及宋、與宋，與宋皆與相關物，

合日新拜，並有合繡緞俱久未，居覺所直。

如此條條理一般，合繡緞的細節為關心，此時代應用主義，與合繡緞之

條條理的品味相符。條條理所列的《合繡緞圖冊》所著的關係，也極不

見得是可靠的史書，史上的關係，也不見得是史資料年代所屬的關係，但

至少它讓我們瞭解合繡緞之善所善的關係。張元的合繡緞著述近於美

的，細節繁複無盡；條條理的關係則成立為其理，多變其無文，以於見形，

這是由合繡緞的合繡緞所屬的精美合繡緞，張元明稱之為「合繡緞」，深受喜

愛。

除了繁複的關係以外，明末清初的合繡緞還有著誰有關的關係，山水或花鳥等紛紛累

的，這些大師或在著著上找到對應，或取材於文學故事，本展展出的合繡緞

人物合繡緞，便以張元明著筆的《桃花源記》為題材，是文人所嚮往的

理想鄉國，因為合繡緞的關係，此社會有這様的合繡緞出現，如專門繡

善合繡緞的香，以及過去著合繡緞的合繡緞，居覺所直。

長物志》有關的盛行，又詩中有含含義含含義的心得，使合繡緞再度感起，使

張元書有載的《宋金博物館》著述，張元書有載的《宋金博物館》記事中所著的

合繡緞，而這樣的合繡緞多有完全依合繡緞所屬，如此次所展出的吳式合繡

緞，將合繡緞蹈到帽微，而又忘不掉上清州時期有足顯，創上點全滿，

至少之中算著尊貴，成為清市所著的關係，於此以外，合繡緞的功能

與文化多化，可作或書畫或室內的用途，如此次所展出的複雜或複雜的

筆等等，促成或長，合繡緞等上所帶的關係；或或為之勝中所著的合繡緞

於合繡緞所展現禮物的關係，而合繡緞也再度受到重視。在好友或從小相

相賴，清話時而之後，點上一塊香，泡上一杯茶，可消消食，增添情趣。雖

然此香僅是現今存，隨著作時色皆可以合繡緞的關係增添，也講出了許多

顏色中的關係，就如有人合繡緞不斷的陳述與，現在也有新的顯著合繡緞

我們的使用更加方便，讓這個延續了上千多年的合繡緞再度復興起來。
A ROCK CRYSTAL CIRCULAR BOX AND COVER

Han Dynasty

The cylindrical box and cover standing on a short foot ring, with sloping shoulders and straight sides. Finely carved on the cover with a central medallion of four spade-shaped lappets circling a central C-scroll stamen. The medallion encircled by raised bands and a band of dense C-scrolls is divided by four taotie masks. The shoulder is incised with twelve S-scrolls, above further dense C-scrolls on the sides. The box is carved with interlocking scrolls. The translucent stone with a fine, soft polish.

6 cm. diam.; 4 cm. high

Provenance:
Private UK collection purchased in London in the 1960’s

Rock crystal has a hardness of 7 on the Mohs scale, much harder than nephrite (around 5 to 5.6) and is therefore a more difficult material to carve, which is probably why it is very rare to find carved crystal pieces attributable to the early periods of Chinese history. However, a large crystal cup now in the Hangzhou History Museum measuring 15.4 cm. high was excavated in a Warring States tomb in Shuang village near Hangzhou (fig. 6), proving that as early as the Zhou period the Chinese had already mastered the techniques to work this material.

The current box is very similar in design to a jade box dated to the Western Han period excavated in Chaohu, now in the Chaohu Municipal Museum (fig. 7), with a similar cross shaped floral element on the cover and the unusual unmatched borders on the sides. Boxes like these were found to store incense, such as the red-lacquer example from the tomb of the King of Nanyue, which contained granules of resin-based incense when excavated (resin-based incense found in the lacquer box in the western chamber of the tomb of King of Nanyue, fig. 8).

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A BRONZE CENSER, BOSHANLU

Han Dynasty 漢

The censer has a deep rounded bowl standing on a stem-foot issued from four spade-shaped petals above a circular drip dish. The high domed cover is pierced with scrolling clouds, below a bird-shaped finial. The bronze has an attractive malachite patina with areas of lapis encrustations.

20.5 cm. high

A similar censer is in the collection of the Hakutsuru Museum, Kobe (fig. 9)
A GILT-BRONZE HAND-HELD CENSER, QUEWEILU

7th Century, Sui-Early Tang Dynasty

The circular censer with a flat base and sharply up-turned, flaring sides. It is cast with two horned mythical beasts around the exterior and stands on a stem foot of lotus petals. Its long, flat handle is attached to the side of the censer with a circular stud, and curving around the outline, rejoins the censer at the base. The side joint of the handle and the censer applied with a pierced ruyi-shaped panel by two studs, and the end of the handle decorated with a counter weight in the shape of a lion on a lotus pedestal. The surface of the handle incised with a phoenix and a wild goose amongst floral scrolls and below clouds. The censer is gilt overall except for the interior.

43 cm. long; 12 cm. high
Although quèweilù, or ‘magpie-tail censer’, of this early form are often seen depicted on Buddhist sculptures and murals from the Northern Wei onwards, there are very few extant examples. An inlaid lacquered bronze example is in the Shosoin, Nara (fig. 15); while another bronze example is in the Hakutsuru Museum, Kobe (fig. 14); with a 3rd silver example excavated from the Famen Temple hoard (fig. 11). The current censer is more closely related to the Hakutsuru example, both sharing very similar proportions and design. The current censer probably originally had a liner, like the Hakutsuru example, which has now been lost.

However, several characteristics on the current censer suggest it is of an earlier date. The lion counter-weight on the current censer is modelled more softly, which is typical of Sui, rather than the pronounced musculature of the Tang pieces. The heart-shaped lobs of the censer are also typical of Sui, rather than the pronounced musculature of the Tang pieces. The heart-shaped lobs of the censer are also typical of Sui, rather than the pronounced musculature of the Tang pieces. The heart-shaped lobs of the censer are also typical of Sui, rather than the pronounced musculature of the Tang pieces.

A very similar quèweilù is carried by a Bodhisattva on a wall painting in cave 159 in Dunhuang (fig. 16); dating to the mid-Tang; and another example with a cover is depicted in cave 220 (fig. 13).
A WHITE-GLAZED CIRCULAR OIL BOX AND COVER

Five Dynasties &代

The box and cover of cylindrical shape with sloping shoulders standing on a slightly convex base. The cover is gently lobed on the top, and covered all over with a translucent glaze on the exterior. The box is glazed overall except the base and the mouth rim, exposing the white stoneware body.

12.5 cm. diam.; 5.5 cm. high

Provenance:
Bluets, London

The shape of the current box and cover suggests that it is copying a metalwork prototype. The inside rim of the box is probably reduced, as it would have curled further inwards to form a secure container for oil, so that the content does not spill in transport, as can be seen on a white-glazed box and cover in the Shijiazhuang Museum (fig. 17).

Vessels like this box were made to contain fragrant oils for the lady's dressing table and were essential for the elaborate coiffures of the Court Ladies of the period.

In Jia Xian's *Qimin Yaoshu* (Essential Techniques for the Peasantry) written in the 6th century, records a recipe for facial moisturiser in the fihl juan:

“Use cow marrow (if short, mix with some cow fat; or if lacking, use cow fat alone); soak cloves and patchouli in warm wine (use same method as when soaking orchids), cook as if making water-plantain soup, also add mugwort for colour; pass through cotton, and store in ceramic or lacquer vessels.”

It is noted by Tang Shenwei in his *Zhenglei Bencao* (Classified Materia Medica) that:

Jasmine...its smell is spicy and not poisonous, steam it with oil to obtain its essence, and use it as moisturiser for face or hair, can cure dryness and scent the skin.

此盒的造型是模仿同期的金属器而作，盒的内部口径本应更宽才利于内壁油，后经换减，这一盒方为流装作内壁花油，而口微可以防止油沾到衣物上。名贵

The box is glazed overall except the base and the mouth rim, exposing the white stoneware body.

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Bluets, London

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此盒的造型是模仿同期的金属器而作，盒的内部口径本应更宽才利于内壁油，后经换减，这一盒方为流装作内壁花油，而口微可以防止油沾到衣物上。名贵

The box is glazed overall except the base and the mouth rim, exposing the white stoneware body.

4

Provenance:
Bluets, London

The shape of the current box and cover suggests that it is copying a metalwork prototype. The inside rim of the box is probably reduced, as it would have curled further inwards to form a secure container for oil, so that the content does not spill in transport, as can be seen on a white-glazed box and cover in the Shijiazhuang Museum (fig. 17).

Vessels like this box were made to contain fragrant oils for the lady's dressing table and were essential for the elaborate coiffures of the Court Ladies of the period.

In Jia Xian's *Qimin Yaoshu* (Essential Techniques for the Peasantry) written in the 6th century, records a recipe for facial moisturiser in the fihl juan:

“Use cow marrow (if short, mix with some cow fat; or if lacking, use cow fat alone); soak cloves and patchouli in warm wine (use same method as when soaking orchids), cook as if making water-plantain soup, also add mugwort for colour; pass through cotton, and store in ceramic or lacquer vessels.”

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The box is glazed overall except the base and the mouth rim, exposing the white stoneware body.
LUOHAN AND INCENSE WOOD

Song Dynasty

Ink on silk

Two collector’s seals: Xishi Zhi Bao, Junsheng Xinshang

20.5 cm. x 20.5 cm. / 48.5 cm. x 31.5 cm. with frame

Provenance:
The Del Drago collection, lot 138, Christie’s London, 16th Dec 1958 (as Kun Can)
The painting is part of a larger hand-scroll. It depicts a luohan seated on a mat of animal skin in royal ease with his left leg raised and right leg resting on the floor. His left arm is holding a plate of fruit and his right arm is held in pran mudra, the mudra of increased vitality. His wispy hair is gathered behind a diadem, and he is wearing a tasseled robe above his foreign attire, with fitted sleeves and heeled shoes. His face is gently shaded to suggest shadow and light. Curiously, in front of him is a circular drum-shaped vessel with a domed base, in which a large piece of dried wood is standing.

The painting is in archaic style, recalling that of Tang period figural paintings, especially with its use of shading on the facial features, such as that seen on the hand-scroll painting Six Hermits in the Palace Museum, Beijing, attributed to Lu Tao of the Tang dynasty. However, whereas in wall paintings of the Tang period the shading is applied as a wash, here the shading is done with very fine lines.

The drum-shaped vessel in the painting is of Song style, very similar to the drum-shaped censer dated to Southern Song period excavated in Canton (fig. 19). Similarly, the vessel in his hand is similar to the ceramics of the Northern Song.

It is likely that this is a Song version of an earlier painting, where the figures have been faithfully copied, while the accompanying elements are given a contemporary flavour, as is often the case in later copies of earlier paintings. Another painting in the Palace Museum, attributed to Lu Lengjia of the Tang dynasty, shows a foreigner carrying a piece of rock-like object to offer to a luohan (fig. 18). Traditionally this object has been called a qishi, or ‘fantastic rock’, but with the Buddhist theme of the painting, it seems equally likely to be a piece of incense wood, as is represented in the current painting.

The use of chenxiangmu as not only incense but something to appreciate visually is recorded in literature from as early as the Northern Song period. Su Shi, for example, gave a chenxiang mountain to his brother Su Che as a birthday present, accompanied by a composition An Ode to a Chenxiang Mountain to console him, who was in exile in Leizhou at the time (in modern day Guangdong province). Su Shi himself was in exile in Danzhou (in modern day Hainan Island), which in the Song dynasty was one of the places that produced chenxiang. He wrote in the prose:

Fig. 18

Fig. 19

...this little swell of a mountain, like an island so pleasant,
Like Qingling and Huashan touching the sky
It resembles the Lone Peak piercing the clouds.
Sente to celebrate your birthday:
It carries my snubborn sincerity.
You might feel the days are wasting away;
But see it as resting home to a rude paddy.
I hope you place this on your desk,
And steep your kerchiefs with its scent.
Maybe not so strong and forceful,
Its lingering smell lasts evermore!

The subtle yet evocative scene of the 'chenxiang' mountain, its solicty and unyielding natural form, were for Su Shi qualities that were worthy of praise. At the low ebb of his brother's life and career, he hoped the incense would bolster Su Che's morals, and encourage him to be unwavering and retain his integrity. In the same way jade was bestowed with five virtues in the Confucian tradition, Su Shi not only enjoyed the scent of chenxiang, but delighted in the visual and allegorical connotations it provided.
A WHITE-GLAZED LION-FORM CENSER AND COVER

With associated contemporary bronze stand

Five Dynasties

The censer is formed by an open lotus flower with three registers of overlapping petals and stands on a high, domed stem-base. The cover is shaped as a lion seated on its haunches, its left leg resting on a brocade ball. Its head looks straight ahead with mouth agape exposing its teeth, and wearing a tassled band around its neck. The censer is glazed overall in a translucent glaze except for the base and the interior, exposing the white stoneware body. The contemporary bronze stand has a lobed top and six cabriole legs joined by shaped aprons and crossing stretchers.

The censer 18 cm. high

Provenance:
The censer
Carl Kempe Collection, Sweden, sold Sotheby's London, 14 May 2008, lot 210

Exhibited:
The censer
Chinese Gold, Silver and Porcelain. The Kempe Collection, Asia House Gallery, New York, 1971, cat. No. 90, and exhibition touring United States and Shown also at nine other museums

Literature:
The censer
Bo Gyllensvärd, Chinese Ceramics in the Carl Kempe Collection, Stockholm, 1964, pl. 346
The World's Great Collections. Oriental Ceramics, vol. 8, Tokyo, 1982, pl. 64

Fig. 20
The censer can be compared to two earlier pottery lion censers dated to the late Tang with similar treatments to the lions, one excavated in the Huangbaoyao kilns (fig. 20), the other in the collection of Gongyao Ceramics Museum (fig. 21). The facial features of the Gongyao example, with its pricked ears, upright snout and a tassled band around its neck, are especially close to those on this lion censer.

Most depictions of lion censers show them displayed on elaborate stands with cabriole legs. Although this bronze stand may not originally have been used for this purpose, its construction and proportions allow us to visualise how this piece was originally presented. The grouping closely resembles the lion censer with a very similar lion base depicted sitting on a stand, in the Song painting *Weimo Yanjiao Tu* (*The Discourse of Vimalakirti*) in the collection of Palace Museum, Beijing (fig. 22).
A CYLINDRICAL TRIPOD STONE CENSER AND COVER

Northern Song Dynasty 元宋

The censer and cover of perfectly cylindrical shape, and carved from a single piece of grey stone. The censer is standing on three short bracket feet, and the cover pierced with a wān symbol.

9.3 cm. diam.; 7.3 cm. high

This charming censer is skilfully carved so that when the cover is placed properly the natural patterns in the stone align perfectly. An identical censer excavated from a Northern Song tomb in Shaanxi, Lantian (fig. 23). From the inscription tablet found in the tomb, we know that it belong to the Lü family, one of whose members, Lü Dālin, was the author of the illustrated catalogue of archaic bronzes, *Kaogu tu*. It is evident then, that censers like this would have adorned the desks of a scholar. Apart from Lü Dālin, Song poet Chen Yuyi for example, also used a stone censer in his studio to accompany him in the cold winter days:

The many ideals I had in my youth,
Have all but vanished with age.
Shaming myself in on the Winter Solstice,
I add prayer beads as the day lengthens.
The northerly wind takes no holiday
In chasing the wild goose south.
How lucky then is my official's hat,
To get a seven-day vigil in the hut!
Deep in the stone censer incense burns,
As I finger moodily through a shelf of books.
All I can do is to entertain myself;
I am too embarrassed to write to Zhang Fu!*

*Zhang Fu was an official in the Three Kingdoms period, who worked so hard he never took time off to see his family. He was chastised by his superior, Su Xuan, for not setting a good example to the people in leading a balanced work and family life.

Fig. 23
A LARGE BRONZE TRIPOD CENSER

Song/Yuan Dynasty, 12-14th Century, The Wood Stand And Cover 18th Century

The censer has a deep rounded bowl rising from three conical legs to a flat rim and two upright bracket handles. It is decorated with a band of *taotie* masks with central flanges; followed by a band of archaistic dragons and downward blades. The legs are cast with vertical flanges above two raised bands and cold worked with *taotie* masks. The bronze has a deep dark brown patina. The censer is fitted with an elaborate wood stand carved with a dragon emerging from clouds, and a cover with further clouds and bats.

The censer 30 cm. diam.; 41.5 cm. high
The form and design of this impressive bronze censer follow fairly closely an archaic prototype, a Shang dynasty triple-footed bronze ding, illustrated both in the Kaogu tu (fig. 25) compiled by Li Daolin in 1902, and in Xuanhe Bogu Tu (fig. 24), compiled in 1123 by Wang Fu under the command of the Emperor Huizong. When it was illustrated in the Kaogu tu, it was in a private collection (Wen family of Henan), and was reputedly excavated in Zhanjia of Puju (at the border of Henan and Shandong provinces). It had a two-character inscription, but only the first character, yi, was deciphered; therefore it was called Yiding. The Emperor Huizong must have known this piece and thought it of sufficient importance, to acquire it for the Imperial collection. When it was illustrated again in the Xuanhe Bogu Tu, the author was able to read the second character of the inscription, ma, and it was given the name Yimaoding.

It is highly likely that the making of the current censer was influenced by the publication of these two works, and it was made to copy this important archaic bronze example. The shape and decoration of the two are very close, only that the current censer is much larger in size (the Yimaoding being around 15 cm. high). To commission such a large bronze would have been extremely expensive, and only possible by a very wealthy individual, a temple or by official command. Although the use of incense proliferated during the Sui period, bronze censers, especially when of such large size, rarely survive, as the metal was often recycled for other uses. In the mid 12th century, for example, China experienced a metal shortage and high inflation, and many bronze vessels were melted down to meet the high demand of coinage both domestic and abroad. Casting of copper and bronze was prohibited, and in 1154 the emperor himself sent 1,500 bronze objects from the Palace to the imperial mint to meet the demand. Only certain items were spared, including those for temple use.

Today, ceramic censers from the Song and Yuan period are held in higher regard than their bronze counterparts by collectors, but they were much cheaper to produce during their time, and were much more common. Bronze censers not only were more suitable for burning incense, a censer made after the design of an archaic example would have been more in keeping with a Confucian scholar’s ideal, satisfying his pursuit of antiquity.

The dating of the current censer is consistent with the thermoluminescence test, with two samples taken from the core material inside the legs, certificate no. C11084.
A CELADON AND GREY JADE CENSER, *GUI*

Early Ming Dynasty 早明

The censer is shaped as a rounded bowl standing on a short foot ring and has two C scroll handles sprouting from dragon heads. The bowl is carved with ribs below a raised band and between key-frets around the mouth and foot rims. The softly polished pale green stone turns grey around the lower part of the body and is mottled with light brown inclusions.

18.5 cm. wide; 7.5 cm. high

Although jade censers of this type are often dated to the late Ming, the balanced proportion, meticulous carving and fine polish on the current censer suggest it can be attributed to an earlier date. Compare an early Ming jade cup in the Palace Museum, Beijing, with a very similar dragon handle to this censer (Fig. 26); and another jade gui censer dated to the Ming period, also in the Palace Collection (Fig. 27).
A BRONZE INCENSE-STICK HOLDER

Yuan Dynasty, 14th Century

The cylindrical parfumier has four cabriole legs and is raised on an elaborate drum-shaped stand. It has two chilong handles on either side of the mouth rim, and is pierced around the body with four ruyi-shaped panels, each applied with a Daoist Immortal riding on an attribute amidst breaking waves.

22 cm. high

This incense-stick holder was probably one of a pair, which combines to illustrate the story Baxian guohai, ‘The Eight Daoist Immortals Crossing the Sea’. Compare an incense-stick holder from the Clague Collection (fig. 28) dated to the Song/Yuan dynasty which shares similar basic shape to the current example. However, the more fanciful design and the subject matter, popularised by Yuan jingju dramas, point to a later, Yuan, dating for the current piece.
A BLUE AND WHITE CYLINDRICAL TRIPOD CENSER

Ming Dynasty, Second Half 15th Century

The cylindrical censer stands on three short cabriole legs and has slightly flaring sides. It is painted around the exterior in a soft blue tone with peony blooms borne on curled leafy stems, below a raised band and floral scrolls.

27 cm. diam.; 20 cm. high

Provenance:
Okano Shigezou collection

Literature:
Mingchu Taoci Tujian, Tokyo, 1948, no. 24

The form of the current censer derives from an archaic bronze prototype, see. Compare a blue and white bowl in the Topkapi Museum, Istanbul, which has similar peony scrolls (fig. 29) painted around the exterior.
A CARVED BAMBOO PARFUMIER

Ming Dynasty, 16th Century

The parfumier finely pierced and carved around the body with a lady holding a mirror on a terraced garden beside two boy attendants, one holding a ruyi sceptre, the other a set of sheng pipes, below a gnarled pine tree and perforated rockwork. The bamboo has a dark honey tone with some charred areas; the ends with horn stoppers.

17.5 cm. high

Parfumiers are made to contain stick incense, and seem to have been popular from the Ming period onwards. The carving on the current censer recalls the style of a bamboo brushpot in the Shanghai Museum (fig. 30) made by the late Ming carver Shen Dasheng.
AN OBLONG COPPER HAND WARMER

Engraved Zhang Mingqi Zhi Four-Character Mark, Late Ming/Early Qing Dynasty (16th/17th century)

The hand warmer has gently rounded sides rising from a recessed base and is fitted with an over-head bracket handle. Its slightly domed cover is finely pierced with seven hexafoil floral motifs amidst a honeycomb lattice ground. The metal has a reddish brown tone. The four-character mark is engraved in the centre of the base.

14.5 cm. wide; 11 cm. deep; 8.5 cm. high

Zhang Mingqi was famed for making hand warmers, and was active in the late Ming/early Qing period. Much like Jiang Qianli’s lacquer or Hu Wenming’s bronze censers, many later pieces are inscribed with Zhang’s name. The meticulously pierced cover and its pleasing, gentle form, however, show the warmer to have been made in the 16th/17th century, and very possibly made by Zhang Mingqi.

Hand warmers were not only used for warming hands; sometimes incense was also added to them for a quick air-freshening effect. In Dream of the Red Chamber, Jia Baoyu paid a surprise visit to his maid Xiren at her parents’ house. She was embarrassed at the unkempt surroundings in her house so she quickly put two pieces of ‘prunus blossom’ incense in her hand warmer and handed it to Baoyu.
A BRONZE TRIPOD CENSER

![Image](image1.png)

Cast Yutang, Qiqouan. Mark, 17th Century 十七世紀

The censer has a shallow rounded bowl and rises from three conical feet to a straight rim. It is cast with two scroll handles to the sides. The bronze has a golden brown tone with ‘snowflake’ speckles. The seal-script mark is cold-worked in the centre of the base in a square.

10.5 cm. diam.; 8 cm. high

A very similar censer but with loose rings attached to the handles is illustrated in the Xuande Yiqi Tupu (fig. 31)

A BRONZE FOLIATE-FORM TRIPOD CENSER

![Image](image2.png)

Cast Xuande Four-Character Mark, 16th Century 明 十六世紀

The censer has a shallow rounded bowl cast in nine lobes and stands on three splayed feet. Its waisted neck is cast with two upright lug handles. The bronze has an attractive dark brown tone with speckles of induced oxidation. The seal-script mark is cast in the centre of the base in a rectangle.

19.5 cm. wide; 12.5 cm. high

A very similar censer is illustrated in the Xuande Yiqi Tupu, and is called an ‘orange segment censer’ (fig. 32), because the lobed design resembles those of orange segments. The mark on the current censer is especially finely cast. Bronze censers like the current censer and no. 14 in the exhibition are normally called Xuanlu, or ‘Xuande’ censers, because they take their designs from one of the examples illustrated in the Xuande Yiqi Tupu, and often carry a Xuande mark. It is alleged in this text that in the 3rd year of Xuande reign the Emperor received a tribute of 39,000 jin of high quality molten bronze from the King of Siam, and he ordered to have 3,000 bronze incense burners cast from this material in the form of archaic bronzes as well as Song ceramics from the Ruan, Ge, Guan and Chai kilns. The text claims Lü Zhen, a minister in the Xuande period, as its author, and is written in the manner of an official document. It was not published until after 1600, the text claims, because it was meant for the Imperial eye only, not for public consumption. However, many scholars have questioned the authenticity of this text. Firstly, no records of such significant tribute can be found in the official documents. Secondly, although the text clearly documents the intended locations of these censers, none of the 3,000 can be located, all having vanished without trace. Some other discrepancies in the text, all in all, lead to some scholars pondering whether the text is a clever late Ming fabrication. Still, many collectors believe it to be genuine, and throughout the generations have collected these unquestionably fine and elegant bronzes, which were made with high quality huangtong, ‘yellow bronze’, a copper alloy containing between 29–35% of zinc, giving it a characteristic yellowish colour.

A CYLINDRICAL BRONZE CENSER AND STAND

![Image](image3.png)

Chunzhu Lou. Mark, 18th Century 十八世紀

The cylindrical censer stands on a short foot ring and is cast with two F-shaped handles to the sides. It has an original circular bronze tripod stand with low flat feet and beaded aprons. The bronze is heavily cast and has an even brown patina. The mark is cold-worked in the centre of the base in a rectangle.

16.3 cm. wide; 7 cm. high
AN IVORY TOOL VASE

Late Ming Period

Carved from a whole piece of ivory, the vase has an elongated mallet shape rising from a recessed base to a slender straight neck. It has a cross section composed of three bracket lobes. The ivory of a warm honey-coloured patina with attractive dark and brown crackles.

10 cm. high

The vase would have formed a set with a censer and a box, and held tools like a small shovel and a spoon, designed for abrasuring incense, or ‘seal incense’. ‘Abrasioning’ is a type of composite incense that comes in powder form, contained in the incense box. The user first of all prepares the incense burner with fine ash, patting it flat with the shovel. He then places an incense mould – like a stencil – on top of the ash, and spoons the incense in the mould to form a continuous shape, often in seal-script characters. When the mould is lifted the seal-impression-like incense is ready for burning.
A BLUE AND WHITE CYLINDRICAL TRIPOD CENSER

Ming Dynasty, Second Half 15th Century

The censer has slightly bulbous body standing on three short cabriole legs. It is freely painted around the exterior with egrets and geese amongst water reeds, below a band of ruyi-heads around the mouth rim. The glaze has a bluish tinge stopping around the base exposing the orange-burned body.

9 cm. diam.; 7 cm. high

Provenance:
Edith & Brodie Lodge Collection

Exhibited:
*Ming Blue and White*, Oriental Ceramics Society, London, 1946, no. 80
AN ARCHAISTIC BRONZE CENSER, ZUN
late Ming period, 17th Century, Incised ‘Hu Wenming Zhi’ Mark 十七世紀
The censer formed as a deep rounded bowl standing on a slightly spreading foot ring. It is cast and cold worked with two mask handles and with a band of dissolved tao-tie masks around the exterior centreing on two vertical flanges, the gently flaring neck is decorated with two animal masks, each flanked by two kui dragons, all reserved on a ring-punched ground. The bronze has a reddish-brown tone. 8.5 cm. high

Hu Wenming is perhaps the most famous bronze caster in the late Ming period, who was active in the Huating area in Zhejiang in the Jiajing and Wanli period. His bronze vessels more commonly feature highly decorated surfaces through casting, hammering, parcel-gilding and inlaying. Their fanciful nature has caused Wen Zhenheng to declare them vulgar and not suitable for a scholar’s studio. However, this elegant censer is remarkably restrained in its aesthetic and its air of antiquity conforms perfectly to a scholar’s taste, which would have undoubtedly met the approval of even the most fastidious of scholars such as Wen Zhenheng himself.

Hu Wenming是晚明嘉慶最負盛名的鍼匠，活動在江蘇嘉慶（今常熟）一帶。他的銅器以造型精美的薩金、金銀、套銀等裝飾，且鶴飾的風格，使得文震亨在著作中將之列為各鍼精銅的一部分。銅器的藝術風格獨樹一格，不為藝術家所靜賞。文震亨在著作中稱之為‘嘉慶銅器中的罕見佳器’，並為文震亨所靜賞。
A BULBOUS BLUE AND WHITE CENSER

Chongzhen/Shunzhi Period, Circa 1640

The censer has deep rounded sides rising from a short foot ring to a slightly flaring rim. It is painted around the exterior in shades of bright cobalt blue with a fisherman in conversation with an elderly man holding a walking staff, the two being observed by a matriarch and two ladies behind doors slightly ajar and surrounded by little boys, while his fishing boat is moored on the riverbank, carrying a boy attendant. The landscape is decorated with craggy rockworks and mountains, dotted with blossoming trees, and divided on one side with vaporous clouds.

21.5 cm. diam.

Provenance:
C. and G. Wingfield Digby Collection
S. Marchant and Son, London

Literature:

The Peach Blossom Spring was composed by the poet Tao Yuanming in 421 AD. It recounts the story of a fisherman who, when fishing one day, lost his bearing and passed through a forest of blossoming peach trees to discover a utopia. He later tried to return to it via the same route but could not find it again. It became one of the most well known allegorical works in Chinese literature and inspired countless poems and paintings.

Compare a censer of the same form painted with The Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove, illustrated by Julia Curtis in Chinese Porcelains of the Seventeenth Century (fig. 33). The style of painting on the Seven Sages censer is very close to the current censer, and is probably by the same hand.
A WOOD TOOL VASE

Qing Dynasty

Carved from a whole piece of fragrant wood to resemble a section of gnarled tree trunk, with burls and corrosions naturally rendered, with a recessed base and a conforming cavity. The heavy wood densely striated with areas of dark resin.

12 cm. high
A GILT-SPLASHED BRONZE CENSER, GUI

Twelve-Character Seal Mark. 18th Century  宋中期

Based on an archaic prototype, the deeply rounded censer standing on a high, stepped base, cast with two animal-head scroll handles to the sides. Crisply decorated on the front and back with two large taotie masks, their eyebrows reserved on a band of fine leiwen ground, and above with a band of dragon scrolls reserved on leiwen around the base. The bronze with a brown patina and embellished around the exterior and on the base with irregular splashes of brilliant gold. The mark cold-worked in the centre of the base in a square, reading, Xuande Erniu Zhou Xijia Xiubuang Zhuren Zhi, ‘made by Zhou Xijia, the Master of Slender Bamboos, in the second year of the Xuande reign’.  

43 cm. wide; 23.5 cm. high

Provenance:  
Formerly in a private English Collection, Hereford
An identical example to the present censer and with the same inscription at the base, possibly its pair, was sold in Christie’s New York, 22 March 1999, lot 76 (fig. 36). Compare also the example in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (fig. 35), which is smaller and without the gilt-splash decoration, but with essentially the same design. All three of these censers follow very closely an archaic prototype, very probably the piece illustrated in the *Xiqing Gujian* (fig. 34), an illustrated catalogue of archaic bronzes in the Imperial collection compiled under the command of the Qianlong Emperor. The base of the current censer was fitted after the casting, a feature frequently found on 18th century bronzes.

*Fig. 34*

*Fig. 35*

*Fig. 36*
A NATURALLY FORMED SECTION OF PENGLAIXIANG

The impressively sized incense wood of an irregular, tree-fungus-like shape. On one side it has the dull natural skin of a decayed tree, while on the other, the amber-coloured wood is striated with dark resin, and the surface is dramatically undulating like a volcanic rock, radiating from the centre and exuding a subtle but distinctive spicy aroma.

28 cm. high

Penglai xiang is one of the most prized varieties amongst the many members of the chenxiang family. Fan Chengda (1126–1193), a well-known connoisseur of incense, wrote in his Guihai Yuheng zhi (Accounts on the Landscapes of Guihai) a chapter discussing various types of chenxiang. One of the varieties he mentioned was Penglai xiang:

Penglai xiang is also produced in Hainan. It is basically chenxiang that has not completely formed. Normally it comes in pieces like a small straw hat or a large mushroom, sometimes reaching to one or two chi in diameter, and is very firm and solid. Its colour and appearance are all similar to chenxiang, but it floats in water. Remove the wooden skin on its back, then it will sink.

The appearance of the current chenxiang section fits the description perfectly, and is no doubt what Fan referred to as Penglai xiang, one of the most popular type of chenxiang for Song scholars.

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A BRONZE TRIPOD CENSER

Six-Character Xuande Mark, 17th/18th Century

The censer has a deep rounded bowl and stands on three cabriole legs, below two upright lug handles on the rim. It is decorated around the exterior with five dragon roundels. The legs are decorated with *ruyi* lappets. The bronze has a dark brown patina. The mark is cold-worked in the centre of the base within a rectangle.

24 cm. wide; 24.5 cm. high
A SANDAL WOOD PILLOW

Qing Dynasty

The pillow is of curved cylindrical shape, and is carved on the base with a long inscription in zhuanshu, above an oblong panel with a further inscription in kaishu.

29 cm. high

Provenance:
The William Lipton Collection

The inscription on the current pillow is a copy of that on the Han dynasty Dafengge Stele, now in Peixian in Jiangsu province. Dafengge (The ode to the Great Wind) was supposed to be the song Liu Bang composed on his way back to Chang’ an after he defeated the King of Huainan, Ying Bu. The stele is now missing its bottom half, but a Yuan copy was made in 1306, and the two steles are now displayed side by side.
A GUAN-TYPE-GLAZED TRIPOD CENSER

19th Century 仿官釉三足香爐

The censer has a shallow rounded body standing on three conical feet and two upright lug handles. It is covered overall in a bluish beige glaze profusely crackled in dark and golden crackles except around the base, exposing the orange-burned porcelain body.

12 cm. wide; 8 cm. high

AN AUBERGINE-GLAZED TRIPOD CENSER

18th Century 紫卍字香爐

The censer has a rounded body standing on three short conical legs, rising to a short neck and an everted, flat rim. The base of the censer has three indentation lines meeting at the centre, dividing the base into three sections, following a bronze li prototype. It is glazed overall in a deep aubergine colour except the tip of the legs, exposing the orange-burnt porcelain body.

15 cm. wide; 8.5 cm. high
A BAITONG HAND WARMER

18th/19th Century, Four-Character Yuyuanxing Zhi Seal Mark

The oval-shaped hand warmer with rounded sides and an overhead bracket handle in imitation of bamboo. Its cover meticulously pierced to imitate wicker work. The metal with an attractive silver patina.

12 cm. diam.; 8 cm. high
A GILT-COPPER CIRCULAR INCENSE BOX AND COVER

18th Century 十八世纪

The cover has a domed shape and is decorated on the top with a foliate panel enclosing two magpies and a blossoming prunus tree against a ring-punched ground, all surrounded by scrolling foliage. The box stands on a foot ring and is similarly decorated with scrolling foliage. Both the box and the cover are covered overall in rich gilding.

6 cm. diam.
A CIRCULAR CARVED CINNABAR LACQUER BOX AND COVER

Qianlong Period, Incised Four-Character Mark

The circular box and cover are of a gently domed shape. Finely carved, when put side by side, to depict a continuous scene of two scholars having a picnic under a blossoming peach tree, both looking towards their left as a young boy attendant kneeling beside rockworks and under trailing clouds and the sun in the sky above.

The interior lacquered black with a partially defaced reign mark incised on the inside of the cover.

4 cm. diam.
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