

Later Chinese Bronzes

Littleton & Hennessy Asian Art

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INTRODUCTION

We have great pleasure in presenting this small, select group of later Chinese bronzes during 'Asian Art in London 2020'. Spanning the Song through Qing dynasties, this group is the product of many years of collecting as each has their own character and story.

During this challenging time for the world we pause to look back through pieces drawn from different periods of post-archaic Chinese history and hope these simple yet vigorous examples of bronze craftsmanship provide a little respite for the viewer.

This November we hope to welcome our friends from the collector, dealer and auction worlds and look forward to 2021 with renewed hope for a happier, healthier and more tolerant world.

Richard Littleton

James Hennessy

Mark Slaats





1 AN ARCHAISTIC BRONZE VASE, 'FANGHU'
Song/Yuan dynasty

銅如意雲耳方壺（宋/元）

Dimensions: 18cm high

Provenance: An English private collection, acquired in the 1990s and 2000s



The vase of rectangular form, the pear-shaped body supported on a splayed foot, with a slightly everted mouth rim. The body cast on each side in low relief with four registers separated by vertical ridges, decorated with different archaistic designs, including 'leiwen', linked-coin motifs and overlapping cicada lappets. The second register flanked by a pair of handles in the form of 'ruyi'-shaped cloud swirls.

Compare a similar example with tubular arrow handles from the Collection of Ulrich Hausmann, Sotheby's Hong Kong, 8 October 2014, lot 3393.



2 A LARGE BRONZE TRIPOD CENSER

Song/Yuan Dynasty, 12-14th century,
the wood stand and cover 18th century

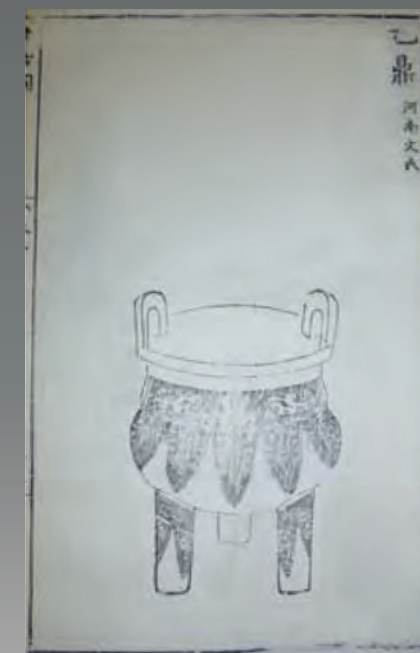
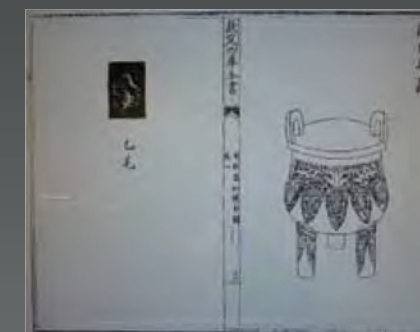
銅沖天耳鼎式爐（宋/元，12-14世紀，底座及蓋18世紀）

Dimensions: the censer 30 cm. diam.; 41.5 cm. high

Provenance: A private Asian collection

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 form and design of this impressive bronze censer follow fairly closely an archaic prototype, a Shang dynasty tripod bronze 'ding', illustrated both in the 'Kaogu tu' (fig. 1), compiled by Lü Dalin in 1092, and in 'Xuanhe bogu Tu' (fig. 2), 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 reportedly excavated in Zhanjia of Pujun (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, 'mao', 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 Song 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 examples 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. C110j84.



3 AN ARCHAISTIC HEXAGONAL BRONZE VASE

Yuan dynasty

銅開光錦紋如意云耳六方壺（元）

Dimensions: 20.5cm high

Provenance: An English private collection, acquired in the 1990s and 2000s

The vase is of hexagonal form, with each side separated into four quadrants. The pear-shaped body rising from a short foot to a slightly waisted neck. The body finely cast with archaistic motifs, including overlapping cicada lappets on the neck and various diaper patterns, flanked by a pair of closed 'ruyi' cloud handles. The exterior of the vase has been patinated to simulate lacquer.

Compare a closely related vase in the Victoria & Albert Museum, Museum Number 179-1899 illustrated in Rose Kerr, 'The Evolution of Bronze Style in the Jin, Yuan and Early Ming Dynasties', *Oriental Art*, Vol. XXVIII, no. 2, 1982, p. 150, fig. 10. For a similar example with a slightly wider neck and higher foot, see: The Collection of Ulrich Hausmann, Sotheby's Hong Kong, 8 October 2014, lot 3392.





4 AN ARCHAISTIC HEXAGONAL BRONZE
DRAGON-HANDLED VASE

Song/Yuan dynasty

銅開光錦紋龍首活環耳六方壺 (宋/元)

Dimensions: 18cm high

Provenance: An English private collection, acquired in the 1990s and 2000s



The vase with twin applied dragon-head and loose ring handles. The pear-shaped body rising to a waisted neck and supported by a splayed boot. The six sides of the vase separated in five sections decorated in relief with archaistic geometric patterns and waves.



5 A LARGE ARCHAISTIC BRONZE ARROW-HANDLED 'HU' VASE
Song/Yuan dynasty

銅饕餮紋貫耳壺（宋/元）

Dimensions: 30cm high

Provenance: An English private collection, acquired in the 1990s and 2000s

The vase is robustly cast in a slight pear-shape, the body rising above a high, splayed foot, the waisted neck with a subtly everted rim. The neck is flanked by a pair of plain tubular handles. The central band around the neck decorated with 'taotie' masks in high relief on a 'leiwen' ground. The base with an archaic inscription within a recessed panel. The surface of the vase has a deep brown patina with traces of red lacquer and malachite incrustations.



6 **AN ARCHAISTIC HEXAGONAL BRONZE VASE**
Yuan dynasty

銅開光錦紋如意雲耳六方壺（元）

Dimensions: 17.5cm high

Provenance: An English private collection, acquired in the 1990s and 2000s



The sides of the hexagonal-shaped vase are separated by slightly protruding vertical ridges, each side separated into five sections. The pear-shaped body rising from a short foot to a slightly waisted neck. The body finely cast with floral, linked coin and 'leiwen' motifs, swastikas and crashing waves, the waisted neck flanked by a pair of elaborate 'ruyi' cloud and leaf-like handles. The foot finely cast with archaic scrolls. The body of the vase with traces of red lacquer.





7 AN ARCHAISTIC BRONZE DRAGON-HANDLED VASE
Yuan dynasty

銅龍首活環耳壺（元）

Dimensions: 22.5cm high

Provenance: An English private collection, acquired in the 1990s and 2000s

The vase finely cast with a pear-shaped body rising from a high, splayed foot to an elegantly waisted neck with flared mouth rim. The neck elaborately cast with twin applied dragon-head and loose ring handles. The body with an understated, simplistic design, decorated with one narrow band of waves, thereby emphasising the shape of the vase and its rich, reddish-brown patina. The foot decorated with a similar continuous wave motif.

Compare a vase of similar shape with elephant-handles from the Collection of Ulrich Hausmann, Sotheby's Hong Kong, 8 October 2014, lot 3329.



8 A BRONZE BURLWOOD-IMITATION 'RUYI' SCEPTRE

Late Ming/Early Qing dynasty, 17th century

銅仿瘿木如意（明末/清初，17世紀）

Dimensions: 33.6 cm long

Provenance: - An English private collection, acquired in New York, 2000
- Sotheby's Hong Kong, Water, Pine and Stone Retreat
Collection – Objects of Contemplation (8 April 2010), lot 1730

The bronze sceptre superbly cast to imitate a naturally formed stalk of 'lingzhi', with clusters of irregular knots and perforations. The gnarled branch with attendant 'lingzhi' heads. The surface of the sceptre has a warm, deep brown patina with golden undertones and patches of russet brown. The underside of the sceptre inscribed with an apocryphal Xuande mark.





9 AN ARCHAISTIC BRONZE 'CHILONG'-HANDLED VASE, HU
Yuan/Early Ming dynasty

銅螭龍首耳壺（元/明初）

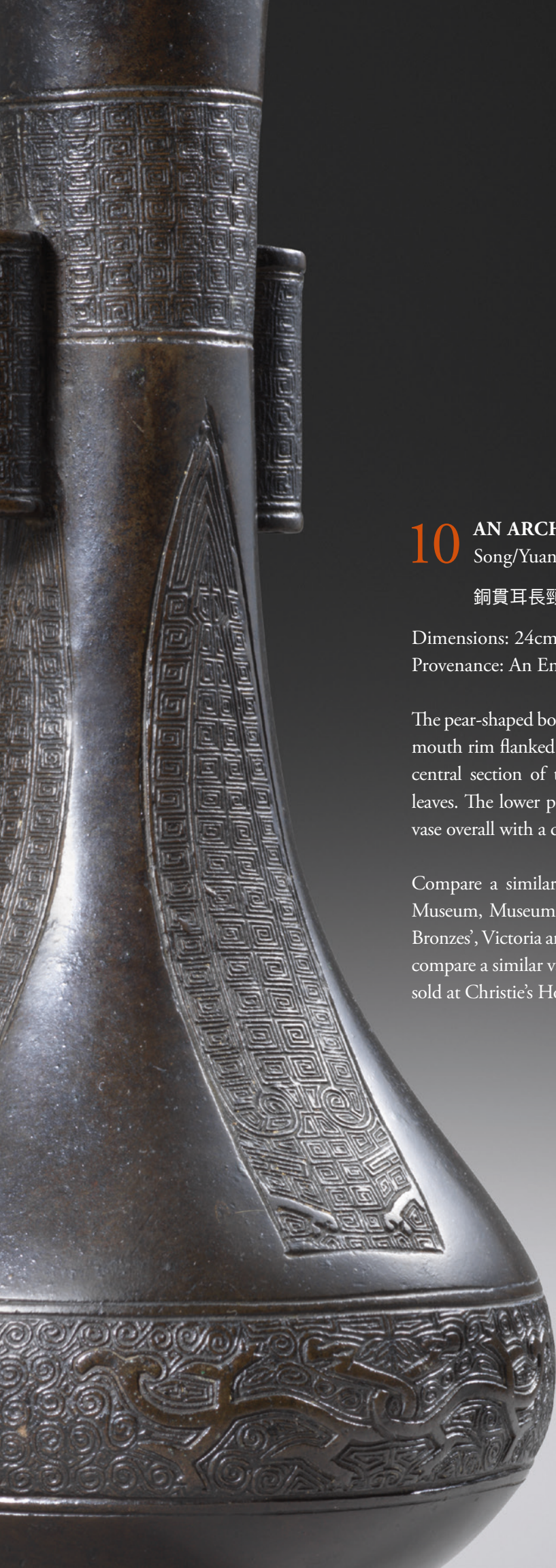
Dimensions: 28cm high

Provenance: An English private collection, acquired in the 1990s and 2000s

The vase of archaistic 'hu' form, the tall neck finely cast with 'ruyi' clouds against a 'leiwen' ground and rolling mountains, flanked by a pair of 'Chilong' handles. The bulbous part of the body cast in high relief with intertwined snake-like 'kui' dragons and 'ruyi' clouds on a plain background. The splayed foot decorated with carved waves.

Compare a slightly smaller vase of similar shape from the Collection of Ulrich Hausmann, Sotheby's Hong Kong, 8 October 2014, lot 3340. Another vase of similar shape is illustrated in Michael Goedhuis - Colnaghi Oriental, 'Chinese and Japanese Bronzes, A.D. 1100-1900', no. 41, 1989.





10 AN ARCHAISTIC BRONZE ARROW-HANDLED VASE

Song/Yuan dynasty

銅貫耳長頸瓶 (宋/元)

Dimensions: 24cm high

Provenance: An English private collection, acquired in the 1990s and 2000s

The pear-shaped body supported on a low foot, the long, narrow neck with inverted mouth rim flanked by a pair of tubular handles, both with a 'leiwen' pattern. The central section of the vase decorated with four evenly spaced elongated cicada leaves. The lower part of the body cast with a band of stylised 'kui' dragons. The vase overall with a deep, dark patina.

Compare a similar vase with looped dragon handles in the Victoria & Albert Museum, Museum Number 5403-1901, illustrated in Rose Kerr, 'Later Chinese Bronzes', Victoria and Albert Museum - Far Eastern Series, 1990, p. 25, fig. 14. Also compare a similar vase of slightly flatter shape from the Quek Kiok Lee Collection, sold at Christie's Hong Kong, The Pavilion Sale, 9 October 2019, lot 212.





**11 A SILVER-INLAID BRONZE TRIPOD CENSER
WITH WOOD STAND AND COVER**

Song/Yuan dynasty

銅錯銀沖天耳鼎式蓋爐（宋/元）

Dimensions: 21.2cm high

Provenance: A private Irish collection

The censer is cast in archaistic 'liding' form, with a deep rounded body below a galleried mouth rim, flanked by a pair of loop handles and supported on three tubular legs. The censer is finely inlaid with silver wire, the body decorated with fierce archaistic 'taotie' masks, all on a 'leiwen' ground. The legs inlaid with cicada leaves below further 'leiwen' motifs.

The censer has a later wood cover, with carnelian finial, and wood stand.

Compare a similar 'liding' with inlay in gold and silver from the Collection of Ulrich Hausmann, Sotheby's Hong Kong, 8 October 2014, lot 3335.

The result of Oxford Authentication Ltd. thermoluminescence test no. C119g91, dated 20 June 2019, is consistent with the dating of this lot.





12 AN ARCHAISTIC BRONZE 'DRAGON' HANDLED 'HU' VASE
Song/Yuan dynasty

銅龍耳壺（宋/元）

Dimensions: 27cm high

Provenance: An English private collection, acquired in the 1990s and 2000s

The vase of archaistic 'hu' form, the neck finely cast with horizontal sections of archaistic decoration against a 'leiwen' ground and bands of intertwined scrolls, flanked by a pair of dragons with long, wide tongues. The bulbous body divided into separate sections by two bands in high relief. The high foot with intertwined 'kui' dragons on a 'leiwen' diaper ground. The vase has a rich, dark patina with traces of red lacquer.



13 A FINE SILVER-INLAID CAST-IRON 'RUYI' SCEPTRE

Qing dynasty, Qianlong period

鐵錯銀如意（清 乾隆）

Dimensions: 46.5cm long

Provenance: David Kidd Collection (1926-1996),
Kyoto, Japan

The 'lingzhi' shaped head decorated in silver with two five-clawed dragons amongst 'ruiyi' clouds contesting a central flaming pearl. The front of the arched shaft inlaid with eight quatrefoil cartouches containing the attributes of the Eight Daoist Immortals' on a 'wan' diaper ground. The back with a twelve-character silver-inlaid inscription in archaic script. The end of the shaft ending in a double silver-inlaid 'ruiyi'.

Compare a near identical example with a Qianlong mark from the Ji Zhen Zhai Collection, sold at Christie's Hong, 9 July 2020, lot 2906. Another example was exhibited at 'Asian Art in London 2007' and is published in 'Littleton & Hennessy Asian Art - Arts for the Scholar' no. 2, p. 6-7.





**14 A FINELY CAST ARCHAISTIC BRONZE
ARROW-HANDLED VASE**

Song/Yuan dynasty

銅鳥紋貫耳長頸瓶（宋/元）

Dimensions: 21cm high

Provenance: An English private collection, acquired in the 1990s and 2000s



The pear-shaped body supported on a slightly splayed foot, rising to a cylindrical neck with an inverted mouth rim. The top section of the neck decorated with cicada leaves, the central section finely cast with elaborate wave decoration and flanked by a pair of tubular lug handles. The lower part of the body cast with two pairs of stylised phoenix on a 'leiwen' ground. The foot also bordered by a 'leiwen' band.

Compare a bronze incense burner, 'liding', with a similar band of phoenix from the Collection of Ulrich Hausmann, Sotheby's Hong Kong, 8 October 2014, lot 3319.

15 A RIBBED RECTANGULAR BRONZE CENSER
Xuande mark, 16th/17th century

銅楞紋方爐（宣德款，16/17世紀）

Dimensions: 12.5cm wide, 11cm height, 9.5cm depth

Provenance: A private English collection

The central section of the censer cast with vertical ribs below a stepped rim with two upright handles of intertwined shape. The body raised on four short cylindrical legs. The base is cast with an apocryphal Xuande mark.



**16 AN ARCHAISTIC SILVER AND GOLD-INLAID
BRONZE VESSEL, 'FANGHU'**

Qing Dynasty, 18th century

銅錯金銀方壺（清，18世紀）

Dimensions: 46.9cm high

Provenance: Christie's London, 6 November 2007, lot 111

The rectangular vessel of slightly pear-shaped form, cast in high relief with a wide band of pendent blades around the neck, the upper part of the body decorated with stylised phoenix above cicada leaves. The foot of the vessel with a band of confronting dragons. The corners are cast with fierce, hooked flanges. The vessel is finely inlaid overall with gold and silver, further emphasising the archaistic design, the plain sections of the body with a deep brown patina.



17 A MINIATURE ARCHAISTIC BRONZE VESSEL, 'GUI'
Qing dynasty, 18th century

銅袖珍簋式爐（清，18世紀）

Dimensions: 9.8cm wide

Provenance:

- Martindale Chinese Art - Summer Exhibition 2016
- A private English collection

The foot and neck of the delicately shaped vessel decorated with bands of stylised animal figures on a 'leiwen' ground, the central section of the compressed globular body cast with vertical ribs, flanked by a pair of loop handles with animal masks.

The vertical ribbed design on this bronze vessel is based on ritual food vessels dating to the Western Zhou Dynasty. Compare a larger 'Gui', dated to the Early Western Zhou Dynasty from the Michael Michaels Collection of Early Chinese Art, Christie's London, 7 November 2017, lot 176. Compare an archaistic bronze vessel of similar size sold at Bonhams New York, Chinese Works of Art and Paintings, 12 September 2016, lot 8011.



18 AN ARCHAISTIC PEAR-SHAPED BRONZE VASE
Yuan/Early Ming dynasty

銅夔龍紋瓶（元/明初）

Dimensions: 20.5cm high

Provenance: From the Collection of Charles George (1879-1966)

The bronze pear-shaped vase with an elongated neck rising to a slightly flared mouth rim, supported on a splayed foot. The lower section of the neck decorated with delicately cast cicada lappets. The two registers on the bulbous body divided by undecorated bands, each register cast in relief with archaistic motifs, including a continuous scroll, concentric circles and stylised 'kui' dragons. The bronze has a rich, deep brown patina.

Compare a vase with similar casting and design from the Collection of Ulrich Hausmann, Sotheby's Hong Kong, 8 October 2014, lot 3340.





19 A LARGE BRONZE DRAGON-HANDLED 'HU' VASE
Yuan/Early Ming dynasty

銅龍首活環耳壺（元/明初）

Dimensions: 30cm high

Provenance:

- Robert McPherson Antiques (London), no. 3700
- An English private collection, acquired in the 1990s and 2000s

The pear-shaped body rising above a stepped splayed foot, with a slender, waisted neck and a plain mouth rim. The central section of the neck bordered with a 'leiwen' ground band, flanked by a pair of dragon loop handles with rings. The narrow section of the base decorated with a further band of 'leiwen' motifs.

Compare a similar vase from the Collection of Ulrich Hausmann, Sotheby's Hong Kong, 8 October 2014, lot 3302.



THE CHRONOLOGY OF CHINA

中國歷代年表

新石器時代 NEOLITHIC PERIOD c.6500-1700 BC	南朝 SOUTHERN DYNASTIES 北朝 NORTHERN DYNASTIES 420-589 南朝 Southern Dynasties 劉宋 Liu Song 420-479 南齊 Southern Qi 479-502 梁 Liang 502-557 陳 Chen 557-589 北朝 Northern Dynasties 北魏 Northern Wei 386-534 東魏 Eastern Wei 534-550 西魏 Western Wei 535-556 北齊 Northern Qi 550-577 北周 Northern Zhou 557-581 隋 SUI DYNASTY 581-618 唐 TANG DYNASTY 618-907 五代 FIVE DYNASTIES 907-960 後梁 Later Liang 907-923 後唐 Later Tang 923-936 後晉 Later Jin 936-946 後漢 Later Han 947-950 後周 Later Zhou 951-960 遼 LIAO DYNASTY 907-1125 宋 SONG DYNASTY 960-1279 北宋 Northern Song 960-1127 南宋 Southern Song 1127-1279 金 JIN DYNASTY 1115-1234 元 YUAN DYNASTY 1279-1368	明 MING DYNASTY 1368-1644 洪武 Hongwu 1368-1398 建文 Jianwen 1399-1402 永樂 Yongle 1403-1425 洪熙 Hongxi 1425 宣德 Xuande 1426-1435 正統 Zhengtong 1436-1449 景泰 Jingtai 1450-1456 天順 Tianshun 1457-1464 成化 Chenghua 1465-1487 弘治 Hongzhi 1488-1505 正德 Zhengde 1506-1521 嘉靖 Jiajing 1522-1566 隆慶 Longqing 1567-1572 萬曆 Wanli 1573-1619 泰昌 Taichang 1620 天啟 Tianqi 1621-1627 崇禎 Chongzhen 1628-1644 清 QING DYNASTY 1644-1911 順治 Shunzhi 1644-1661 康熙 Kangxi 1662-1722 雍正 Yongzheng 1723-1735 乾隆 Qianlong 1736-1795 嘉慶 Jiaqing 1796-1820 道光 Daoguang 1821-1850 咸豐 Xianfeng 1851-1861 同治 Tongzhi 1862-1874 光緒 Guangxu 1875-1908 宣統 Xuantong 1909-1911 中華民國 REPUBLIC OF CHINA 1912- 洪憲 HONGXIAN (YUAN SHIKAI) 1915-1916 中華人民共和國 PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA 1949-
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