

# Art of China

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**Standing Buddha.**  
Wei dynasty. 477 A.D.  
Bronze.

## Beginning of Chinese Civilization

Chinese civilization, which began some 2000 years before the birth of Christ, can lay claim to being the oldest continuous culture in the world. The Chinese are credited for such accomplishments as **inventing the compass, paper, porcelain, and printing with carved wood blocks.**

## The Arrival of Buddhism during the Han Dynasty

Near the end of the Han dynasty (206 B.C.) the religion of **Buddhism**, which originated in **India** came to **China**. This religion had a great impact on the way artists approached their work.

**Buddhism** offered comfort to the weary and hope for an eternity of peace in the next world. It recognized the existence of people who had attained a state of enlightenment. It also recognized those who had either postponed death or made the decision to return to the world for the purpose of bringing comfort and offering guidance to the living. Such a person was known as a **Bodhisattva** or **Buddha-to-be**. With a serene smile he extends his hands in a sign of welcome and a promise of peace. Unlike ancient Greek sculptors who recognized the beauty of the human body and tried to capture that beauty in their sculptures, Chinese sculptors did not regard the body as a thing of beauty.

## T'ang Dynasty Sculpture

Most of the sculpture produced during the T'sang period was religious. Believers in **Buddhism**, looking forward to a peaceful life in the next world, commissioned thousands of sculptures of Buddha.

Tomb sculptures were also created to honour the dead. Such as the horse, a symbol of wealth and loyalty to the emperor.



**Glazed horse, 618-907,  
8th century, Earthenware.**



**Classical  
Greek  
Spear  
bearer  
sculpture  
440 B.C.**

1. Explain the difference between how the Chinese and Greek sculptors viewed the human body. (1)

2. Make an outline sketch of the Chinese Standing Buddha sculpture and then compare it with the Classical Greek Spear bearer sculpture and list 2 stylistic differences between the works. (3)

Stylistic Differences:

1.

2.

3. What the horse symbolizes in Chinese culture? (1)

# Art of China: Scroll Painting

In addition to a few murals on the walls of burial chambers, the earliest Chinese paintings that have survived to the present are of two kinds: **hanging scrolls** and **horizontal hand scrolls**.

A **scroll** is a long roll of **illustrated parchment** or **silk**. Scrolls were designed to be rolled and carefully stored away. When their owners were in the mood for quiet reflection, the scrolls were taken from the shelf just as we might choose a book to read. The viewer unravelled the scroll and gazed at no more than 24 inches or so at a time.



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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What is a scroll painting and how is it used? (2)

## T'ang Hand scroll

Horses were highly prized by the Chinese. The emperor Ming Huang was said to own over forty thousand. This hand scroll shows one of his favourite horses rearing against the tether that binds it to a post. One of the chief measures of excellence in Chinese painting throughout its long history is the quality of the **brush line**.

Han Kan. Hand scroll: Night-Shining White.  
T'sang dynasty, c. A.D. 742-56. Ink on paper.



2. What was considered the primary measure of excellence in Chinese painting? (1)

3. How has Han Kan created a sense of movement in the Handscroll: Night-Shining White? (1)

# Art of China: The Importance of Meditation in Painting

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**Buddhism** places great emphasis on **meditation**. It had a great impact on Chinese art. Chinese artists found that long periods of time spent in **meditation** enabled them to recognize the beauty of a leaf, a tree, a rock, or a mountain. The landscape was a primary interest in Chinese painting.

**Kuo Hsi. Clearing Autumn Skies Over Mountains and Valleys. Date unknown. Section of hand scroll, ink and colours on silk. 26cm. (cut work)**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What influence did meditation have on the creation of Chinese landscape painting? (1)

2. Look at Kuo Hsi's Clearing Autumn Skies Over Mountains and Valleys hand scroll, what kind of mood/feeling do you get from the depiction of mountains and valleys and why? (2)

Painters like **Kuo Hsi** claimed that the value of landscape painting lay in its capacity to make viewers feel as if they were really in the place pictured.



# Art of China: Landscape Painting

Unlike Western paintings, Chinese art makes use of different **vanishing points**. In perspective drawing, a vanishing point is the point at which receding parallel lines seem to converge. Thus, as you unroll a hand scroll, you may find that the **perspective shifts**. The result is a stronger sensation that you are indeed traveling through the work.

The contemplation of nature is the theme of a painting by **Chao Meng-fu**. These works were not done to decorate a wall or tell a dramatic story but to inspire the viewer to have the same deep thoughts like the artist when they created the work.



**Chao Meng-fu. Twin Pines, Level Distance. early 14th century. Hand scroll, ink on paper.**



**French Western Landscape, Corot's Hay Cart Along a River from 1865-70.**

3. Compare Kuo Hsi's Clearing Autumn Skies Over Mountains and Valleys with Camille Corot's Hay Cart Along a River. List two stylistic differences between the works (2)

1.

2.

4. Why is it important for the viewer to learn what not to look for in a painting like Chao Meng-fu's Twin Pines? (1)

# Art of China: The Production of Porcelain

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During the **Sung period**, the production of porcelain ware perfected earlier was carried to new heights.

**Porcelain**, a fine grained, high-quality form of china, is made primarily from a white clay known as **kaolin**. This clay is relatively rare and can be found in only a few locations in China, Europe and England and North America. After a **vessel** is made from this clay and others that give it a more workable quality, it is fired in a **kiln** to a high temperature. It is then coated with a **glaze** containing **feldspar** and fired again. The result is a vessel with a hard translucent surface of great beauty.

## The Art of the Ming Dynasty

The use of stunning cobalt blue glaze was produced during the Ming dynasty and was regarded as one of the major accomplishments in the development of Chinese porcelain.



**Pair of Vases. Mei-p'ing. Ming dynasty. 1426-35. Porcelain with under glaze blue decoration.**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What is porcelain made of? (1)

2. What important major accomplishment in the development of Chinese porcelain is evident on the pair of vases (Mei-p'ing) from the Ming dynasty of 1426-35? (1)

3. How does the artist create a sense of movement on the pair of vases (Mei-p'ing) from the Ming dynasty of 1426-35? (1)