

Exhibition „In the Realm of the Dragon. Chinese Art in the Collections of the National Museum in Krakow”

The exhibition is an encounter with the most valuable and fascinating examples of Chinese arts and crafts, collected by the National Museum in Krakow. It is the first time in eighty years that we have presented such a diverse selection encompassing so many areas.

The National Museum in Krakow boasts one of the best collections of Far Eastern Art in Poland. In addition to the well-known selection of objects representing Japanese art, it comprises relics of Chinese culture. Today, eighty years after the first exhibition held in the Sukiennice, we can once again extend an invitation to become acquainted with the remarkable works of art and crafts created by masters in ancient China.

We hope that this exhibition will bring this remote and still little-known, yet very interesting culture a little closer- says the Director of the National Museum Zofia Gołubiew.

The collection, which currently consists of nearly three thousand objects, was created thanks to the donations from over thirty benefactors and was supplemented by successive purchases. From its very beginning - the first decade of the twentieth century – it was developed by museum curators, though it is particularly indebted to Professor Julian Ignacy Nowak (1865-1946). In 1946, he bequeathed the Museum his extensive collection of Chinese ceramics of great historical and artistic value, which allows the viewers to trace the history of this field of craftsmanship from the Han Dynasty (206 BC - 220 AD) to the end of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). What is worth emphasizing is that before his donation to the National Museum in Krakow, objects from Professor Julian Nowak's collection had been exhibited in 1934 in Krakow's Sukiennice and in 1935-1936 at *The International Exhibition of Chinese Art* in London.

Ceramics constitute the focal point of the exhibition, placing in the spotlight a period of nearly 2000 years from China's rich and much longer history. Vessels with iridescent surface, dating back to approximately 2nd century BC, are the oldest of the presented objects. The space of exceptional significance at the exhibition – the one devoted to the sacred sphere – consists of valuable funerary figurines from the Tang Dynasty, sculptures and other works created under the influence of the Buddhist philosophical system, such as the portraits of sixteen arhats – the Buddha's disciples.

The ceramics from the Song and Yuan Dynasties introduce us to the world of subtle, sophisticated shapes and colours, whereas the vessels glazed in Longquan or Yaozhou attest to the extensive range of the nuances of green, called *celadon* in Europe. Tea bowls, in turn, draw attention with their decorative glazing juxtaposed with mottled tortoiseshell or the “hare's fur” pattern. Ming Dynasty's products are associated with blue and white porcelain.

The exhibition also presents extremely rare examples of ceramics demonstrating China's openness to other cultures, such as stoneware with multicoloured glaze, which was created under the influence of fascination with Persian decorative art dating back to the Sasanian Dynasty (224-651).

Qing Dynasty Ceramics constitute a world extremely rich in innovation and technological ingenuity, fascinating monochrome and flamed glazes as well as decorative forms of white vessels. This state of affairs was significantly influenced by the emperors – connoisseurs, patrons and art experts - such as Kangxi (1654-1722) and Qianlong (1736-1795).

Painting - one of the most valued arts in China – is the element that binds the journey in time and space. The selected paintings are presented both in the classical form of hanging scrolls and as less common horizontal compositions.

A special section at the exhibition is dedicated to clothing and accessories. Visitors have the opportunity to come across a unique and intriguingly saturated palette of colours. While admiring the variety of robe forms and styles, ornaments and embroidery, they will also find references to the ethnic complexity, customs, and finally – to the tastes of the Chinese society in the Qing Dynasty.

In the Realm of the Dragon, one can encounter a great variety of themes which contribute to the creation of a coherent story about one of the oldest cultures in the world, presenting its aesthetics, tradition and symbolism.

Exhibition curators: Beata Pacana, Beata Romanowicz

text by Beata Romanowicz, Beata Pacana