A Sanpan Shan Chariot Ornament and the Xiangrui Design in Western Han Art

Wu Hung
Harvard University

In 1965 the cultural relics team of Hebei province in the People's Republic of China excavated three large tombs at Sanpan Shan, Dingxian county. With the advance of the Cultural Revolution in the following year, however, the unearthed materials along with the relevant records were left unattended in a provincial storeroom to gather dust. They remained virtually unknown to all but the small number of persons directly concerned with their handling until ten years later, when one of the artifacts from these tombs, a chariot ornament, was selected for exhibition in the United States. This was the first time an item from these excavations was shown to the public; in the words of Professor Li Xueqin, "this particular work of art won the admiration of many during exhibitions both in China and abroad" (Fig. 1a).

In my opinion, this chariot ornament is significant for the study of Chinese art history in two respects. First, as Shi Shuqing has pointed out, it demonstrates outstanding skill in gold and silver inlay of bronze. It could be said that in the chariot ornament this special technique reached its apex following a long development that began in the Spring and Autumn period. Second, this piece epitomizes a popular Han dynasty art motif that may be called the xiangrui (good omen) design. This art motif has been discussed by various scholars, such as Laufer and Hayasi, who have each focused on Eastern Han variations of the Western Han xiangrui design. To my knowledge, however, no one has studied the Western Han design itself. This article will discuss the date and subject matter of the Sanpan Shan chariot ornament, what the xiangrui design signified to the people of that time, how this design related to their customs and ideas, and this motif's artistic realization.

The Date and the Owner
This chariot ornament belonged to a set of chariot fittings and was used to join the handle of a canopy to a carriage. From pertinent archaeological evidence and relevant historical documents, we can derive a fairly clear idea of the date and place of its manufacture, as well as of the status of its owner.

The three tombs (M120, M121, and M122, according to the designation of the Hebei Museum) are located side by side from east to west, facing south. High earthen tumuli were built on top of each grave, giving the place its name, Sanpan Shan, which means "three circular mounds." Each tomb has a wooden chamber in a vertical pit that is further divided into parts, the front containing funerary objects, and the back, the body of the deceased. Since this kind of wooden chamber tomb, typical of the Western Han in Hebei province, was later replaced by the brick tomb during the Eastern Han period, this feature of the Sanpan Shan tombs provides a valuable clue to the probable date of their construction.

Lunyu, the capital of the ancient Zhongshan feudalatory state during the Han dynasty, was located in Dingxian county. According to Li Daoyuan's Shuijing Zhu, four of the princes of this kingdom were buried in the vicinity of the capital. Archaeological finds confirm his report. Three tombs, all located in suburbs of Dingxian, have been identified as the tombs of Prince Huali (d. 55 B.C.), Prince Jian (d. A.D. 90), and Prince Mu (d. A.D. 174) of the Zhongshan. In tomb M120 of the Sanpan Shan tombs, two seals were found bearing the names of Liu Jiaojun and Liu Zhanshi. In tomb M121 was found a piece of stamped clay that bears the royal title Zhong-shan. Another tomb, M122, yielded two bronze vessels
inscribed with the characters Zhongshan Neifu (the royal house of Zhongshan). Liu was the family name of the Han royal family, of which Zhongshan was one lineage. These finds indicate that these three tombs belonged to the royal family of Zhongshan state. For identifying the persons buried in these tombs, a passage in the Shuijing Zhu provides a valuable record: “The Ko River continues to flow eastward and runs north of Baitu. The tomb of Prince Kang, son of Prince Qing, lies to the south. It can be identified as a group of three tombs built side by side.” The ancient Ko River, now known as the Tang River, runs north of the Sanpan Shan tombs. This correlation has led the author of Dingxian Zhi to believe that the Sanpan Shan tombs that lie east of the present Baitu village belonged to Prince Kang’s family. From tomb M122, which is the largest of the three, came the most elaborate chariot fittings, including the piece discussed in this article. These facts may suggest that this was the tomb of Prince Kang himself, who was buried in 90 B.C. The other tombs may be those of his wife and son.

So far eight of the graves of five generations of Zhongshan rulers have been found in Hebei province. As shown by the contents of the graves, when a Zhongshan prince died, a large number of chariots was often buried together with him, including a highly elaborate one. From historical records and from the study of the tombs of the Zhongshan princes, we know that this type of elaborate chariot was a status symbol of the royal prince. This means that when a former prince’s royal chariot was buried with its owner, another one had to be made for his successor. The particular ornament under consideration here belongs to a set of extremely elaborate chariot fittings from the tomb of Prince Kang. Its date can be estimated to fall between 110 and 90 B.C., the years of Prince Kang’s rule.

Differing from all other chariot ornaments found in the tombs of Zhongshan princes, the decor of the Sanpan Shan piece is a complete pictorial composition, skillfully inlaid with gold, silver, turquoise, and gems, that successfully creates mountains, plants, and 125 human and animal figures in four scenes. This kind of inlaid pictorial work requires costly materials, highly skillful cutting and inlay techniques, and an extraordinary amount of meticulous work. To date we know of only one similar chariot ornament, in the collection of Tokyo Art Institute (Fig. 2). Since the decor of these two works has almost identical motifs and shares certain artistic characteristics, and since no comparable artifacts have been found in the earlier or later graves of Zhongshan princes (though these graves contain some of the finest inlaid work of the times), I would venture the opinion that this kind of inlaid pictorial decoration was mainly used in the period around 100 B.C., as indicated by the date of the tomb at Sanpan Shan belonging to Prince Kang of Zhongshan state.

**THE XIANGRUI DESIGN**

The motif of the decor on the Sanpan Shan ornament has been called the hunting design. Similar decorations have also been called animal designs. It is my belief that these appellations are not completely accurate because even though the designs consist of animals and hunters, their meaning differs from that of the hunting designs of the Warring States period. Because a new idea is expressed, I will refer to this motif as xiangrui.

Xiangrui refer to certain phenomena that the people of the Han dynasty interpreted as expressions of the will of Heaven. For example, if beautiful birds of multicolored feathers came to rest on the palace roof, if the emperor found a qilin (unicorn) during a hunt, or if one stalk of wheat had many ears of grain, it was understood to mean that Heaven had bestowed its blessing on the emperor’s rule. Good omens indicated that the ruling emperor was enlightened and governed his country well. In contrast to the auspicious xiangrui the Han people considered other natural phenomena, such as eclipses or big gusts of wind, to represent Heaven’s dissatisfaction. This view of natural phenomena already existed before the Qin dynasty, especially during the Eastern Zhou. But at that time evil omens were more frequently mentioned. The Spring and Autumn Annals (Chun Qiu) records solar eclipses and earthquakes...
Fig. 1(a). Chariot ornament, bronze inlaid with gold and silver. Excavated from tomb M122 at Dingxian, Hebei province, in 1965.

Fig. 1(b–e). The same. Drawings of decoration. Photograph and drawings reprinted with permission from Zonghua Renmin Gongheguo chutu wenwu zhanlan: zhanpin xuanji (Beijing: Wen Wu Press, 1973), pl. 85.
Fig. 1(f). The same. Drawings of decoration, with central motifs encircled.

Fig. 1(g). The same. Drawings of decoration, with mountain forms reinforced in black. Fig. 1(f, g) reprinted with permission from *A Selection of Archaeological Finds of the People’s Republic of China* (Beijing: Wen Wu Press, 1976), pl. 66.
about a hundred times as signs of bad political conditions. By Han times, perhaps due to the effort to legitimize the newly unified state and its ruling power, xiangrui abounded.

The political system and moral principles of the Han rested on the basic concept of the mandate of Heaven (tian ming). When he received Heaven's mandate, an emperor became sovereign and father of all earth under Heaven. Thereafter, the emperor could give orders to ministers, fathers could give orders to children, men to women, and so forth until the entire social structure was completed. The first link in this social structure, that between Heaven and Emperor, was the most important and the most difficult to justify. As Heaven was believed to communicate with people on earth through xiangrui, the appearances of xiangrui seemed to cement the first link in the chain of relationships. As Dong Zhongshu, the most prominent official theorist of the Han dynasty, stated, "When a King is about to rise to power, beautiful signs of good omen will appear first."
Dong thus called xiangrui "tablets bearing the heavenly mandate."

The first important xiangrui of the Han dynasty was the appearance of a yellow dragon in Chengjiad county during the rule of Emperor Wen. From then on, the yellow dragon was taken as the symbol of the Han imperial court. Every ruler after Emperor Wen saw many xiangrui that "legitimized" his reign. Appearances of xiangrui reached their height during the rule of Emperor Wu, Emperor Xuan, and Wang Mang. According to historical records, the important xiangrui of Emperor Wu's rule included a white unicorn-like beast, flying birds, flying horses, red wild geese, the mystical plant glossy ganoderma, tripods, stones from the sky, mysterious rays of light, rainbows, falling stars, cloudless thunder, and so on. During Emperor Xuan's reign, phoenixes appeared fifty times in different places, as well as did white storks, five-colored geese, godly lights, red-breasted bluebirds, immortal sparrows, a white tiger, and a yellow dragon; a bronze figure grew hair; dew was sweet; and so on. During Wang Mang's time, all kinds of xiangrui appeared — more than 700 omens within a five-year period.

Only if we examine such ideas prevalent in that period can we understand the meaning of the designs of this chariot ornament. This ornament is divided evenly into four registers. In each register one figure, or group of figures, forms the center of the composition. Each of these four centers occupies a different quarter of the circular surface of the tube and thus forms a spiral (see Fig. 1f). This was a conscious arrangement intended to enable people to enjoy the ornament from every side. In the upper register (Fig. 1b) the yellow dragon is in the exact center of the design, although it appears on the right in the reproduction, pictured to the right of the ornament. The yellow dragon was the most important xiangrui because in the Han xiangrui conception the dragon symbolized the emperor, and yellow was the chosen color of the Han dynasty. The appearance of a yellow dragon signified the manifest destiny and essential vitality of the Han dynasty. Following the dragon (whose tail appears at the left of the reproduction) is a white elephant. On its back sit three naked drivers. Their nakedness and their snail-shaped coiffures may indicate that they represent minorities from the south. During Emperor Wu's time, a small country to the southwest once paid tribute to the Han Emperor by sending an elephant. When the elephant arrived it was considered to be an important xiangrui. As a poem dedicated to the Emperor himself reveals:

The elephant, white like jade
Came here from the west.
It eats the morning dew
From Heaven . . .
And drinks luminescent spring water.
This elephant reveals Heaven's will,
Bringing happiness to human beings . . .

Above the yellow dragon flies a winged horse, another xiangrui. Emperor Wu was said to have seen winged horses twice. He wrote poems about each of these xiangrui in praise of Heaven's mandate. In the first he wrote:

Tai-yii has given the horse of Heaven—
Moist with crimson sweat, foaming russet spittle
A will and spirit wondrous and strange—
Trampling the floating clouds, darkened it races aloft.
And oh this horse has leapt ten thousand li,
And with what can it be paired?
The dragon its companion.

At the end of the second he wrote:

. . . The horse of Heaven has come
Open the far gates
Raise up my body
I go to Kunlun.

The horse of Heaven has come
Mediator for the dragon
He travels to the gates of Heaven
And looks on the Terrace of Jade.

These poems corroboreate the fuller meaning in the scene portrayed in the first register. Besides the dragon, elephant, and heavenly horse, there are also flying rabbits and an immortal driver of a chariot drawn by two deer. All were recorded in ancient texts as good omens.

The second register depicts a hunting episode. In a lush mountain valley, an archer turns back to take aim at a tiger. The meaning of this scene will be discussed below in the Hunting Scene section of this article.
The significance of the third register, which we now consider, centers on a crane with its head turned back, followed by a camel (see Fig. 1d). The white crane is one of the most auspicious of birds. It is recorded in history that once when Emperor Wu was making sacrifices to Heaven he saw a flock of white cranes. He issued a special edict recognizing white cranes as sacred beings sent down by Heaven. Thus the role of the white crane in this register may be interpreted as identical to that of the yellow dragon in the first register. They both represent the will of Heaven and lead the other auspicious beasts sent from tributary states to the emperor. In this register there is also a weird beast with a bird’s head and leopard’s tail, called a feilian. This beast was also an important xiangrui worshiped during the Han dynasty.

The fourth register features a huge bird, its wings outspread, singing, while all the surrounding birds and animals dance to its song (see Fig. 1e). During the Han dynasty, this bird, called the weifeng (the majestic feng bird), was believed to have divine powers. Just as the dragon was regarded as the king of all beasts, so was the feng king of all birds. It was generally thought that a weifeng always appeared accompanied by an escort of innumerable animals and birds. “The feng is eight feet high and followed by flocks of iridescent birds” and “birds numbering 10,000 line up facing the feng from the four directions.” These notations in Han records could be about the scene in this register.

Shi Shuqing points out the relationship between these scenes and the description of royal hunting in Sima Xiangru’s Changyang Fu. In my opinion, these scenes are more like illustrations of the ceremonial songs attributed to Emperor Wu:

In autumn
The flying dragon soars to Heaven
The auspicious elephant brings good fortune . . .

Li Qi commented: “This means that the barbarians sent envoys to pay respect and tribute.”

The elephant, white like jade
 Came here from the West . . .
The red wild geese
 Came thick and fast . . .

Yan Shigu commented: “This means that the emperor acquired elephant chariots from the West and red wild geese from the East—what an abundance of xiangrui!”

Similar descriptions can be found in many other lines. The only difference between the scenes described in these royal ceremonial songs and on the Sanpan Shan chariot ornament lies in the medium—the same wishes of the rulers are expressed by words in one and by pictures in the other.

I must explain that xiangrui were neither the product of the fanciful imagination of a few emperors, nor were they merely part of a policy calculated to manipulate popular beliefs. A strong belief in xiangrui was widespread. In 110 B.C., Emperor Wu went to offer a sacrifice to Mount Tai. He ordered special animals and rare birds from far away to be brought to Mount Tai. It seemed as if many good omens had come to Mount Tai from Heaven. At the time, Sima Tan, the Grand Historian of Emperor Wu (and father of Sima Qian, who wrote the Shi Ji) was not able to take part in this ritual sacrifice at Mount Tai and had to remain in Loyang. This made him so angry that he fell ill and died. Before his death, he clasped his son’s hand in grief and murmured fearfully, “I could not go to see this great ritual performed by the Emperor. What a fate! What a miserable fate!” The modern historian Ku Chieh-kang writes that “in reading Sima Tan’s words after a lapse of 2,000 years, we find his faith and sorrow convincing and we can deduce that the important aspects of Emperor Wu’s thought were shared by people of that period.”

Whenever an important xiangrui appeared the era name of the reigning dynasty was changed, new songs were sung, and the whole country celebrated. Although in theory xiangrui were both the intermediary and the medium of communication between Heaven and earth, they were actually a means of dialogue among people. When an emperor issued an edict declaring, “A lin unicorn and a feng bird have appeared near the capital; divine texts have emerged from the Yellow and Lo Rivers,” he was actually informing the people that the empire was being managed well.
and therefore no one should make trouble.47 Or, if the people started gossiping among themselves, saying, "Something’s gone wrong. A huge tree to the east suddenly fell over; a stream of black water gushed out of the ground in the west," what they really meant was, "The Emperor is a bungler. His reign is about to collapse."48 When a minister felt that the emperor had done something wrong, he said simply, "Since you’ve ascended the throne we have had earthquakes, landslides, frost in the summer, thunder in the winter. You had better think about this!"49 These were characteristic dialogues in Han times. The popularity of the xiangru images explains the widespread use of xiangru decorations.

It is fair to say that such images were omnipresent during the Han dynasty—whether on chariots, bronze mirrors for daily use, incense burners, toilet boxes, wine goblets, liquor sets, houses, or tombs. Many highly regarded works of art portray xiangru animals. Even the common people adopted this type of decoration for their coarse ceramic ware (Figs. 3–6).

The people of that time believed that the portrayal of xiangru images on clothes and objects of daily use would invoke the appearance of real xiangru. This practice was called invoking the auspicious omen (faruib).50 According to the Fengchan shu in the Shi Ji, Emperor Wu was advised by necromancers that if he wanted to communicate with divine beings he should have their images portrayed on objects of daily use; otherwise, the divine beings would not appear. Emperor Wu was persuaded to build a "cloud breath chariot."51 This anecdote helps explain the popularity of xiangru designs in the Han dynasty. It also suggests what the function of the Sanpan Shan chariot might possibly have been.

The development of the xiangru idea reveals a significant shift in thought from the Warring States period to the Han dynasty. In the Warring States period and even earlier, people also believed in Heaven and sometimes mentioned xiangru.52 However, as indicated by the saying, "The way of Heaven is distant; the way of man is close at hand,"53 the people of this period took people as the point of departure in their ideas. In their art, they often portrayed human activities such as scenes of war, hunting, and sacrifices. This changed in the Han; the concept of Heaven assumed a much more active role in the minds of the people and dominated more of their thinking. It seemed as if Heaven were constantly expressing its will. People rationalized their own existence as
Mountains and Clouds

An important role of the xiangrui concept in Han culture was that of broadening the perspective of art. It led the Han people to cast their eyes upon nature. The environment surrounding these fantastic, bizarre animals was not the temple but jungles, valleys, and distant lands. People must have felt the importance of events happening outside the temples. Among the many aspects of nature, mountains and cloud breath (yunqibc) were most prominent. These two natural phenomena were also the most prevalent features in the xiangrui design of the Sanpan Shan chariot ornament and of other Han art works as well.

During the Han people worshiped many mountains, which could be roughly classified into three categories. The first kind, known as the Five Yue,bd occupied the four cardinal directions—North, South, East, and West—and the Center of China. It was in the Yue mountains that the Chinese emperor received the mandate of Heaven.54 The second kind were the Xian Shanbc (Immortal Mountains), commonly believed to be the three islands of Penglaibf in the Eastern Sea. If one could find these three islands one could become immor-
tal. As for the third, Shen Shan (Mystical Mountains), it was generally believed that strange people and exotic animals inhabited these mountains, which were covered with grotesque rocks, gnarled trees, and craggy precipices. It is this last type, the Mystical Mountains, that provided the inspiration for the xiangrui design.

The concept of the Mystical Mountains is rooted in two traditions, one inherited from earlier times. Just as the concept of the Immortal Mountains was popularized in the region of Yan and Qi during the Warring States periods, the idea of the Mystical Mountains had already developed in the state of Chu during the Eastern Zhou. Recognized by the orthodox tradition as barbarians of the South, the people of Chu appeared to have been especially imaginative. Many of their fanciful stories recorded in the book Shan Hai Jing describe numerous mystical mountains as well as the gods and demons who inhabited them. These fantasies have found their way into the xiangrui design.

The second source of the Mystical Mountains concept stems from the realities of Han life itself. During the forty-three years of his reign, the Emperor Wu made use of the strength accumulated in the early years of the dynasty to double the territory of his empire. His western boundary stretched to Tashkent in Central Asia. After his military victories, the Han emperor acquired tortoise shells and rhinoceros cloth (xibu) from the Pearl Cliffs of the south, flying horses and exotic grapes from Dawan in the west. It is also recorded in the Han Shu that following his victories giant elephants came lumbering from the west and red geese flew in from the east, glittering pears, wenjia, iridescent feathers, dragons, fish eyes, horses that sweat blood, lions, ferocious dogs, gigantic birds abounded: “exotic things poured in from all directions.” One can hardly imagine the impact their sudden appearance had on the local parochial people of Central China. These events must have served to substantiate to the Han people the strange stories they read or heard about in the Shan Hai Jing and must have greatly inspired the Han people’s imagination.

For example, there was a kind of xiangrui called huow, a flame-resistant cloth. We can now say that this material was, in fact, asbestos. Han people were much more imaginative in their explanations. They not only considered the acquisition of huowan from the west a good omen and important signal from Heaven, but they invented many colorful stories about its origins. Dongfang Shuo, minister to Emperor Wu, was said to have told one such story. There was a Fire Mountain in the south thirty li long and fifty li wide covered with incessantly burning trees. Rats covered with hairs two feet long and as fine as silk lived in the burning forest. In the fire, the rats were red, out of the fire, they were white. If doused with water the rats died. Their hair could then be woven into huowan. Knowledge of such tales helps us understand why the makers of xiangrui designs seemed to be creating a world of fantasy. By understanding the basis of these flights of imagination, on the other hand, we can see that their fantasies contained many realistic factors. These two elements, immortal realm and worldly events, fantasy and reality, are mingled together in the pictorial decoration of the Shanpan Shan chariot ornament.

Besides xiangrui animals and mountains, the people also had special regard for yunqi (cloud breath), which forms the third important subject of the chariot design. The pre-Qin concept of qi was close to a philosophical concept symbolizing the vitality inherent in the cosmos and in the human body. However, the people in Han times preferred more tangible illustrations of these ideas. Qi gradually became an observable phenomenon and the observation of it an important occupation. Professional “qi-watchers” could distinguish variations in the shape and color of clouds, all of which signified specific phenomena. Qi appeared in the shape of pavilions, banners, boats, and animals. One particularly special qi was the qingyun. It “looked not quite like smoke and not quite like clouds, but like fine, intertwining strands.” This is an apt description of the forms that we find on many cloud-patterned Han decorations (Figs. 7, 8). Furthermore, people believed that when searching for something one should first seek its qi.
The Han people were obsessed with the idea of immortality. The immortal qi was much sought after. As recorded in the Shi Ji, Emperor Wu sent necromancers out to sea to look for the immortal Penglai Islands. When they returned, they reported that Penglai was not far away, but they had failed to reach the islands because of a failure to spot Penglai’s qi. Emperor Wu was so impressed with this report that he set up an official position for a “Deputy Qi Diviner” (Wangqi zuohou) who was to stay on the seashore and peer out to sea day after day, waiting for the islands’ qi to appear.64

In addition, the appearance of xiangrui was always accompanied by qi. A bronze tripod unearthed during Emperor Wu’s reign was recognized as a xiangrui from Heaven. The emperor himself went out to accompany the tripod as it was brought into the capital. On the journey, at a place called Zhongshan (where the chariot ornament was excavated) a gust of yellow clouds appeared and enshrouded the tripod as the Emperor’s entourage proceeded back to the capital.65 In Liyue Zhi of the Han Shu it is mentioned that when Emperor Wu captured a xiangrui in the form of a red serpent it was also accompanied by a canopy of yellow clouds.66 Once we understand the particular significance of qi and that of the combination of cloud patterns and xiangrui during the Han we will be able to clarify the following aspects of Han art:

1. The cloud pattern became the most popular Han decorative motif. It appeared not only on bronze and lacquer vessels, but also on clothes, furniture, coffins, and tomb paintings (Figs. 7, 8).

2. The xiangrui animals are always accompanied by cloud patterns, as seen on the bronze rhinoceros, whose entire body is covered by these patterns (Fig. 9). They also surround the auspicious deer in the decoration of the coffin from Mawangdui tomb no. 1 (Fig. 10).

3. The reason why the boshanlu (mountain-shaped incense-burner) became an important form of art was that the incense-burners produced smoke that would then envelope the xiangrui carved on the Mystical Mountains, thus providing the most vivid combined expressions of Magical Mountains, xiangrui, and yunqi (Fig. 11).
The second register in the Sanpan Shan chariot ornament depicts a hunting scene; a mounted archer, with arms extended, turns back to take aim at a tiger (see Fig. 1c). The effect it produces is quite different from that of the Warring States hunting scenes. The pictorial bronzes of the Warring States period give one a strong sense of scale and intensity, of fierce combat between man and beast and between beasts; the beast is not only hunted, it is also on the offensive. The ferocity of the struggle is portrayed through short, segmented lines (Fig. 12). The emphasis of the Han dynasty hunting scenes, on the other hand, is focused on the gracefulness of the riders and the fluidity of lines. There is no trace of intense struggle. It almost resembles a theatrical performance in its elegance. The dissimilarity in the impressions conveyed by the hunting scenes of these two periods reflects a difference in the values placed upon hunting in the Warring States and the Han periods.

In neither period did the aristocracy engage in hunting mainly for economic purposes. In the Warring States period, hunting had a military significance. In the Zuo Zhuan by we find the following comment by Zang Xibo, a minister of the State of Lu, on hunting. "Hunting during all four seasons of the year is an important affair of the state for it provides practice in military maneuvers and can help maintain order and discipline among the troops. If hunting activities are carried on continuously for three years, a state will surely become powerful." According to accounts of large-scale hunting activities of that time, plans and strategies were devised as if for real warfare. The degree of intensity and danger involved was comparable to that of real combat. In the Zuo Zhuan there is an account of the Prince of Qi participating in one of these large-scale hunting expeditions. During the hunt while in pursuit of a boar, the Prince was thrown from his carriage by the enraged beast. With his foot injured and shoes lost, the Prince had to be rescued by his attendants.

In sharp contrast to this description, the Han dynasty records of hunting reflect none of the severity and danger that characterize the earlier accounts. The works of some of the noted literary figures of the Han period, such as Sima Xiangru's Zixu Fu and Ban Gu's Liangdu Fu contain descriptions of the splendor and grandeur of imperial and aristocratic hunting scenes. It is clear from these accounts that the Han dynasty nobles were not hunting in the wilds where the beasts naturally roamed but in the artificial confines of enclosed hunting parks that were stocked with
Fig. 11. Incense burner, excavated from tomb no. 1 at Mancheng, Hebei province, in 1968. Figs. 11, 12, 17, 18 reprinted with permission from Wen Fong (ed.), *The Great Bronze Age of China* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1980); pl. 95.

captive animals. For example, the famous imperial hunting preserve, the Shanglin Garden, contained fenced-in areas under the care of official gamekeepers. According to the *Liangdu Fu*, the garden had qilin from the state of Jiuzhen, the treasured steed from the state of Dawan, rhinoceroses from the state of Huangyou, and rare birds from the state of Tiaozhi. These animals were all sent to the Shanglin Garden from all sorts of different places, some as far away as 30,000 li, from beyond the Kunlun Mountains and from the other side of the ocean. During the hunts, these exotic animals were released into the hunting grounds. Hunting in such a magnificent environment must surely have fulfilled the need of emperors and nobles to identify themselves with the divine world of the xiangrui.

Hunting also provided the Han court with an opportunity for the conspicuous display of wealth and luxury. In *Zixu Fu* Sima Xiangru goes to great lengths in describing the grandeur of the royal hunt, the extravagance of its ceremonies, the superb horsemanship, the various exotic beasts encountered during the hunt, and finally the countless courtesans who waited upon the noble participants after the hunt was over. The atmosphere and mood reflected by the writer accord perfectly with the spirit of the scene portrayed on our chariot ornament.

Another difference between the Warring States and the Han periods that is expressed in the xiangrui design is the relation between men and beasts. As noted earlier, in the art works of the Warring States period men and beasts were often portrayed
as locked in head-on struggle. In some of the paintings, sculptures, and bronzes of the period, men were portrayed as the heroic conquerors subjugating the beasts. K. C. Chang once noted, "Men became masters or at least the challengers of the animals during the Eastern Zhou period."75 In the Han, however, it is evident from the art works that the sense of conflict between men and beasts had diminished. Images of men forcibly subduing beasts were gradually replaced by a new scene of concord. Animals were no longer presented as a threatening force requiring vigorous subjugation. Instead, animals were shown in harmony with human fate.

The most illuminating example of this change lies in the relationship between people and dragons, which were considered the most powerful and divine of animals. In bronzes of the Shang and Zhou, dragons were sometimes portrayed as devouring or capturing men (Fig. 13). In such cases, dragons represented a threatening power that put men on the defensive. This relationship completely changed during the Warring States period. Humans not only battled dragons but subjugated them. The man holding a dragon's reins in a silk painting found in a Chu tomb in Changsha9 is poised and completely at ease; the dragon is under his control (Fig. 14). By Han times the position of animals was again elevated under the influence of ideas about xiangrui and immortality. Yet this elevation did not give rise to conflict with people. For example, the famous silk painting exhumed in the Mawangdui tombs was supposed to facilitate the dead's ascent to Heaven.76 Two dragons, one on either side of an image of the deceased, convey an upward motion. All the other xiangrui animals, such as the heavenly horse, reinforce this sense of rising motion (Fig. 15).

Such concord is fully expressed in the Dingxian
county chariot ornament through the juxtaposition of the man, the white elephant, and the camel. It is clear that the harmonious relationship between people and animals in the Han is closely related to the popularity of the ideas of xiangrui and immortality. In this schema, animals were heavenly envoys bearing good news to human-kind of beings facilitating the immortalization of people. People welcomed the animals’ arrival as messengers that did not themselves control their fate.

THE XIANGRUI DESIGN
AND THE HAN WORLD VIEW

In comparing xiangrui designs on the Sanpan Shan chariot ornament and the Warring States period pictorial bronze vessels we see another marked difference. The latter display a static composition structure. Images that seem unmoving are presented in sequence (Fig. 16). By contrast, fluidity characterizes the Han designs in which all objects—mountains, clouds, animals—are incorporated into a constantly shifting, circulating system (see Fig. 1g). The formation of the Han view of the objects is closely related to the yin-yang and the five phases theories, which lay at the base of Han thought.

The yin-yang and the five phases concepts existed primarily as philosophical ideas during the Warring States period. During the Han dynasty, however, they became the accepted framework for religious, political, and intellectual thought.\(^7\) Yin and yang express the polar relationships of opposites. The relationships among wood, fire,
earth, water, and metal—the five phases—were understood to be alternatively mutual resistance and mutual transformation. This relationship was taken to be the basic mode for all movement in the universe. The theory that wood overcomes earth, earth overcomes water, water fire, fire metal, and metal wood, was a theory of a circular process.

Each one of the five elements had a corresponding color, which symbolized a dynasty. The earliest ruler, the Yellow Emperor, possessed the virtue of earth; Heaven then revealed xiangrui in the form of yellow dragons. When the virtue of earth was exhausted, the Xia dynasty, with the virtue of wood, replaced the Yellow Emperor. Different xiangrui were revealed to justify the rule of the Xia. Following the Xia came the Shang dynasty, which overcame the virtue of wood with the virtue of metal, only to be overcome in turn by the Zhou dynasty, which possessed the virtue of fire. These successions thus demonstrated the cyclical system of history. The Han people thought that they occupied the succeeding position, that of earth, in an everturning cycle. Heaven again sent down yellow dragons as xiangrui.78

Constant transformation is also the essence of the Han view of the cosmos. The element of earth is at the center. The Han view of the cosmos combined the transformations of the five elements with the four directions—north, south, east, west. Each direction had a corresponding color, animal spirit, season, musical scale, style of dress, food, color, taste, virtue, and so forth. In short, the system incorporated everything under Heaven, all in constant movement and transformation.

When this way of thinking became the dominant trend of thought during the Han dynasty, absolute reasons no longer explained the existence of objects whose positions in the universe remained immovable around a fixed center of the universe. The cardinal points had been previously considered to be fixed in place,79 as was social status. For example, as recorded in the Shi Ji, King Zhou of Shang squandered wealth and his advisors warned him that he would lose his kingdom. He confidently rebuffed their concerns, saying, “Did not Heaven give me the mandate?”80 Han emperors, in contrast, worried ceaselessly as if they were constantly treading on thin ice. Like everyone else living in Han times and influenced by the five elements theory of continuous transformation, they believed that the virtue of the Han would be replaced by a dynasty with the virtue of wood. They seemed to think of the cosmos as a giant red, white, black, yellow, and blue revolving disc, the four directions and colors constantly turning.

The new outlook was also reflected in many different art forms. For instance acrobats, very popular during the Han, performed a show known as yulong manyan zhixi (transmutation of fish and dragon). According to historical records, the performance began with one actor dressed as a lynx, dancing in a courtyard. When the lynx reached the front hall of the palace it jumped into a pool and transformed itself into a flounder. Clouds burst from the mouth of the fish, obscuring the sun. By the time the clouds dispersed, the fish had changed into a dancing yellow dragon eighty feet long, whose scales gleamed and flashed more brightly than the sunlight.81 Almost all these scenes can be viewed in the pictorial stone carving from Yinan tomb (Fig. 17 a–c).

The most popular literary form of the Han was the fu,82 which in describing natural settings used the formula: “in the east . . .”, “in the south . . .”, “in the west . . .”, “in the north . . .”, “above . . .”, “below. . . .” Within such a structure, authors depicted fantastic scenes and animals.82 It was as if the authors had no set point of observation, but rather glided around their unfolding subjects.

Highly stylized bird-script characters originated with inscriptions on bronze weapons from the southern state of Yue during the Warring States period. By Han times they had become widespread, appearing on bronze vessels as well as on stone tablets. A famous example is the hu vessel from the tomb of Liu Sheng, Prince Qing of Zhongshan state (Fig. 18). The surface of the vessel is covered with fine gold and silver inlays in flowing, scroll-like configurations forming forty-two highly ornamental characters. Without any resemblance to the strokes in standard script, these characters create the visual impression of
fluent movement rather than prompting the mind to decipher familiar codes.

In the design on our chariot ornament, undulating mountains define the main compositional element within each register. The mountains in the four registers connect with one another in an upward spiraling movement. Following the mountains’ swirl, all the other elements are in constant motion. Trees, plants, cloud breath, and animals are all depicted with flowing curved lines, lines that seem to reinforce the sense of movement in the spiraling mountains (Fig. 1g). We could say that behind this particular artistic expression, as well as behind the Han fu and the acrobats, lies the deep sense of constant transformation embodied in the Han world view.

**CONCLUSION**

In the above sections I have compared the art of the Han and the Warring States periods by demonstrating differences in their subject matter and style. On the other hand, the development of art during these periods showed great continuity. Many of the elements popular in Han xiangrui art originated in the Warring States period or even earlier. That animals are a medium of communication between Heaven and man is a very ancient notion, already clearly formulated during Shang times. For example, in the oracle-bone scripts, the bird feng (the character for which also means “wind”) was referred to as “the messenger of Heaven.” There is little doubt that the formation of the systematic xiangrui concepts in later times had their origins in this conception. During the Warring States period, we already find many references to good omens and calamities, indicating that this kind of thinking was already on the rise, although it had not permeated political, religious, and intellectual thought to become the mainstay of social psychology as in the Han. Furthermore, these concepts had not yet been illustrated by the various art forms; the xiangrui pattern of decorative arts, in particular, was not yet popular.

The Han dynasty was an empire with vast territorial holdings. Han thought was a synthesis of ideas that had developed in various regions before
of the Qin dynasty. For example, references to good omens or calamities can be found mainly in documents from the state of Lu in the north. But the forms of the Han xiangrui designs resemble those of the Chu culture to the south. The ideas of immortality and the Immortal Mountains of Penglai came from the Qi and Yan states in the north. But a work from the south, the Shan Hai Jing, describes Magic Mountains. Qi to the necromancers of the states of Qi and Yan meant "the immortal qi." For Zhuang Zhou (Chuang-tzu) of the Chu state, qi symbolized cosmic life in a philosophical sense. For Mengzi (Mencius) from the Central Plain, qi was related to ethical and moral civilization. These different concepts, each bearing its own regional stamp, were combined into the synthesis of Han thought and art.

The Zhongshan state in the Warring States period and the state of Chu had a particularly strong influence on Han art. Recent archaeological discoveries have revealed that animals were the most prominent characteristic of art around the Zhongshan area during the Warring States period. Besides fluidity of style, animals also figured prominently in the Han xiangrui motif. According to historical documents, the nomadic Baidi tribes, which came into China from the north, established the Zhongshan state. Migrations of ethnic groups was one way the nomadic animal art of the north influenced Han designs. Surprisingly, the Chu state, which was considered barbaric and which had been defeated in battles with the Han, exerted great influence on Han art. The Chu culture had its own distinctive music, philosophy, and visual art. The most prominent features inherited by the Han from Chu art were the fluid cloud design and, more importantly, the mood of transience.

It must be stressed that these curvilinear designs did not appear first on bronze vessels, but rather on lacquerware. The different decorative styles of bronze and lacquerware were probably directly related to their functions: bronze vessels were traditionally used in sacrificial ceremonies and their decoration was affected by more formal constraints. The lacquerware pieces were for more mundane use. Their decoration adapted more quickly to the changing spirit of the times. Once lacquer designs became more popular, they were adopted for some bronzes of daily use. By Han times, the ceremonial and religious functions of the bronze vessels had decreased; large quantities of bronze vessels with luxurious decorations were fashioned for daily use. Following changing tastes, decorations formerly restricted to lacquerware became common on bronzes as well. The ponderous, geometric decorative style originally used on bronze vessels was inherited by the decorative bricks in the halls of ancestral worship and in tombs. The serious atmosphere exuded by the designs on these bricks resembled the feeling expressed by the ceremonial bronzes. Following this course, we see that around the end of the Han and the beginning of the Wei Jin period, decorations in tombs dropped the ponderous, geo-

Fig. 18. Bronze hu vessel, excavated from tomb no. 1 at Mancheng. Reprinted with permission from Wen Fong (ed.), *The Great Bronze Age of China*, pl. 96.
metric style in favor of the more fluid designs popular in daily life. The more ponderous geometric style then became transferred to a new and rapidly developing art—the Buddhist art in cave temples. To be sure, this is a drastic oversimplification of the real development taking place in the various art forms. In reality, the inheritance of designs by one form from another is never total and the differences never absolute.

In conclusion, I would like to stress two points. First, as shown by the analysis of the xiangrui design, the formation of a given style of art is closely connected to various aspects of thought and certain kinds of already existing art, forming a whole with interrelated parts. Therefore, only by trying to reconstruct the life and thought of a particular period in a comprehensive way can one come to some understanding of the significance and value of a particular art form that is part of that whole. Art is often categorized by the material from which it is made. Art history is viewed as consisting of specialized fields such as bronzes, paintings, decorative bricks, cave temples, and so on. Research often concentrates on development within a given category. However, as shown above, not only is the development of different categories of art interconnected, but also, under certain circumstances, a particular style characterizing one category can be transferred to another category. Therefore, only by reconstructing the relationships among various categories of art, and the various aspects of human conception they reflect at different periods, can we come to understand the development of a particular art form.

Chinese Characters

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Notes

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1. The exhibition Archaeological Finds of the People's Republic of China was held in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, from December 13, 1974 to March 30, 1975, and in the Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum, Kansas City, from April 20 to June 8, 1975.


13. Yang Shouqiang, Shuqing zhushu, pp. 311–312. As noted by Yang, Li Dianyuans made a mistake in identification in this passage. According to Han Shu the father of Prince Kang should be Prince Ai, not Prince Qing.
15. Ibid., vol. 2, p. 28.
17. A comparison between the Sanpan Shan tombs and the famous Mawangdui tombs might help clarify to whom the former may have belonged. The Mawangdui tombs, constructed in the same dynasty and belonging to the family of a high-level provincial officer, consisted of three graves that have been identified as the tombs of Dai Hou, his wife, and a son (7). Among the Sanpan Shan tombs, on the one hand, M122 has been suggested to be Prince Kang himself in this article; M120 yielded two seals bearing the names Liu Jiaojun and Liu Zhanshi, demonstrating that the deceased was a male member of the Zhongshan royal family, perhaps a son of Prince Kang; the third tomb, from which came a Zhongshan family clay seal, then might belong to Prince Kang’s wife.
18. In addition to the three tombs mentioned in note 12 and to the Sanpan Shan tombs, the graves of Prince Qing (d. 111 B.C.) and his wife Dou Wan were found in Mancheng in 1968. See the Institute of Archaeology, CASS, Hebei CPAM, Mancheng Hanmu fazue baogao, vol. 1, pp. 336–337.
20. Geijutsu Daigaku Zokushu Zuroku (Tokyo, 1976), vol. 5, pl. 7.
28. Ibid., pp. 1215–1248.
29. Ibid., pp. 1248–1253.
32. Ban Gu, Wudi ji, Han Shu, vol. 6, p. 176: “In the second year of the yuanhao era [121 B.C.], during the reign of Emperor Wu, South Vietnam gave in tribute a tame elephant.”
34. The winged (heavenly) horses were discovered in the third year of the yuanhao era (120 B.C.) and in the fourth year of the taichu era (101 B.C.). Ban Gu, Wudi ji, pp. 176, 202; Liyue zhi, pp. 1060–1061.
36. Ibid., p. 1067.
37. See Wu Rencen, Shanhaijing guangzhuzu (Taipei, 1972), vol. 3, p. 16.
38. Ban Gu, Wudi ji, p. 211.
39. Ibid., p. 193; also see the commentaries of Ying Shao and Jin Zhao.
41. The edict in the second month of ganlu era third year (51 B.C.), quoted in Yu Hais.
42. Shi Shuqing, Wuzuo gudai de jincuo gongyi, p. 70.
43. Sima Qian, Xiao Wu benji, Shi Ji (Beijing, 1959), vol. 12.
46. Cf. ibid., p. 31.
50. Sima Qian recorded that Emperor Wu once used the skin of a white deer to invoke the auspicious omen, in Xiao Wu benji, p. 457. Also in Han Shu it is said that the same emperor made the lin zhijin golden coins in the shape of a unicorn’s foot, to invoke good omens.
52. Sima Qian, Xiao Wu benji, p. 458.
54. Du Yu, Chunqiu jingshu jijie (Beijing, 1955), vol. 24 (the eighteenth year of Zhao Gong), p. 2; cf. Guo Moruo, Xianqin tian- daoguan zhi jinzhan, Qingtong shidai (Beijing, 1966), pp. 1–53.
57. Most scholars identify Shan Hai Jing as a shamanistic work originating in south China (Shi Jingcheng, Shanhai jing yanyu lunji (Hongkong, 1974), pp. 1–77; Meng Wengtong, Zhonghua wenshi lun cong (Beijing, 1962), vol. 1; Yuan Ke, loc. cit. (1978), vol. 7. Yun Xingpe, however, suggests that this book had its origin in the He-Lo area of western China, loc. cit. (1979), vol. 1.
58. The information concerning luowu can be found in the following texts: Chen Shou, Shan shaodi jijie, Sanyoo Zhi (Beijing, 1959), vol. 4, p. 18; Gan Bao, Souchen Ji (Beijing, 1970), vol. 10, pp. 124, vol. 13, p. 165; Taiping yulan, vol. 38, 399, 820; Fuyuan Zhi, vol. 37: Chouxue Ji, 26; and Yiwen leiju, vol. 7.
60. Dongfang Shuo, Sheyi Jing, quoted in Chen Shou, Shanshaodi ji, p. 118.
62. Sima Qian, Fengchuan shu, p. 1339.
63. Cf. ibid., p. 1336.
64. Ibid., p. 1393.
68. Zuo Zhan, the Fifth Year of Yin Gong, Liu Wenqi, Chunqiu zuo shuzhu xiaochen (Beijing, 1959), pp. 29–33.
69. Zuo Zhan, the Twenty-seventh Year of Xi Gong, ibid., pp. 404–405.
70. Zuo Zhan, the Eighth Year of Zhuang Gong, ibid., pp. 148–149.
71. Ban Gu, Zhang Shizhi zhuan, Han Shu, pp. 2307–2308: “The Emperor goes into the fence holding the tigers and asks the deputy of the Shanglin Garden the categories of beasts and of birds.” Yan Shigu’s commentary: “The fence is the place for raising animals.”
72. Ban Gu, Liangdu fu, in Yan Kejun, Quan Han wen (Wuchang, 1894), vol. 24, p. 4.
73. Wei Hong, Han jiuyi, in Han liqi zhidu ji qita 5 zhong, Qunghua shuju cheng (Changsha, 1939), pp. 16–17: “When the Emperor goes to hunt in the Shanglin Garden in fall and winter, officials fill the garden with animals and birds.”
74. Sima Xiangru, Zixu Fu, in Yan Kejun, Quan Han Wen, vol. 21, p. 6.
76. Shang Zhitan, Mawangdui 1 hao Hanmu feiji shishi, Wen Wu 9 (1972): 43–47; J. M. James, A Provisional Iconology of Western Han Funerary Art, Orienta Art XXV (3) (1979): 347–357.
79. For example, Yao dian states that Yao commanded his officers to reside at the points of the four cardinal directions in order to observe the zodiacal spaces; to calculate the movements of the sun, the moon, and the stars; and so to deliver respectfully the seasons to the people; cf. James Legge, The Chinese Classics (Hongkong, 1960), vol. 3, pp. 1–23.
82. Cf. The Department of Chinese Language and Literature of Beijing University, Zhongguo wenshu shi (Beijing, 1959), p. 139.
83. Jin Zutong, Yinzi yizhu (Shanghai, 1939), no. 935.