

The Cyrus Tang Hall of China: Deep Tradition, Dynamic Change.* Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago.

Reviewed by Timothy Lloyd

The *Cyrus Tang Hall of China* exhibition, subtitled *Deep Tradition, Dynamic Change*, opened at the Field Museum of Natural History in June 2015. Intended as a permanent exhibition, the Hall was made possible by a gift from the Chinese-American businessman and industrialist for whom it is named.

The exhibition is organized on a combination of thematic and chronological principles. Five galleries house three hundred and fifty objects from the Field Museum's China collection of about thirty five thousand artifacts, many of them collected by Dr. Berthold Laufer, the Field's first curator of Asian anthropology, on research trips during the first third of the twentieth century. The galleries' themes, in order, are: Diverse Landscapes, Diverse Ways of Life; Ritual and Power, War and Unification; Shifting Power, Enduring Traditions; Beliefs and Practices, Symbols and Stories; and Crossing Boundaries, Building Networks.

Highlights of each section of the exhibition include:

- In Diverse Landscapes, a 360-degree video display of six diverse ecosystems within the boundaries of today's China, and dioramas of Neolithic settlements in those regions
- In Ritual and Power, bronze vessels that served as status symbols in early Chinese states, and an automated map showing the succession and extent of China's dynasties through history
- In Shifting Power, a display of the tools of the trade of the scholars, bureaucrats, and educated officials whose detailed and elegant handwritten records enabled communication and continuity across far-flung dynasties; and a seventeenth century copy of a twelfth century scroll depicting a variety of activities along a river during the Qingming (Spring) Festival
- In Beliefs and Practices, a collection of artifacts from Taoist and Buddhist tradition, and a pair of videos of a contemporary shadow puppet performance (one of the very few contemporary works in the exhibition) of a story from the famous and broadly funny epic *Journey to the West*, one video showing the performance as it is seen by the audience in front of the screen, and the other showing the puppetry and musical work going on behind the screen at the same time
- In Crossing Boundaries, several of the museum's artifacts collected from a Java Sea Shipwreck of the twelfth or thirteenth century, and others from the Silk Road to the West, both indicative of China's many trade connections with the larger world

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The exhibition ends with a contemplative rock garden space, facing Lake Michigan, for relaxation and reflection.

The exhibition's overall message is there is no one China, constant change and strong continuity define the history of Chinese culture, and each object in the exhibition has multiple stories to tell. This last point in particular is realized through touch-screen display panels below each case of objects, which provide the visitor with several perspectives on the history, contexts, and use of each object. The exhibition is notable, in fact, for its thoughtful and creative employment of display, presentation, and interpretive techniques from across the history of museum work—dioramas and models; closely lit objects behind glass; 360-degree videos, touch screens (including quite a remarkable one that allows the visitor to browse and learn about the entire Qingming Festival scroll in detail), and that hilarious and compelling dual-video puppetry presentation—to advance its messages.

I do not know whether the Field Museum has undertaken more recent research and acquisition trips to China to follow on Laufer's, the first of which took place more than a century ago. Since that time, China has experienced several centuries' worth of rapid and extreme political, social, economic, and cultural change, which continues, perhaps even faster in some dimensions, today. The Chinese government's current, intensely proprietary interest in China's tangible and intangible cultural heritage, and its variable but growing suspicion of Western ideas and influence, may mean that museums in the West will never be able to present and interpret the China of recent decades from their own collections. In that light, exhibitions—perhaps carried out by China and US museums in partnership—that will complement *Deep Tradition, Dynamic Change* by bringing the presentation of Chinese culture and history through material culture closer to the present would be especially welcome.

An online version of the exhibition is available at <http://chinahall.fieldmuseum.org/>, and the Field Museum has also developed an online educator kit for classroom use, available at <http://www.fieldmuseum.org/discover/on-exhibit/china/educators/>.

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