Crafts and Stories from Ancient China

옛 중국인의 생활과 공예품

English

Legends, Stories, and Rituals 神話 故事 儀禮 신화 · 고사와 의례

❶ The Story of Nine Tripod Cauldrons

Ancient Chinese people created bronze ritual vessels as vehicles for offering sacrifices to heaven and to their ancestors. Among these, nine tripod cauldrons (鼎, *ding*) symbolized dominion over the world and thus represented an authority reserved for the Son of Heaven. Those who strived for power sought to acquire nine tripod cauldrons. In 255 BCE, while King Zhao of Qin (秦昭王, r. 307–250 BCE) was moving the nine tripod cauldrons captured from the conquered Zhou (周, 1046–256 BCE) court, he mistakenly dropped one into the waters of the Si River (泗水). A rubbing of a pictorial stone carving from the Wu Family Shrines (武氏社) in Shandong Province depicts the story of the First Emperor, Qin Shi Huang (秦始皇, r. 220–210 BCE) as he fruitlessly attempted to fish the cauldron from the river in an effort to prove the legitimacy of his reign over all of China. As this demonstrates, in ancient China nine tripod cauldrons were auspicious items that validated the authenticity of the throne and delivered the Mandate of Heaven to the Son of Heaven.

❷ *Nuo* Rituals

During the Han dynasty (漢, 206 BCE–220 CE), the royal court sponsored an exorcistic *Nuo* ritual designed to ward off evil spirits in the final month of every year. It was performed by men disguised as *Nuo* gods (儺神) of whom devils were particularly afraid. A depiction of a *Nuo* ritual on a stone carving from the Wu Family Shrines on the right-hand side shows an exorcist known as a "fangxiangshi" (方相氏), who acted as a *Nuo* god in the ritual (the second man from the right in the second row). The *fangxiangshi* is wearing a bearskin mask with four eyes as described in ancient texts, wielding various weapons, and sprinkling red pellets (赤丸) and the five sacred grains (五谷/五穀) to expel disease-causing demons. The variety of weapons used in Nuo rituals were symbols for exorcising disease and disaster.

❸ Banquet Scene on a Pictorial Brick

The relief on this brick describing two men seated facing each other enjoying a drink provides a glimpse into the lives of ancient people as they enjoyed drinking alcohol at a banquet. It also illustrates some of the items used at the time. The man to the viewer's left is wearing the headgear of a military officer, while the man to the right is wearing that of a civil official, known as *jinxian guan* (進賢冠). Small swords (佩刀, *peidao*) are laid behind the two men, and a bronze liquor bottle with handles (鐎尊, *jiaozun*), cups with ear-like handles (耳杯, *erbei*), a liquor jar (樽, *zun*), and a ladle (勺, *shao*) for scooping alcohol are also in view. This unusual meeting of a civil official and a military officer to enjoy a drink, each bearing a sword, is suggestive of the Feast at Hong Gate (鴻門宴), an anecdote on Liu Bang (劉邦, 247–195 BCE) and Xiang Yu (項羽, 232–202 BCE), rivals over the Qin capital Xianyang (咸陽) who took part in a banquet while a sword dance was being performed.

Rituals with Music and Acrobatics 儀禮 音樂 曲藝 의례 속 음악과 곡예

❹ Diverse Performances in Buddhist Rituals

In the Northern Wei period (北魏, 386–534), Buddhist ceremonies such as ritual offerings (齋會) and processions of a Buddhist statue on a palanquin (行像) were often accompanied by events such as musical performances, acrobatics, and magic shows. Originating in India, these events were held concurrently with the main rituals and gained huge popularity, attracting crowds of spectators.
This Buddhist stele dated to 582 during the Sui dynasty (隋, 581–618) is carved with images of a dancer and short men playing musical instruments, including a flute and lute, as well as Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and the donors. This scene reflects the musical performances of the time that were accompanied with singing and dancing, events held from the Northern Wei period as part of ritual offerings by donors and monks to celebrate the consecration of Buddhist statues. Such performances added grandeur to the main Buddhist ritual while also entertaining participants through spectacles.

❺ Musical Performances in Ancient Tombs

Musical performances were an integral part of Buddhist and other types of rituals and banquets. From the Han dynasty, a number of ancient tombs featured images of musical performances beside the depiction of a procession or a scene of subjects paying respect to the tomb occupant. They also appeared in the form of freestanding figures playing musical instruments. The tile carvings discovered at Dengxian Tomb (鄧縣墓) and Jinjiacun Tomb (金家村墓), both constructed in the fifth to sixth centuries during the Southern Dynasties period (南朝, 420–589), offer a glimpse into the musical performances held at funerals, with images of a band of musicians at the scene of a *Nuo* exorcism ritual held at the tomb and a scene depicting a procession to heaven.

Tang People's Tastes for Exotics 唐 胡風 당나라 호풍의 유행

❻ The Introduction and Spread of Short Blouses and Trousers

Traditional Chinese clothing consisted of a loose blouse with wide sleeves (衣, *yi*) and skirt (裳, *chang*). Influenced by the horse-riding culture of nomadic tribes during the Warring States period (戰國時代, 403–221 BCE), however, a new type of attire consisting of a short blouse with tight sleeves (褶, *zhe*) and trousers (袴, *ku*), a style more convenient for mounting a horse, was introduced to the Han Chinese. This type of clothing worn by nomadic tribes in northern and western China was known as *hufu* (胡服). Due to its practicality, it took root as formal attire in Han Chinese society from the Han to the Jin (晉, 265–419) and the Northern and Southern Dynasties (南北朝, 386–589) periods.

❼ Popularity of *Hu* Style and Tang Women in Male Attire

Hu style was a definitive exotic style that emerged during the Tang dynasty (唐, 618–907). *Hu* dances were enjoyed by all classes of Tang society, from the imperial court to the common people. Tang women considered their *hu* counterparts to be beautiful and imitated *hu*-style costumes and makeup. Influenced by the customs of the Western Regions and the Khitan, women at the imperial court began to wear male attire, a practice which spread to ordinary women who gradually took on male clothing as their daily outfit. Tang women wore heavy makeup and exposed their faces under *hu*-style hats, leaving behind the practice of hiding their faces as had been common in previous periods. Dressed as men, they enjoyed horse riding.

❽ *Hu* Style and Cultural Convergence during the Tang Dynasty

The Tang imperial court fully adopted the *hu* style of clothing; as a result, all classes of people, from the emperor to the commoners, were wearing short blouses and trousers. For instance, Tang people wore robes with collars open to two sides (翻領袍, *fanlingpao*) and trousers in the style of the nomadic tribes, and donned Han-style hats known as *putou* (幞頭; literally, "head wrap"). The Tang imperial court practiced a tolerant attitude toward different ethnic groups, allowing each culture to maintain its unique features. Generally open in nature, Tang people liberally embraced and enjoyed diverse cultural elements from different ethnic traditions, such as *hu* style. This practice of enthusiastic eclecticism and internationality played a vital role in developing the characteristic cosmopolitan culture of the Tang dynasty.

Woman's Everyday Life in Ancient China 女人 여인들의 생활

❾ Cosmetics Culture

Cosmetics culture in ancient China developed early in the pre-Qin period, and by the time of the Han dynasty diverse methods of makeup were being practiced. Cosmetic products introduced from the Western Regions, such as calcium carbonate powder known as *hufen* (胡粉) and rouge known as *yanzhi* (臙脂) were among the most popular items at the time. Some of the splendid and elaborate cosmetic utensils used in this period have been passed down to the present day. For example, a box for storing small cosmetic tools was excavated from a Han dynasty tomb. The white powder, *yanzhi* rouge, powder puff, wig, combs, and cosmetic oil discovered inside the box demonstrate the maturity of Chinese cosmetics culture in the Han period.