

Chinese archaeological treasures at Royal Ontario Museum: an exhibition to end all exhibitions

A display of close to 400 archaeological treasures, the dates of which span more than half a million years of Chinese history, was opened at the Royal Ontario Museum on August 7 by Mrs. Jules Léger, wife of Canada's Governor General.

The Genius of China: An Exhibition of Archaeological Finds of the People's Republic of China, better known as the Chinese Exhibition, is in Toronto — its first showing in North America — under the cultural agreement between the Governments of Canada and the People's Republic of



Earthenware figure of a tomb guardian covered with three-colour glaze, from the T'ang dynasty, early 8th century A.D. It was supposed to ward off evil spirits from the tomb and its contents. Excavated in 1959.



Bronze figure of a flying horse of the Eastern Han dynasty, 2nd century A.D. This piece, excavated in 1969, is the only sculpture that has been found of

a horse depicting a pacing animal. The figure balances on a swallow, the bird turning its head in surprise at the touch of a hoof.

China and follows highly successful visits to Paris, London, Vienna and Stockholm.

Some 500,000 visitors are expected to see the show during its three-month stay ending on November 16. In London and Paris the exhibition, which is insured for \$50 million, drew huge crowds; in London, more than three quarters of a million people passed through the Royal Academy while it was there. One critic writing in the *Sunday Times* of London said:

"The treasures of China have arrived. As they emerged from grey packing cases, the Royal Academy was taken over by a dazzling company of princesses, actors and musicians, prancing horses, riders and grooms. With these prizes have come an array of goods, both sumptuous and mundane, to show us just how rich the soils of China still are in the buried treasures of her imperial past."

The cultural age of the exhibits goes back 600,000 years, beginning with the plaster cast of the Lantien Man, discovered in 1964, and ending with

objects of each dynasty up to the fourteenth century, at about the time Marco Polo travelled to China.

Since the People's Republic of China was established in 1949, Western scholars have followed with intense interest Chinese publications describing remarkable archaeological discoveries. These included priceless pieces of unsurpassed beauty as well as artifacts of significant historical importance. In late 1971 and early 1972 many of the objects, which were unearthed during the Cultural Revolution that began in 1966, were seen in Peking for the first time. They caused a sensation.

The finds included jade burial suits that had clothed the bodies of a prince and princess of the Han dynasty, a remarkable bronze representation of a flying horse, silver and gold bowls of sophisticated design of the T'ang dynasty, porcelain objects of remarkable translucence of the Sung dynasty, beautiful bronze objects of the Shang dynasty and exquisite miniatures of leopards inlaid with silver and gems.