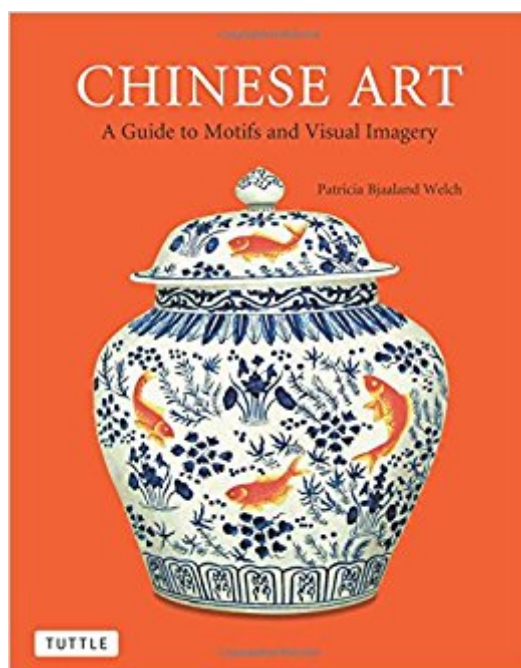


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# Chinese Art: A Guide To Motifs And Visual Imagery



## Synopsis

With over 630 striking color photos and illustrations this Chinese art guide focuses on the rich tapestry of symbolism which makes up the basis of traditional Chinese art. *Chinese Art: A Guide to Motifs and Visual Imagery* includes detailed commentary and historical background information for the images that continuously reappear in the arts of China, including specific plants and animals, religious beings, mortals and inanimate objects. The book thoroughly illuminates the origins, common usages and diverse applications of popular Chinese symbols in a tone that is both engaging and authoritative. *Chinese Art: A Guide to Motifs and Visual Imagery* is an essential reference for collectors, museum-goers, guides, students and anyone else with a serious interest in the culture and history of China.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Reading `Chinese Art: A Guide to Motifs and Visual Imagery' is like taking a stroll around a museum, with the author, Patricia B. Welch playing the well-informed guide who tries to seamlessly weave an artful narrative to entertain the visitor by telling them as much as possible and yet without overwhelming them. This does not come as a surprise since Welch has had guiding experiences at museums in Boston, Bangkok and Singapore. Welch's writing style flows in a smooth fashion, taking the reader from a discussion on the cultural and historical contexts of certain symbols deemed imperative to Chinese art to a detailed analysis of religion and religious influences to the emergence of particular art forms to the specificities of colour, patterns, numbers and other inanimate objects.

For instance, in a discussion on the usage of butterflies in Chinese art, Welch shows how in various contexts, butterflies take on different meanings; conjugal fidelity when represented with a flower, a 'change of seasons' when represented with chrysanthemum, a 'sympathetic way of expressing the desire that someone reach old age', happiness and longevity inter alia (pp. 91-93). Such details make the book an excellent reference material. The beauty of this book lies in the fact that Welch writes for a wide range of audience including specialists, amateurs and students, like myself, with little knowledge on Chinese art yet extremely fascinated by the subject. I have always been in search of a one-stop reference guide to pull out from the shelves to get information on just about anything pertaining to Chinese art and this book provides me with just about every detail I need and more. The book is divided into three parts: the first focusing on symbols from nature, the second on mortal and religious beings and the third on inanimate objects. Content aside, 'Chinese Art' is filled with hundreds of rich pictures of art from all over the world, making it an excellent coffee-table book. The detailed chapter endnotes and bibliography show the arduous and meticulous research which Welch has done to put this book together and these act as excellent points of reference for those interested in further research into specific subject matters. 'Chinese Art' is a joy to read and I highly recommend it to anyone who is fascinated by the subject.

"Chinese Art: A Guide to Motifs and Visual Imagery" distinguishes itself from other art books as fresh and contemporary, capturing the timely explosion in world-wide interest in Chinese art. It is reminiscent of the publication of "Art of the Western World: From Ancient Greece to Postmodernism" by Bruce Cole, which brought an appreciation of Western Art to the general population in a manner not achieved previously. "Chinese Art" is a similarly beautiful example of book as work of art; and P. B. Welch has constructed a narrative that is inviting, concise, and intelligent. The text is balanced with a well-chosen mix of figures and images that illustrate the use and meaning of each motif across a variety of contexts. P. B. Welch has crafted a writing style such that the stories and background information will appeal not only to the beginning student of Chinese art but also to the expert museum curator. In addition, the choice to arrange the book into the three sections of symbols from nature, mortals and religious beings, and inanimate objects makes for easy reference if the reader is in search of a quick explanation. For example, one can quickly learn why the crab is a symbol of 'harmony' and the reasoning behind bamboo representing 'integrity' and 'being a gentleman.' P. B. Welch further examines the multiple, and sometimes hidden, meanings in Chinese phrases, never missing an opportunity to share the humor, superstitions, traditions, or subtleties. Armed with the information in this book, a stroll through a Chinese museum

becomes a transformative experience.

In the 20 years that I've been studying and enjoying Chinese culture, I have not come across a book that so comprehensively decodes the symbolism that permeates Chinese art. In 288 meticulously researched and beautifully illustrated pages, Ms. Welch precisely and clearly unlocks the meaning that imbues Chinese art. What this book reveals so eloquently is just how tightly interwoven visual symbols are with the Chinese language. Ms. Welch opens up the book with an excellent primer on Chinese art symbolism, explaining how Chinese art 'contains a whole code of symbols...based on the similarities of an object's attributes to another object (metaphor), while others are a play on a word's pronunciation (a pun or rebus).' The book is organized into 4 major sections, and 17 chapters, all indexed clearly and concisely at the front of the book, making the task of finding just what you're looking for all that much easier. Like the Chinese language itself, visual symbols in Chinese art can be mixed and matched in countless ways. Explanations of the symbolic meaning underlying Chinese art become a lesson on the power and beauty of the Chinese language. While it won't get the novice learner of Mandarin up and running on the streets of Shanghai - and that clearly is not its intent - the book does equip the reader with the linguistic foundation for understanding and appreciating Chinese art - and by way of that, Chinese culture more broadly. This book is like the Rosetta Stone of Chinese culture. The illustrations and photos are very well done throughout. This would make an excellent reference for the serious scholar of Chinese art and culture, or just a beautiful 'coffee table book' that you can dip in and out of at home. For the person who 'has it all', it would also make for an impressive and memorable gift.

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