

FOLK CRAFT HERITAGE OF CHINA



# FOLK SILVER ACCESSORIES



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS

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*Compiled by Wang Jinhua*



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS

First Edition 2008

ISBN 978-7-119-04676-1

©Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, China, 2008

*Published by*

Foreign Languages Press

24 Baiwanzhuang Road, Beijing 100037, China

<http://www.flp.com.cn>

*Distributed by*

China International Book Trading Corporation

35 Chegongzhuang Xilu, Beijing 100044, China

P.O. Box 399, Beijing, China

*Printed in the People's Republic of China*

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## 图书在版编目 ( CIP ) 数据

民间银饰: 英文 / 王金华编著.

—北京: 外文出版社, 2008

( 中国民间文化遗产 )

ISBN 978-7-119-04676-1

I. 民... II. 王... III. 银—首饰—民间工艺—中国

—英文 IV.J526.1

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字 ( 2008 ) 第 119617 号

---

出版策划: 李振国

英文翻译: 欧阳伟萍

英文审定: May Yee 韩清月

责任编辑: 杨春燕

文案编辑: 刘芳念

装帧设计: 黎 红

印刷监制: 韩少乙

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本书由中国轻工业出版社授权出版

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## 民间银饰

王金华 编著

© 2008 外文出版社

出版发行:

外文出版社出版 ( 中国北京百万庄大街 24 号 )

邮政编码: 100037

网 址: [www.flp.com.cn](http://www.flp.com.cn)

电 话: 008610-68320579 ( 总编室 )

008610-68995852 ( 发行部 )

008610-68327750 ( 版权部 )

制 版:

北京维诺传媒文化有限公司

印 刷:

北京外文印刷厂

开 本: 787mm × 1092mm 1/16 印张: 8.5

2008 年第 1 版第 1 次印刷

( 英 )

ISBN 978-7-119-04676-1

09800 ( 平 )

85-E-648 P

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## INTRODUCTION







Chinese silverware dates back to the 5th to the 3rd century BC, when many of China's unearthed silver accessories were produced, such as: the gilded silver buckle inlaid with jade and glaze found in Huixian County, Henan Province; the ape-shaped silver ornament unearthed in Qufu, Shandong Province; the nine pieces of silver accessories in a Hun (ancient Chinese nomadic people) tomb in Inner Mongolia; the silver tiger, deer and hoops in Shaanxi Province; and the more than 100 pieces of silverware in the tomb of Liu Xiang (?-179 BC, king of the State of Qi during the Western Han Dynasty). Among the silverware found in Liu Xiang's tomb were an engraved gold-plated silver plate and a small design-gilded silver plate produced in 214 BC. All of these serve as a testament to the superb silver-crafting skills during those times.

During the heyday of China's silver-crafting (7th-9th centuries), silverware was produced in large quantities with a wide diversity, and was widely distributed. It also featured exquisite and highly skilled designs.



Gold crown,  
Warring States Period:  
Inner Mongolia



Gilded bronze kettle carved  
with a coiled dragon design,  
Han Dynasty



Gold four-dragon bracelet,  
Tang Dynasty:  
Tang tomb in Xianyang





*Imperial Maids with Hairpins, Tang Dynasty*

From the 10th to the 14th century, silverware production became commercialized and the skills of casting, carving, engraving and welding were improved. Silver accessories, which earlier could only be used by royal and noble families and rich merchants, began to spread among the common people. They featured a wider variety and more lively designs. The designs covered the following themes: flowers, birds, fishes and insects; pavilions, chambers and towers; plants and other auspicious designs; and even lines of poetry.

The period from the 14th to the 20th century witnessed an unprecedented development in Chinese metal work. The gold and silver accessories and vessels became more diversified and luxurious. From 1426 to 1436, the Casting Bureau instituted a regulation that all regional craftsmen must work for the royal court for three months in the capital city, which greatly spurred the development of metal craft.



Tibetan silver accessories:  
Yushu, Qinghai Province

From the 17th to the 19th century, enamel silverware production thrived. And the first half of the 20th century saw the rapid development and large-scale production of folk silver accessories.

During this period, with the rapid development of metal craft, silverware workshops sprang up as a non-governmental industry. A great deal of small silverware of practical and aesthetic value emerged, such as silver cigarette cases, pipes, snuff bottles, rouge cases and incense burners, as the skills of polishing, engraving and carving achieved maturity.



Tibetan women's accessories:  
Yushu, Qinghai Province



Miao hat ornaments: Guizhou



Miao silver necklace: Leishan, Guizhou



Miao silver lock: Leishan, Guizhou



Tibetan waist ornaments: Yushu, Qinghai







Miao silver accessories: Leishan, Guizhou



HEADWEAR

## Headwear

Silver headwear refers to elegant silver crowns worn by noble families.



Gilded silver headwear with endless knots and vines and coral, Mongolian style, late Qing Dynasty

## Endless Knot

The "Endless Knot" is one of the eight Buddhist treasures (the other seven being: Wheel, Conch Shell, Parasol, Victory Banner, Lotus, Treasure Vase, and Pair of Gold Fish). The Knot is a long twisted rope, which symbolizes endless Buddhist blessings. It is widely used as an auspicious symbol on windows, balustrades, buttons, hairpins, etc.



### Winding Vine

The design of "Winding Vine," also called "Winding Grass" or "Longevity Vine", dates back to the early 3rd century and has been popular ever since. This pattern features curving vines with flowers, buds, leaves and fruits on them, representing different growth periods of plants; therefore, the pattern is used to symbolize endless life or posterity.



Gilded silver crown (profile)







Coiled vine-design silver crown inlaid with coral,  
Mongolian style, Republic of China





Detail of a silver crown