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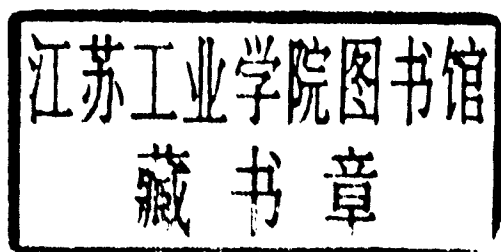
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## Chinese Auspicious Pictures

### Auspicious Sheep

In ancient China, 祥 (pronounced *xiang* and meaning auspiciousness) and 羊 (pronounced *yang* and meaning sheep) were interchangeable. And so 吉祥 (*ji xiang*, meaning good luck) could be replaced by 吉羊 (*ji yang*, literally, auspicious sheep). So a porcelain sheep was often used as a gift when wishing someone good luck.

Auspicious objects are products of man's primitive culture, which developed during the long history of man's adaptation to Nature. Centered on the need for survival, primitive man's instinct was to seek to ward off evil spirits. This is the reason why many of them would tattoo their bodies or wear amulets. Auspicious objects are products of the combination of witchcraft, which expresses the wish to have magic powers, and art and aesthetics, which imitate the celestial phenomena (e.g. the sun, moon and stars) and geographical features (e.g. mountains, rivers and landforms) and therein show visual effects such as symmetry, contrast and proportion. In the oracle bone inscriptions the characters for "auspiciousness" and "great auspicious sheep" occur frequently, giving a clue to the Chinese culture and mentality.

The origin of the Eight Trigrams was also an auspicious object. The ancient Chinese people created such imaginary auspicious animals as the dragon, phoenix, kylin and *bixie* (a winged and horned, lion- or tiger-like beast in ancient legends, believed to have the power to ward off evil), which are still the major images on

auspicious objects even today. The

origin of auspicious objects can be traced back to the totems of primitive tribes and the ornamental patterns on some utensils. Since the Shang Dynasty (c. 1600-1100 BC), auspicious objects have never been out of the picture in the course of development of Chinese culture, auspicious patterns abstracted from ancient auspicious objects being commonly seen in people's clothing, cuisine, housing and transportation. Being a





**Kylin on a Chopsticks Container**

form of artistic expression in the Chinese historical and cultural tradition, auspicious patterns are closely linked to the people's everyday life, customs and cultural background. They are symbols with certain implied meanings developed from some decorative motifs.

The idea of "good fortune and fulfilled wishes" among the Chinese people is directly reflected in auspicious patterns. According to archeological records, Chinese auspicious objects and pictures originated in the middle and late Paleolithic Age, and developed together with the people's material and cultural history. From the relics of the Upper Cave Man near Beijing, we know that animal tooth decorations and painted ornaments were the



### **Bronze Dragon**

This bronze dragon stands in the front of the Renshou Hall in the Summer Palace. The dragon was a symbol of the imperial majesty and power.