

## **Appendix: Summaries of the three public lectures in CUHK's "Chinese Art History Lecture Series 2026"**

### **First lecture: "China's Unique Architecture: A New View from Recent Archaeological Discoveries" (29 January)**

Professor Dame Jessica Rawson highlighted how architectural platforms in ancient China have long been overlooked in scholarship. These raised platforms played a crucial role in the development of ritual architecture, appearing in palaces, religious complexes and other ceremonial spaces.

Recent archaeological discoveries at the Shimao site in Shaanxi revealed that as early as 4500 BC, people were already making use of the properties of loess to construct rammed-earth walls. These served not only as fortifications but also as foundations for early Chinese buildings. The architectural culture of building atop rammed earth subsequently spread southward to the Yangtze River region and eventually further, to Japan and Korea.

Professor Rawson remarked: "The platforms are very dominant and we underestimate them because we think they are just like any old stone platforms, but they are not. They are part of a much longer tradition made of earth. As a result, I would say if we look at China's civilisation, then it is the Loess Plateau that produces the platforms which make eastern wooden architecture. Without platforms, China would not have gone in this direction, and going in this direction has made an enormous impact on the world."

### **Second lecture: "Jade and Gold: Chinese and Eurasian Cultures Compared" (31 January)**

The second lecture was organised by CUHK's Department of Fine Arts and the Hong Kong Palace Museum. Dr Louis Ng, Director of the Hong Kong Palace Museum, delivered opening remarks.

Professor Rawson then explained that although climatic conditions shaped distinct cultural trajectories in China and the West, the nomadic peoples of Central Asia played a pivotal role in facilitating exchanges between the two spheres.

As early as 10000 BC, Western societies began using metals to craft tools, while China started using jade as a primary material about 6000 BC. Jade culture later spread to Liangzhu and to regions across northern and southern China through population movements. Meanwhile, metallurgical technologies from West Asia and the Balkans were transmitted eastward along the routes of nomads.

She further noted that early Chinese bronze weapons were influenced by Siberian prototypes in terms of manufacturing, polishing and design. Over time, China incorporated bronze technology into the production of ritual vessels, though gold remained relatively underutilised. Beginning in the Han dynasty (202 BC-9 AD and 25-220 AD), China's diplomatic engagement with Western regions heightened its interest in gold and silver, leading to increased production of gold artefacts. Inscriptions and carving practices also demonstrated how differing religious traditions shaped China and the West's distinct attitudes towards foreign material cultures.

### **Third lecture: “The Dancing Horses of the Tang Dynasty (618-906) and their Predecessors” (4 February)**

Professor Rawson traced the introduction of horses into China and the development of horse-rearing traditions. She explained that domestic horses originally thrived on the cold northern steppe, while the warm, humid Central Plains were ill-suited for their survival. Horses also require selenium for muscle development, and the soils of the Central Plains are selenium-deficient. In addition, agricultural land use left insufficient space for large-scale pasturage.

Given these geographical constraints, Chinese rulers had to import horses from nomadic peoples in the crescent-shaped steppe zone for military and ceremonial purposes. The earliest evidence dates to the late Shang (c.1250-1046 BC) capital of Anyang, where bronze vessels were exchanged for northern horses; square-shaped bits found in oracle bone inscriptions and tombs in the region confirm that horsemanship had already spread there.

In Zhou dynasty (c.1046-256 BC) tombs, she observed, bit designs had evolved to incorporate curved forms from the Eurasian steppe and Mesopotamian empires, improving control and manoeuvrability. Horsemanship continued to advance in China, playing an essential role in ritual, military affairs and the symbolic imagination of Chinese society. China gradually developed tributary trade relations with Central Asia, forming a distinctive “gift economy”. As horses were introduced from the unfamiliar northern steppe, the professor suggested, people often mythologised these extraordinary creatures.