

The 2022 Tang Prize in Sinology is awarded to Professor Dame Jessica Rawson, “for her gift and mastery of the craft of the visible to read the art and artifacts of Chinese civilization. By giving voice to the ancient world of objects, she has taught generations how to see when they look at things, and her acuity and vast visual learning have given new insight into the world of the lineages, transformations, and migrations of mute things.”

Her contributions show that, besides the written word, there is another talent, another craft, which, by reading the art and artifacts of the world, allows us to interpret and understand distant and ancient societies, with their beliefs and interactions. Professor Rawson has taken this approach in her study of Chinese bronzes and jades, and most especially in the exchanges between the peoples of the central China and their neighbors, for example in horse harness, revealing the role of horse-trading with the steppe and along the Silk Road. She has shown that the many regions of Eurasia had their own traditions, their own visual systems, in which artifacts, their materials, their forms, and their multiple ornaments were combined in set ways. In reading these combinations, she has, for example, been able to follow and illuminate the

transmission of Western classical architectural ornament to Western Asia and then along the Silk Roads to China, where it was adapted for the great Buddhist caves. This exchange was the foundation of a whole new repertory of design in China. In due course this new repertory was taken westwards again by the Mongols. As such visual systems are taken over in new contexts, they leave behind their former messages and gain thereby new associations.

Professor Rawson has also made extensive studies of ancient Chinese tombs which provided a complete afterlife world for the dead. Shang and Zhou period vertical shaft tombs were accompanied by bronze and jade artifacts, which not only gave the dead objects for ritual and status, but also weapons and carriages for war. Many major changes occurred with the Qin. The elaborate burial of the First Emperor, Qin Shi Huangdi, not only contained an army of terracotta warriors, but also stables, carriages, court officials, wrestlers, concubines, and images of the heavenly bodies, making the tomb not an image of a universe, but actually creating this universe for the afterlife of its occupant. In this research, Professor Rawson has drawn our attention to the very different approach in ancient China to the notion of images, where the terracotta warriors were in the Emperor's eyes a complete army for warfare in the afterlife.

Professor Rawson's contributions to the field of Sinology extend beyond original and trailblazing scholarly contributions. Her tireless efforts to develop and promote exchange in the field of Sinology as well as help the public better understand Chinese civilization are equally laudable. Starting out as a museum curator, she has long been both a practitioner and an academic, and the impact of her curated exhibitions has long been evident to all. Even after moving to the University of Oxford after 28 years of service at the British Museum, she continued to present the diversity of Chinese culture to the public through enlightening exhibitions including *China: The Three Emperors, 1662-1795*
. Held at the Royal Academy of Arts from 2005 to 2006, this exhibition took us back to imperial China, to the reigns of three of the most powerful Qing emperors, to explore the artistic and cultural riches of this period and their vivid connotations.

Born in London and educated at the University of Cambridge and the University of London, Professor Rawson is currently Professor of Chinese Art and Archeology at the University of Oxford, and previously served as the first female Warden of Merton College from 1994 to 2010 and Pro-Vice-Chancellor from 2006 to 2010. Professor Rawson has expanded the study of Chinese culture and civilization both on and off campus. From 2011 to 2016, funded by the Leverhulme Trust, she collaborated with Chinese scholars and led a major transnational research project titled, “China and Inner Asia: Cultural Exchange that Transformed China (1000-200 BC)” to investigate newly excavated sites and artifacts to study the interaction of northern China with the Mongolian and South Siberian Steppe. On campus, she has facilitated academic exchanges between scholars from around the world and nurtured students of various cultural backgrounds, many of whom have become leading scholars in the field of Chinese art and archaeology. Of particular note is her contribution to furthering Sinological research at Oxford. She bid and received a ten-year grant to support the development of the study of contemporary China, which enabled the appointment of two senior and two junior academic positions, leading to the expansion of posts in the study of China. This was one of the moves that contributed to the foundation of the Oxford University China Centre in May 2008.

When it comes to recognition, Professor Rawson’s career has been marked by honors. She is a Fellow of the British Academy and was made a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 2002 for her contribution to Oriental Studies. In 2012, she was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences as an International Honorary Member and received the 2017 Charles Lang Freer Medal for her lifetime work in Chinese art and archaeology. And now, we award the 2022 Tang Prize in Sinology to Professor Rawson for her remarkable contributions that created a new dimension in the study of Chinese art and archaeology, deepening our understanding of the growth of Chinese civilization.

About the Tang Prize

Since the advent of globalization, mankind has been able to enjoy the convenience brought forth by the advancement of human civilization and science. Yet a multitude of challenges, such as climate change, the emergence of new infectious diseases, wealth gap, and moral degradation, have surfaced along the way. Against this backdrop, Dr. Samuel Yin established the Tang Prize in December 2012. It consists of four award categories, namely Sustainable Development, Biopharmaceutical Science, Sinology, and Rule of Law. Every other year, four independent and professional selection committees, comprising many internationally renowned experts, scholars, and Nobel winners, choose as Tang Prize laureates people who have influenced and made substantive contributions to the world, regardless of ethnicity, nationality or gender. A cash prize of NT$50 million (approx. US$1.7 million) is allocated to each category, with NT$10 million (approx. US$ 0.35 million) of it being a research grant intended to encourage professionals in every field to examine mankind's most urgent needs in the 21st century, and become leading forces in the development of human society through their outstanding research outcomes and active civic engagement.