Original pottery horse of the T'ang dynasty, excavated in Loyang from the tomb of a military man of the period.

An impressive imitation. There is no reason to doubt this piece except that the author saw it being made in Peking.

Genuine or Fake?

Excellent reproduction of late Chienlung ivory. Slightly polychromed, 10½ inches high. The technique of carving from a tusk pointing downwards is here correctly reproduced, as is the baroque softness of the period.

Good imitation of Lungmen statuary, made in Peking. Face and hands very expressive, feet weak. Probably copied from original fragment which did not include feet. Fourteen inches high, blackish stone.
By MARIO PRODAN

While Confucius was governor of a township, he passed a law prohibiting the counterfeiting of curios by giving them a false appearance of age.

Thus the fakers of Chinese objets d'art have a venerable tradition to look back on. The experience they have gained during all these centuries has brought their skill to a point of such perfection that the collecting of curios in China has become a very risky undertaking. In spite of this, there are few foreign visitors to China or people who have made their homes here who have been able to resist the temptation of buying some “genuine” pieces.

We have asked a well-known art dealer to put down some of his experiences. The amateur collector will be pleased to learn from him that even experts have been fooled. Mr. Prodan came to China at the age of eighteen as an apprentice to a trading firm. He was soon captivated by the beauty of Chinese art and developed what he calls “a champagne taste on a beer income.” He decided to deal in the things he could then not afford to buy. Since then he has made a name for himself and has visited many collections of Chinese art both in the East and in America. The names used in his article are, of course, fictitious.—K.M.

ABOUT 1934 there appeared on the curio market of Peking fragments of stone bas-reliefs which, for artistic merit, should have found their place alongside the great works of the early Italian Renaissance. Perfectly attuned to modern taste, they were terse, ascetic, impressionistic. They could have been the work of a mystical Modigliani. They were from Lungmen in Honan, the work of persecuted Buddhists who had taken refuge in caves from intolerant Chinese emperors in the sixth century, at a time when the first reports of the decline and fall of Rome were possibly reaching China.

Superb were these pieces stuck together with stout fish glue, and beautiful—but too few to go round, so the “faker” went to work.

I was buying antiques in Peking at the time with a dealer from Paris who had enjoyed the reputation of being a true connoisseur for more than thirty years. The main object of his trip had been to see the Lungmen finds, of which he was hoping to arrange an exhibition in Paris. Mr. Er, our know-all factotum, to whom we had repeatedly mentioned our interest, had told us that there were none to be had, that they had all been bought up at enormous prices by other dealers, in fact, that our chances of acquiring any Lungmen were practically nil. This we viewed as a tactical offensive that would eventually yield results costly to us. We decided to wait.

One day—it was psychologically the ripest time—Mr. Er informed us that, thanks to his great efforts, he had received the confidence of a dealer from Honan who possessed an unusually fine Lungmen group, just arrived from the interior. We would be given the opportunity of seeing it the next day. To anyone who has not been infected
by the antique-hunting contagion a description of our feelings would sound like a piece of preposterous drama and will therefore be omitted. The fact that the dealer would come in the evening at an hour that Mr. Er would not define added to the sense of mystery and suspense.

Just before dinner the following day the mysterious visitor appeared, carrying a large parcel wrapped in black cloth. With an air of circumspection he began to unpack his treasure, and to our eyes was disclosed a magnificent group of bas-relief statuary. Everything was there: the religious intensity of the artist, the sweep of the composition, the color of the stone, the patina, and that breath of life that is common to all great art. A central figure wearing a Phrygian cap exactly like those worn by the French revolutionists had been lifted with adroit slashes of the chisel up to the waist from the rock. The Boddhisatva was surrounded by four attendants, two on each side and at different levels. While the central figure was almost in full face, the attendants were partly in profile and partly in three-quarter face, gazing on their saint with the most exquisite expression of mystical understanding. Without even consulting each other we knew we must eventually own the piece. The price was high but not preposterous, psychologically the right price. But it was too important a piece to be decided upon immediately, so we asked whether it were possible to leave it with us to be examined more carefully. By the next day we would decide whether we wished to buy it. The dealer accepted, and this, again, was psychologically correct.

That night we looked at the group from all angles and distances. We examined the glue, the stone, patination, all the mechanical indications that are the tour de force of the antique dealer's job. The results were decidedly positive. The only thing that we were later able to credit to our status of connoisseurs was our subconscious. It was remarkable that, though we seemed to be so sure that the group was genuine, neither of us mentioned the price-offer we would make to the dealer.

The next morning our subconscious asserted itself even more: one of us remembered that a photographer in the city had a complete collection of photos of the statuary of Lungmen in situ! We quickly assured each other that it was only fair that we establish documentary proof of our knowledge. We rushed to the photo studio and there, prominently, on the third page of the album was our group. The photographs had been taken twelve years earlier, and the glorious sculpture hewed into the living rock was practically still intact. Eureka and Hosannah! Yes, there it was! Identically the same group and obviously a very important one in the caves.

Minute examination followed: Yes, everything checked, the posture of the hands of the Boddhisatva, the sacred beads, reaching to the hand and continuing beyond... and continuing beyond? Did they in our original? (our original was etched in our minds in every detail). Surely not! But was that possible? We bought the photograph and rushed home. In our original, or rather the dealer's fake, the beads looped upwards above
COLLECTOR BEWARE!

the hand, thus showing the string of beads in its completeness, while in the photograph the beads turned upwards below the hand, and in a fragment such as that submitted to us the necklace should have appeared incomplete. (In our sketch the beads of the fragment are indicated in black, those of the photograph in white.)

The psychology of the dealer had been perfect throughout. The slip had been perpetrated by the sculptor who had been commissioned with the imitation. No doubt once again the human element had sabotaged a carefully laid plan: the very human desire to round out and fulfill things, to leave no loose ends, had caused the sculptor to join the necklace that should have remained with two ends running out of the fragment.

It is not an apologia for the shortcomings of the author as a connoisseur in the light of the preceding story that it is here recorded that stone imitations are the most difficult to recognize. It is a fact that seems to be true everywhere. The Dossena scandal, that exposed the credulity of great experts in Greek and Roman sculpture in America and Europe, is one of the examples. Lungmen, Tienlungshan, and Yungkan stones were bought by museums and later acknowledged as imitations by the very same institutions. There is no known technical means of differentiating between the good and the bad. All has to be left to a sixth sense that can best be described as the digest or common denominator of all great art. It is the sense that acts with the force of an impact which, when it hits you, is the surest sign of authenticity. Is it a cultivated sense? It can be cultivated but not always acquired. In some rare cases it is instinctive. When you possess it, it acts immediately. The Chinese have an expression for this sense; they say k'ai men chien shan—you open the door and see the mountain.

COLLECTOR beware! The imitation industry in China is an important one. Stones, porcelains, pottery, bronzes, wood, enamels, ivory, hardstone carvings, and paintings are imitated today with varying but not negligible degrees of success. The kilns of Chintehcheng, the original sites of the famous Sung, Ming, and Ching porcelains, turn out today what are really no more than imitations of the old objects and designs, though the marketing of them as antiques may not be implied by the manufacturers. This is left to the fakeselling specialists of Peking and Shanghai, and some of the finer objects made by these modern artisans are sold as authentic antiques without much difficulty.

A very specialized and lucrative form of imitation in porcelain is the decoration by modern painters of old plain specimens, when K'anghsi, Chienlung, and even Ming effects are obtained. Only a keen power of discrimination will allow the prospective buyer to differentiate, for the pigments used are in all respects equal to the original antique ones. Many theories of the crackling of painted modern glazes as compared to the old ones (and vice versa!), and of intensity of colorings have invariably ended on the rocks.

The most convincing reproductions of Sung and Ming "celadon" porcelainous stone ware are made in Japan, as this beautifully hued and simple ware still ranks first in the appreciation of Chinese art in that country.

T'ANG pottery, glazed and unglazed, was formerly imitated in Loyang on the sites of the original excavations. Today they are made in Peking, in the Yang Jho Hutung (Goatmeat Lane) by the same men, imported together with clay from Loyang. In this ware, imitations are easier to verify, especially in the glazed objects. There is a most pleasing depth in the original glazes that, compared to the modern imitations, is like water seen through crystal compared to empty cellophane. The unglazed ware is easier to reproduce, especially in the lesser known potteries of the Han and Sui periods. A local dealer furnished practically all the high-ranking diplomats of Peking
with painted Han statuettes of dancing ladies until he overdid himself and sold too many, whereupon they were unanimously branded as fakes, whether genuine or not.

Green and often cream glazes acquire through age and the chemical action of earth acids a beautiful silver-pearlish iridescence. Vinegar and urine have been employed with adequate success to reproduce the effect, but the violent action of these acids on the glaze causes the latter to flake off.

BRONZES are more difficult to imitate. The powerful specimens of design, execution, and conception of a Herrenvolk such as the Shangs do not lend themselves too comfortably to duplication. Besides, the casting technique of those masters is lost. Then there is the all-important problem of patination to cope with. Though muriatic acid applied to bronze surfaces gives good results, the melon-skin patinas of the fine Anyang bronzes have not yet been achieved.

In this field the great menace to the collector is the excellence of a few craftsmen who have mastered the art of reconstructing fragments to appear as original unbroken objects. The haphazard and necessarily feverish methods of excavating used by the grave robbers of Honan must needs exclude all the circumspect care of a work usually carried out by scientists. Therefore the harvest of these ghouls is composed mostly of fragments that sometimes can and more often cannot be completely reassembled. The latter fragments are taken care of by the above-mentioned craftsmen. It sometimes happens that a bronze one has purchased breaks and is given to a friendly dealer to be repaired. The returned and repaired object is of such perfection as to raise the hair of a conscientious merchant. This reconstruction work is also done, though less effectively, on pottery.

One might mention here the story of the bronze collection of a certain very important American museum. When an apparatus was purchased which could sensitively X-ray the actual state of all their bronzes, believed up to then to be in perfect condition, it was discovered that over eighty per cent of the objects were no more than perfectly assembled fragments. So much for the skill of the modern bronze patcher.

IMITATION of wood statuary has been employing a considerable number of wood carvers in Peking recently. Imitation Ming statues and statuettes have been made by the thousand during the last two years. "American dealers' cargo," the makers say. Whether they are sold to American dealers (or in turn by them) as new or old is a matter for speculation. These statuettes of varying sizes are almost always carved from old telephone poles, probably stolen in the less frequented areas of China. This is a cheap and highly convincing material.

The original fine T'ang, Sung, and Ming wood carvings were in most cases temple decorations and as such painted and repainted many times by believers in fulfillment of their vows. They were then removed from ruined temples where the sacred objects had been piously left untouched, until the collecting interest of the foreigner placed an interesting price on them. It therefore often happens that the layers of paint are worn away by the elements, leaving a few remnants of color on the less exposed portions. All these details the imitators reproduce faithfully. But, as a rule, art, that sublime power to give life, escapes the imitator of wooden statues. Perhaps it is because the material is more plastic and therefore more subtle. In any case, it is true that the wood sculptor falls short of his stone colleague.

IVORY is another material that, like wood, possesses sensitive qualities that render duplication none too easy. Though old tusks are often used to imitate the work of the fine Ming
sculptors, it seems that the art of those religious enthusiasts was too great to be effectively reproduced. Here are works with the aura of life! Exquisite Kwan-yin’s, dramatic lohans, bold mortals, comic in their preposterous self-assurance. When seeing these fine old miniature sculptures, that sixth sense we mentioned before has little difficulty in asserting itself. And yet the work of the modern ivory carver is good, and his tricks of dipping new ivory into tea and of smoking it to provide it with the mellow tint of age are very effective. It appears that excellent ivory imitations are now being made in South China, where rhinoceros-horn cups, too, are imitated to perfection.

The execution of hands and feet always calls for thorough artistic treatment, and when examining statuary of any kind the eyes of the versed appraiser go to the hands and feet immediately after the face has been studied.

As the little Ming ivory statuettes were often adornments of home or temple altars, they were credited with supernatural powers by the people. Part of the incantation was to rub and handle the statuettes in the manner of sacred beads. For this reason the lineaments are often almost entirely obliterated, thus adding what one might call a strong impressionistic touch to the whole.

Then there are the figurines of naked ladies, used by doctors as a chart upon which the modest patient pointed out the locality of her ailment. These figurines, involved as they were with the art of medicine, in time acquired in the minds of the people curative qualities, so that pieces were broken off them and powdered to be taken as medicine. Well, all this the imitator features in his nefarious pursuit for the benefit of the benighted collector.

Painted enamels and cloisonné have been severally and well imitated. Here the stone pigments used are in some colors not as bright as the Ming and Ching paragons. But where these particular colors (blue and yellow) are omitted, and when the imitator has the good sense to curb his desire for profits by providing a heavy base to his enamels in the manner of ancient cloisonné, the results are difficult to tell apart. The imitated objects are buried, washed, and often treated with acids.

In jade and other hardstones good imitations are made, but, given a certain experience, it is the writer’s opinion that fakes are easily discovered. Apart from a polish that time alone seems to be able to produce, modern carvings lack a certain technique of finish always to be found in antique objects.

It is in paintings that the author is absolutely at bay. Here the unscrupulous dealer has a legion of conspirators. The man whose profession it is to remount old paintings and to give them the silk and paper backing, the piao lha-erde, (literally “sticker of paintings”) is often a genius. From an original fragment no bigger than your hand he can reconstruct an imposing work to cover your wall. Falsifiers of old imperial seals, calligraphers, old silk merchants, modern painters who have spent a lifetime imitating and studying the great Sung, Yuan, and Ming painters, Ching painters who imitated Ming painters, Ming painters who imitated Yuan painters, and Yuan painters who imitated Sung painters all seem to have got together to make the study of old Chinese painting a near impossibility. This branch of Chinese art is vast enough to fill the lifetime of a student and is, quite honestly, way above your raconteur’s head.

The frequent mention of the dealer’s psychology in the early part of this tale may have seemed somewhat repetitious, yet, I assure you, it is no mean equipment of the fake seller. The Chinese, unequaled expert in things human, is a virtuoso who knows how to strike each note of your response.
so as to get the maximum results. The fake seller combines with this innate gift of his race the fruit of his experience. The first essential in his campaign is that the fake which is to be sold must attract you. There are therefore three categories of fakes, i.e.:

1. The fake that is superlatively good and for which a high price is demanded. Here the attractiveness is in the object itself, and the collector will wish to have it even at a high cost (the Lungmen stones).

2. The fake that is not too successful. In this case the dealer will demand a very high price, thereby creating a doubt in your mind as to whether you may not have misunderstood a very fine piece. After having done this, he will proceed slowly to decrease his price to a point when you are getting a bargain. Then . . . there you are.

3. The fake that is cheap, very cheap. Here the dealer knows that you know that the piece is false, but that you may want it because of its low price (the wood figures bought by American dealers).

So you see that there is a definite exercise of psychological understanding that, you may be sure, in most cases works wonders.

But the most fatal pit into which the average buyer falls is that strong human desire to trust, the feeling that he (or indeed she) has found the one trustworthy man. How pleasantly sure you are of being the great exception, how eager to believe the lovable, dignified, kindly, hospitable, venerable gentleman who is selling you a piece you like!

If this article has told you nothing else, may you, O Reader, at least make use of the following categorical instruction: be wary of the antique dealer; unless, of course, you can afford the luxury of buying imitations for the moral pleasure of having trusted. Remember: the attitude of the curio dealer is that of the player at "liar dice": lying is the sport.

THE following personal experience illustrates the nonchalance of the Chinese dealer and brings to a close the present excursion into incredulity.

Lee Foo-lee had come to me often with paintings that were, he said, Sung and Yuan. I never bought any from him because after a brief examination I found myself at least eight centuries away from him.

So one day Lee Foo-lee asked me, in a tone that hardly veiled the beginning of a disintegrating patience, whether I was actually interested in Chinese paintings and, if so, in just which ones. And that was how I confessed to him my nostalgic passion for Castiglione's work: Castiglione or Lang Shih Ning, the Italian Jesuit, who painted at the courts of K'ang Hsi, Yung Cheng, and Chien Lung.

"Tomorrow I shall bring you a Lang Shih Ning that has no peers," said Lee Foo-lee and departed.

The next day he arrived with a triumphant smile and a tin cylinder. He opened the tin cylinder, and as he unrolled the painting his smile changed to a look of admiration accompanied by a sound that is achieved by smacking the tongue against the teeth and inhaling sharply at the same time, like this: "tsk!" I did not like that "tsk!" It is a sound typical of the small dealer trying to impress the buyer with the excellence of a piece in which he himself hardly believes.

The piece in this case was a painting on paper, of a lady dressed in a very transparent cloak, lying on a bed and feeding a child. A subject typical of the Chinese 1910 period, inspired by naked French ladies but not without the vestiges of the Kwan-yin of all peoples, the mother eternally busy with the child. It was a very mediocre painting, badly drawn but with a trace of progressive originality. It was crowned by a superb flight of fancy that had forced the artist to paint a window in the wall of the background, through which you could see a steamboat with wheels. "At last," I said to myself, "I have caught Lee Foo-lee in flagrante."
"Lee Foo-lee," I said to him, "we are agreed that Castiglione painted at the courts of K'ang Hsi, Yung Cheng, and Chien Lung, that is to say, more than two hundred years ago. Now through the window in that wall of the picture you have brought me I see a steamboat, an invention that reached China not earlier than fifty years ago. Just how can you explain this difference of a hundred and fifty years in our opinions?" I looked at Lee Foo-lee with that very same triumphant smile that he wore when he came: the musketeer who has disarmed his adver-
sary. But Lee Foo-lee has never been conquered and never will be conquered. He looked at the window and then at me. Then, with a hurt tone, he said: "Mr. Pu, please look at the painting with a little more care. That which you call a window in the painting is not a window; it is a picture hanging on the wall."

Next day Lee Foo-lee brought me another painting. It was of another semi-naked lady feeding another child. But it had no progressive originality and no pictures hanging on the wall.

PHOTO CONTEST

"WOMEN OF EAST ASIA"

The political, economic, and ideological problems of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere have in the last few months been dealt with at length in the press of the world. But the purely human side has sometimes been ignored. We have therefore decided to hold a contest for the best photographs of types of women belonging to the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. The conditions for this contest are as follows:

1. The photographs must represent types of women, regardless of age, belonging to the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.
2. In the judging of the photographs their subject as well as their artistic merit will be taken into consideration.
3. Entries should be addressed to the editor of this magazine, P. O. Box 4082, Shanghai.
4. Photographs submitted should be clear copies on glossy paper, approximately 4 x 6 inches in size.
5. Every photograph should be marked on the back with name and address of competitor as well as with a description of the picture, nationality or race of subject, and place where picture was taken.
6. The best pictures will be rewarded as follows: First prize CRB $300.00, second prize CRB $200.00, third prize CRB $100.00. Any further pictures used will be paid for at the rate of CRB $50.00 each. Pictures not used will be returned if return postage is included.
7. Closing date for entries: August 15, 1942.

The Editor