



San Antonio Museum of Art

ASIAN ART IN FOCUS: A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS



ASIAN ART IN FOCUS:

A Resource Guide for Educators

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Valance (*detail-cover*)

Embroidered silk satin and painted cotton tabby
China, Qing dynasty, dated to 1911
H. 45 1/4 in (114.8 cm); W. 256 1/2 in (651.3 cm)
Gift of the family of Mr. and Mrs. William M. Young
2003.35

INTRODUCTION

With the opening of the Lenora and Walter F. Brown Asian Art Wing in May, 2005, the San Antonio Museum of Art hosts one of the largest and most comprehensive collections of Asian Art in the southwestern region. This astonishing array of more than 1400 works of art spans more than 3000 years of history and encompasses all of the major cultures, and reflects many of the major trends, of Asia.

Technological developments, religious and social movements, trade routes, and even military history can be observed in the collection. The collection provides a multi-cultural treasure trove for examining a diverse range of subjects on many levels.

The first section of this Guide provides an overview of the primary cultural regions addressed in the collection, with maps and a timeline to assist in teachers' development of lessons to utilize the collection. Each geographical region includes some highlights of the collection, with curatorial notes about the significance of the object, its function and how it was made.

The second section of this material provides a specific resource for Texas educators to address requirements of Texas standards. These prepared lesson plans are meant to inspire.

Above all, as you examine this material, we hope you enjoy the beauty and elegance of this rich resource: objects that serve as time capsules, cultural marking stones that whisper from the past.

The San Antonio Museum of Art is grateful to the SBC Foundation for underwriting the Asian Art in Focus: A Resource Guide for Educators. The Foundation has been instrumental in bringing the Museum's unique cultural resources to classrooms throughout the region.

This Guide is intended to help facilitate and enrich your students' experience at the Museum, and can also be used independently in the classroom setting. Although it is designed to be used with grades 4 - 12, teachers of younger students will be able to adapt the information and activities for their own needs.

The Guide is also available as a pdf downloadable file via the Museum's website, www.samuseum.org. This feature allows the Museum to bring its Asian collection to the classroom thereby providing accessibility to students worldwide.

We hope that you will enjoy this educational resource, and that your visit to the Museum will be an exciting experience that provokes interest and inquiry of Asian art and culture. If you would like to schedule a tour of the Lenora and Walter F. Brown Asian Art Wing, please call 210.978.8138 or email us at tours@samuseum.org.

Sincerely,



Rose Demir
SBC Curator of Education
San Antonio Museum of Art



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CHINA



While the rise of secular society in the West can be traced to the Renaissance five or six centuries ago, society in China was shaped by secular values since the founding of an empire in 221 BC. Law and historical precedent both resulted from its strong central government and defined society for over 2,000 years. Decrees emanated from the emperor; those appointed to administer or enforce them attained social recognition and enjoyed the privileges of their position. From the earliest periods of Chinese civilization, court rank was the key determinant of social status, economic stability, and prestige.

So pervasive was the belief in a central authority that the court also served as model for both domestic and religious life. At family gatherings such as weddings, birthdays, or New Year celebrations, the patriarch and his wife sat on throne-like chairs to receive homage of family members ranked like courtiers: by generation, birth order, and gender. Similarly, pantheons of gods and goddesses were thought to hold court when they received the adoration of the faithful, as in the painted scene decorating one side of the embroidered, silk satin valance from the last year of Qing dynasty.

Attitudes about politics, society, and religion were shaped by the teachings of the fifth-century BC philosopher Confucius. His *Five Confucian Classics* describe and celebrate an idealized period of social stability and peace under the Western Zhou kings (c. 1050 - 771 BC), considered China's golden age. According to Confucius, the unrest that characterized his own time arose because people no

longer understood their assigned roles and place in society. Those roles required them to defer to superiors while acknowledging the needs of inferiors. Confucius proposed a code of social conduct based on the family, with its precisely defined relationships. By extension, he argued that the family was the basis for an ordered political life. Just as the authority of the patriarch was assumed, the right of rulers to rule was unquestioned. Nevertheless, the ruler - like a father - was morally obligated to rule for the benefit of society.

In the Confucian plan for moral government, the ruler was aided by a class of educated scholar-officials, who held rank based on their education and performance on three sets of rigorous examinations based on the *Classics*. Those attaining the highest, or *jinshi*, degree were guaranteed a position in the imperial civil service. Rank and position were clearly marked: Objects, which served in many contexts, declared status. Entitlement to specific kinds of goods and materials in the public sphere raised awareness of the value of art and encouraged connoisseurship and the discipline of collecting and displaying decorative arts privately. Rank, privilege, and the arts were inextricably connected. Decorative objects signified and perpetuated the class system, and those associations remain strongly embedded in Chinese society: It is one factor that contributed to Mao Zedong's decision to unleash the Cultural Revolution in October 1966, which witnessed the destruction of so many historical artifacts and structures.

The emphasis on education reflected the Chinese preoccupation with written language. Writing developed on the North China Plains during the second millennium BC, and accorded dominance in East Asia to the culture that became China. Writing allowed the culture to keep records and to store its collective knowledge. Through writing, the superiority of Chinese civilization was lauded and communicated widely.

One of the great achievements of the unification of China into an empire in the third century BC was the standardization of official language and writing. Despite these efforts, the written language remained complex and difficult to learn. These challenges encouraged educated people to distinguish themselves by showing off their skills with particularly demanding literary styles. The state examination system also perpetuated the use of complex, rather than simplified, forms of writing. Expanding the language to include new ideas and new vocabulary was also burdened by its written form.

Early 18th-century dictionaries list over 50,000 separate characters, the vast majority of which were rare or obscure variants that had been accumulated over the millennia. Historically, an educated person would probably have recognized about 6,000 characters. Under Mao, characters were simplified to facilitate writing them mechanically and make them easier to learn; since his character reforms of the 1950s, a person needs to recognize only 3-4,000 words to read a newspaper. Despite these efforts at modernization, there is a certain irony in the fact that Mao's own calligraphy, which was steeped in historical tradition, was much praised and served as a model for school children.

It, like the lyric poem inscribed on the glazed earthenware pillow or Wang Bo's seventh-century preface and poem, which occupies an entire side of the massive underglaze cobalt blue vase, demands a highly educated audience. Even the woman's canopy bed, with its finely detailed words carved into the railings, is meant to be read. The carving, which includes the words "good luck", "long life", and "prosperity", hints at the conception of sons who will succeed in passing the civil service examinations, thus securing status and rank for the next generation.

Writing is also at the heart of the sophisticated symbolism that characterizes Chinese decorative arts. All Chinese characters have only a single syllable. Therefore, many words are homophones, sharing the same or similar pronunciations. In oral communication, meanings rely on context, intonation, and placement within a phrase. Despite this, a certain ambiguity exists and verbal puns are a common feature of the spoken Chinese. Written language, however, is extremely precise. The symbolic language seen in decorative motifs plays with this dichotomy; images that have the same pronunciations as other words are used to evoke phrases of wishes for happiness, long life, or wealth.

The decoration on the embroidered valance [2003.35] transmits auspicious wishes through symbols and rebus. For example, the pair of ducks with lotus in a pool-side setting symbolizes a happy marriage, as Mandarin ducks were thought to mate for life. The lotus was particularly valued because it blossoms and bears fruit simultaneously. The name for lotus, *lian*, is pronounced the same as the word "to repeat" and "continuous".

Lotus seeds, called *lianzi*, express a potent message for continual birth of children, because *zi* means both "seed" and "child". In the border at the top, among dragons chasing pearls, are bats - common rebus for wishes of happiness. The name for bat, "fu", is pronounced the same as the word "happiness" and "contentment". The lower border includes *Citrus medica* (Buddha-hand citron), peach, and pomegranate. Together, these motifs can be arranged to read, "May you have an abundance of luck, long life, and children."

Confucian society valued the efforts of individuals on behalf of the group. In the family, all contributions were directed toward the benefit of clan. In government, massive public-works projects, such as the building and maintenance of the Great Wall, were organized with conscripted labor. This trend toward subdivision of labor and centralized control is reflected in the earliest production models for the manufacture of luxury goods. The consistently high quality of these goods over time is remarkable, but not surprising given the social significance of objects.

The sheer number of art objects produced in this period in China is unparalleled. The volume of production encouraged the development of extensive marketing and distribution systems. High aesthetic standards made these luxury goods desirable both within and outside China. Traditionally, Chinese diplomacy was centered on the person of its ruler.

Securing the loyalty of subordinates and the support of foreign allies involved distributing lavish gifts. Sanctioned trade, the corollary of gift-based diplomacy, spread Chinese luxury goods and ideas far beyond the borders of the empire. Through gifts and trade, Chinese rulers attempted to develop tributary relationships that kept the empire at the center of the civilized universe.

Trade also opened China to foreign goods such as the heavenly steeds, or *tianma*, of Central Asia, that were prized by the Han and Tang dynasties ruling elite. The artists and artisans who created these works have also been inspired by foreign influences: materials, such as cobalt ore from the Middle East, used to produce the intense blue on underglaze painted porcelains that have come to define "chinaware"; technologies, such as pink overglaze enamels; and religions, such as Buddhism, which introduced new customs and forms.

The artifacts that follow offer a sampling of the San Antonio Museum of Art's collection. They include goods made for burial, dishes for the emperor's table, objects of devotion, items for export, art for collectors, and furnishings for the home. Together, they span more than 4,000 years of history. Demonstrations of consummate skill and artistry, these works also embody cultural values, celebrate status, and proudly proclaim the tangible benefits of rank.



The borders of the nation we now know as China have been flexible over the centuries. While the dominant population at the center of the nation are the ethnic Han Chinese, and most dynasties throughout China's history were defined by these people and their customs, many diverse populations of other ethnicity have existed, and continue to

exist, particularly the edges of graphical China and in the remote mountainous reaches to the West and North. At points in China's history, various tribal groups have asserted influence, and even gained political dominance, some of them established dynastic rule.

TIMELINE

CHINA	BCE	OTHER CIVILIZATIONS
Neolithic Cultures (8000-2000 BCE)		Indus Civilizations (4000 BCE) Egyptian Civilizations (3000 BCE) Code of Hammurabi (1750 BCE) Babylon
Shang (1600-1027 BCE)	1800	Minoan-Aegean Civilization (1750-1000) Greece
Western Zhou (ca. 1027-771 BCE)	1000	
Eastern Zhou (771-256 BCE)	800	Greek City States (750-400) The Buddha (ca. 563-483) Socrates (469-399) Alexander the Great (356-323)
Qin (221-206 BCE)	300	Punic Wars and Roman Conquest of Mediterranean World
Former Han (206 BCE -9 CE)	100	Roman Peace (Pax Romana) (27 BCE-CE 180)
Introduction of Buddhism into China	BCE/CE	
Xin (9-23)	100	
Later Han (25-220)		
Period of the Three Kingdoms (220-80)		
Jin (220-316)	300	Emperor Constantine (306-37)
Period of Division (316-588) Northern Wei (386-534)		Germanic Invasions of Rome
Sui (518-617)	400	Gupta Empire (ca. 320-540) India
	500	
Tang (617-907)	600	Muhammad and the Koran
	800	Charlemagne (crowned) Holy Roman Empire

TIMELINE

Five Dynasties (907-60)	900	
Northern Song (960-1127) Southern Song (1127-1279)	1000	The Crusades (1096-1204)
Liao (907-1119) Jin (1115-1234)		
Yuan (1279-1368) Marco Polo in China	1200	Magna Carta signed Renaissance
Ming (1368-1644)	1400	Discovery of the New World William Shakespeare
	1600	Sir Issac Newton develops ideas on gravity
Qing (1644-1911)	1700	The Enlightenment American and French Revolutions
Chinese Republic (1912-49) Nationalist Rule (1928-49) People's Republic of China/ Republic of China (1949-Present)	1900	First World War Second World War

Looking at Art: China



Ewer

Red earthenware

China, probably Shaanxi province, Longshan culture,
Keshengzhuang II phase, Neolithic period 2800-2000 BC

H. 8 7/8 in (23 cm)

Gift of The Nathan Rubin - Ida Ladd Foundation's Ester R. Portnow Collection of Asian Art
on the occasion of the opening of the Lenora and Walter F. Brown Asian Art Wing

L.2003.20.12

Background

Continuous development of ceramic manufacture using kilns for firing has flourished in China for more than 8,000 years, although isolated evidence of ceramic production recovered from some Chinese archaeological sites can be dated to 10,000 BC. Production covered a wide range of goods, including dishes and vessels used in daily life to specialized objects for ceremony and burial, architectural ornaments and trade goods. Over the centuries huge quantities of ceramics were made, yet only a small portion survives. Broken pieces called sherds (pronounced shards), which survive in burials, garbage dumps, or destroyed buildings also contribute to our knowledge of Chinese ceramic history.

Several distinct Neolithic cultures developed along the Yellow River in North China and the Yangzi River in the south, from around 5000 BC. These were characterized by permanent settlements and a lifestyle based on agriculture. In the north, Neolithic cultures using chipped stone and bone tools grew millet. In the south, they cultivated rice. Dogs and pigs were domesticated. Several of these cultures developed jade carving technologies to produce items for ritual and decoration.

China's historical age began during the 16th century BC when conquest brought the populations of the entire North China Plains under the political control of one state. Prior to that time, a series of distinguishable cultures succeeded or coexisted with each other. Distinctive ceramics are associated with many of these Neolithic civilizations.

How to look at this object

Three-legged vessels are one of the most distinctive shapes to evolve in East Asia. The legs offer stability and raise the body above the fire. By exposing the maximum surface to heat the vessel helps speed cooking and saves fuel.

Here, three smaller components, each with a pointed bottom, have been joined to a fourth vessel with a shaped spout. A strap handle joins the neck and rear leg. Although the works are plain, the potter has taken pains to create a polished surface and apply a strip of clay with pinched crenellations linking the two legs under the spout. These crenellations complement the notches that ornament the strap handle where it attaches to the back leg.

NOTES: [Lined area for notes]

Function

We do not know exactly how this vessel was used. The shape is functional and suggests it was made to heat its contents over a fire: The handle would have facilitated removing it from the flames and controlled pouring the heated contents. The absence of soot or discoloration on the legs indicates that this vessel was never placed over a fire, leading us to surmise it was made specifically for burial, either for ritual or as a symbol of goods used in daily life that would be needed in the next world.

Tripods were used in the preparation and serving of both food and drink. By the Shang dynasty (c1600-1027 BC) three-legged food and pouring vessels were prominently displayed in sets of ritual dishes. By the Zhou dynasty (1027-221 BC) the three-legged vessel called *he*, for pouring libations of heated liquors, had fallen out of fashion. However, tripod, serving containers, called *ding*, continued to be conspicuously displayed on altars throughout Chinese history.

NOTES: [Lined area for notes]

How this object was made

This earthenware jar was made from fine, grainy clay using a coiling method. Each section was probably made individually. The work was then assembled and smoothed by hand and by beating with a paddle on the outside against a pad held on the inside of the pot. Once the clay had dried, the potter rubbed or burnished the surface with a smooth stone to create a metal-like sheen. The shiny, burnished areas contrast with the rough, unburnished areas on the underside of the handle and interior of the spout.

The piece was fired in a simple, wood-burning kiln dug into the ground. Temperatures would have reached temperatures between 800° and 1050° Celsius, causing the silica in the clay to fuse creating a ceramic classified as earthenware.

Looking at Art: China



Wine storage vessel or yu

Piece-mold cast bronze

China, Western Zhou dynasty, 11th-10th century BC

H. 11 5/8 in. (29.5 cm.); W. 10 in. (25.5 cm.)

Lent by Lenora and Walter F. Brown

L.2001.7.4

Wine storage vessel or yu

L.2001.7.4

Background

China's Bronze Age extended from around 1800 to 500 BC. Bronze technology transformed Chinese culture by providing more effective weapons and better tools. The rulers of the Shang dynasty (c1600-1027 BC) also used bronze objects in ritual.

Excavations at Anyang, which served as capital of the late Shang dynasty kings between 1300 and 1050 BC, have revealed large palaces, workshops, including bronze foundries, and burial sites with many bronze vessels. These bronze objects were mainly made for the king and nobles.

In 1027 BC the Shang kings were defeated by a group from the West who established a dynasty called Zhou (1027-221 BC) and built a new capital at Xian. Bronze vessels, once reserved for ritual, now served as items of luxury and demonstrations of power.

How to look at this object

The bucket-shaped container has a lid and swinging bail handle. Zones of ornament contrast with smooth areas of the vessels surface, emphasizing the vessel's elegant shape and calling attention to functions of its particular parts. The points of attachment for the bail handle are marked with three-dimensional buffalo heads with bottle-shaped horns and a band of relief ornaments. Complementary bands of ornament mark the foot, which supports the bulging body of the vessel, and the rim of the lid.

On each band are stylized hooked designs organized around a stylized "eye." They represent birds with crests. On the central band, birds flank a small animal mask called *taotie* (pronounced "ta-o-taya"). Under the Shang, these fantastic creatures may have served as intermediaries between the world of men and the realms of the spirit. Their meaning, seems largely to have disappeared after the Zhou took political control, although they continued to appear as ornaments.

NOTES:

Function

This elegant bucket with its oval cross section was used to store and transport liquid, probably wine. It has a fitted lid.

Cast bronze vessels were first used in rituals conducted by the Shang kings. Those rites focused on communicating with gods and ancestors. The belief that the spirits of the dead had the power to influence events on earth was important in early Chinese culture and continues to shape many social attitudes. Since the spirits were powerful, they required attention and appeasement. Periodically, rulers conducted sacrifices, preparing ritual meals to which the spirits were invited. Elaborate bronze cooking and serving vessels evolved to meet this need. The importance of these ritual obligations to the rulers may account for the fact many bronze vessels were buried in tombs.

Bronze vessels continued to be used in rites to honor the ancestors under the Zhou, but they also became status symbols which conveyed information about rank and prestige.

How this object was made

Bronze is an alloy of copper and tin, mixed with a small amount of lead. The knowledge of how to smelt or melt these materials into bronze was probably introduced to China from western Asian. However, the method of casting bronzes using ceramic molds was unique to China.

A model of the vessel was first made of clay. Once it had hardened, more clay was packed around it to make a mold, which was carefully cut into sections and removed. These mold pieces would have been fired, then assembled around a slightly smaller clay core. Molten metal was then poured into the space left between the mold and the core, which, on cooling, formed the vessel. The piece-molds method allowed both complex shapes and fine decoration

Looking at Art: China



“Hill jar” censer

Red earthenware with green lead glaze

China, Eastern Han dynasty, AD 25-220

H. 9 1/2 in. (24 cm); Diam. 8 in. (20 cm.)

Gift of Elizabeth H. Maddux

93.93.1.a-b

NOTES:

“Hill jar” censer

93.93.1

Background

In 221 BC the king of the Qin state unified North and South China and declared himself first emperor of China; He proclaimed a dynasty that would “last 1000 years.” The Qin dynasty was in fact short-lived. Soon after the death of the first emperor, the throne was claimed by the Han dynasty (206 BC-AD 220). The Han consolidated political power and established many of the cultural values that persist to this day. Through conquest, the borders of the empire reached from the Pacific to Central Asia in the West, and from Vietnam to Manchuria. International trade flourished, bringing a steady supply of goods and people to the Han capital.

Censers

From as far back as the East Zhou period (771-221 BC), the Chinese used censers, like these openwork bucket-shaped bronzes, for burning aromatic woods. Such customs may have been influenced by contact with non-Chinese peoples living in southern Siberia, who were known to inhale the vapors of burning narcotics.

“Hill jar” censers like this *boshan* became popular during the Western Han dynasty (206 BC-AD 24) and may have been influenced by contact with the Sichuan culture. The Sichuan civilization was conquered and assimilated into Han culture, but it contributed many influences on Chinese Daoist beliefs.

Sacred Mountains

China’s earliest surviving writing dates from the end of the Zhou dynasty (1027-221 BC). It includes descriptions of rituals, songs, and myths incorporating animistic and shamanistic beliefs, ancestor worship, and a cosmology that included heaven, earth, and man. Mountains, particularly tall ones, occupied an important position in this system as intermediaries between man and heaven. Five Sacred Mountains together with Four Sacred Rivers represented all existing mountains and rivers, symbolically embodying the power of the earth as a whole. They were the sites of state ritual where the emperor made report to heaven and where he received the mandate by which the dynasty ruled.

Among the powers ascribed to mountains, the ability to provide water was the most significant to China’s farmers. Mountains were sources of clouds, which brought rain. “Cloud breath,” seen as the trailing wisps of clouds in Chinese art, was regarded as an auspicious omen. Mountain wildernesses were home to many sorts of creatures: The deities who presided over mountain ranges often combined human and animal traits.

Daoism

Daoism, one of China’s three main philosophical systems, is first described in the *Dao de jing* (Book of the Way and its Power) attributed to Lao Zi (Old Master), who reportedly lived during the 6th century BC. In answer to the question “What is the nature of the natural world?” Lao Zi replied that it is the visible manifestation of the Dao, the Way, which contains within itself the matter and form of every physical phenomenon. The central teaching of Daoism is that one must live in intuitive harmony with the Dao. In the Han dynasty, the teachings of Lao Zi were incorporated into a religious movement in which elaborate rituals and sacred writings were developed.

How to look at this work

This censer is made in two parts. A cylindrical body is supported on three curved legs resembling animal paws. A removable lid is sculpted into a mountain peak. The bottom part imitates a metal vessel. Its straight wall is decorated with ring handles suspended from monster masks. There are a variety of animals above a “cloud breath” band, which includes two important Daoist symbols relating to the ordinal directions. Facing a ring handle are depictions of the tiger of the West and the dragon of the East. These animals relate to Daoist notions of the *yin-yang* balance and often served as guardians in Han dynasty tombs.

Function

Censers were meant to be used to burn aromatic woods and incense to invoke the gods in ritual or to enhance daily life by making pleasant odors. This ceramic is actually only a model of a censer. Its lid does not have holes hidden among the clefts in the mountain for the smoke to escape. It was made for burial to represent a much more expensive metal censer.

How this object was made

This vessel of red clay was made using a mold. The potter covered the outside with glaze made of silica to which he added lead that served as a flux, (a substance that lowered the temperature at which the silica fused or melted to become glass) thus reducing production time and fuel. Copper oxide in the glazing solution produced the bright green color.

Lead-glazed earthenwares are the first consciously-glazed Chinese ceramics. The technique of using lead as flux was probably introduced from the West. Most Eastern Han dynasty lead-glaze ceramics made for burial were colored green with copper-oxide, which actually made them poisonous for human use.

Looking at Art: China



Civil official

Earthenware with *sancai* glaze

China, Tang dynasty, AD 618-906

H. 34 in. (86.4 cm.); 19.1 cm.)

Purchased with funds provided by Lenora and Walter F. Brown

82.84

Civil official

82.84.291

Ceramics

Production covered a wide range of goods, from dishes and vessels used in daily life, to specialized objects for ceremony and burial, as well as from architectural ornaments to trade goods. Over the centuries huge quantities of ceramics were made but only a small portion survives.

Tombs

Archaeological excavations of early Chinese burials reveal retainers and servants were sacrificed and buried with the bodies of their royal or noble owners. These early tombs were square pits dug into the soil. At the bottom of this deep shaft there was a central excavation for a coffin surrounded by a step-like terrace on which ritual bronze vessels, weapons and the bodies of sacrificed servants and attendants were placed. By the 5th century BC burial practices changed. Rather than caches of luxury goods, tombs began to resemble residential complexes under the ground. Rooms were furnished with objects that reflected the good life, attesting to beliefs in an afterlife in which those activities continued. Possibly responding to a South China custom of including wooden models of servants needed in the next world, Chinese tombs started to include clay reproduction of attendants, armed escorts, entertainers and even pets and farm animals.

Confucius

Confucius (551-479 BC), a teacher and minor government official, changed attitudes about politics and society and influenced religion. In contrast to the period of political fragmentation and unrest which characterized the Eastern Zhou period (771-221 BC), Confucius wrote and compiled a set of works known today collectively as the Five Confucian Classics, which describe and celebrate an idealized period of social stability and peace under the previous Western Zhou kings (1027-771 BC), considered China's golden age. According to Confucius, the reason for the unrest that characterized his time was that people no longer understood their assigned roles and place in society that required them to defer to superiors, but acknowledge the needs of inferiors. He proposed a code of conduct based on the family with its precisely defined relationships. The family patriarch was at the apex of authority. By extension, Confucius argued that the family was the basis for an ordered political life. Like a family, every member of the imperial court looked to the emperor as father of "all under Heaven." In the same way that the authority of the head of family was assumed, the right of rulers to rule was unquestioned. Nevertheless, the ruler, like a father, was morally obliged to rule for the benefit of society.

Confucius acknowledged the importance of religion and spiritual life, but because they were intangible, he concentrated his efforts on reforming society. As a result much of Chinese culture is focused on secular issues rather than sacred ones.

Looking at Art: China



Horse tomb model

Buff earthenware with white slip and amber, cream, and green lead glazes

Sancai ware

China, Tang dynasty, early 8th century

H. 24 3/8 in (62 cm); W. 24 1/2 in (62.3 cm)

Gift of Lenora and Walter F. Brown

82.174

Horse tomb model

82.174

Ceramics

Production covered a wide range of goods, from dishes and vessels used in daily life, to specialized objects for ceremony and burial, as well as from architectural ornaments to trade goods. Over the centuries huge quantities of ceramics were made but only a small portion survives.

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Horses

The *tianma*, or heavenly steeds, of Central Asia were prized by China's ruling elite from the Han through the Tang dynasty - a period of nearly a thousand years. Imported from the pasturelands of Ferghana (in what is now Uzbekistan), often with their foreign grooms and trainers, these highly-coveted animals marked the high status and prestige of their aristocratic owners in life. Beautifully sculpted and glazed tomb models often accompanied their owners in death.

How to look at this work

This horse stands solidly on four legs attached to a base which has bowed during firing. The elegant lines of the head and neck and musculature of the front and back legs, are prominently displayed. These anatomical features distinguish these horses from the smaller Mongolian ponies that are native to northern China.

Many of these deluxe steeds were caparisoned or decorated with elaborate harnesses and saddles decorated with finely cast and gilded metal fittings. Much like today's private jet airplanes, these horses were trophies of position and rank.

Function

This figure was made to be placed in a tomb.

It would have been one of a larger group of models including human figures and other animals as well as a variety of goods required in daily life. Life at court was guided by regulations based on rank and entitlements. Tomb size and the quality of burial goods were also strictly regulated. While such objects were included in burials as acts of homage for an ancestor, they attest to the wealth, status and personal interests of the deceased.

How this object was made

Tang dynasty tomb figures were generally made of earthenware (a type ceramic fired at temperatures between 800° and 1100° Celsius). Figures were shaped in molds, then assembled and finished by hand. There were separate molds for the two sides of the body, the legs and head. An iron armature was generally employed to support the weight of the clay on the four thin legs. The harness and saddle were separately molded and applied. Once the piece had dried in the air, it was covered with white slip (a very liquid form of clay) which served as the ground for glazing.

The potter has applied three colored glazes to the surface of the piece, which, because they melt at slightly different temperatures, tend to run together. He has left the saddle and blanket unglazed.

Looking at Art: China



Ewer in the shape of a pair of geese

Buff earthenware with white slip and amber, green, and pale yellow lead glaze

Sancai ware

China, Liao dynasty, late 11th - 12th century

H. 9 7/8 in. (25.2 cm.); L. 11 7/8 in. (32.7 cm.)

Purchased with funds provided by Faye Langley Cowden

92.14.30

NOTES:

Looking at Art: China



Censer

Grey earthenware with white slip and with amber, green, and pale yellow lead glaze

Sancai ware

China, Ming dynasty, 16th-17th century

H. 26 1/4 in (67.7 cm); W. 21 3/4 in (56.3 cm)

Gift of Lenora and Walter F. Brown

81.193.11

Censer

81.193.11

Ceramics

Production covered a wide range of goods, from dishes and vessels used in daily life, to specialized objects for ceremony and burial, as well as from architectural ornaments to trade goods. Over the centuries huge quantities of ceramics were made but only a small portion survives.

Altars and temples

Selected ritual vessels found in Shang dynasty (c1600-1027 BC) burials have a continuous history in China. Altars of Daoist, Buddhist and Confucian places of worship were decorated with three, five and seven-piece altar sets. Sets included a three-legged incense burners flanked by a pair of tall beaker-like vases and sometimes a pair of candle sticks and a pair of offering dishes. The original function of the ancient vessels was associated with food preparation to honor the spirits. For example, the three-legged vessel called *ding* was used for cooking food over a fire. Altar vessels were concerned with five offerings—incense, light, water, flowers and fruit.

How to look at this work

This large vessel was designed to be seen from a distance and would have occupied a central place in temple. The rounded body is set on three legs. A pair of handles rises from the rim of the vessel. Originally these would have facilitated lifting the vessel from a fire. Every part of the vessel is decorated with three-dimensional lotus flowers, foliage and writhing dragons. The legs of the vessel are animal masks evoking the *taotie* (pronounced “ta-o-taya”) of ancient ritual bronzes.

Function

This censer would have held a layer of ash into which burning incense sticks would have been placed, symbolically carrying the prayers of the worshipper to the gods above. Its large size suggests it was made for a temple. Although this piece bears no dedicatory inscription, it is likely to have been ordered from the kiln for a specific temple in a commission that may well have included other altar furnishings (vases, candlesticks, offering plates). Such offerings were typically made by wealthy individuals or groups of individuals who used such donations as a means of demonstrating their support and devotion to a particular institution.

How this object was made

Earthenware is a type ceramic fired at temperatures between 800° and 1100° Celsius. The central section of this vessel was wheel thrown of gritty clay. Additional molded pieces like the legs and handles were added. The three-dimensional flowers, leaves and dragons were also molded or made by hand and applied to the surface of the vessel. Once the piece had dried in the air, it was covered with white slip (a very liquid form of clay) that served as the ground for glazing.

The potter has applied three colored glazes to the surface of the piece, which, because they melted at slightly different temperatures, have run and blended together. During the Song and Ming dynasties *sancai* glazing techniques were utilized for architectural ceramics and for burial and ritual wares.

Looking at Art: China



Jar

Porcelain with painted cobalt blue under a clear glaze

Jingdezhen ware

Qing dynasty, Kangxi period, 1662-1722

H. 28 in. (70.9 cm.)

Gift of Lenora and Walter F. Brown

92.25.49

Jar

92.25.49

Ceramics

Blue and white porcelain has been among the most popular and influential types of ceramics both in and outside China. The first blue and white wares were produced during the Tang dynasty of the 9th century. However, the development of the blue and white porcelain industry and its widespread export dates to the mid-14th century.

Jingdezhen kilns and imperial patronage

The kilns at Jingdezhen in Jiangxi province became the most important center for porcelain manufacture during the 10th century and continue to produce quality wares to this day. During the Yuan dynasty, (1279-1368) select kilns came under imperial control. These kilns were geared toward producing tablewares for imperial use and prestige gifts for diplomacy and trade. The Yuan dynasty was established by nomadic peoples from the north called Mongols. They brought new ideas to China and established a widespread trade network across Asia. Cobalt ore, the blue coloring agent for blue and white porcelain was traded from West Asia and was known in China as Islamic blue.

The following Ming dynasty (1368-1644) restored Chinese control of the empire. The Ming continued patronizing Jingdezhen kilns from the early 14th until the very early 17th century. Imperial patronage ceased under the Manchu who replaced the Ming with the Qing dynasty in 1644. Patronage of the kilns was resumed only in the 1680s, after the Qing armies completed the conquest of South China.

Literati tastes

During the 16th and 17th centuries, Jingdezhen porcelains were produced for many markets. Those decorated with literary scenes and motifs were created for civil officials. This class held rank and position predicated on their ability to pass three sets of rigorous examinations based on Confucian writings. Attaining the highest, or jinshi, degree guaranteed a position in the imperial civil services, which conferred prestige and status, as well as a steady income.

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How to look at this work

One side of this massive jar features a striking landscape emulating the brushwork of an ink painting. The other side contains a very lengthy inscription, which quotes the preface to a collection of poems written by renowned Tang dynasty poet Wang Bo (649-676). The inscription quotes one of the most beloved works in Chinese literature. The preface describes a journey to a famed beauty spot, the pavilion of Prince Teng, which he finds neglected and in disrepair. The poem considers the temporary nature of all things.

*The lofty pavilion of Prince Teng
stands facing the river.*

*Sounds of jade pendants and carriage bells:
the singing and dancing is over.*

*Mornings, over the painted beam
soar clouds from South Shore.*

*Evenings, through raised vermilion blinds
come rain from West Mountain.*

*The reflection of the leisurely clouds in the lake
is sadder by the day;*

*The scene changes, stars shift in the sky:
how many autumns have come and gone?*

*The pavilion's prince—where is he now?
Beyond the railing, the long river
flows emptily on its own.*

Function

This object was a status symbol, probably acquired by a scholar-official or someone who prided himself on literary accomplishments. It reflected good taste as well as the education of its owner. The inscription is copied from a well-known text filled with allusions and images that derived from classical literature.

Although the image and inscription is reminiscent of a scroll painting, this decorative porcelain jar was meant to be displayed on a shelf or pot stand. Originally, this showy display piece had a lid and may have been part of a pair of vases. This jar was probably meant to be displayed in the reception room of a private home to impress visitors with its size and extraordinary imagery.

How this object was made

This object was thrown on a potter's wheel. It is made of porcelain, which becomes nonporous, vitrified (glasslike) (and, on a thin pot, translucent) when fired at temperatures above 1300° Celsius. Porcelain is a combination of two clays, kaolin and petuntse. While other wares vary in body color, porcelain is nearly always white.

After the potter made this jar, it was air-dried. Other artists applied cobalt-oxide mixed with water to paint the landscape and characters on the body. The jar was then covered with a colorless glaze and fired in a kiln. Different densities of cobalt oxide produced the shaded effects in the painting.

Looking at Art: China



Valance

Embroidered silk satin and painted cotton tabby

China, Qing dynasty, dated to 1911

H. 45 1/4 in (114.8 cm); W, 256 1/2 in (651.3 cm)

Gift of the family of Mr. and Mrs. William M. Young

2003.35

Valance

2003.35

Background

Silk

Silk is produced by the moth *Bombyx mori*: it is processed from the cocoon in which the larva reside during metamorphosis. Neolithic Chinese farmers domesticated the “silkworm” over 5000 years ago. From the late Bronze Age until the 4th century silk textile production was a Chinese state monopoly, which enhanced the prestige of its elite and furthered the diplomacy of its rulers. Silk weaving eventually spread across Asia to Europe, where it remained a luxury industry. Thread production, dyeing and weaving complex patterned fabrics involved levels of capitalization and marketing practices beyond the reach of most households.

Rulers used silk to enhance China’s image and as a reward of government service. Silk clothing and furnishings often indicated rank, conveying status and prestige. Silk textiles adorned the furniture and interiors much as costume adorned people. Cloth transformed both ceremonial and social occasions.

How to look at this work

The embroidered face includes fantastic animals amid birds and flowers in a symbolic landscape.

The painted surface depicts the Xiwangmu, the Queen Mother of the West, one of the most ancient deities in China. She is associated with Mt. Kunlun and is often viewed as a patron of learning.

The viewer is expected to “read” this work as a painting and would have been aware of the particular symbolic meanings of the motifs that convey auspicious wishes for good luck, prosperity and long life. For example, the pair of ducks with lotus in a pool-side setting symbolized a happy marriage. Mandarin ducks were thought to mate for life and the lotus was particularly valued because it blossoms and bears fruit simultaneously. Its name, *lian*, is pronounced the same as the word “to repeat” and “continuous.” Lotus seeds, called *lianzi*, express a potent message for continual birth of children, because *zi* means both “seed” and “child.”

Function

This piece would have hung near the ceiling across a doorway or alcove opening. It was intended to convey an air of special celebration to the room in which it was hung. This particular valance is unusual in that it had decoration on both sides, implying that it was to be viewed from both sides. The inscriptions on the borders of the piece proclaim it was “Made by Yusheng Branch of Zhuangyuan Workshop in the Capital of Guangdong Province for the Hall of Jiqing, Ji County,” and the date: “autumn of the Third Year of Xuantong Emperor’s Reign” (1909-1911; i.e. 1911). The hall for which it was made may have been an ancestral or clan hall for a family, as much of the symbolic imagery relates to domestic events such as weddings or the passing of civil service examinations.

How this object was made

The valance is made of a number of different textiles. Those on the red side are all silk. They have been embroidered with floss silk in colors and with gold wrapped threads that have been sewn to the surface of the silk with another thread (a technique called couching). The other side is made of cotton cloth; it is unbleached, retaining its natural beige color. The outlines and some of the textures of the scene have been painted with brush and black ink. Tints of color have also been applied with a brush.

An artist working for the embroidery workshop would have planned the design and drawn it on the various pieces of fabric that would have been stretched on a frame. Embroiderers and painters would have worked on each piece. Once all were complete, other needle workers have sewed the pieces together to form the valance.

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JAPAN AND KOREA

Japan and Korea - one an archipelago, the other, a peninsula - lie at the eastern edge of the Asian continent. For both, harsh terrain and the sea contribute to a sense of isolation and self-sufficiency. Geography also shapes attitudes about nature and human existence within it. Although each nation is small, rugged mountains and swift-flowing rivers cut the land into parcels, making travel and communication disproportionately difficult. For this reason, both countries turned to the sea, which augmented agriculture for sustenance, provided local and international transport, supplied lines of communication, and at times fostered careers in trading or piracy.

Korea and Japan each evolved distinct social and political systems over long periods of time, while their relative isolation allowed evolution from tribal communities to refined court systems. The geography of each conferred a degree of autonomy. As technologies advanced in transportation and materials, other influences intruded, most notably those of China, the region's dynamo for a millennium.

The arts of Japan and Korea therefore reflect their proximity to China and its nearly overwhelming size, economic power, and political might, as well as its written language. China served as a conduit for ideas and goods moving eastward across Asia; sometimes these were carried by missionaries and merchants, and sometimes imposed by invasion or tribute. In spite of the scope of Chinese influence, Japanese and Korean arts remain distinctive from those of the Middle Kingdom in style, execution, materials, and temperament. They reflect the complex interaction of geography, climate, social pressures, religious beliefs, and history that influences art production and the opportunities afforded its makers.

Korea's climate, like its geography, is severe, buffeted by the weather patterns of the Asian landmass. Summers are hot and humid; winters are bitterly cold and dry. Sudden weather changes and a rugged terrain made for a hard life. To cope with the precariousness of human existence within these environmental extremes, Koreans turned to the mediation of the shaman, who traveled between the world of spirits and humans. The shaman tradition evolved from the practices of the Siberian taiga and nomads from the Eurasian steppe, ancestors of Korea's original settlers. Korean artists often infuse their works with a boldness and naturalism unknown in China.

By contrast, Japan's climate is moderated by the surrounding ocean, which produces a more hospitable environment. Throughout the islands, four distinct seasons occur with predictable regularity, measuring time and giving the Japanese an acute awareness of nature. For the Japanese, viewing cherry blossoms or observing maple leaves are major social occasions, often promoting a kind of celebratory craze. Japan's indigenous religion, Shinto, is based on awe and respect for nature. Whereas Chinese art-making emphasized technical mastery, Japanese artists believe that materials found in nature, such as wood, clay, and rock, are imbued with the spirit of the *kami*, or gods; they therefore tend to prize "natural" effects, imperfections, and spontaneity.

The Longshan-culture tripod ewer [2003.20.12] from Shaanxi province and the Jomon-period jar [88.3] are comparable in date, but reveal two very different attitudes about production standards. Both were made in the third millennium BC and are formed of coils of clay that are pressed together

and smoothed by hand. Both are complex shapes. The Chinese potter has paid particular attention to make each of the leg units identical; all traces of the potter's hand have been eliminated, suggesting mechanical perfection. The surface has been burnished to a metal-like sheen. The Japanese potter, on the other hand, has made a point of being spontaneous. Finger marks remain on the elaborately sculpted crown with pierced projections, which give the vessel its name, *kaenshiki*, flamed shape.

Whereas conscripted labor and mass-production methods encouraged monumental projects in China, Japanese art production is generally more intimate in scale. Art production was traditionally carried out in family workshops dedicated to particular fields such as ceramics, lacquer, or sculpture. Individual craftsmen held a much higher position in Japan than in China, as objects reflect the artist's involvement and personal respect for the materials. In the 19th century, westerners first observed this underlying respect for nature in things such as bonsai, ikebana, and temple gardens; it remains a fixture of our perception of Japan.

Less focused on the natural world, China's cultural conceit placed it at the center of the universe, a role the nation's political and economic might guaranteed. Korea and Japan reacted with a mixture of dread and envy. For them, being dominated or independent, receptive or exclusionary, were constants factors of life.

The northern half of Korea was colonized by China as early as the second century BC - part of a strategy to secure the empire's northern borders from nomadic invaders. In 1218, the peninsula was incorporated into the empire: The Mongols would control it as rulers of China's Yuan dynasty (1279-1368).

The Korean peninsula was frequently a launching pad for invasions of Japan. The Mongols used it as a base of operations to launch assaults on Japan in 1279 and again in 1281. They had no navy of their own, but appropriated Korean vessels, sea captains, and fighting forces. Weather intervened: Winter storms in the Sea of Japan, and the threat of being stranded without secure lines of supply, caused the first invasion to be abandoned. A second ended in catastrophe because of a typhoon. Rescued once again by nature, the Japanese immortalized this feature of the East Asian climate as the Heavenly Winds, or *kamikaze*. Others, including the Russians in the early years of the 20th century, would continue to use Korea to assail Japan.

Throughout the centuries, China also practiced means other than force to exert its influence. Among potentially hostile nomadic groups to the northeast, Chinese strategy played favorites, conferring status on one group to set the factions against each other, thus weakening collective political and military power. This divide and conquer philosophy reflected China's cultural bias that its non-Han Chinese neighbors were barbarians. With Korea and Japan, Chinese strategies were markedly different; shared histories and common values linked Korea and Japan to China.

The Korean court received China's imperial envoys and became a tributary to the Son of Heaven in the seventh century and again in the 14th century. Japan maintained diplomatic relations with the Chinese court from the mid seventh through the early ninth century. In acknowledging the supremacy of the Chinese emperor, Korea and Japan entered into what was essentially a non-aggression pact and most-favored-nation trading arrangement. Tribute guaranteed trade with China, and gave

Korea and Japan access to markets along the Silk Road further west.

Significantly, the Silk Road not only served as a trans-Asian conduit of commerce but facilitated the movement of people and ideas. In the fourth century, merchants and monks brought Buddhism to Korea, from which it was transmitted to the Japanese court in mid sixth century. Buddhism's flexibility and inclusiveness introduced rich new ways of thinking.

Iconographic models for Buddha images were transmitted from India and Central Asia together with a vast number of scriptures and a complex liturgy. The finely cast bronze image of A'mita Buddha, which dates from the late 17th or early 18th century, acknowledges 1,500-year-old iconographic models for making images of this Buddha. Its proportions, physical marks such as the snail-shell curls and domed cranium, yogic posture, and hand gestures were fixed. Nonetheless, the Korean artist's hand is present in the sweet disposition of the Buddha's face and the precision of casting, which captures the floral patterns on the textiles of his patchwork mantle.

In contrast, the scriptural basis for *Aizen Myo-o's* [91.20] wrathful appearance originates in an eighth-century Chinese text that returning pilgrim monks brought to Japan, where his fierce image was formulated during the 13th century. The artist turned to Japanese warrior imagery. The fierce, mask-like face is reminiscent of samurai helmet faceplates.

The seemingly greater independence in Japanese artistic tradition reflects an actual political and social condition: China's attempts to keep Japan a tributary of the Dragon Throne were less successful, and somewhat less pressing, because of distance. The

story of Taishokan, or the Legend of the Great Woven Cap, focuses on the mission sent by the Chinese emperor Taizong (r. 627-650) to ask for the hand of the daughter of Fujiwara Kamatari (614-699). Fujiwara Kamatari founded the Fujiwara clan that established the dynasty that ruled Japan during the late ninth through the 12th centuries. Such diplomatic marriages added immeasurably to local prestige and gave China a foothold in foreign politics.

In contrast, the Wanli emperor's (r. 1573-1619) efforts to subdue the growing power of Japan met with the wrath of the ruling Generalissimo Hideyoshi Toyotomi in the 1580s, when the general discovered that the emperor's gifts of presentation robes were only appropriate to the rank of duke, not king. This diplomatic faux pas may have solidified Hideyoshi's resolve to mount a campaign to conquer China. Japan's invasions in 1592 and 1597 wreaked havoc on Korea. The campaign was called off with Hideyoshi's death in 1598.

Korea and Japan were also affected by a wide range of non-political influences from China. The introduction of the Chinese system of writing and Chinese Confucian philosophy were critical factors in the early development of both countries.

When Chinese statecraft was imposed, Korea quickly adjusted its centralized government, headed by a hereditary monarch. Unlike the Chinese ideal - which opened advancement to the most qualified candidates regardless of family background - the scholar bureaucrats who served the king in Korea were almost exclusively drawn from old aristocratic families: The traditional court wore a kind of Confucian veneer. Patronage by the ruler and the circle of aristocratic families affected technical and aesthetic achievements such as the development of celadon wares that gained international renown as



TIMELINE		
JAPAN	OTHER CIVILIZATIONS	
Jomon (7500-300 BCE)	BCE	Cuneiform in Sumeria (3200 BCE)
	1700	Hittite Empire in Asia Minor (Anatolia) (1600-1200 BCE)
	400	Conquest of Alexander the Great (334-323 BCE)
Yayoi (300 BCE-300 CE)	100	Principate of Augustus Caesar in Rome (27 BCE-14 CE)
Kofun (300-500)		The Huns invade Eastern Europe (370)
Asuka (552-645)	400	
Spread of Buddhism in Japan (552)	500	
Hakuho (645-710)		
Nara (710-794)		Muslim conquest of Spain (711-715)
Heian (794-1185)	800	Reign of Charlemagne (768-814)
Woodblock printing of books in China, Japan, and Korea (900)		
Kamakura/Muromachi (1185-1573)	1200	The Age of Mongol Dominance (1200-1350)
	1300	Black Death (1347-1350)
	1500	
Momoyama (1573-1603)		
Edo (1603-1868)	1600	The First Industrial Revolution: Textiles and Steam (1712-1830)
	1800	
Meiji (1868-1912)		
Taisho (1912-1926)		
Showa (1926-1989)		
Japan Since 1945	1900	1937: Incident at Marco Polo Bridge leads to war with China. 1941: Japan attacks Pearl Harbor 1945: U.S. bombs Hiroshima and Nagasaki

Looking at Art: Japan



Jar

Earthenware

Japan, Jomon period, 3000-2000 BC

H. 24 in (60.8 cm.); Diam. at mouth 18 in. (45.6 cm.)

Purchased with funds provided by the Lenora and Walter F. Brown Asian Art Challenge Fund

88.3

Jar

88.3

Background

The Jomon period is the earliest and longest period in Japanese history. Scholars date the period from 10,500 BC to 300 BC - a period of nearly ten thousand years. The era peaked around 2500 BC and came to a close around 300 BC, when rice production and metallurgy were introduced from China.

The Jomon people survived on berries, nuts, wild animals and fish. They were a hunting and gathering culture. There is very little known about the Jomon people and excavations from ancient shell mounds have produced the most evidence. The first Jomon period excavation was made near Tokyo in 1879 by the American scholar Edward Morse. Morse used the term 'Jomon' to describe the cord marked decorations found on the surfaces of the ceramic vessels. The word Jomon is literally a translation of the Japanese term for "cord markings".

How to look at this object

The vessel has a narrow foot that widens into the body and expands into an opening at the lip. It has a flat bottom, but the circular projections at the rim suggest that it was not a utilitarian jar. The rim decoration undulates in waves from sharp peaks to shallow valleys. The rim-like projections have been referred to as resembling flames in a fire or waves in the ocean. Below the rim a bamboo stick has been used to carve vertical lines.

Obviously we do not know the maker, but the artist's presence is strongly communicated through the marks he leaves on the object. The maker has formed the circular rings and projections on the rim with his fingers in the wet clay. He or she has created a surface texture with a braided cord, by rolling the cord over the body of the vessel.

Function

No one is certain how these vessels were used. Most Jomon pots are more plainly decorated and may have been used for cooking or storing food, but these larger, more lavishly decorated pieces are ill-suited for daily use. Their upper bodies are often soot-blackened, suggesting they were placed over a vigorous fire that later died down. This leads scholars to conclude that these pots may have been used to prepare food for ritual.

How this object was made

The artisan made of soft clay coils, which were layered one on top of the next to create the vessel shape. A paddle is used to reinforce the vessel walls and create an even surface. The artist added additional coils of clay to the rim and formed flame-like shapes with his fingers. Additional incisions to the rim were made with the bamboo tool. The surface of the vessel was decorated with a braided rope or cord that was rubbed along the surface of the soft clay. Additional details were added with the bamboo tool. After the surface decoration was complete the pot was fired in an open bonfire.

Looking at art: Japan



Aizen Myo-o

Wood with gesso, pigment, and gilding and with gilt metal fittings

Japan, Late Kamakura period, 14th century

H. 19 3/4 in. (49.8 cm.) plus pedestal 18 1/4 in. (46.2 cm.)

Purchased with funds provided by the Lenora and Walter F. Brown Challenge Fund

91.20

Aizen Myo-o

91.20

Background

Buddhism originated in India in the fifth century BC with the teachings of the Buddha or the “Enlightened One.” Born in Nepal 563 BC, this spiritual leader known as Sakyumuni taught that all of life is suffering. He preached that the cure lay in the suppression of the ego and the release from reincarnation to which all living beings were thought to be destined.

Buddhism traveled over trade routes and ultimately influenced all mainland Asia. It was brought to Japan from Korea in AD 538. The Mahayana form of Buddhism, which was first adopted in Japan, included many Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Later, many different sects of Buddhism were introduced, among them Esoteric Buddhism, Pure Land Buddhism and Zen Buddhism. Esoteric Buddhism was introduced in Japan in the 9th century several hundred years after it was developed in India. Esoteric Buddhism promised the attainment of salvation or enlightenment in this life if the devotee practiced the proper rituals and rites. Esoteric Buddhism, or Vajrayana, is the same form of Buddhism that was introduced into Tibet. It was incredibly complex with numerous deities. Painted images such as mandala diagrams and sculpture of powerful deities were made for meditation by priests and initiates.

Aizen Myo-o, the Lord of Passions, is one the guardian kings of Buddhist truth. He was a major deity within the pantheon of Japanese esoteric Buddhism as taught by the Shingon sect. The scriptural basis for Aizen’s wrathful appearance originates in an 8th century Chinese text that was brought to Japan, where during the 13th century his fierce image was formulated. Colored red, emblematic of human desire, Aizen sits on a lotus throne surrounded by flames, glaring intensely and baring fangs. A third eye and lion crown symbolizes commitment to the path of spiritual awakening; the attributes held in his six hands indicate his swiftness of action.

How to look at this work

This wrathful deity has three eyes: His mouth is open, bearing fangs. His body is colored red and he wears a black robe which covers his right shoulder. His flaring bands of hair accentuate the emerging lion head which rises from his head. He wears a necklace and crown made of metal.

Wrathful deities were often depicted with numerous arms and heads to illustrate their power to protect the devotee from evil. This deity has six arms and probably held iconic symbols in each hand. Today three emblems remain. The figure holds a bow in his middle right hand. The bow is a symbol of his swiftness in action. In his lower left and right hands he hold a bell and vajra, or thunderbolt. When they appear together these two emblems symbolize the unity of wisdom achieved from seemingly opposite principles

Looking at art: Japan



Palanquin

Wood with lacquer, gold leaf, and gilt and copper mounts; interior painting: ink, color and gold on paper; blinds: bamboo and silk

Japan, Edo period, early 19th century

Cab: H 40 7/8 in (122 cm); L. 46 in (116.8 cm); W. 32 1/2 in (82.5 cm);

Beam: L. 163 in (414.5 cm)

Purchased with funds provided by the Lenora and Walter F. Brown Fund, the John and Karen McFarlin Purchase Fund and an anonymous donor

91.130

Palanquin

91.130

Background

A palanquin is a carriage powered by servants. Like today's ultra luxury cars, this palanquin, with its gleaming black lacquered surfaces patterned gold leaf, would have celebrated the status of its owner. Lest an observer mistake the owner's identity and status, the family crest, or mon, is liberally displayed on the carriage and carrying bar. The notched lozenge shape is the mon called matsukawabishi, or pine bark.

From 1615 to 1868, Japan experienced a period of relative peace under a military government ruled by a hereditary Shogun based in Edo (modern-day Tokyo). Prior to and during the Edo period, Japan was divided into a little more than 100 provinces, each ruled by a feudal lord, or *daimyo*.

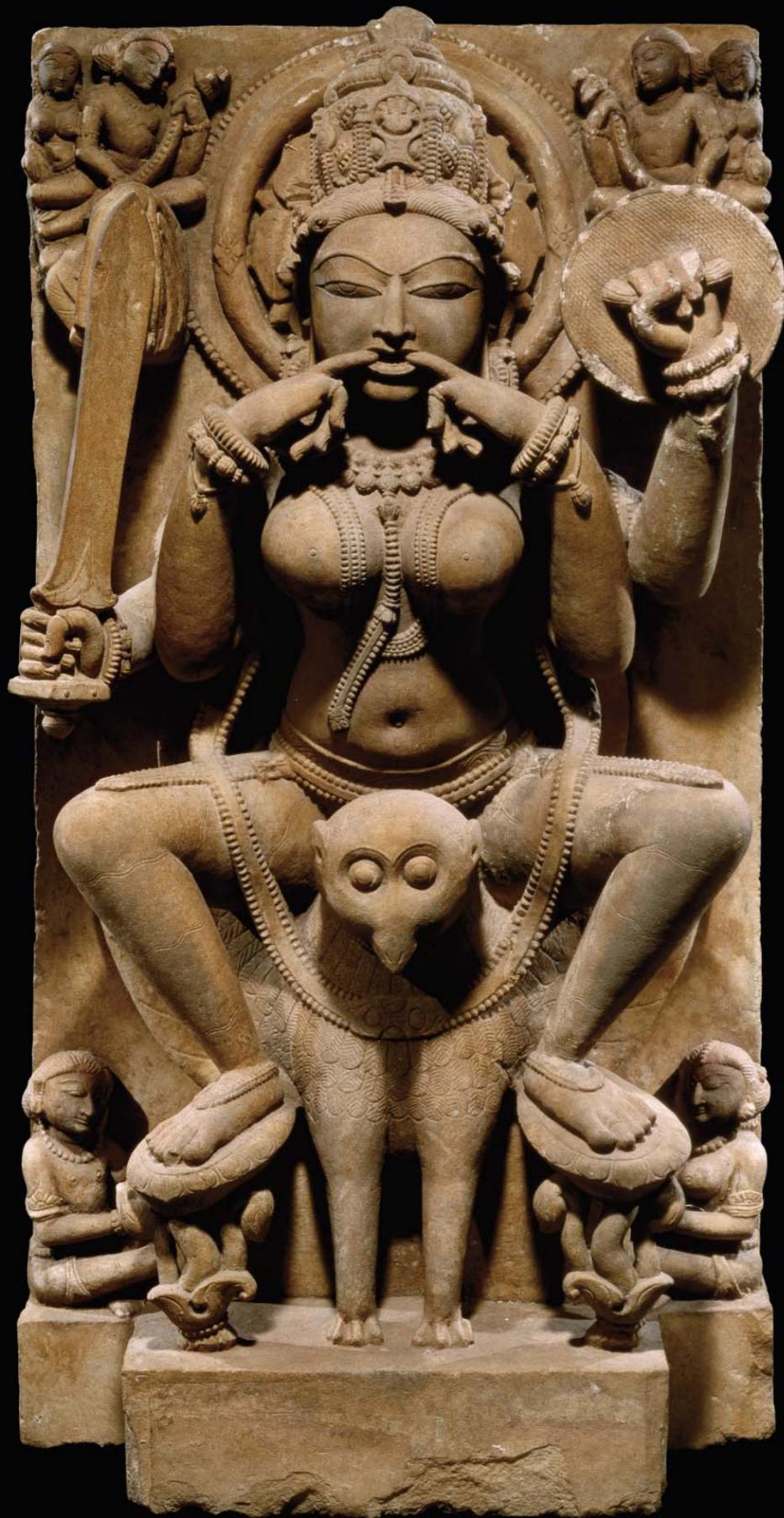
These feudal lords, their family and entourage were required to reside in the capital during alternate years. The formal processions to and from the capital from the *daimyo's* home province were momentous occasions for which such a carriage was an essential symbol of authority and status.

How to look at this object

A luxury item such as the lacquered palanquin would have been reserved for a feudal lord or someone in his family. With its gleaming black lacquered surfaces patterned in gold leaf, this vehicle celebrates the status of the owner. The family crest is displayed in gold on the carriage and carrying bar. It is also engraved in the copper mounts. The notched lozenge shape is known as the pine-bark shape. It is difficult to say which particular feudal domain used this lozenge as their family symbol. Many feudal families had numerous symbols, making this exploration more complicated.

This particular palanquin is clearly a vehicle for a woman. The inside is painted with symbols of autumn (in the form of maple leaves) and symbols of spring (in the form of morning lilies). The ceiling is divided into numerous square blocks, each painted with a different flower. Palanquin for men did not include painted interiors or cushioned arm and backrests.

NOTES:



SOUTH ASIA AND THE HIMALAYAS

Western cultural myth runs deep about South Asia and the Himalayas. The arts are rich and mysterious to an outsider, laden with a sense of esoteric knowledge, demanding clues to decode them. Yet, in many ways, the mystery exists only because traditions of the West have so deeply entrenched a sense of the exotic.

Geography and climate sharply differentiate South Asia from the Himalayas, marking them as distinct from other regions of Asia. The tropical south can be lush. Changes in climate are largely determined by monsoons blowing southwest from May to October and northeast from November to April. In contrast, at the “roof of the world” the climate is dry; summer offers a brief respite from fierce winter. For both regions, environment produced extremes that influenced attitudes about nature and the place for human society within it. Violent, relentless weather patterns affected mobility and survival, and shaped cultural principles about coexistence with a hostile nature. Meditation strategies arose, aimed at extinguishing human existence in order to merge with a greater force. Notions of cyclical time emerged, to encompass the universe throughout eons of existence.

With its keen spirituality and complex pantheon of deities, many of which celebrated sensual subject matter thought too delicate, the region captivated Europeans as perhaps no other. Towering peaks of the Himalayas added to the mystique. The first British outpost in India was established in 1619, in an era of profound religious intolerance in Europe. India’s spiritual beliefs, necessary to a comprehension of their art, could not be examined, only dismissed as heretical. Europeans formally colonized the region in the 19th century. Among

others, England claimed India, and France colonized Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. Many traditions and cultural characteristics would vanish during the years of colonial rule.

Entering Asia as merchants and conquerors, Europeans also emphasized the exotic and developed a highly romanticized vision of the region. Western notions of India and Southeast Asia are largely derived from the reflection of writers of European extraction, such as Rudyard Kipling, who celebrated English colonial achievements. Seen through the lens of the British Empire, the dominated cultures are often reflected as child-like, naïve, or cruel. “Real life” accounts, such as *Anna and the King of Siam*, were frequently highly fictionalized. Similarly, the first literary work to impact the western world with images of the Himalayas was *Lost Horizon*, which created a utopian vision of a village at the edge of the clouds, Shangri La, where time stands still. These infantilized and romanticized notions obscure a complex truth, in which longstanding social and class divisions have been offset by expansive, evolving, religious development that has resulted in elaborate mythology and iconography.

In contrast to the political and economic forces that unified Chinese society, in South Asia and the Himalayas class and religion defined and segregated it. In India, caste membership by lineage and associated occupations created an inescapable identity for the individual and the group. This social structure can be traced to the Aryan invasion of the India subcontinent around 1500 BC. The Aryans, an Indo-Iranian group, came to the subcontinent from Central Asia and the West. Their superior weapons, chariot warfare, and disciplined society probably precipitated the collapse of the

Indus Valley civilization in what is now northwest India and Pakistan. That society had boasted extensive cities, irrigation systems, and trade networks, and had flourished for 1,000 years.

The physical environment also affected the emotional and psychological framework in which people lived. Nothing could be done about nature. Similarly, there was nothing people could do, individually or collectively, to change their lot in life. Family and caste bestowed identity and social cohesion through rigorously enforced codes of conduct. Like the despotism that marked political control in South Asia and the Himalayas, they were repressive. Issues of status and prestige were philosophically irrelevant, so people looked beyond the present reality. Rather than idealizing political power or social institutions, as was the case in China, South Asians focused on a cosmic vision beyond manifest existence. The challenge of making the invisible visible became an all-consuming endeavor.

At the core of the Aryan caste system was religious purity, which shaped notions of status and entitlement. An individual's life was governed by karma. The doctrine of karma asserts that one's state in this life is a result of physical and mental actions in past incarnations, and actions in this life can determine one's destiny in future incarnations. Karma is a natural, impersonal law of moral cause and effect and has no connection with the idea of a supreme power that decrees punishment or forgiveness of sins. Karmic law is universally applicable, and only those who have attained liberation from rebirth can transcend it.

Yoga, which we in the West are most familiar with as an exercise regime, is actually a physical and spiritual discipline. The devout combine yoga with meditation to seek detachment from the results of action and karmic cycle. Yogic discipline is at the core of Hindu and Buddhist practice and is often emphasized in art. The Buddha is frequently shown seated in lotus position to mark the six years of intense meditation and austerity that led to his enlightenment. In the gilt bronze portrait statue, *Lama Mipham* wears a yogi strap over his shoulder. Although a Tibetan, Mipham is represented as a *mahasiddha*, or mystic in the Indian Hindu tradition, with matted hair in a prominent topknot and robes exposing his chest. Like the Buddha, he sits in the lotus position, in contrast to Vajrapani, or Holder of the Thunderbolt Scepter, who - as a special protector of the historical Buddha - strikes the posture of the active warrior, known as *pratyahidhara*.

Belief in the interconnectedness of all things made Indian theologies complex and dynamic. Within multilingual populations, Sanskrit, the language of the conquerors, became the language of worship and the transmitter of scripture. Artists responded to the subtleties of scriptural descriptions of divinity with a complex pictorial and sculptural language, rendering infinite manifestations of the divine. Some, like the Museum's buff sandstone stele *Lakshmi Narayana*, express the karmic vision of past, present, and future incarnations of a deity. Although the work is named for Vishnu's consort of Lakshmi, the artist has surrounded the couple with images of Vishnu.

Vishnu is often called Narayana, one who dwells upon the waters, because he is the infinite ocean from which the world emerges. From his navel grows the lotus out of which Brahma, the creator of the universe, appears. Along with Shiva, the destroyer of the universe, they form the principle trinity in Hinduism. As the preserver of the universe, Vishnu is concerned with forces of good and evil that struggle for domination over the world: He descends to earth when the balance is upset. Surrounding the main image are 10 avatars, incarnations that maintain order.

Some images, such as the panel depicting the historic Buddha Shakyamuni, use a more conventional narrative strategy - linked to late Hellenist artistic traditions from the West - to depict time. Four events from the Buddha's life are arranged to the left and right. Their counterclockwise organization reflects the karmic cycle, from which Buddha's enlightenment offered escape, and direction for walking around objects of devotion during worship. Others, like the cult image of the yogini and the black-schist Vishnu stele, alter human anatomy with additional limbs to evoke transcendent power and simultaneous action.

The Hindu concept of karma and its infinite manifestations of the divine influenced Jainism and Buddhism, which also arose on the Indian subcontinent. Successive waves of missionaries, teachers, and monks spread these ideas across Asia. Maritime trade with the kingdoms of Southeast Asia and Indonesia hastened the spread of these beliefs across south Asia. Hindu iconography also affected Buddhist theology and its artistic expression, which moved not only south and east over maritime routes, but also traveled north and east to Central

Asia, China, Korea, and Japan with transcontinental commerce. Indications of this movement can be found in the Museum's collection. Subsequently, Buddhism also spread north to Tibet, where a particularly exuberant form of esoteric tantric Buddhism flourished. Such Buddhism was also patronized by Ming and Qing dynasty emperors, as evidenced by the gilded bronze Amitayus Buddha in the Museum's collection.

The interest in discourse and delight in philosophical debate that formed an important part of intellectual and religious life are embodied in the c1765 miniature, which probably illustrates an episode from the 41st chapter of the Bhagavatapurana. This Hindu classic is concerned with all the incarnations of Vishnu. The 10th section describes the life and activities of Krishna, the eighth incarnation, together with his brother Balarama, in discussion with leaders and scholars of the holy city of Mathura. The artist has placed the scene within a palace garden, mixing gods and mortals in daily life.

During the colonial era many traditions were supplanted or intentionally eradicated. The British outlawed certain Hindu practices and worship of specific deities. India became independent in 1947 and has continued to emerge as an important nation. Home to the second-largest population on the planet, it is the world's most populous democracy. India's role as a nuclear power, its high levels of emigration to every part of the planet, and its evolving economic relationship with the West have continued to shape modern perceptions of the region, replacing outmoded colonial notions with more accurate understanding.

TIMELINE

TIBET		OTHER CIVILIZATIONS
Indus valley civilization (2500-1500 BC)	5000	Neolithic cultures (8000-2300 BC)
Vedic period (1500-322 BC)	1500	(Europe) Egyptian Kingdoms and Bronze age Aegean Empire (2300-1000 BC) (3150-1100 BC)
	1000	Early Greek art (900-480 BC)
	500	Classical period Hellenistic period (480-320 BC) (320-30 BC)
Maurya dynasty (322-185 BC)		Roman Republic (509-27 BC)
Shunga period / Early Andhra period (185-72 BC)		
Kushan period / Later Andhra period (Gandharan) (Late 1st century-3rd century)	BC 0 AD	Roman Empire (27 BC-AD 395)
Gupta period (320-647)	500	
(South) Pallava period (500-800)		Christian and Byzantine era (100-1453)
(Northeast) Pala period (730-1197)		
(South) Chola period (897-c.1200)	1000	Romanesque art (1050-1200)
(North) Sultanate of Delhi (1206-14th century)	1200	Gothic art (110-1500)
(South) Vijayanagar period (13th century-1565)	1500	Renaissance (1400-1600)
(North) Mughal Empire (1526-1756)	1600	Baroque and Rococo (1575-1775)
(South) Madura period (1646-1900)	1700	Neoclassicism and Romanticism (1725-1875)
British rule of India (1757-1947)	1800	Realism and Impressionism (1820-1890)
	1900	Modernism (180-1940)

TIMELINE

NEPAL	TIBET		OTHER CIVILIZATIONS
		1000	Early Greek art (900-480 BC)
563 BC - Birth of the Buddha in Lumbini, Nepal		500	Classical period (480-320 BC)
			Hellenistic period (320-27 BC)
		0	Roman Empire (27 BC-AD 395)
Licchavi Kingdom (300-879)	Yarlung dynasty (600-850)	500	Christian and Byzantine era (100-1453)
Transitional Kingdoms (750-1200)	2nd diffusion (975-1250)	1000	Romanesque art (1050-1200)
Early Malla period (1200-1482)	Sakya dynasty (1270-1358)		Gothic art (110-1500)
			Renaissance (1400-1600)
Late Malla period (1482-1768)	Period of Monastic Conflicts (1368-1642)	1500	Baroque and Rococo (1575-1775)
			Neoclassicism and Romanticism (1725-1875)
Shah dynasty (1769-present)	Period of the Dalai Lamas (1642-present)		Realism and Impressionism (1820-1890)
			Modernism (1890-1940)
		2000	Post-modernism (1940-present)

Looking at art: India



Plaque with female deity

Terracotta

India, West Bengal, Chandraketugarh region, Shunga period, 1st century BC

H. 6 3/8 in. (16.3 cm.); W. 3 1/4 in. (8 cm.)

Gift of Drs. Ann and Robert Walzer on the occasion of the opening of the Lenora and Walter F. Brown Asian Art Wing

2003.39.3

Plaque with female deity

2003.39.3

Background

The Mother Goddess image is one of the most enduring forms in Indian art. The Goddess figure is represented with large hips, narrow waist and full breasts, symbolizing the abundance of the land and her power to procreate. The cult of the Mother Goddess pays reverence to the power of fertility and abundance, found in nature and symbolized by the female figure.

Archaeological remains from prehistoric sites indicate that a highly sophisticated culture flourished in the Indus River Valley (located on the western border of India near present-day Pakistan) between 2600-1900 BC. Excavations include large numbers of female goddess figures formed from terracotta. With prominent breasts and hips and large fan-shaped headdresses, these figures have been referred to as Mother Goddess images. Evidence of a Mother Goddess cult from this time is reinforced by the lack of similar figures depicting males.

A nomadic group of people from the northwest, who called themselves Aryans or Noble Ones settled in northern India around 1300 BC. They composed the Vedas and the Upanishads, sacred literature written in Sanskrit describing their worldview. This system was male-dominated and did not incorporate the indigenous Mother Goddess. Instead, the gods that controlled nature were male, such as Surya, the sun god, and Indra, the god of storms.

Mother Goddess imagery never completely disappeared and terracotta images of the goddess reappeared around 200 BC. Around this time Emperor Ashoka (r. 272-231 BC), who ruled a large part of north India, converted to Buddhism and spread it throughout his kingdom. Images of Mother Goddesses are featured prominently on the sandstone pillar railings at Buddhist temples founded in the period, such as Bharhut and Sanchi. Hinduism as we know it today seems to have formed at the beginning of the first millennium AD. The Mother Goddess concept and image was quickly absorbed into this belief system. It flourished there with numerous deities and manifestations of female power, or shakti.

This Mother Goddess plaque was made during the first century BC, in the eastern Indian region of Chandraketugarh, not far from modern-day Calcutta. The region was famous for ceramic production; a large number of terracotta plaques depicting human figures was excavated in the 1950s and 1960s.

How to look at this work

The subject of this plaque is a female figure wearing an elaborate headdress, bracelets, anklets, a necklace and earrings. She is depicted frontally and addresses the viewer directly with her gaze. She stands with straight legs, feet parted. Her left arm, covered with bracelets, rests on her hip, while her equally-embellished right arm hangs to her side. Her right hand holds the excess of the garment she is wearing. A chain girdle descends from her hips.

The strong and confident stance of this female figure is further enhanced by the highly detailed headdress she wears. Her unique hair arrangement consists of a floral headband, a floral pendant on top, and multiple “hairpins” projecting from the sides. Scholars believe these ornaments actually represent vegetation, such as corncocks, and weapons, such as an elephant goad. There appear to be six ornaments on each side. The ornaments are connected to each other by patterns of beads symbolizing chains. These symbols reflect her power and position as a goddess.

The plaque is of buff-colored terracotta, and is slightly concave at the center. It is rectangular in shape and curves inward and then out again in the lower section. The edges are embellished with a floral bead pattern. A single hole at the top suggests it may have been suspended by a cord. The female figure is rendered in high relief with naturalistic modeling. Her belly is slightly protruded.

Function

The function of this type of plaque is unknown. Based on the small shape and subject matter, it may be surmised that this was an object for personal worship, placed in a domestic shrine. Some scholars think that this type of plaque could have been used as a votive offering. The hole at the top suggests it could have been hung in a home and used as a protective amulet or charm. Being made of clay, it would have been too fragile to be worn.

How this object was made

This plaque was made from a terracotta (fired clay) mold in a technique called press molding. Craftsmanship is required for making the mold itself and in adding details to the plaque after the clay images has been formed. Working in wet clay, the mold maker created the remarkable details seen here, some of which were created after the impression had been made. This technique enabled multiple copies of the same image to be produced from a single mold.

NOTES:

Looking at art: Gandhara



Shakyamuni Buddha

Gray schist

Pakistan or eastern Afghanistan, Gandhara region, Kushan period 2nd - 3rd century

H. 19 3/8 in (49.1 cm); W. 42 5/8 in (108.4 cm)

Purchased with funds provided by the Bessie Timon Endowment Fund

77.956

Shakyamuni Buddha

77.956.42

Background

This panel conveys key theological elements of the Buddha's life to the faithful who attended services or prayers in its presence, and was probably made to decorate a temple or shrine. Buddhism first flourished in the Gandharan region (modern-day Pakistan) during the reign of Ashoka (273-232 BC), but with the Kushan conquest in the 1st century AD an ambitious program of proselytizing and patronage led to founding of many religious establishments. Over the next four centuries Gandharan region artists created a new human-based iconography, influenced by Hellenistic styles from the West, that helped spread Buddhism across Asia.

The Buddha

When Siddhartha Gautama, a 6th century BC prince of the Shakya clan, was unexpectedly exposed to the world outside the palace, he renounced his position to seek the meaning of life. Through ascetic practices and meditation he realized the cause of suffering lay in the attachment to physical desires. Only through the complete elimination of worldly attachment, Siddhartha reasoned, could individuals escape their karma of endless rebirths and suffering to attain eternal bliss, called nirvana (extinction).

Siddhartha became known as Buddha, or “the Enlightened One”. He taught that nirvana could only be attained by realizing the Four Noble Truths: that all life is suffering; that suffering is caused by desires; that to eliminate suffering, one must eliminate desires; and that this can be achieved by following the Eightfold Path.

In the first few centuries after Buddha's death, devotees often lived as monks and nuns. Worship was focused on devotions held at stupas, large earth mounds containing relics, and by making pilgrimages to important places in the Buddha's life. Although Buddhism spread throughout Asia, by the 13th century it had ceased to be a major religion in India itself.

Gandhara

Early Buddhist art in India shunned depictions of the historical Buddha in favor of symbols representing his presence or aspects of his teachings. Later, Gandharan artists responded to the needs of local populations, which were familiar with late Hellenistic and Roman art (part of the legacy of Alexander the Great's successors and the result of trade with the eastern Roman Empire). Over the next four centuries, artists created a new human-based iconography for Buddhism that helped spread Buddhism across East Asia.

Carved stone sculpture from the Gandharan region depict the Buddha and his attendants with more musculature. The heavyset bodies, togalike robes with realistic three-dimensional folds, and coiffure show inspirations from Mediterranean cultures.

How to look at this work

This panel features scenes from the life of the Buddha. This large slab of black schist was carved into five architectural sections. The Buddha is featured in the center, below an arch flanked by lions and a jewel. Two large, rectangular panels surmounted by two smaller panels flank the central image of Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha. He is depicted in a seated position with his hands in the “turning-the-wheel of the law” hand gesture (or *mudra*) which signifies teaching. He is seated in the lotus position on a double lotus throne. Surrounding the central figure are scenes depicting seminal events in his secular and sacred life: his birth, his life as a prince, his life as the Buddha and his death.

The lower right panel features the birth of the Buddha. In this scene, Queen Maya, the Buddha's mother, lies horizontally on a couch surrounded by attendants. A full-grown image of the Buddha sits on the edge of the couch facing the viewer. In most representations of this scene, the Buddha is featured as an infant. Directly above this panel is a smaller panel depicting the Buddha in his role as a prince. He is shown wearing necklace and earrings. In the panel opposite (upper left panel) the Buddha is shown in his enlightened state which he assumed after renouncing his earthly life. He wears monastic robes and no jewelry. He stands with devotees. The lower left panel shows the death of the Buddha. Similar in composition to the Birth scene, this panel features the Buddha reclining on a couch surrounded by devotees.

Lakshanas

Figures of the Buddha have particular features, called lakshanas, which express the exalted state of the Buddha as the Enlightened One. The bulge at the top of his head is called an ushnisha and signifies his transcendent knowledge. The urna, which is the whorl of hair between the eyebrows, is another symbol of his transcendent nature. It is often depicted as a dot, and its placement corresponds to that of the pineal gland.

Images of the Buddha have other distinguishing marks. His earlobes are elongated from wearing heavy gold earrings when he was a prince. After gaining enlightenment, he discarded such adornments, which represented attachment to the physical world. Princes traditionally had long hair piled up in an elaborate coiffure. When the Buddha became an ascetic, he cut his hair short as a sign of renunciation and humility; in visual art, it is often shown curled in tight snail-like whorls.

Function

This sculpture has a didactic function, as it was made to teach the important phases in the life of the Buddha. It was probably made to decorate a Buddhist temple.

How it was made

This panel was carved from gray schist native to the region of modern-day Pakistan. Chisels and hammers were used to carve out the rough form and then smaller tools were used to refine the details.

Looking at art: India



Ganesha

Black schist

H. 37 1/2 in. (64 cm)

India, Bengal region, Pala period, 11th century

Museum purchase with Timon Endowment Fund

91.15

Ganesha

91.15

Background

Hinduism began to evolve as a religion around 1000 BC. Initially it centered around three gods: Brahma, the creator; Vishnu, the preserver; and Shiva, the destroyer of the universe. Shiva and Vishnu became the most important deities, as their reactions and interactions throughout the cycles of creation and destruction of the universe were celebrated. Female deities also play prominent roles in the religion.

Hinduism has no holy book or prophet, nor is it interpreted by a hierarchy of priests. From the beginning Hinduism was open to assimilate, rather than reject, ideas. As a result, it developed complex overlays of beliefs, cults, gods and forms of devotion. Worship is not congregational: rather, it is based on a one-to-one relationship between devotee and god. The faith continues to be practiced by the majority of Indians today.

Ganesha is one of the most popular deities in Hinduism. As the remover of obstacles, he is invoked before the start of important events such as a marriage or the beginning of a new job or large business deal. It is common to see offerings (money or food) placed in front of Ganesha images.

Ganesha is the child of Shiva and his wife Parvati. As the story is told, Parvati became lonely when Shiva was away and created Ganesha from her own body. One day, Shiva returned unexpectedly to find this young boy guarding his wife's bath. When the boy refused to allow Shiva to enter, Shiva cut off his head. When Parvati discovered what had happened she became very upset with Shiva and made him promise to replace the head of her son with that of the next creature that passes - which turned out to be an elephant.

How to look at this work

This sculpture features a dancing Ganesha carved in relief on a rectangular slab of black stone with a curved and pointed top. The figure is standing in an architectural framework, with columns and a central arch carved in a lower relief. A platform at the bottom provides a space for Ganesha's vehicle or mount, the rat. Crowning the stele is a bunch of mangoes: Pairs of apsaras (angel-like figures) flank either side.

Ganesha is one of the easiest Hindu deities to identify because of his elephant head, big ears and trunk. In this sculpture, Ganesha is depicted with a third eye in the center of his forehead reminiscent of his father Shiva's, third eye. His hair is divided into braids and tied in a top knot similar to the style worn by ascetics and Shiva. He wears a sacred cord over his right shoulder that drapes over his belly; belts and a lion-skin around his waist; and jewelry to adorn his upper and lower arms and ankles.

Yogini

90.92

Background

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A yogini, a female counterpart of a yogi, represents a yoga-practitioner whose meditation culminates in the attainment of perfected stability and inner tranquility. There are sixty-four yogini in the Hindu pantheon. Although worshiped individually, this group of esoteric deities, which were associated with the Shaiva Kaula cult, was believed to emanate from the great goddess Durga. They represent *shakti* or female creative energy. Because it also describes the feminine aspects of male gods like Shiva, *shakti* represents the universality of deities.

The female deity, or Mother Goddess, is an enduring tradition in Indian art. Votive images of female deities excavated at Harappa and Mohenjo-daro, two important Indus River Valley sites date back to 3500 BC.

How to look at this work

Yogini are conceived as voluptuous and seductive beings with human heads, like this one, or as terrifying beings with heads of animals. This four-armed deity sits on an owl. Two hands are held up to a partially open mouth with clearly delineated teeth, suggesting a gesture to indicate whistling. The owl, a creature of the night, and the attributes of sword and shield held in her other hands invest this image with a feeling of occult and dark power.

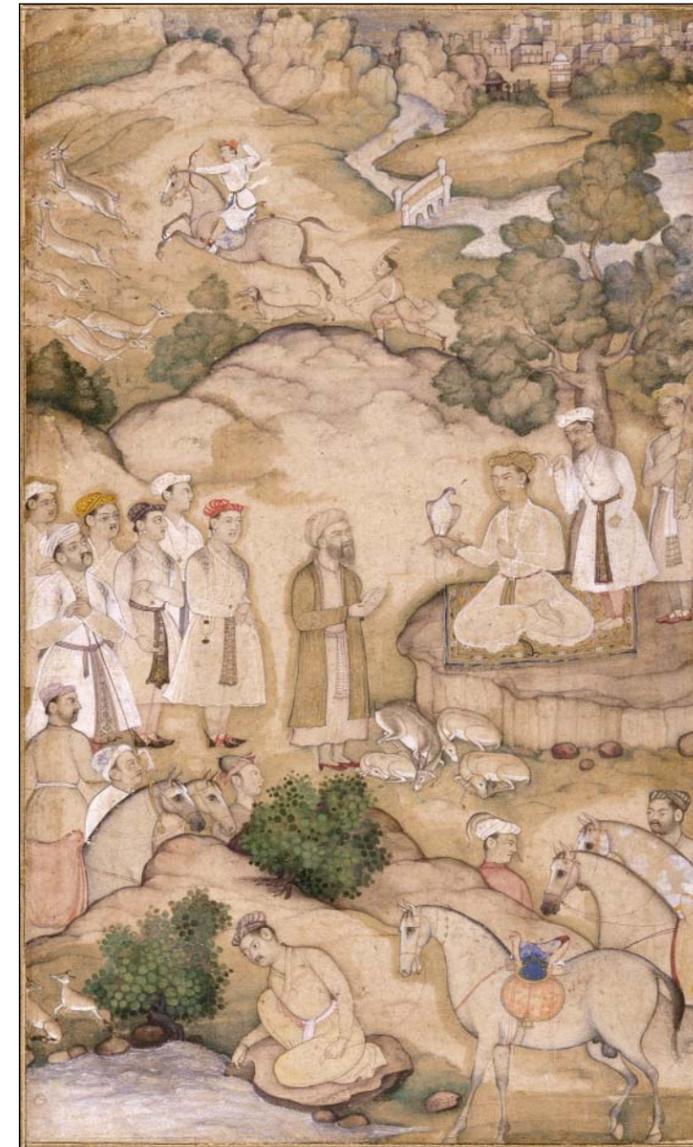
Function

Yogini temples, for which this image was probably made, are common in northern India. They are circular in plan and have images set in sixty-four niches facing inward to a small shrine, which is usually devoted to Shiva in his fearsome form as Bhairava.

How this work was made

This object was carved from a slab of pale sandstone commonly found in central India. First, large tools such as chisels and hammers are used to carve the rough form: Smaller tools are then used to refine the details. The work would have then been buffed, giving it a smooth surface texture.

Looking at art: India



A Prince on a Hunting Excursion

Ink and pigments on paper

India, Northern India

Late 16th century

Painting: H. 9 1/4 in (23.4 cm); W. 5 7/8 in (15 cm)

Mount: H. 13 in (33 cm); W. 9 1/4 in (23.4 cm)

Purchased with funds provided by Mr. and Mrs. E. B. McFarland

61.100.1

Looking at art: Tibet



Lama Mipham

Cast bronze set with turquoise on a repoussé and gilt bronze base

Tibet, 17th century

H. 20 1/2 in (52 cm); W. 15 in (38.2 cm); D. 11 in (27.8 cm)

Purchased with funds provided by the Ewing Halsell Foundation

2004.7.1

Lama Mipham

2004.7.2

Background

The arts of the Himalayas are predominately shaped by Buddhism. Introduced into Tibet during the 7th century, Buddhism remained relatively isolated at the court holding power in central Tibet until the 11th century. Led by Tibetan scholar-translators and Indian missionaries Vajrayana or tantric Buddhism was revived and became the predominant aspect of Tibetan civilization.

Vajrayana, translated as “diamond path” evolved in India during the 5th century. It emphasizes the goal of bodhicitta (mind of enlightenment) and teaches each person can become a complete Buddha in a single existence by following the direct path. To clear the mind of ignorance, a guru or teacher often directs a devotee’s development physically, intellectually and spiritually.

In Tibet the search for enlightenment was supported by a wide range of objects, sounds and physical actions. Whether practiced in religious communities or privately, under the direction of a teacher or *guru* or by one’s own determination images, paintings, portraits and ritual objects, the sounds of chanting and the reading of scripture as well as the exercise of yoga disciplined the mind and body.

How to look at this work

This figure is identified by inscription as Lama MiPHam Phun Tshugs Shes Rab. He is seated on a double lotus, and holds his right hand in the bhumispara mudra, or earth witnessing gesture and left hand holding a vase filled with life-giving water symbolizing immortality. The inscription suggests the statue was commissioned after his death, and expresses the hope for an auspicious rebirth.

Lama Mipham is known to have lived in Mustang in the late 16th to early 17th century where he was a lama and preceptor to the king. Mipham was revered for teachings and spiritual accomplishment.

The figure is not represented in typical Tibetan lama garb, but as a mahasiddha or mystic in the Indian tradition, with matted hair in a prominent top knot and robes exposing his chest and the sash over his right shoulder recalling the strap used by yoga practioners.

