

Art
ToGo

The Cleveland
Museum of Art

Journey to Asia



Lisa Robertson

Contents

3 At a Glance

A summary of major objectives

4 Presentation Outline

A brief description of the lesson

8 Questions and Answers

Additional background information and some useful definitions

11 Things to Think About

Creative ways to introduce and pursue the subject

12 List of Objects

Resources

13 “Webbing” Asia

How to connect Art To Go concepts to other disciplines

14 Getting Ready for the Visit

Logistics of the Art To Go visit and suggestions on how to configure your classroom

14 Lesson Plan

Formatted especially for teachers

15 Suggestions for Further Reading

Books for students and teachers

Also in Your Folder

a. Presentation Evaluation

Please fill out and return to the museum after the presentation. Thank you!

b. Fax Sheet

Use this form for shorter questions or concerns relating to the Art To Go visit.

Cover: Ganesha, South India, Chola, 12th century. Gift of Katharine Holden Thayer 1970.62

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Introduction

In nine works of art dating from the 1500s to the 1900s the presentation *Journey to Asia* provides an overview of five hundred years of Asian art.

Through the works in this presentation we can learn what life was like at different times and places in Asia, and better understand Asia's climate, geography, social structures, religions, and natural resources. Some of these works serve as examples of artistic methods and materials for which Asia has been renowned worldwide. While all of the pieces in the suitcase are authentic works of art, several are also functional objects that suggest insights into everyday personal and social life. As the lesson proceeds, the Art To Go volunteer teacher will introduce the objects along with ideas about Asian history and culture. While handling some of the works and observing them closely, students will become interested in learning more about Asia's civilizations and diverse cultural heritage.

At a Glance

The word Asia may conjure images of spicy curry dishes, Chinese junks (sailing vessels), meditating monks, and crowded cities. While some of these sights are still common today, a vision of Asia based only on such popular symbols fails to convey Asia's rich artistic traditions, culture, and history. The presentation *Journey to Asia* attempts to broaden views of Asia beyond familiar conceptions. As we traverse

the many countries and cultures that are part of Asia's past and present, the works of art in the presentation offer images that guide us on our journey.

Today, Asia is a region of global economic power, a major source of industrial technology, and home to at least half of the world's population. Its many cultures vary widely in geography, extensive history, and size, but share some important characteristics. The Art To Go presentation will focus on connections among Asian civilizations at specific points in time, as illustrated by art objects from Asia. Links among the different regions and cultures of Asia have been forged through trade, language, religious beliefs, agriculture, technological advances, and art.

Presentation Outline

Long before modern transportation, Asia attracted traders, monks, warriors, and explorers. For about 3,000 years, Asian land and sea routes have offered access to numerous products and ideas, while also providing passage for both invaders and diplomats. At times, both trade and travel have helped to unify the contrasting cultures and countries of Asia. The history of Asia is filled with stories of travel: traders buying and selling goods from city to city, explorers discovering new lands, governments sending ambassadors to nearby countries, and religious pilgrims seeking to spread their beliefs or to learn more about their own faith. A variety of objects made in distant corners of Asia were exchanged through travel and commerce. Ancient Egyptian and Roman records show that people in many parts of the world valued

Asian spices and silk so highly that they were willing to exchange large quantities of gold for them. Thus, Asia's economic power in world markets was established by the first century CE, as Asia became renowned worldwide as a source for desirable commodities.

Many of Asia's inventions and innovations were easily transported, and thus widespread travel and trade ensured that natural resources found only in Asia were distributed across the globe. Certain Asian artistic materials and techniques were renowned and refined to the extent that they still serve as symbols of a particular country or culture. By 1100 CE, China had become known for producing beautiful ceramics made of a special type of clay fired at extremely high temperatures. The extensive popularity of blue and white porcelains, such as the vase in the presentation, in both Europe and Asia made the term "china" synonymous with the land where such objects were crafted. Today, we continue to use the word "china" to designate the country that remained the world's sole source of fine porcelain until the early 1700s. Since porcelains were admired within Asia as well as in other parts of the world, other cultures such as Korea and Japan attempted to emulate China's ceramic technology. The Korean celadon bowl found in the presentation confirms the influence of Chinese ceramics over styles in other parts of Asia, and that artists throughout the region often created vessels in standard shapes. Thus even widely separated geographical areas shared some of the same aesthetic sensibilities.

While goods were traded across areas of Asia, religious ideas were shared as well. Beliefs were transmitted through conversations, exchanges of docu-

ments (such as religious texts), and objects used in religious rituals, including works of art. For example, Buddhist ideas originating in India around 400 BCE were later introduced to other areas of Asia, such as Thailand, where Buddhist texts and images had become established in about 150 BCE. Images in the presentation demonstrate that artworks have been a primary means of expressing religious beliefs for centuries across many regions of Asia. Some of the presentation objects, such as the bronze head of Buddha, served as models for believers on the Buddhist path to enlightenment. Other religious works, like the wooden Tibetan prayer wheel, were intended to aid individuals in achieving religious goals more efficiently. Still in use today, prayer wheels allow Buddhists to constantly “say” their prayers by spinning a hand-held object with prayers inscribed inside while performing daily tasks. Today, Buddhism remains an important part of everyday life for much of the population in many Asian countries.

Buddhism is only one of several religions that developed in India and China and later became prominent throughout Asia, as religious ideologies spread along trade routes and shaped the belief systems of many people. Religious motifs in Asian art encompass numerous subjects and themes from different places and historical periods. For example, although Hindu beliefs predate Buddhism, both Buddhism and Hinduism had become important belief systems in India by 100 CE. The bronze sculpture of the Hindu god Ganesha in the presentation, made about 1500 CE, reminds us that Hindu worship became more prevalent than Buddhism in most areas of India by about 900 CE, and thus Hindu images became

more common by the end of the first millennium. Likenesses of figures prominent in other Asian religions, such as Confucianism, Daoism, and various local traditions, were also crafted in both human and fantastic forms. The Seven Gods of Good Luck, or *Shichifukujin*, found on the Japanese *kozuka* in the presentation include figures that represent Buddhist, Confucian, and Daoist gods, thus demonstrating the transfer of images and ideas between India, China, and Japan. The diverse religious artworks in the presentation illustrate how beliefs changed over time within regions, alternately uniting and separating parts of Asia. Further, the numerous portable religious objects in the presentation show how easily beliefs were shared through personal devotional items transported by faithful travelers across Asia.

Although similarities, such as common materials, forms, and religious subjects, exist among Asian artworks, stylistic approaches and artistic contexts vary from one culture to another. For instance, some of the objects in the presentation were intended to be purely decorative, while others were made to be both aesthetically pleasing and functional. Thus, some presentation objects emphasize distinctions among regions while others highlight similarities and connections.

The various works of Asian art in *Journey to Asia* transport us to remote places and distant times. By studying these objects, we create opportunities for understanding Asian art, history, and culture as we encounter objects that contrast sharply with what we are accustomed to seeing in the United States. Students are encouraged to continue explorations of Asia begun through the presentation by visiting the Asian galleries at the Cleveland Museum of Art.

Why so many religious subjects?

Several major world religions originated in Asia. About 2,500 years ago, important philosophers began to gather their ideas in written form in India and China. Both religious and philosophical beliefs shaped Asian culture from early times. By 100 CE, both Buddhism and Hinduism were central religious traditions in India, and these beliefs continue to be prominent throughout Asia today. Chinese records show that Daoist and Confucian ideals had strongly influenced government and social structures by 100 BCE, and Daoist and Confucian views continue to be central in China, Korea, and Japan today.

Daoist and Confucian beliefs provide ways of understanding everyday human experience. Similarly, Japan's oldest religion, Shinto, is intertwined with Japanese daily habits and explanations of Japan's cultural origins. Thus, some Asian religions are not formalized religious traditions but rather stress belief systems as a means of regulating social relationships.

Just as politics, technology, and commodities were diffused along Asia's silk routes, religions and ideas were also shared. For example, Confucian principles originating in China strongly influenced Japanese and Korean societies. Buddhism and Hinduism spread across Asia, far from the places where these religious ideas originated.

Images have long served as a means of communicating and celebrating Asian religious beliefs. For instance, in Japan, Korea, and China, Buddhism was introduced from India through painting, sculpture, and religious texts. Hinduism and localized religious

beliefs also inspired artists across Asia. Representations of gods, goddesses, and other holy figures made Asian religious and philosophical beliefs more accessible and comprehensible.

The presentation includes works depicting two Hindu figures—Durga and Ganesha—from India, a sculpture of Buddha from Thailand, and images of the Seven Gods of Good Luck (*Shichifukujin*), important figures in Japanese folk traditions. Another object, the Tibetan prayer wheel, shows how religion inspired art objects designed for personal ritual use and demonstrates the central role of sacred writing, important to many Asian religions. *Journey to Asia* represents a variety of artworks associated with both cultural and personal religious beliefs in Asia.

Often writing is visible in Asian art. Why is that?

The written word plays a prominent role in the art of many Asian cultures. Asian civilizations were among the first to develop written languages. The writing system used in China today has the longest continuous history of any modern language. Further, many Asian countries have a long tradition of safeguarding traditions and religious stories by preserving them in written form.

Writing is considered a fine art in several Asian cultures, and often decorative writing is a centerpiece in Asian artworks. Two objects in the presentation feature the written word: The Tibetan prayer wheel is carved with the words of a sacred Buddhist chant, and the miniature Japanese screen bears an inscription. Sanskrit and Chinese characters (used in Japan and Korea as well as China) have been written artfully for centuries, for both sacred and secular purposes. Thus, respect for the power of the written

word and appreciation of skillful handwriting are evident in many Asian artworks.

Was Asian art made only for the nobility, or for everyone?

Often the wealthy commissioned art to display their wealth and social position, as well as for simple enjoyment. Patrons of Asian art have included emperors, empresses, kings, queens, or other nobles. Religious leaders were patrons as well. Wealthy women of aristocratic—but not necessarily royal—birth would have used some of the presentation objects, such as the Chinese silk shoes made for bound feet. In fact, women who owned such shoes were often responsible for crafting them, in part because they had to be custom-made. Footbinding was a sign of status in China for hundreds of years, so shoes for bound feet were symbols of the elite. Other objects found in the presentation were reserved for nobles, such as the celadon bowl from Korea. Glazes of this color and type of porcelain clay were only available to members of the upper classes until the modern era. However, people of lesser means may have owned other works in the presentation, such as the prayer wheel. Many varieties of prayer wheels have existed, and several types are still made today.

While sometimes made of precious metals, most prayer wheels intended for daily use are not crafted from expensive materials, so this prayer wheel demonstrates how important religious art has been for people from all walks of life in Tibet.

Things to Think About

Below are a few sample questions that may help students to think creatively about the presentation. These can be used as focus points before an Art To Go visit, or after the presentation to encourage further discoveries in Asian art and culture.

- If you took a trip to Asia, which country would you visit? Is there anything that you own that reminds you of some place you have been?
- What are some of the first signs of spring that we look forward to in the United States? (Relates to the Chinese vase and the Japanese screen.)
- If you believed that your feet were your most beautiful feature, how would you show them off? Why were the shoes in the presentation, made for a grown woman, so small?
- Can you think of some prayers to help you get to heaven (or ensure some other positive result) if you repeat them many times? (Relates to the prayer wheel.)
- What shape and color would you choose for your rice bowl? Remember that rice is eaten at least twice a day in many areas of Asia! (Relates to the celadon bowl.)
- If you were an Asian warrior and you carried a sword, how would you decorate it to ensure that it would bring you good luck? In the United States, what symbols bring good luck? (Relates to the knife handle.)
- If you were a god or a goddess and you had extra arms, or several heads, what would you use them for? What did the goddess Durga use them for?

List of Objects

- Vase, China, porcelain with underglaze blue decoration, 18th century.
- Shoes, China, embroidered silk, 19th century.
- Prayer Wheel, Tibet, wood with metal supports and paper inserts, 19th century.
- Ganesha, South India, bronze, 16th century.
- Durga Slaying the Buffalo Demon, India, ink and color on paper, 20th century.
- Head of Buddha, Thailand, bronze with traces of gilding, 16th century.
- Bowl, Korea, glazed stoneware, uncertain date.
- *Kozuka* (Knife Handle), Japan, bronze with decoration in other metals, uncertain date.
- Small Six-fold Screen, Japan, ink and color on silk, mounted on wood and paper frame, 20th century.

Note: *All of the objects in the presentation are not suitable for handling.* However, all works may be observed closely. Supervision of object

handling is the responsibility of the Art To Go volunteer teacher. Presentation contents may be affected by weather and object condition.

The Cleveland Museum of Art reserves the right to change the objects included in the presentation at any time.

Vocabulary

In order of discussion during the lesson.

Silk Road

porcelain

cobalt

glaze

footbinding

Buddhism
"Bood-ism"

chant

merit

Sanskrit

Ganesha
"Ga-ne-sh"

Shiva
"She-vah"

Parvati
"Par-vah-tea"

Durga
"Dure-gah"

Hinduism

Shakyamuni
"Shahkiya-moo-knee"

Buddha
"Bood-dah"

celadon
"cella-dawn"

kozuka
"koh-zoo-ka"

Seven Gods of Good Luck

Daoism
"Dowism"

byōbu
"beeyoh-boo"

Webbing Asia

Suggestions for making art the center of student learning.

Visual Arts

Asian paintings are often executed on paper or silk, and can be conveniently rolled up for storage. Discover at least two different types of Asian scroll paintings in the

museum's galleries, and then create one, using brush and ink. Paint an animal, flower, or scene that symbolizes Asia. Roll up your scroll, tie it with some yarn, and share it with a friend.

Language Arts

Imagine being a traveler on the Silk Road. Write a story about acquiring a prize possession—one of the items in the Asia presenta-

tion. How does the object represent the country where it was made? How many people were involved in making this treasure? How was it made?

Asia

Mathematics

Identify four different Asian capital cities, each in a different time zone. Calculate the time difference between each of the

cities and your hometown. Make a chart indicating the time of day in each of these locations when it is noon in your city or town.

Science

Asia, in the Eastern Hemisphere, is on the other side of the world from the United States, which is located in the

Western Hemisphere. Locate Asia on the globe. Using a flashlight, demonstrate how the earth's revolution around the sun causes night and day.

Social Studies

Ideas of beauty have changed over the centuries and around the world. Often, we are willing to restrict movement or growth in order to appear attractive. Identify conventions

designed to improve physical appearances. Consider both contemporary culture and practices used in the past. Examples may include high heels, scarification, armor, hoop skirts, neckties, and corsets.

Health and Nutrition

Many people in Asia eat rice. What grain do most people eat on a daily basis in the United States? Compare the soil and climactic conditions

necessary for growing various types of grains. How are parts of Asia suited to the cultivation of rice? Compare the nutritional value of rice with wheat and other grains.

Getting Ready for the Visit

- The Art To Go presentation will take about 40 minutes.
- Anyone who wishes to handle objects from the Art To Go presentation must wear gloves, which will be provided by Art To Go staff.
- We respectfully request that a homeroom teacher or events coordinator be present and attentive during the lesson.

Classroom Setup

- Please have a small table or desk available at the front of the room.
- If possible, arrange the students in a semicircle facing the presentation. This allows Art To Go staff to pass objects among the students.
- Please provide student identification so that the Art To Go teachers may call on students by name.

Lesson Plan

Focus

Students will explore past and present Asian cultures as they handle original works of art.

Purpose

To travel to different times and places through the experience of art, and to understand how people in other cultures viewed the sacred as well as daily life.

Motivation

Students will be asked to imagine taking a journey to Asia. Map reading will also be used to introduce the lesson content. A sense of Asian history and culture will be strengthened by handling objects made and used in various areas of Asia.

Objectives

- Students will learn how Asian geography, climates, lifestyles, and religions helped shape the art and history of Asia.
- Students will realize that works of art are not only appreciated for their appearance, but are also a means of understanding individuals and social groups.
- Students will understand that museums have an important role in preserving original art objects.
- Direct encounters with Asian art will help students to think critically about Asian cultures and make comparisons between Asian countries and the United States.

Participation

Students will be asked to observe, comment on what they see, question and draw conclusions about the Asia presentation objects through discussion. Art To Go staff will help students to build their knowledge through questions and responses.

Comprehension Check

Students will be asked questions as the lesson is taught. The homeroom teacher may follow the presentation with curriculum ideas in this packet or sources listed in the bibliography. Teachers may also incorporate ideas from the lesson in an art project.

Closure

Students will visit the Asian galleries at the Cleveland Museum of Art, where they can continue the visual and cultural explorations begun through the Journey to Asia presentation. Curriculum connections suggested in this packet (see “Webbing” and “Suggestions for Further Reading”) offer useful follow-up activities that enable students to reinforce what they have learned from the Art To Go visit, and to broaden their knowledge by pursuing personal interests.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Note: Slide packets and other teacher resources are available for purchase or loan through the Teacher Resource Center in the museum's Department of Education and Public Programs. For further information and a list of resources, please call 216-421-7340 x 469.

ESPECIALLY FOR STUDENTS

Corwin, Judith Hoffman. *Asian Crafts*. New York: F. Watts, 1992. Ages 9-12. This book furnishes step-by-step instructions for making ancient and modern crafts, toys, and foods from various Asian countries.

Kalman, Bobbie. *The Lands, Peoples, and Cultures Series*. New York: Crabtree Publishing, 1990. Ages 9-12. Glimpses of life in both ancient and modern cultures of various countries, including India, China, Japan, Tibet, and Vietnam, are provided in this series.

Franck, Irene M. and David M. Brownstone. *The Silk Road: A History*. New York: Facts on File, 1986. Young adult. Presents an illustrated history of Asia's most important land travel routes from earliest times to the present.

Kranz, Rachel. *Across Asia by Land*. New York: Facts on File, 1991. Ages 9-12. This volume, part of the "Trade and Travel Routes" series, introduces Asia's overland trade networks to young readers.

Needler, Toby, and Bonnie Goodman. *Exploring Global Art*. New York: American Forum for Global Education, 1991. Ages 12-adult. This introduction to the arts of Japan, China, and India, among others, places emphasis on exploring cultures through visual art.

Reid, Struan. *Inventions and Trade*. New York: New Discovery, 1994. Ages 9-12. Details the economic impact of technological innovations and cultural exchange within Asia and elsewhere.

World Religions Series. *Buddhism; Confucianism; Hinduism; Shinto; Taoism*. New York: Facts on File, Ages 12-adult. Presents the history, customs, and beliefs of various Asian religions in a compact, accessible format.

FOR ADULT READERS

Ainslie T. Embree and Carol Gluck, eds. *Asia in Western and World History: A Guide for Teaching*. Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1997. The fifty-six essays in this volume, produced in conjunction with the Columbia University Project on Asia in the Core Curriculum, outline Asia's place in history, while also covering contemporary issues. Includes timelines for Asian countries.

Along the Silk Road. *Stanford: Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education (SPICE) Publications, 1993*. Grades 6-12. This unit enlivens the history and geography of the Silk Road through the experiences of travelers such as Marco Polo and Xuan Zang. Includes a video.

Heinz, Carolyn Brown. *Asian Cultural Traditions*. Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, 1999. Anthropologist Heinz investigates various Asian societies in historical and contemporary perspectives, citing differences even as she identifies common Asian cultural strands.

Lee, Sherman E. *A History of Far Eastern Art*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994. Written by a former CMA director, this book includes many works in the museum's Asian collection. For many scholars, this is the definitive survey of Asian art.

Mapping Asia. Stanford: Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education (SPICE) Publications, 1994. Grades 6-12. This unit encourages exploration of geographic concepts through study of the distribution and spread of major world religions within Asia, using group activities.

Whitfield, Susan. *Life Along the Silk Road*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999. This absorbing scholarly account offers insight into the lives of those whose fortunes were shaped by the flow of commodities and travelers on the silk routes.

WEBSITE

www.clevelandart.org

We encourage teachers and students to visit the Cleveland Museum of Art in person. We also encourage teachers and students to visit the museum's website, where information about the museum's permanent collection and educational programs can be found.

Journey to Asia

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