THE POWER OF POETRY: CROSS-CULTURAL ART IN EAST ASIA

Painted Poetry in Japan and Korea embraces Chinese classical poems, called kanshi in Japanese or hansi in Korean, as an international culture code in East Asia. This catalogue and exhibition examine the transformation by Japanese and Koreans of the cultural influence from China into their own unique masterpieces, demonstrated here by examples from the collection of the Cleveland Museum of Art. Diverse factors can be brought to bear in trying to account for this phenomenon of cross-cultural merging in East Asia. This essay does not attempt to treat the phenomenon comprehensively. Using works from the museum’s collection, it concentrates on the classical Chinese poetry that Japanese and Korean elites learned and applied to their own arts. The first part introduces the aesthetics of painted poetry. The following five parts focus on the image of the poet, landscape paintings, figure paintings, artisanal crafts, and calligraphy. Finally, several contemporary artists inspire with their visions for reviving this long tradition of blending words and images.

The Aesthetics of Confucianism in the Painted Poetry of East Asia

Japanese and Koreans used the Chinese language for official records and documents until the nineteenth century, even though their spoken languages vary considerably from Chinese. As a result, Chinese classics not only created the cultural zone of East Asia that spanned national borders, but they also occupied a central position in Japanese and Korean arts and aesthetics that paralleled the influence of domestic classics. The educated classes of Japan and Korea employed Chinese as an international written language and regarded Chinese-style poetry as a highly sophisticated liberal art until English took its place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Japanese and Korean elites identified with Chinese philosophy and aesthetics as well as the language. Confucianism, accepted as the guiding principle for ruling the state and the educational system, affected artistic taste. The aesthetic principle of poetry in East Asia can be traced back to suixue (having no unfaithful thoughts). It was a major concern for Confucius (551–479 BC) when he compiled the Shi Jing (Book of Songs) in Lun Yu (Analects). Confucianism was established in Korea as early as the fourth century during the Three Kingdoms period. The Goguryeo king Sosurim (371–384)
established the National Confucian Academy, yanghak, in 372 in Korea, according to the 
Samgukagi (History of the Three Kingdoms). Japanese historical records such as the 
Kojiki (Record of ancient matters) and Nihon Shoki (Chronicles of Japan) report that a 
Korean Baekje, scholar, Wang in (active 4th century), brought Lung Yu to Japan.

The spirit of “having no unfaithful thoughts” fit well with the aristocratic elite in 
the Unified Silla and nara periods. They were the exclusive class to understand Chi-
inese characters and to express intellectual elegance through their own Chinese-style 
poems. Chinese poetry (kanriki) written by Japanese princes and high-ranking regents 
was compiled in the Kaifūsō (Fond recollections of poetry) in 751. Koreans such as 
Choi Chwion (b. 888) passed the tang dynasty state examination, and their Chinese-
style poems gained high praise even in China. In addition, Japanese and Korean envoys 
to the Tang court brought back Chinese culture, which became the driving power to 
develop Tang-style visual images as an international mode in Japan and Korea. The 
treasures of Shosoin in Japan prove that a variety of visual images, such as grapes and 
long-tailed birds with a sprig of grass in their beaks, were introduced during the Unified 
Silla and Nara periods.

The upcoming elite class of sinhungha sadae (newly emerged high officials) 
in the Goryeo period and Zen monks in the Kamakura period began to adopt Chinese 
style poetry, paintings, and calligraphy as expressions of their morality ever since literati art was established in the Song period. Japanese and Koreans corresponded to this new mode.

Differences between Japan and Korea arose during this period. The Goryeo dy-
nasty in Korea established an examination, called waga-geo, since 998, designed to select 
the best administrative officials for the state’s bureaucracy, but Japan did not. In Korea, 
writing and reading Chinese poetry to express Neo-Confucianism was the crucial re-
quirement to pass the state examination and to ensure future success as an official. 
This was not only a personal achievement, but also a necessity to maintain a family’s 
social status. During the Yuan dynasty, King Chongseong of the Goryeo court established 
the Korean Royal Academy, called mangwondoing in Beijing, in 1354. The academy served 
as headquarters for importing to Korea the Neo-Confucian School of Zhu Xi (Japanese, 
shūshigaku). This school (Japanese literati artists), which included artists from various 
social classes, pursued literati art just like China and Korea and created a renaissance 
of Chinese-style poetry and painting. The way in which Confucian aesthetics affected 
painted poetry in Japan and Korea will unfold in the following examples.

Elegant Gathering: Portrait of the Poet

THE IMAGE OF A PED. What is the image of a poet in East Asian art? It differs from the 
Greek philosopher Plato’s idea in his Republic that poetry is not ethical, philosophical, 
or pragmatic. The poet in East Asia was assumed to have the ethical spirit Confucius 
described in his Lun Yu. Because poetry anthologies were published by the elite class 
who manifested highly faithful spirituality, only respectable poets were selected and 
republished time after time. Therefore, the image of the poet was that of a wise, faith-
ful, and respectable intellectual.

East Asian paintings also portrayed poets to express their spiritual faithfulness in 
a visual image that corresponded to poems. Even though real portraits of poets did 
don not survive, the well-educated could identify the image of a poet by only a few motifs 
from his or her poems. The ability to identify poems in a painting without any inscription 
was considered the highest level of poetry appreciation among the literati.

Koreans and Japanese especially valued the Chinese Tang poet Du Fu (712–770) 
among hundreds of Tang-period poets because of his faithfulness. The Joseon dynasty 
court praised Du Fu’s faithfulness to the king in his poems. Among hundreds of Tang-period poets because of his 
the Joseon dynasty court praised Du Fu’s faithfulness to the king in his poems on the basis of Confucianism. 
The Joseon king Sejong (1397–1450) of the Joseon period inaugurated the first Korean 
translation project of Du Fu’s poetry, the Dusanhón, as soon as he created the Korean 
alphabet, Hangul, in 1443. Because both the original Chinese text and the Korean 
translation were available, Du Fu’s “Climbing Yueyang Tower,” for example, became a 
popular theme in Korean paintings and on porcelain.

In Japan, Du Fu gained popularity among Zen monks in the Muromachi period 
and became more widely appreciated in the the Edo period. The Japanese literati painter 
ike taiga (1723–1776) adapted Du Fu’s “Climbing Yueyang Tower” from a Chinese Qing-
period album to suit the larger Japanese screen format in Landscape with Tower (Na-
tional Treasure, TNM).

The Japanese also transformed Chinese aesthetics in regard to Du Fu. The Edo 
period painter ichijirō’s (active 19th century) portrait of Matsu no Bashō (1644–1694) 
cat. 1) is an example. Bashō is Japan’s greatest master of the haiku, a short poem in 
seventeen-syllable verse, who showed his deep sympathy with Du Fu by quoting his 
“Chuwang” (A View of Spring) to lament war and old age in the preface of Oku-no-
haomichi (The narrow road to the interior). On the basis of Du Fu’s influence, Basho 
transformed his Zen Buddhist efforts to restore his true self-identity by casting away his 
ethical attachments. In the eighteenth century, Bashō’s image was visualized by the Japanese literati 
painter and haiku poet yosa Buson (1716–1783). Owing to Buson’s many depictions of 
Oku-no-haomichi in screen and handscroll formats, the standard image of Basho was 
that of a humble old gentleman wearing the black headgear of a tea master, in the
Ceramic inkstones had been made from Koto (cat. 2), for example, reflected the witty idea of musical inspiration for writing: an artist uses for writing or painting. The Shino-oribe ware writing box, on the cover of motifs and genre painting such as ukiyo-e were applied to the design of a Yamato-e century. Furthermore, the Japanese invented a range of writing boxes made with lacquer.

In the Muromachi period, Zen clerics placed their Chinese-style poems above an ink painting and created a hanging-scroll called shogyoku. Zen monks were not only committed to Zen Buddhism but also served as cultural leaders in diplomatic and cultural exchanges with China and Korea, the reason these ink paintings contained Chinese, Japanese, and Korean poems and images. On Landscape (cat. 6), which could be either a Japanese or a Korean painting, the inscription by Japanese Zen clerics is quoted from Su Shi’s (1037–1101) essays on Sima Guang (1019–1086). They interpreted the studio surrounded with bamboo as a metaphor for the Chinese Song scholar-official Sima Guang’s garden, which he enjoyed alone during his exile in Luoyang, following the example of the Tang poet Bai Juyi (772–846).

The cheerful gathering of poets was one of the most popular themes in literati paintings. Literary Gathering in the Orchid Pavilion (cat. 7) depicts the poets’ party that was held in 533 by the Japanese calligrapher Wang Xizhi (321–379) to celebrate the annual Spring Purification Festival on the third day of the third month. Wang Xizhi invited forty-one scholar-poets to engage in poetry and drinking while seated along the bank of a winding rivulet. The left screen shows preparations for the gathering. The lost right screen is assumed to have depicted the poets sitting along the stream.

In adapting the Chinese theme, Yosa Buson merged two styles: Jan (Chinese) and ukiyo-e (Japanese). He composed both Chinese-style poems (kanji) and Edo-period Japanese her mouth onto a wall as though writing calligraphy and forms the characters shinobu koi (perseverance in love) on the screen. The poem is written using Chinese motifs maintained popularity, for example the Island of Immortality, Mount Penglai (Kokusen-zen in Japanese), as evident in the portable box (cat. 4).

**ELEGANT GATHERINGS.** Poets and literati have sought spiritual freedom through reclusion. This reclusion meant keeping distance from the mundane life, but it did not always require a lonely life in the mountains, separate from the world—in other words, it could be called an “armchair” reclusion. The spirit can remain faithful even during court responsibilities or in the midst of city life. Korean and Japanese elites commissioned paintings of their elegant gatherings and added their own poems or companions’ inscriptions. In the early Joseon period, paintings of scholar-officials’ gatherings, called gyeohoe, gained popularity among the elite. For example, Sim Eongwang (1487–1540), an official of the Joseon court, commissioned literary gathering (cat. 5) to depict the gathering of Joseon court cabinet officials (saganwon), called miwon gyeohoe. It was presumably ordered around the time Sim Eongwang was the head of saganwon in 1530. This piece is earlier than an example by Seong Saechang (1482–1548), Miwon Gyehoedo, 1540 (Treasure 869, NMK). Sim Eongwang added his poem at the bottom of the painting to express “literati respect for the high spirituality,” as quoted in the first line. The poem was later recorded in his anthology Eochonji (Book of Fisher village). Other gyeohoe paintings usually recorded a list of names, but Sim Eongwang uniquely added his poems, and the distant mountain was not included in his version. This painting looks more like a sketch created on the spot at the gathering.

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Cat. 5: Literary Gathering, 1430s, Korea

Cat. 6: Landscape, c. 1424, Japan/Korea
Cat. 7. Literary Gathering in the Orchid Pavilion, late 1700s. Maruyama Ōkyo. Japan.
As the River Flows: Landscape in the Mind

Japanese and Korean elites enjoyed appreciating Chinese landscapes through the imagery of poetry because most could not travel to China. Even though some diplomatic delegations were dispatched there, they could not journey to all the mountains and rivers described in the poems. Because most of the poems related to paintings were written during poets’ seclusion or exile, the poetic settings were usually far from the capitals where the Japanese and Korean delegations visited. Among the Chinese landscape paintings based on poems that affected Japanese and Korean art, three representative themes of landscapes are the Eight Views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers, Gazing at a Waterfall, and West Lake.

THE EIGHT VIEWS OF THE Xiao AND Xiang RIVERS. The “Eight Views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers” (Japanese, Shōshō Hakkei; Korean, Sosang Palgyeong) show the scenery of the two rivers that flow together into Lake Dongting in Hunan Province, China. The imagery of the eight scenes is assumed to have been established during the Northern Song dynasty in China, around the eleventh century. These views are identified by poetic motifs rather than as specific landscapes: “Wild Geese Going Down to a Sandbar,” poems (haikai), likewise, his paintings paralleled the Chinese literati and Japanese haiga painting traditions. He also switched from using Japanese classical poems to fit the contemporary Edo taste for haikai. He established the iconography of the thirty-six poets of haikai, transformed from sanjūrokkaishō (thirty-six poetry immortals), a group of Japanese poets of the Nara, Asuka, and Heian periods. His student, Matsumura Goshun (1752–1811), painted eight of Buson’s thirty-six haikai poets in A Poetic Gathering (cat. 8) and inscribed Buson’s poem at the top of the painting. Buson had asked his student Goshun to take care of his young daughter when he died. Goshun added his painting to his teacher’s poem to raise money for the marriage of Buson’s daughter.

Kawanabe Kyosai’s (1831–1889) Painting Party (cat. 9) depicts a shogakai (gathering for calligraphy and painting), where calligraphers and painters do their work in response to their patrons’ requests during the gathering. The “Gathering for Calligraphy and Painting Party” was a popular topic in the early Meiji period. This painting demonstrates the cheerful atmosphere of the gathering. Each tiny image and the calligraphy were made by an individual artist with his own seals and signature.

Even before it became a popular topic for paintings, this type of elegant gathering was already employed in arts and crafts designs, particularly in depictions of the four accomplishments celebrated by the scholar-literati elite as elegant pastimes: playing the stringed instruments and chess, and practicing calligraphy and painting. Pitcher (cat. 10), for example, is a rare Korean celadon inlaid with two figures sitting together under a tree, dating as early as the twelfth century. After the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when the Japanese developed the technique of porcelain using high-temperature firing and adding colors, the elegant gatherings of East Asian culture also became a favorite theme in porcelain design for export to Europe (cats. 11, 12).
Cat. 13a-b: Landscape of the Four Seasons, c. 1444. Yi Sumun, Korea

The "Eight Views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers" was appreciated as imagery reflecting Confucian values, not as a realistic depiction. A Korean scholar-official, Yi Hu-baek (1520–1578), summarized the Korean interpretation in his verse 310, titled Sosang palgyeong (the Eight Views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers). He praised Qu Yuan’s (340–278 BC) noble spirit for protesting the corruption of that era by committing suicide at the Miluo river where it merged with the Xiang River. Yi also focused on the spotted bamboo growing by the river. The spots symbolized the tears shed by the Xiang River goddess mourning the death of their beloved husband, the Chinese Emperor Shun. The poet wanted to convey this admirable example of marital loyalty.

In Korea, the "Eight Views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers" were cherished as early as the twelfth century, in the Goryeo period. The Goryeo king Myeongjong (1173–1202) requested poems on the Eight Views from scholar-officials, and those by aristocrat scholars such as Yi Inro (1153–1210) and Jin Hwa (active 1300) were known as the most esteemed. In the fourteenth century, scholar-officials from the newly emerging literati class, such as Songdo and Hansan in their poems.

In paintings, the motifs of the Eight Views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers were highly popular during the early Joseon period. Prince An Pyeong (1618–1651), well known as the patron of Dream Visit of Peach Blossom Land (Important Cultural Property, now Tenri University Library, Nara, Japan), ordered court painters to make a handscroll of a woodblock print copy of the Southern Song Dynasty Emperor Ningzong’s (1195–1224) poem on the Eight Views along with those paintings, writing Goryeo’s Yi Inro and Jin Hwa’s two poems on the Eight Views and nineteen scholar-officials’ inscriptions. Emperor Ningzong’s poem and paintings were lost, and the other poems were mounted into an album of his Bihaedang Sosang Palgyeong Sicheop (Prince An Pyeong’s poetry anthology on the Eight Views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers) [Treasure 1405, NMK]. The court painter An Gyeon’s (active 15th century) style prevailed in most of the Eight Views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers paintings of the early Joseon period.

The theme of the Eight Views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers was exchanged with that of the four seasons in a pair of eight-panel screens. Landscape of the Four Seasons (cat. 13a–b) is an extremely rare screen by Yi Sumun (b. 1404), known as a Korean painter who went to Japan.14 In his Bamboo (Private collection, Japan), he left an inscription stating that he came to Japan in 1424, at age twenty-two. Yi Sumun’s special composition reminds us of the Eight Views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers (NMK) attributed to An Gyeon. However, his brushwork did not follow An Gyeon’s technique, which was derived from the Lu Guo style of the Chinese Northern Song and Yuan periods; Yi’s style more likely represents the Yuanti school, the style of royal court paintings during the Southern Song period.

The Japanese have preferred the Southern Song style of the Eight Views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers to fit the larger space of shokuzai (sliding door paintings and screens). Like Shûami’s similar paintings in the Daisen-in in Kyoto, his Eight Views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers (cat. 15) in the Cleveland collection is believed to have been taken off sliding doors and remounted in hanging scroll format. He was the last of three generations of connoisseurs, called the Armi School, who served as artistic advisors to the Ashikaga shoguns in Kyoto. Therefore, he could have had access to original Southern Song versions of this natural environment of Japan. As early as the fifteenth century, the Ashikaga shogunates collected Chinese handscrolls attributed to the late Song–early Yuan (late 13th century) painters Muqi and Yujian. This Southern Song-inspired style primarily influenced the Eight Views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers paintings in Japan, but other versions of the Joseon and Ming periods were simultaneously introduced to Japan by the Kano school.16 For example, the Japanese monk Sonkai (d. 1549) brought back Korean versions of the Eight Views in 1535, now housed in the Daigan-ji temple in Hiroshima, Japan. The Muromachi-period Japanese Zen monk and painter Shûami Sesson’s (1504–1589) Eight Views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers (cat. 14) is a small hanging scroll, which is thought to be a copy of a Chinese prototype in the Japanese format of shukusa (miniature painting). The original version might be close to Returning Sails off a Distant Shore (from the Eight Views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers) attributed to Muqi (NKM).

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In the Edo period, Watanabe Shikō (1683–1755) (cat. 16a–b), a painter who combined the Kano school with the Rimpa style, rendered the theme of the Eight Views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers on a pair of six-panel screens. For the composition of this painting, Shikō followed the Kano school’s sense of space, which was transformed by Japanese artists Sesson and Kano Tanyū’s (1602–1674) miniature copy of paintings (shukuzu) on Southern Song versions. Like Kano Naonobu’s (1607–1650) version (TNM), Shikō depicted simple motifs of the moon, boat, geese, and temple to suggest the other six scenes while also creating an airy space. He focused on the seasonal changes from spring to winter with Mountain Market in Clearing Mist (top) and River and Sky in Evening Snow (bottom).

The literati painter Tani Bunchō’s (1763–1840) 1778 images of the Eight Views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers (cat. 17a–d) prove that Bunchō had already mastered the Ming dynasty Wu school’s literati style by the young age of twenty-five. The style clearly differs from both the Southern Song-inspired mode of Muromachi ink painting and from the Kano school. Inscriptions by Confucian scholar Ichigawa Kansai (1749–1820) and other elites suggest that these Wu school-style paintings were possibly commissioned by newly prominent Edo-period Confucian scholars. Bunchō’s original set of eight paintings seems to have been first in albums and later remounted as hanging scrolls. Now
four of the eight paintings are in the collection of the Cleveland Museum of Art. Bunchō left his signature and seal on the last scene, River and Sky in Evening Snow. The copies of his late versions from 1823 are housed at the Tokyo University of Art.  

**GAZING AT A WATERFALL.** The theme of gazing at a waterfall originated from Tang poet Li Bai’s (701–762) poem, “View of a Waterfall at Lushan.” In Korea, the typical Chinese iconography of a waterfall was often depicted in albums of figure and landscape paintings in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. When the Joseon court scholar Seo Gyeongon (1420–1488) added his poetic inscription to the painting *Gazing at a Waterfall*, and Yi Gyongyu (1454–1611), a literati painter from the royal family, depicted this theme for an album (Korea University Museum), they did not identify a specific waterfall in Korea. Beginning in the seventeenth century, though, painters have preferred the real scenery of waterfalls, for example the true-view landscapes by Jeong Seon (1676–1759). *Landscape with Waterfall* (cat. 18) described the famous waterfall of Guryong (Nine Dragons), Mount Geungang, where many earlier painters, including Jeong Seon, had worked. At the bottom right of this painting, a monk guides two Korean costumed literati to a waterfall.

The Japanese first appreciated the waterfall as a religious motif in the painting of Nachi waterfall (Nam) in the Kamakura period. After that, the literati theme of gazing at a waterfall, inspired by Li Bai’s poem, gained popularity during the Muromachi period in Zen monks’ Chinese-style poetry, called gozan bungaku (Five Mountains literature). A Rinzai-school monk-poet, Keijo Shūrin (1440–1518), identified Li Bai’s poem in *Gazing at a Waterfall*. He recorded that Geiami’s (1431–1485) painting *Gazing at a Waterfall* (Nam) shows sharply delineated brushstrokes and bright colors. In contrast, his son Soami followed the Chinese Southern Song style more faithfully in his small painting *Two Men Observing a Waterfall* (cat. 19).

During the Edo period, Japanese literati painters such as Tani Bunchō loved depicting the theme of gazing at a waterfall in a blue-and-green landscape style in hanging-scroll format. Bunchō’s *Watching a Waterfall* (cat. 20) is one of his masterpieces, expressing poetic sensations through color and dramatic composition. He added two lines of a seven-word poem: “The stone cliff layered with rocks is extremely high. Falling waterfalls in the sky reverberate in the clouds.” Japanese literati artists preferred to depict a waterfall as an East Asian motif, not limited to any particular Japanese spot. In contrast, the Japanese ukiyo-e artist Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849) made many real Japanese waterfalls his motifs in a series of waterfall prints in 1833.
Cat. 20  Watching a Waterfall, 1790. Tani Bunchō. Japan

Cat. 21  View of West Lake, 1700s. Ike Taiga. Japan
WeSt laKe. the West lake near Hangzhou, China, was one of the favorite places for the elites of Korea and Japan, even though they had never been there themselves. The West Lake is legendary for the famous Chinese poets, such as the Tang poet Bai Juyi and the Song scholar Su Shi, who lived in its vicinity. The Song poet Lin Bu (967–1028) also led a recluse life among cranes and plum blossoms on Solitary Hill near West Lake. Owing to the popularity of Lin Bu’s poems about the recluse life, both the crane and the plum became symbols for the recluse life in poetry, paintings, and the arts and crafts. The line, “plums’ subtle scent pervades the moonlit dusk,” from Lin Bu’s poem “Tiny Plum Flowers in Mountain Garden,” has been especially cherished to the present day.

the landscape painting of the West Lake gained popularity in Japan as early as the Muromachi period. Osai’s screen of the West Lake (KNM) represents a bird’s-eye view. Keijo Shūrin pointed out Lin Bu in a West lake painting.

Later, the bird’s-eye view style of the West lake was revised by Kano school painters. in the edo period, a founding literati painter, ike taiga (1723–1776), challenged himself in his View of West Lake (cat. 21) to depict the lake in hanging-scroll format by transforming an image he had discovered in the Chinese woodblock print Tianxia mingshantu (1633).

In addition to the themes mentioned above, many more examples related to landscape paintings are inspired by Chinese poetry. The reason Japanese and Koreans consistently chose these icons of painting from Chinese poems might be the same—Chinese poetic themes matched their idealistic landscape, expressing faithful spirituality, rather than the realistic landscape seen in everyday life. Painted poetry reflects the image of utopia in the minds of the Japanese and Korean elite, but it did not always correspond to real images of China.

Freedom of Spirit: Recluses of the Heart

The lure of spiritual freedom has been expressed even more directly through figure paintings. in Korea, the images of Chinese recluses gained favor at the end of the Goryeo period in silent resistance to Yuan’s interference in their internal affairs. The great Goryeo scholar Yi Jejeon, for example, listed the twelve Chinese recluses in his poem for his father-in-law, Kwon Bo. Seo Geojeong’s inscription on the painting of the seven sages of the bamboo grove proved the existence of paintings on the recluse theme even in the early Joseon period. in the late Joseon period, Korean painters sometimes combined the Daoist attitude toward the recluse life with imagery from Chinese illustrated books. Scholar Enjoying His Leisure (cat. 22) depicts a Tang poet, Zhang Zhihe (750–810), who enjoyed the life of a recluse composing “Fishermen’s Songs,” following the motifs...
Cat. 24a–b Pan Lung (Hanrō) [bottom] and Su Shi (Sotōba) [top], early 1600s. Ukioku-Tōgan, Japan
Cat. 25: Man Riding Backwards on a Water Buffalo, 1687. Yamaguchi Sekkei. Japan

Cat. 26a–b: Four Elders of Mt. Shang (bottom) and Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove (top), 1600s. Kano Tanyū. Japan
Cat. 27a-b: The Eight Immortals of the Wine Cup, later 1700s. Soga Shohaku. Japan.
In Japan, the Muromachi period Zen monks’ interest in the reclusive life was later adapted in motifs for sliding door paintings and screens in the Momoyama and Edo periods.\(^5\) Su Shi was one of the favorite poets among Muromachi Zen monks.\(^6\) Unkoku Togan (1547–1618) paired the two recluses Pan Lang and Su Shi (cat. 24a–b) with the motif of a donkey. This painting portrays the first line of Su Shi’s poem “Responding to Wang Anshi” (1021–1086): “I was banished to the deserted distant land riding on a donkey.” It expressed the mutability of life—Su Shi was exiled for a difference of opinion about Wang Anshi’s reformation of the Song dynasty, but ultimately even Wang’s plan failed. On the bottom screen, the Song poet Pan Lang (b. 1009) is riding a donkey backward to admire the three peaks of Mount Hua in Shaanxi, China. Riding backward originated with the iconography of the founder of Daoism, Laozi, reading his Daodejing backward on a buffalo, as seen in Sekkei Yamaguchi’s (1644–1724) Man Riding Backwards on a Water Buffalo (cat. 35).

The Kano school was the professional artists’ group patronized by the shogunate in the late Muromachi period. A leader of the Edo Kano school, Kano Tanyū (1602–1674), paired Four Elders of Mt. Shang and Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove (cat. 26a–b), referring to the same theme as the painting attributed to Kano Motonobu (TNM). The Kano school adopted these themes for political reasons, to convey the importance of royalty to the shogunate, rather than glorifying the simple recluse in the mountains.

In the late Edo period, eccentric painters spun Chinese recluse themes from seriousness to humor in response to the desires of the middle class, chōnin. Soga Shōhaku (1730–1781) or his follower depicted The Eight Immortals of the Wine Cup (cat. 27a–b), derived from Du Fu’s poem. In an earlier example, Kaikoku Yoshū’s (1733–1815) screen (KNM) enlarged the imagery of Muromachi ink paintings to the screen format—still the poets’ gathering looks elegant even though they were drunk with wine. In contrast, Shōhaku’s version exaggerated mundane pleasure through their facial expressions.

Matsumura Goshun (1752–1811), trained in literati art by Yosa Buson and Maruyama Okyo, expressed a more faithful depiction of Chinese themes. Following the example of his teacher Yosa Buson’s Evening Banquet at the Peach and Pear Blossom Garden, inspired by a 718 Li Bai (Sumiya-hozonkai) poem, Goshun chose to paint the scene “Oath of the Peach Garden” from the classic Chinese novel Romance of the Three Kingdoms (cat. 28). Goshun also depicted an example from Japan’s own literary tradition, Tsurezuregusa (Essays in idleness), on his screens (cat. 29a–b). This collection of essays was written by the monk Yoshida Kenkō between 1330 and 1332. The work is widely considered a meditation on the theme of Japanese reclusive life. Koreans and Japanese enjoyed depicting Chinese reclusive themes, but later they developed their own taste inspired by their own literature.
Cat. 29a–b Scenes from “Essays in Idleness,” late 18th–early 19th c. Matsumura Goemon. Japan
Uncovering the hidden meanings in the decorative arts through poetry is a worthwhile challenge. The more we know the poems, the more we enjoy interpreting the symbolic meanings in such crafts designs as the chrysanthemum, lotus, crane, phoenix, grape, and plum.

CHRYSNANTHEMUM. The chrysanthemum is the flower of fall. In East Asia, its wine was believed to bring longevity if drunk during the Double Nine Festival (September 9). Tao Yuanming’s (365–427) poem “Drinking Wine” provided a visual image of the reclusive life in these lines: “From the eastern fence, I pluck chrysanthemum flowers, and idly look toward the southern hills.” In Korea, the chrysanthemum was established as a popular motif for inlaid celadon as early as the twelfth century in the Goryeo period. The chrysanthemum was used as the main motif for wine service vessels, as in Pitcher with Cover (cat. 30), Cup and Saucer (cat. 31), and Bottle (cat. 32). When Koreans drank wine from Goryeo celadon containers with chrysanthemum designs, they believed that Tao Yuanming’s faithful spirit in his poem “Drinking Wine” transferred to their inner mind, in addition to the blessings of longevity associated with the Double Nine Festival. In the Joseon period, the chrysanthemum was a beloved image for the literati yangban class in their practice of Four Gentlemen paintings (together with the orchid, bamboo, and plum blossom), as well as for its association with Yuanming’s poetry.

In Japan, the chrysanthemum was appreciated in more varied ways, in addition to the Double Nine Festival and Tao Yuanming’s reclusive life. The sixteen-layered chrysanthemum became the symbol of the Japanese imperial family. Emperor Gotoba (1180–1239) of the late Heian period applied the chrysanthemum motif to his sword and everyday utensils as his personal emblem. The chrysanthemum was also the symbol of longevity in the noh drama Kikujidō (Chrysanthemum boy). When a boy wrote the two lines of the Lotus Sutra on the petal of a chrysanthemum, it produced an immortal juice. Later on, an image of a chrysanthemum with flowing water symbolized the wish for immortality.

The Japanese used the chrysanthemum in designs for arts and crafts, on mirrors, lacquer wares, porcelain, and textiles. In the Heian period, a chrysanthemum with cranes or longtail birds was a common motif on mirrors. In the later Kamakura and Muromachi periods, the design of a chrysanthemum on mirrors (cats. 33–39) was divided into three patterns with different symbolic associations: a chrysanthemum with cranes (longevity), water flowing (Kikujidō), and the east fence (Tao Yuanming’s “Drinking Wine”). The mirror with a Buddhist icon (kyōjō), along with a chrysanthemum design on the back, represented the chrysanthemum that was valued in the context of Buddhism in the Kamakura period.

Hidden Meanings: Symbols of Flowers and Birds

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Design (cat. 40) proves that the chrysanthemum pattern was also applied to lacquer wares as early as the Kamakura period.

In the Edo period, the chrysanthemum was one of the most popular motifs for export porcelains to Europe. Dish with Chrysanthemums and Marigolds (cat. 41) shows that the chrysanthemum pattern of mirrors and lacquer wares was applied to colored porcelains. The Large Jar with Peonies and Chrysanthemums (cat. 42) and Fluted Bowl with Dragon, Butterfly, and Flowers (cat. 43) demonstrate that porcelain makers referred to bird and flower paintings for their chrysanthemum designs on porcelains.

Additionally, ukiyo-e printmakers and Rimpa school artists for the Japanese domestic market used chrysanthemum motifs in response to the demands of the rich chōnin class in the Edo period. The painting Basket with Fan, Chrysanthemums, and Mushrooms (cat. 44) presents a variation on Birds and Flowers Prints by Katsushika Hokusai. On the Gourd Basket with Chrysanthemum Design (cat. 45), Rimpa school artists displayed their creative ideas by carving a real pumpkin and painting it with chrysanthemums and the seal of Korin on its bottom. In the late Edo period, this type of decorative aesthetics also had an effect on the design of an originally very simple Buddhist Priest Robe (Kesa) (cat. 46).
Cat. 41: Dish with Chrysanthemums and Marigolds, 1700s. Japan

Cat. 42: Large Jar with Peonies and Chrysanthemums, late 1600s. Japan

Cat. 43: Fluted Bowl with Dragon, Butterfly, and Flowers, early 1700s. Japan
LOTUS. Lotus was related to Buddhist images of purity and rebirth. In some instances, the lotus instead drew its meaning from the Song-period Neo-Confucian philosopher Zhou Dunyi’s (1017–1073) poem “Love of the Lotus Flower”: “The chrysanthemum is like a recluse; the peony is like a person of high position and wealth; whereas the lotus is like a gentleman.”

Chinese lotus and bird paintings evoked both naturalistic and decorative depictions of lotus during the late Southern Song or Yuan periods. They often took the form of a pair of hanging scrolls. *Lotuses, Insects, and Birds* (cat. 47), the left hanging scroll of a pair, succeeded this tradition. This painting was presumably made in Korea in the sixteenth century, but it could have been created much earlier. It shows a softer color than the late Southern Song-period version attributed to Gu Deqian (Important Cultural Property, TNM). The motifs are less crowded than in Gu Deqian’s version. The composition is closer to the version attributed to Xu Chongsi (active 11th century) (TNM) and *Lotus and Waterbirds* (MIT). Two egrets are standing at the bottom, and two lotus flowers and one bud are depicted. The red dragonfly is simpler than the ones seen in *Grass and Insects Paintings* attributed to the Yuan painter Qian Xuan (1239–1301) (DIA). The layered large flower under the lotus flowers looks more like a peony.
In the Goryeo period, the lotus was a popular celadon motif as well. Wine ewer (cat. 48) is shaped like a bamboo shoot, but it is also reminiscent of a lotus bud. A slightly abstract, outlined lotus is depicted in an inlaid design on a late Goryeo period vase (cat. 49) and also on Buncheong wares in the Joseon period.

The motif of children and lotus has been used to celebrate birth in China and Korea. A traditional bride’s robe (cat. 50) displays a lotus design to represent the bride’s purity. The back of the robe is embroidered with lotus and egrets at the bottom. Peonies and birds are allocated to the upper part. On the front and the sleeves, a phoenix is standing on the colored rocks under the peonies. Two lines on the shoulders read: “It is the origin of all fortune to get two family names together.” Additionally, a folding ten-panel lotus screen often decorated a woman’s room in the late Joseon period.

In Japan, the lotus was popular as one of the “four loves” motifs (lotus, chrysanthemum, plum, and orchid or peony), called shiai, in both secular and Buddhist arts starting from the Muromachi period. Following the example of Kano Masanobu’s fifteenth-century painting, *Zhou Maozhu (Dunyi) Appreciating Lotuses* (KUNM), many artists, including Hasegawa Tōhaku (1539–1610), applied the theme of the four loves,
Fish in a Lotus Pond, 1800s. Ohara Danrei. Japan
including lotus, to sliding door paintings and screens. The “four loves” tradition turned into the realistic representation of lotus by the Japanese Shijō school. Ōhara Donshū’s (1792–1858) Fish in a Lotus Pond (cat. 51) focused on the depiction of lotus through the realistic manner of the Shijō school. A more airy composition with few leaves of lotus presaged the trends of Japanese modern art. Plate with Zhou Maoshu Admiring Lotus Flowers (cat. 52) demonstrates that the “four loves” theme of appreciating lotus was adapted from painting to Kakiemon porcelain.

CRANE, PHOENIX, AND LONGTAIL BIRDS WITH FLOWER IN MOUTH. Birds are messengers from heaven in both the East and the West. These messengers have been represented in various forms: as a crane, a phoenix, and longtail birds. Shōshin Treasures of the Nara period demonstrate that the motif of a bird with beads and leaves in its mouth was imported to East Asia from Persia. The crane (Japanese, tsuru; Korean, durum) is regarded as a symbol of longevity related to Daoism. Owing to Lin Bu’s poem, “Tiny Plum Flowers in Mountain Garden,” the crane was also appreciated as the literati’s best companion for the reclusive life.
For patrons of the arts in the Goryeo period in Korea, the crane suggested the double meaning of an immortal place and the faithful spirit of the elite class. The crane flying in the clouds was one of the favorite motifs for Goryeo celadon, such as the Prunus Vase (cat. 53). The royal court appreciated the crane as a wish for the king’s longevity. The aristocratic class applied the name cheonghak (blue crane) to a secret reclusive site on Mount Jiri, which was later interpreted as an immortal place. In the Joseon period, the double-layered symbolism of the crane continued. Screen of Ten Longevity Symbols (NMK), for example, was used at the Joseon court as a wish for the king’s longevity. The crane was the official symbol of the literati class and was embroidered on their official robes.

In Japan, cranes also represented the dual symbols of longevity and the reclusive life. Cranes with pine trees and turtles were applied in the arts and crafts, such as mirrors (cats. 54–61), lacquer wares, and textiles, as a set of longevity symbols since the Heian period. When Chinese poems were popular among Zen monks in the Muromachi period, Kettle with Crane Design (cat. 62) represented the lure of the reclusive life, which matched the mentality of the tea ceremony. During the Edo period, the crane had Confucian ritual connotations. The Korean king sent Joseon envoys to Japan with three gifts—a candle dish with crane designs, an incense burner, and a flower base—for the Confucian ritual honoring the late Tokugawa Iesasu (1543–1616). Crane (cat. 63), from the early 1900s, imitates this gift.

The phoenix has been described in many poems as an imaginative bird. Goryeo celadon such as Bowl (cat. 64) and Kundika: Water Ewer (cat. 65) shows the engraved phoenix, which, because of its long chin, is also called a parrot design by Korean scholars. In Japan, the phoenix has likewise held a place of prominence, as seen on Flask in the Shape of a Fan (cat. 66) and Basket Dish (cat. 67). Ever since the motif of a long-tailed bird with a flower in its mouth, hanakuidori, was imported during the Nara period, it has also been part of a long tradition of use in the decorative arts of lacquer ware (cat. 68), mirrors (cats. 69, 70), and textiles (cat. 71).

GRAPE. The grape was an exotic fruit imported to East Asia from the West through the Silk Road. The grape motif was introduced to both Korea and Japan through the Tang dynasty’s “Tang grass pattern.” Koreans and Japanese learned of grape wine as described in the Tang poet Wang Han’s (Chinese, 687–726) verse composed in the state of Liang: “When I am about to drink the finest grape wine with a jade glass.” Liang is close to Xinjiang, located on the Silk Road.
Cat. 64. Bowl, 1100s. Korea

Cat. 65. Kundika: Water Ewer, late 1100s. Korea

Cat. 66. Flask in the Shape of a Fan, 1600s. Japan

Cat. 67. Basket Dish, late 1800s–early 1900s. Okuda Eisen. Japan

Cat. 68. Letter Box, 1800s. Japan
In Korea, making wine from grapes gained popularity in the Goryeo court around the fourteenth century through contact with the Yuan dynasty, which then dominated the Silk Road and Xinjiang. The Yuan emperor presented grape wine to the Goryeo king Chungnyeo (1236–1308). Court scholar Yi Saek, who went to the Yuan court with King Chungnyeo, described his familiarity with wine in his poem, "Grape Wine Was Prepared at Parties Every Day." Because of the popularity of grape wine, starting from the end of the Goryeo period, grape ink paintings, for example Grapes (cat. 72), became popular in the early Joseon period. The court scholar Seo Gejong left two inscriptions on Gang Hae’s (1429–1464) two grape paintings: Grapes in the Windy and Rainy Day and Grapes under the Bright Moonlight.

Depictions of grapes were appreciated in both Japan and Korea as a symbol of fertility and as an expression of the wish to have many children, like bunches of grapes. Ichū Tsujo (1349–1429) and Saiin Shunshō (1358–1422) wrote about their appreciation...
Cat. 74a–b: Flasks, 1500s. Japan
for other artists’ grape ink paintings. In the seventeenth century, both Japanese and Korean elites were able to secure wine from Europe. In his 1636 travel diary Haecharok, Kim Seryeom (1593–1646), a vice director of Korean envoys to Japan, recorded that he drank Western red wine with the head of Japan’s Tsushima Island, situated in the Korea Strait, which separates the two countries. Such records indicate that export porcelain, Square Bottle with Squirrel and Grapes (cat. 73), for example, could have been used as a wine bottle. Japanese Zen monks also enjoyed grapes during the Muromachi period. The grape design of Sake Flasks (cat. 74a–b) also reflects the popularity of grapes and wine at the time. The working classes in Japan and Korea, however, did not have many opportunities to enjoy grape wine until the twentieth century.

PLUM. The status of the plum as the orthodox symbol of the literati’s pure spirit originated from Lin Bu’s poem “Tiny Plum Flowers in Mountain Garden.” Plum was widely depicted in paintings. For example, the Korean painter Yang Kihun (1843–77) used one of the Four Gentlemen motifs in his Bird, Plum Blossom, and Bamboo (cat. 75) to express his feelings about the unstable situation of the late Joseon period. In Japan, the literati painter Yamamoto Baiitsu (1783–1856) loved plum and changed his name to include the word plum. He created a dynamic composition to show the energy of the late Edo period in his Plums, Bamboo, and Orchid (cat. 76). Both in Korea and in Japan, the theme of plum studio paintings gained wide popularity among the literati class and the middle class in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Plum was a fascinating motif in the decorative arts. In Korea, Wine Flask (cat. 77) embodies Lin Bu’s poetic line: “Plums’ subtle scent pervades the moonlit dusk.” The circular shape indicates the full moon, and some unintentionally spread gray color on the lower part of the flask suggests the permeating scent of plum.

In Japan, cherishing the plum was popular among the elite class since the Nara period, prior to the ascendance of the cherry blossom. In the Heian period, plum was established as the symbol of scholarship by Sugawara Michizane (845–903). He was a scholar and politician who was also considered an excellent poet, particularly in Chinese poetry, and was widely known for his love of plum blossoms. Later, plum became
Cat. 76: Plum, Bamboo, and Orchid, 1854. Yamamoto Baiitsu. Japan

Cat. 77: Wine Flask, 1600s. Korea
the symbol of Tenmangū, the shrine for Sugawara Michizane. Plum was an especially beloved decoration for colored porcelain, both for domestic use, kyō-yaki, and for export, in kakiemon ware, as in Bowl (cat. 78), Hexagonal Jar (cat. 79), and Covered Jar with Chrysanthemums, Peonies, and Prunus (cat. 80).

The Japanese also adapted the Chinese image of the plum by drawing inspiration from domestic traditions. Writing Box (cat. 81) was a later copy of Hatsune no chōdo, a set of fifty-seven lacquer utensils made for the wedding of the first daughter of the third Tokugawa shogun, Tokugawa Iemitsu (1604–1651). It was decorated with designs inspired by a waka (poem) in the “Hatsune” chapter of the Tale of Genji.

Revival of Intellectualism: Pictorial Verse

Calligraphy is a tool to transfer poems more clearly and directly to their audience. In Korea, the ability of the elite class to compose Chinese-style poems was a fundamental requirement for passing the state examinations. In this sense, Chinese-style poems had been more dominant than pure Korean ones for official careers and social success. However, in daily life, Korean literati also enjoyed the Korean verse sijo and translated it into Chinese poetic styles for publishing in anthologies of poems and verses.
Cat. 82. Poem on Plum, 1500s. Attributed to Yi Hwang, Korea

Cat. 83. Still Life, Landscapes, Birds and Flowers, and Scenes of Everyday Life (front and reverse), 1800s. Korea

Cat. 85. Autumn Poems from the “Kokin wakashu” (Collection of Japanese Poems from Ancient and Modern Times) with Design of Pine on a Beach (detail), 1600s. Attributed to Tawaraya Sotatsu (artist), Hon’ami Koetsu (calligrapher). Japan.
Among examples of Korean literati who wrote their own poems and also transcribed classical Chinese poems are first, Poem on Plum (cat. 82), attributed to the great Confucian scholar Yi Hwang (1501–1570). Yi Hwang was well known for his love of plums. His private school, Dosanseowon, was surrounded by plum trees. Yet this poem was not included in his anthology, which was posthumously published by his followers. It reads:

On the windy street, maples trees are shown from the mountain house.
My sleeves are floating in the blue sky when horse steps on the frost.
The weather is truly cold, however we don’t mind it.
The wind from the north blows to the fence, and we can feel the deep fragrance of plum.

The second, the Korean screen Still Life, Landscapes, Birds and Flowers, and Scenes of Everyday Life (cat. 83), has the poems on the reverse. This economical format often used in Korea allows the viewer to enjoy both sides of a single screen. On the back, several Chinese poems were copied about the four seasons, among them Tang poet Liu Zongyuan’s (773–819) “Composing in the Daytime of Summer” and Song scholar Zhang Shi’s (1035–1180) “Composing When Spring Begins.”

In Japan, there are also two traditions of writing both Chinese-style poems and Japanese poems. Japanese calligraphers loved to transcribe Japanese poems from the
imperial waka anthologies, the Kokin wakashū (Collection of Japanese poems from ancient and modern times) of the Heian period and the ShinKokin wakashū (New collection of Japanese poems from ancient and modern times) of the Kamakura period. The Japanese poems were mostly written in a soft and feminine cursive writing style on decorative paper. Following this tradition, Hon’ami Kōetsu (1558–1637) and his followers created kana calligraphies from the two anthologies on delicately decorative papers (cats. 84, 85). The techniques of paper decoration were highly developed. For the paper of Autumn Poems (cat. 85), a cofounder of the Rimpa school, Tawaraya Sōtatsu (active early 17th century), painted pine trees with gold and hills with silver. For the paper of Poem-Card (cat. 86), Meishioka grass and two lions were printed with gold and silver on two kinds of colored paper. Sōtatsu’s followers continued this tradition (cat. 87).

Chinese-style poems were preferred by Zen monks of the Muromachi period and by literati scholars and painters of the Edo period. Some composed their own poems, but others copied poems from Chinese anthologies, such as Guwenzhubao (Anthology of classical Chinese poetry), edited by the Song scholar Huang I’an. The literatist painter and haiga poet Yosa Buson composed both Chinese-style and Japanese-style poems. In Figures with Calligraphy of a Passage from the “Heike Monogatari” (cat. 88), Buson copied the text from the great historical romance describing the rise and fall of the Taira family with his two-figure paintings.

The calligraphy of poems still inspires many contemporary artists. Ninomiya Hakuryū (b. 1915) expressed his sensitive playfulness writing the title on a fan turned
Takaki Seikaku (b. 1923), a kana calligrapher, was awarded the Prime Minister Prize at the Japan Fine Art Exhibition (Nitten) in 1991 and received the honor of Bunkakorōsha (Culture Merit) in 2006. He paired Japanese haiku and waka on delicately decorative papers and transcribed Nakajima Getsuryu’s (1899–1987) haiku “In the Spring Mountain, the Melting Water is Hitting on Rocks” (cat. 90). Other examples of his calligraphy feature a poem of spring from the oldest existing collection of Japanese poetry, Manyōshū (cat. 91), and A Poem of Longevity from “Kokin wakashū” (cat. 92).

Bundo Shunkai (1877–1970), a calligrapher and Buddhist monk of the Tendai sect (Japanese school of Mahayana Buddhism), dedicated himself to establishing modern Japanese calligraphy. He was decorated with the honor of Culture Merit in 1968. He pursued the transformation of the Chinese Six Dynasty style. His oversized monumental handscroll, Freedom and Justice (cat. 93), represents Japan’s newly adopted value of democracy, influenced by Western culture. My Spirit Is Like the Spring Wind and Autumn Moon (cat. 94) reflects his continued adherence to the East Asian tradition in which the human spirit and nature are like one.

Aoyama Sanu (1912–1993), a calligrapher and professor at Daito Bunka University, transformed the literati calligraphy of the Chinese Qing period. He was decorated as...
Bunka Bunko Shi in 1988 and Bunka Kunshō (Decoration of Culture) in 1992. He expresses his admiration for the faithful mentality in his writing of Du Fu’s Poem (cat. 95a–b) and reflects on the preciousness of everyday life in Reserving the Mundane Life (cat. 96).

Aoyama San’s student Takaki Seiu (b. 1949), also a professor at Daito Bunka University, focuses on the importance of personality. He delivers the message that many people prefer to follow a respectable person in his Clouds Follow Dragon (cat. 97), and he stresses the value of righteousness in Working with Right Principles (cat. 98).

In Korea, contemporary artists have significantly altered the long tradition of painted poetry. One artist has taken two-dimensional calligraphy on paper into three dimensions, carving poems on black-and-white glass forms in a revival of the Joseon period practice of carving poems on rocks. The tradition of literati art thus continues in various ways.

In conclusion, East Asian art highly values faithful spirituality in poems, calligraphy, paintings, and artisanal crafts from the long tradition of Confucianism. The elites of Korea and Japan, being receptive to intellectual influences, have enriched their own art and culture with the spiritual and aesthetic aspiration from Chinese classical poems that expressed faithfulness. The tradition of Confucianism to cultivate the inner mind through poetry, calligraphy, and paintings is the key to understanding the common culture of East Asia. To enrich ourselves culturally, we have to learn how to refresh our own culture through appreciating our neighbors beyond nationalities. True globalization can be achieved by cross-cultural appreciation with an open mind.