



5. Art Along The Silk Roads

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Unit 5

BUDDHIST IMAGES: CULTURAL EXCHANGE BETWEEN INDIA AND CHINA

Essential Questions: How do Buddhist religious images change as they travel from one culture to another along the Silk Roads? How do religious sculptures become living things rather than objects?

Learning Experience: Students will (1) look at some of the stylistic and iconographic¹ elements important to Buddhist craftsmen and the Buddhist faithful; (2) study changes in artistic style as Buddhism traveled from India through Central Asia to China; (3) explore the magical side of religious art by seeing how religious images are invested with power.

Anticipatory Set: It's not difficult to think of music as being alive: it makes people dance and feel all kinds of emotions. Religious art also makes a strong claim on the emotions. Painting and sculpture were important carriers of the Buddhist message. This unit shows how artistic styles changed as they traveled from India to China and how the arts were made to come alive with emotion to awe and attract the faithful.

Context: Indian craftsmen probably began creating Buddhist images around the first century CE. Although they had well-established pre-Buddhist traditions to draw upon, they still needed to develop ways of conveying Buddhist ideas. How, for example, could they show that Sakyamuni (c. 563–483 BCE), the historical founder of Buddhism, was both a human being and a spiritually perfected being? They did this by focusing on special physical features described in Buddhist texts. These were called *lakshanas*.² Images of the Buddha—both sculpted and painted—were made with:

- Circular bumps on the tops of their heads (*ushnisha*) denoting wisdom;
- A circle placed in the center of the forehead (*urna*), another mark of wisdom, described in scriptures as a tuft of hair;
- The outlines of a lotus flower on the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet;
- Long earlobes, symbolic of nobility.

All of the above were indications of the Buddha's sacred status. There are thirty-two major *lakshana*, but few images include all of them.

In addition, Buddha images were given specific hand gestures, called *mudras*. Mudras symbolize aspects of the Buddha's teaching and religious activity: meditation, fearlessness, debate, warding off evil, prayer, teaching.³

Since the Buddha was a spiritually perfect being, he was given an ideal physique. Images were created according to elaborate systems of proportion and certain features were sometimes given legendary origins: The tight curls on the heads of many Buddha images, for instance, were said to be snails that climbed up to shield him from the sun during meditation.

Missionaries and traders travelling along the Silk Roads transmitted Buddhist images to China. They carried Buddhist texts, illustrated copybooks, and small objects of worship. Although the earliest evi-

¹ Underlined terms appear in the glossary at the end of this unit.

² This and other terms are in Sanskrit, the ancient classical language of India.

³ See <http://www.buddhanet.net>





dence for Buddhism in China dates from 65 CE, it didn't become widespread until the third and fourth centuries.

The earliest Chinese Buddhist images relied heavily on Indian prototypes, especially for the appearance of the face, robes, and body.⁴ A uniquely Chinese style of Buddhist art developed during the Northern Wei period (386-534 CE), when a non-Chinese people, the Tuoba, controlled north China. This dynasty sponsored the construction of huge image-filled caves that still survive today.⁵ Many Northern Wei figures are distinctive for their slender proportions and linear design. The fluttering scarf-like drapery seems in constant motion and there is almost no sense of a body underneath. This is characteristic of Chinese rather than Indian art (see B, below).

Over the centuries, Indian art exerted varying degrees of influence on Chinese Buddhist imagery. During periods of active exchange, travelers, texts, and sacred objects flowed freely into China and influenced Chinese Buddhist art. By contrast, when the trade routes were unsafe, Chinese artistic styles developed more independently. By the twelfth century, when Buddhism had ceased to exist as an organized religion in India, this influence came to an end.

The arts are central to the transmission of the Mahayana Buddhist message. Famous Buddha images or monuments attracted pilgrims from all over Asia; great cave temples filled with sculpture and paintings were used for worship and meditation. Also, the creation of religious art itself was surrounded by magic and ritual. New statues were consecrated in ceremonies where the pupils of the eyes were painted in; relics, scriptures, magic spells, or textile models of human organs would be put within special hollowed-out places. All this served to endow images with sacred life and power (Ghose 1998: 121; Nickel 2002: 23-25).

The first activity in this unit focuses on stylistic change in Buddhist art; the second on ritual, magic and the creation and use of images.

Teacher Resource for Activity 1

Activity 1 consists of three Buddha images, one from India and two from China, plus three comparison images that are unidentified on the student handouts (pp. 302-303). These are similar in origin and style to each of the identified images.

The following descriptions discuss the three identified Buddha images.⁶

⁴ Visit the Metropolitan Museum of Art's *China: Dawn of a Golden Age, 200-750 AD* website http://www.metmuseum.org/special/se_event.asp?OccurrenceId={8DC7B584-ACB9-4D15-ABCB-2B0CE09C6652}

⁵ See <http://www.orientalarchitecture.com>. Click on "China," scroll down to "Datong/Yungang Grottoes."





A. Standing Buddha—India (Gupta period, c. 319-500 CE)—Stone Carving



Gupta Period (c. 319-500 CE)
Mottled Red Sandstone
33 in. high x 16 in. wide
Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York City
Technique: carving

(Source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Enid A. Haupt Gift, 1979 [1979.6]
Photograph, all rights reserved, The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

http://www.metmuseum.org/Works_of_Art/viewOne.asp?dep=6&viewMode=0&item=1979%2E6

Gupta sculpture, the classic creation of Buddhism in India, established the standard type of the Buddha image. This was exported in two main directions—to Indonesia, and through Central Asia to the Far East. Whenever one thinks of the Buddha image one thinks of the Gupta type or its derivatives (Lee 1973: 106).

One goal of Indian craftsmen was to convey the idea of *prana* or “breath.” The “breath” was spiritual rather than physical. South Asian sculptors and painters made full-bodied, fleshy figures that looked as if their skins were filled with air, like balloons. Their contours were fully rounded and the bones and muscles invisible beneath the skin. The robe worn by the figure was clearly made of thin cloth. This is sometimes referred to as a “wet look.”

A: Unidentified Comparison Piece



Seated Buddha
India, Mathura, 3rd Century
Mottled Red Sandstone
25 in. high
Cleveland Museum of Art
Technique: carving

(Source: Cleveland Museum of Art)

<http://www.clemusart.com/explore/work.asp?searchText=seated+buddha&recNo=0&tab=2&display=>



B. Maitreya Altarpiece—Eastern Wei Dynasty (534-549)—China—Stone Carving

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*Stele with Sakymuni and
Bodhisattvas*
China, Eastern Wei Dynasty
(534-549)
Limestone; 30 in. high
Cleveland Museum of Art
Technique: carving

(Source: Cleveland Museum of Art)

<http://www.clemusart.com/explore/work.asp?searchText=stele&recNo=3&tab=2&display=>

The centuries between 220 and 589 CE in China are broadly known as the “Period of Disunion” or the “Northern and Southern Dynasties.”⁶ In the early fourth century, North China fell to groups of semi-nomadic people who had settled within its frontiers. Warfare and famine drove sixty to seventy percent of the Chinese upper classes south, where they established a series of kingdoms known as the “Southern Dynasties.” China wouldn’t be united under a powerful dynasty again until 589.

Buddhism became well-established in northern China during this period. Its promise of universal salvation found a ready audience in such unstable times.⁷

The Wei dynasty was founded by the Tuoba clan. The Tuoba were Xianbei, a people originally from southern Manchuria. This image was made during the Eastern Wei, a short-lived successor to Northern Wei.

The central figure is clearly a Buddha or enlightened being. It has all the correct iconographic markings—the bump on top of the head (*ushnisha*) and the long earlobes. Although the Buddha wears monk’s robes based on Indian styles, they are thick and heavy, completely cover the body beneath, and fall in highly stylized folds. The body of the Buddha seems to have no physical substance—his chest is sunken beneath the neckline of the robes, and the contours of his torso are hidden. Both the hemline of the central Buddha and the ends of the halo behind him are linear designs that vividly convey energy and movement.

The flanking Bodhisattvas are depicted wearing worldly robes and ornaments. Since they are beings who delay entrance into Nirvana in order to help others reach enlightenment, this is said to symbolize their connection to the material world.

⁶ Chronological Table, p. 50.

⁷ Daoist religion, China’s indigenous faith, also became established during this era.



B: Unidentified Comparison Piece



Maitreya Altarpiece
Northern Wei Dynasty, dated
524 CE, China
Gilt Bronze
30 in. high
Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York
Technique: casting

(Source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1938 [38.158.1a-n] Photograph, all rights reserved, The Metropolitan Museum of Art)
http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/ho/06/eac/ho_38.158.1a-n.htm

C. Seated Buddha—Tang dynasty (early 8th Century)—Cast Bronze



Vairocana Buddha
China, Tang Dynasty (618-907),
c. 670-680
Stone
50 ft. high
Longmen Caves, Henan
Province, China
Technique: carving

(Source: Photo courtesy of Robert Fiala, 1988, Luoyang)

Over the centuries, Indian art exerted varying degrees of influence on Chinese Buddhist imagery. During periods of active exchange, travelers, texts, and sacred objects flowed freely into China. This resulted in an increased resemblance between contemporary Indian and Chinese Buddhist images.

A movement toward a more three-dimensional Indian style took place in the sixth century and flourished in Chinese Buddhist art during the Tang dynasty (618-907). In part, this was because connections between China and Central Asia over the Silk Roads had reached a high point during Tang. The body of the huge Vairocana Buddha⁸ from the Longmen Caves⁹ was no longer lost in drapery. It appears to wear its robes, rather than disappear beneath them. The body is full, solid, and fleshy.

⁸ "Vairocana" means "Illuminating One." While Shakyamuni is the historical Buddha, Vairocana represents his supreme cosmic aspect.

⁹ The Longmen caves are located about ten miles south of the city of Luoyang in Henan province.



C: Unidentified Comparison Piece



Tang Dynasty, Early 8th Century,
China
Gilt Bronze
8 in. high
Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York
Technique: casting

(Source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1943 [43.24.3] Photograph, all rights reserved, The Metropolitan Museum of Art)
http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/nd/buda/ho_43.24.3.htm

Rationale: Students will learn how the Buddha image changed as it traveled from India to China over the Silk Roads. They will also explore the magical side of religious art through three reading selections.

Time: Two or three forty-five minute sessions.

Instructional Resources: Three Buddha images; three unidentified comparison images of similar style, three document-based questions, glossary.

Some documents are primary sources and some are secondary materials selected from various books and articles. Primary sources are marked with an asterisk. *

Procedure: This unit consists of two activities.

- Activity 1: Distribute images A, B, and C. Teacher and class discuss each image within the context of cultural diffusion along the Silk Roads. They go over physical factors such as size, materials used, techniques (definitions are in the Glossary, p. 307).

The teacher then questions the class about the stylistic elements of the three figures. Some suggested questions:

Image A

- What does the “wet look” enable the sculptor to show?
- Can you see the bones and muscles beneath the skin of this figure?

Image B

- How do you know this figure is a Buddha?
- Do the folds of the Buddha’s clothing resemble real cloth?





Image C

- How are energy and movement conveyed in this image?
- Compared to image (A), what is the relation between the Buddha's clothing and the body it covers? How does this sculpture differ from the "wet look" of (A)?

Next the class is divided into groups of three. Each group receives the three unidentified figures. Each group member gets a different image to identify by comparing it with the images previously discussed by the whole class.

Each group presents its results. The unidentified images are discussed and identified by the whole group. For a homework assignment, students choose one image and write a paragraph discussing their reactions to the piece.

- Activity 2: Three document-based questions: (1) the power of images according to the *Lotus Sutra*; (2) painting in the pupils of the Buddha's eyes, a ritual from modern-day Sri Lanka; (3) Buddhist images in action from a Tang dynasty short story.

Students will answer the questions following the documents and then write a brief paragraph.

Whole Group Reflection: Why do art styles change as they move from one culture to another? Does everything change or do some things remain the same?

If religious images can be made from twigs or by scratching pictures on the ground (Activity 2, Document 1), why bother to have craftsmen devote years of training to carving stone or casting metal?

Instructional Modification: Teachers can assign parts of "The Artist's Tale" in Susan Whitfield's *Life Along the Silk Road*.¹⁰ This is a fictionalized account of a tenth-century painter working on one of the Mogao caves near Dunhuang.

Application: Students can compare Buddhism with other religions (Islam, Judaism) that strongly discourage the use of religious images.

¹⁰ Susan Whitfield. *Life Along the Silk Road*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 206-222.





Student Handouts

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Activity 1: Three Buddha Images

A. Standing Buddha-India



Gupta Period (c. 319-500 CE)
Mottled Red Sandstone
33 in. high x 16 in. wide
Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York City
Technique: carving

(Source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Enid A. Haupt Gift, 1979 [1979.6] Photograph, all rights reserved, The Metropolitan Museum of Art)
http://www.metmuseum.org/Works_of_Art/viewOne.asp?dep=6&viewMode=0&item=1979%2E6

B. Stele with Sakyamuni and Bodhisattvas—China



*Stele with Sakymuni and
Bodhisattvas*
China, Eastern Wei Dynasty
(534-549)
Limestone; 30 in. high
Cleveland Museum of Art
Technique: carving

(Source: Cleveland Museum of Art)

<http://www.clemusart.com/explore/work.asp?searchText=stele&recNo=3&tab=2&display=>

C. Seated Buddha



Vairocana Buddha
China, Tang Dynasty (618-907),
c. 670-680
Stone
50 ft. high
Longmen Caves, Henan
Province, China
Technique: carving

(Source: Photo courtesy of Robert Fiala, 1988, Luoyang)





Unidentified Comparison Piece 1



(Source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1938 [38.158.1a-n] Photograph, all rights reserved, The Metropolitan Museum of Art)
http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/ho/06/eac/ho_38.158.1a-n.htm

Unidentified Comparison Piece 2



(Source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1943 [43.24.3] Photograph, all rights reserved, The Metropolitan Museum of Art)
http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/buda/ho_43.24.3.htm

Unidentified Comparison Piece 3



(Source: Cleveland Museum of Art)
<http://www.clemusart.com/explore/work.asp?searchText=seated+buddha&recNo=0&tab=2&display=>





Activity 2: Three Documents

PART A

DOCUMENT 1: FROM ENNIN'S DIARY: MAKING A STATUE OF MANJUSRI*



Manjusri on a Lion
China, 12th or 13th century
Gilt bronze, 21 in. high
Kimbell Art Museum, Ft. Worth,
Texas

(Source: Copyright © 2005 Kimbell Art Museum)

<http://www.kimbellart.org/database/index.cfm?detail=yes&ID=AP%201987.05%20a,b>

Manjusri was the bodhisattva of wisdom, worshipped all over East Asia. This document is by Ennin (793–864), a Japanese monk who wrote a diary about his pilgrimage to China. Here he tells about a famous statue of Manjusri he saw in a monastery. When it was being made, it split apart six times. The artist felt that Manjusri was displeased with his work and prayed to the bodhisattva to show him his true appearance.

As soon as he had made his prayer, he opened his eyes and saw before him the bodhisattva Manjusri on a golden-colored lion. After some time, Manjusri mounted a multicolored cloud and flew up into the sky. The artist wept for joy. He then realized that the statue he had made before had not been right. He changed his model to match what he had seen in size and appearance. Thus the seventh time he cast it, it did not crack; in fact, everything proved easy to do. Once the statue was finished, it was placed in this hall. With tears in his eyes, the artist said, “What a miracle, I have seen what has never been seen before. I pray that in all my successive lives, age after age, I will be a disciple of Manjusri.” Having said this, he died.

- 1. Someone once said that art is “one tenth inspiration and nine tenths perspiration.” Does this passage agree or disagree with this saying?**

- 2. From a Buddhist point of view, is this story tragic because of the artist’s death? Why or why not?**





DOCUMENT 2: PAINTING THE EYES OF THE BUDDHA

A Buddha image wasn't "alive" until the pupils of the eyes were painted. Every Buddhist culture placed importance on this. The following modern account is about the Eye Festival in Sri Lanka. This passage tells us a lot about the power of religious images and the power of art.

The Buddha image is treated with the greatest respect. One particular ceremony known as the Eye Festival gives an indication of the high regard and reverence paid to it. The ceremony is an elaborate long-drawn-out one, the most important aspect of which is the ritual of painting the eyes on the image. It is the last and most important act of the whole Eye Festival. In olden days a king or someone of high standing probably did this. Today a specialist craftsman is carefully chosen to perform this most sacred and awesome act.

On the day when the ceremony is to take place, the craftsman comes in procession from his home to the place where the image is. He offers prayers . . . Then he goes to the place where the image is, accompanied by another, who brings a box of colors and a mirror. This mirror is held in front of the image and the craftsman, looking at the mirror, paints the eyes over his shoulders or sideways, without looking at the image . . .

. . . It is believed that the gaze of the image is so powerful that no one must look at it direct. That is why the sculptor uses a mirror . . . It is believed that once the eyes are set the image comes alive, so to speak (Adapted from De Silva 1974: 118).

- 1. What makes the eyes of a Buddha image so important? (Hints: Think of the eyes of someone you admire or fear. Also, draw a face with the eyes blank, then draw in the pupils of the eyes. What happened?)**

- 2. Look at the eyes of the images in the handouts. Are they important? What word(s) would you use to describe them?**





DOCUMENT 3: BUDDHIST GUARDIAN FIGURES IN ACTION*

Colossal Guardian Figure (c. 670-680) from the Longmen Caves (Near Luoyang, China, Tang Dynasty, 618-907)



(Source: Photo courtesy of Robert Fiala, 1988, Luoyang)

In this story, also from the Tang, guardian figures enforce the Buddhist rule against eating meat and drinking alcohol.

At the gate of the Kaiyuan monastery in Wuzhou there are two . . . guardian figures whose divine powers have been celebrated for generations. Birds dare not go near them. When sick people pray to them they get results time and again, and come visiting to pay respects.

A bureau director from the prefecture held a banquet on the upper floor of the monastery gate. Everyone pointed out that the guardian figures were there—that wouldn't do. But one man said, "They are only clay: what can they do?" And he put meat and liquor in their mouths. In a moment clouds closed in and lightning played around the gate-tower; gales and thunder raged, as the meat and drink flew into the air to the terror of all present. The particular man who had defiled the guardian figures was dragged out hundreds of feet from the gate-tower and struck dead (Adapted from Dudbridge 1998: 379-380).

Vocabulary

Defile: To corrupt, to make dirty.

1. Relate the pose and expression of the Longmen guardian figure to the content of the story.





PART B

Directions: Write a brief, well-organized essay entitled “Creating a Living Buddhist Image.” It should include an introduction, a body, and a conclusion.

Task: Using information from the documents to support your ideas,

- Describe how an artist can be divinely inspired.
- Give an example of how an image can be made to “come alive.”
- Describe how, once successfully made, the kind of power images have.

Student Handout:

Glossary¹¹

Casting: Making sculpture using casts or by shaping in a mold; usually refers to pouring liquid material into a mold.

Carving: The act of shaping, marking, or decorating wood, stone, or another material by cutting or incising, typically using tools such as chisels and other blades.

Gilt (Gilding): Surface application of metal in the form of leaf or powder applied directly to the surface to approximate the effect of solid or inlaid metal.

Iconography: The traditional images or symbols associated with a subject, especially a religious or legendary subject.

Lacquer: Objects, usually made of thin wood, which are coated and decorated with layers of resin secreted from certain species of trees.

Linear: An emphasis on line as opposed to volume.

Modeling: Use of soft materials such as wax or clay to create three-dimensional objects.

Stylization: Stylized forms take natural appearances such as the shape of an object and depict them in accordance with artistic ideals or conventions. “Stylized” is the opposite of “naturalistic”—depicting things based on the observation of individual examples.

Volume: The quantity or mass of an object or material that occupies space.

¹¹ Most of these glossary entries are cited (or adapted) from the *Getty Art and Architecture Thesaurus on Line* <http://www.getty.edu/research/tools/vocabulary/aat/>.



Unit T

MOSQUES IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD AND CHINA

Essential Questions: How do mosques reflect the practice of Islam? How do contemporary Chinese mosques reflect how Chinese Muslims relate to the Islamic world outside of China?

Learning Experience: Students will look at mosques in Central Asia, Iran, and North Africa, and study some of their basic architectural features. They will also compare them with two mosques, one ancient and one modern, in Xi'an, China. They will see how the appearance of a mosque can reflect changing views of what it means to be a Muslim in contemporary China.

Anticipatory Set: Show the class a photo of an office building and a church. Ask them to identify the differences between the two, both in terms of appearance (size, shape, decoration, etc.) and function. Tell students that in this unit they will learn about how another kind of building, the mosque, fits the practice of Islam in both the Middle East and China.

Context: The spread of Islam from Arabia to the rest of the Middle East and beyond is one of the great military and political achievements of the pre-modern world. The story begins with the *Hijra* (“Migration”) in 622 CE, when Muhammad and his followers went from Mecca to Medina to escape enemies and forge political-religious alliances. By the early eighth century CE, about a century after Muhammad’s death, Arab armies had conquered the Middle East, Iran, North Africa, Spain, and parts of Central Asia.

As a center of worship and community activity, the mosque accompanied the spread of Islam. The word “mosque” comes from the Arabic word *masjid*, “the place where one goes to prostrate oneself” (Denny 1994: 121).

The first mosque was the house of the Prophet Muhammad in Medina [Saudi Arabia]. This was a simple rectangular . . . enclosure containing rooms for the Prophet and his wives and a shaded area on the south side of the courtyard which could be used for prayer in the direction of Mecca. This building became the model for subsequent mosques which had the same basic courtyard layout with a prayer area against the qibla wall.¹ . . . The roofs of the prayer area . . . were supported by columns . . .

Several features which were later to become standard features of mosques were introduced at an early stage. The first of these is the minbar,² or pulpit, which was used by Muhammad to give sermons. A later introduction was the mihrab or prayer niche which was first introduced in the eighth century. Other features include the ablutions facilities and a central pool or fountain and the minaret . . . (<http://archnet.org/library/dictionary>).

Although mosques changed in accordance with regional architectural styles and building techniques, these basic features remained.

Mosques play an important role in the daily life of Muslims.³ The mosque is

¹ The qibla is the direction facing Mecca. It indicates the direction the worshipper must face while praying. Underlined words are defined in the “Basic Features of a Mosque,” the table at the end of the classroom exercise for Activity 1 (p. 307).

³ For a virtual tour of an English mosque, visit: <http://www.hitchams.suffolk.sch.uk/mosque/default.htm>.





. . . a multipurpose building where important public announcements and proclamations are made, crowds are gathered in times of crisis—for example, to rally support for defense or holy warfare—and where at the Friday worship service, the ruler’s name is mentioned in the sermon, thus demonstrating his continued authority . . . The major mosque also often has an educational function, with learned shaykhs holding forth either in the mosque itself or in special attached buildings or arcades. The mosque provides a place for men to rest, to socialize, to take time out from a busy day in order to meditate for a while, even to eat, as well as, of course, to perform the obligatory daily salats [formal prayer/worship performed five times a day] (Denny 1994: 295-296).

The history of Islam in China is almost as old as the history of Islam itself. Muslims came to China

. . . as political emissaries and merchants within a few decades of Muhammad’s flight from Mecca to Medina in 622 . . . For six centuries thereafter Arabs and Persians . . . played significant roles in China’s economic life, especially along the Silk Roads in the northwest and in the port cities of the southeast coast (Lipman 1997: 25).

Beginning with the Mongol Yuan dynasty (1279-1368 CE), large populations of Muslims began to settle permanently throughout China. Some, such as the Uyghurs of the northwest, weren’t ethnically Chinese; others, like the nine million Chinese Muslims known as Hui, are found today practically everywhere in the PRC and, except for their practice of Islam, for the most part speak, look, and act Chinese (Gillette 2000: 11).

In this unit, students will learn about some of the basic architectural features of the mosque.⁴ Also, in looking at how an “old style” and a “new style” mosque divided opinion among Chinese Muslims, they will gain insight into what it means to be a Muslim in contemporary China.

Rationale: What is the relation between religion and religious architecture? How do buildings help people express and define religious faith?

Time: One forty-minute session

Instructional Resources: Diagram showing the features of a mosque; photos of various mosques; document-based questions.

Some documents are primary sources and some are secondary materials selected from various books and articles. Primary sources are marked with an asterisk. *

Procedures: This unit consists of two activities:

- Activity 1: How do mosques reflect the practice of Islam? This consists of two parts, (A) an internet-based homework assignment on mosques and worship in Islam; (B) a classroom activity where students identify the basic features of a mosque using a diagram and a group of photos.
- Activity 2: How does a contemporary mosque reflect what Chinese Muslims think about the Islamic world outside China? Students learn about two kinds of Chinese mosques, one ancient and one modern, and the reasons behind their architectural differences.

Whole Group Reflection: How do religious buildings express religious ideas?

⁴ For a tutorial on the arts of Islam, including architecture, see: http://www.ucalgary.ca/applied_history/tutor/islam/learning/.



Instructional Modification: Students will be given the following two options as a homework assignment:

- Visit a mosque and write a 3-5 page report—provide pictures if possible.
- Interview a practicing Muslim.

Application: How do the opinions of Chinese Muslims concerning the New Mosque versus the Great Mosque reflect contemporary Islam as it appears in today's headlines?

Activity 1: How Do Mosques Reflect the Practice of Islam?

A: HOMEWORK READING ON THE WEB

What is a mosque and how do Muslims worship? Access the following web page on worship in the mosque:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/worship/index.shtml>

Read the page and also access the highlighted words and terms. Use these questions to help organize your research results:

1. What do Muslims do before entering the mosque?

2. What must they do before prayer?

3. How are mosques decorated? Why?

4. Where do people kneel or stand when they pray?

5. What is a mihrab?

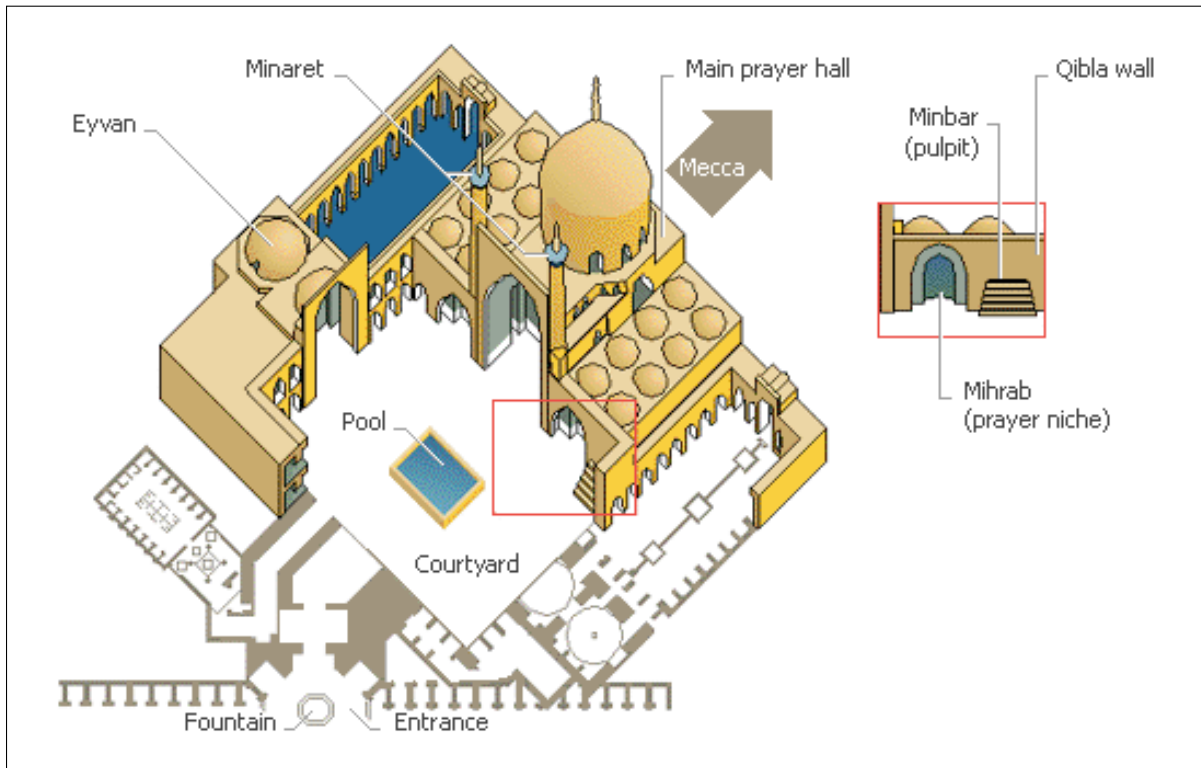
6. What is the function of a minaret?



What are the Basic Features of a Mosque?

Using the following diagram as reference, identify the architectural features appearing in the six photographs. Indicate which photograph shows which feature in the table on p. 313.

Diagram 1: Layout of a Mosque



(Source: Microsoft Encarta, http://encarta.msn.com/media_461550648_761579171_-1_1/Layout_of_a_Mosque.html)



1. Bin Yusuf Mosque, Morocco



(Source: Image courtesy of The Threshold Society)
<http://www.sufism.org/society/salaat/wudu.html>

3. Emin Mosque, Turfan



(Source: Photograph courtesy of Marleen Kassel, 2001)

5. Neighborhood Mosque, China⁵



(Source: Aga Khan Visual Archive, MIT)
http://vandyck.anu.edu.au/work/teach/context/libraries.mit.edu/rvc/aka/agakhan/KA_SELECTED_MOSQUES/53.html

2. Qayt Bay Mosque, Egypt



(Source: Aga Khan Visual Archive, MIT)
http://vandyck.anu.edu.au/work/teach/context/libraries.mit.edu/rvc/aka/agakhan/KA_SELECTED_MOSQUES/59.html

4. Mosque of Amr Ibn al-As, Egypt



(Source: Courtesy of the Fine Arts Library, Harvard College Library)

6. Sahn-I Kuds, Iran



(Source: Aga Khan Visual Archive, MIT)
http://vandyck.anu.edu.au/work/teach/context/libraries.mit.edu/rvc/aka/agakhan/KA_SELECTED_MOSQUES/akjpegs/C2228-065.jpg

⁵ In Kashi (Kashgar), an old oasis town along the Silk Roads in northwest China.





| Basic Features of a Mosque | |
|--|-------------------|
| Feature | Which photograph? |
| <u>Dome</u> : Circular construction used as a means of roofing. | |
| <u>Fountain</u> : Place to wash before prayers. | |
| <u>Minarets</u> : Towers from which Muslims are called to prayer. | |
| <u>Mihrab</u> : A niche in the wall pointing toward Mecca. This shows worshippers where to face as they pray. <u>Qibla wall</u> : The courtyard wall facing the direction of the holy city Mecca. | |
| <u>Minbar</u> : Similar to a pulpit. | |
| <u>Entrance</u> : Monumental portal, gateway, or doorway, usually to a building or courtyard. | |

(Adapted from <http://archnet.org/library/dictionary>)



Activity 2: Chinese Muslims and Chinese Mosques

How does a contemporary Chinese mosque reflect what Chinese Muslims think about the Islamic world outside China?

Islam spread throughout the Middle East, Iran, and Central Asia beginning in the seventh century. China's first contacts with Muslims—Arab and Persian traders on the Silk Roads—began around the same time.

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, large numbers of Muslims began to settle in China. The two mosques discussed below were both built in what is today the city of Xi'an. Xi'an is an ancient city in northern China, known as Chang'an for much of its early history. Chang'an was once the eastern end of the Silk Roads.

One mosque was built in the fourteenth century and one in the 1990s. One is a Chinese-style building, and one is Middle-Eastern in style and resembles some of the buildings in Activity 1.

The following documents and pictures discuss these two buildings. In answering the attached questions, you will not only learn about Chinese mosques, but also about how the appearance of a mosque can reflect changing views of what it means to be a Muslim in today's China.

Shops Outside the Great Mosque in Xi'an, China



(Source: Photograph courtesy of Lier Chen, Xi'an, 2004)



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DOCUMENT 1: BUILDING MATERIALS

The most important materials that go into making a building are the ones that need to bear weight. The foundation bears the weight of the walls, and the walls bear the weight of the roof. Since buildings like mosques and churches need a lot of open space inside for worshippers, columns might also be needed to hold up the roof.

Building materials depend on geography: some materials are more abundant in certain parts of the world than others. Stone and brick were the most common materials used to build mosques in the Middle East, Iran, and Central Asia. In China the situation was different:

An important characteristic of Chinese traditional architecture . . . is the reliance upon a wooden framework, for brick and stone structures were never as widely adopted. The skeleton of such buildings is a wood frame which bears the weight of the roof as well as upper stories. Walls are for enclosure, and support only their own mass.

. . . Because wooden structures must be moisture-and rain-proof, every structure sits on an above-ground platform and is sheltered by a roof with a rather prominent overhang . . .

The roof has concave surfaces that curve upward . . . Wooden structures need the protection of paint to prevent decay (Steinhardt 1984: 10, 11, 13).

1. Compare the materials used in Middle Eastern and Chinese buildings.

2. What is the function of a Chinese building's wooden frame?

3. Why are Chinese buildings painted?



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DOCUMENT 2: THE GREAT MOSQUE (XI'AN, CHINA)

The Great Mosque is located in Xi'an's Muslim district, home to about 30,000 Hui, or Chinese Muslims. It is one of the most important Muslim buildings in China. Built in 1392 CE, it consists of various buildings arranged within five courtyards.

a. Entrance Gate



(Source: Photograph courtesy of Lier Chen, 2004, Xi'an)

b. Main Prayer Hall



(Source: Photograph courtesy of Lier Chen, 2004, Xi'an)

c. The "Tower of Looking into the Mind-and-Heart" that Serves as a Minaret.



(Source: Photograph courtesy of Rex Geissler, GCI, <http://greatcommission.com/china/2002078.jpg>, 2002, Xi'an)

4. Describe two features that make the above buildings look typically Chinese rather than typically Islamic. Refer to Document 1.



DOCUMENT 3: A REVOLUTION IN CHINESE ISLAM

At the end of the nineteenth century, currents of radical religious change originating in Arabia affected Chinese Muslims. The desire to make Islam less Chinese and more like Islam in the Middle East, Iran, and Central Asia touched Muslims all over China. This trend continues to the present day. One influential reformer was

. . . opposed to . . . all external influences on Islam, refused to learn to read and write Chinese, forbade his children to learn Chinese, and insisted on Arabic and Persian education as the foundation of Muslim religious practice (Adapted from Lipman 1997: 205).

Imitation of Arab dress, architecture, and other practices was an important feature of Islamic reform . . . By the 1980s and 1990s, Arabic dress, architecture, and Qur’anic pronunciation⁶ had spread to far-flung Muslim communities as various Muslims strove to recapture the “one true religion” . . . (Adapted from Gillette 2000: 77).

5. How did reformers want to change education?

6. Describe two things characteristic of the “one true religion.”

⁶ Since the language of the *Qur’an* and its correct pronunciation are regarded as the perfect expression of the Arabic language, Muslims who recite and memorize the book are urged to learn from experienced reciters.

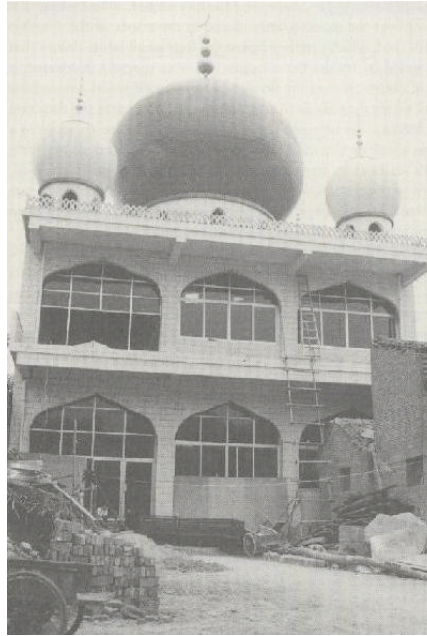


DOCUMENT 4: THE NEW MOSQUE—AN EXPRESSION OF RELIGIOUS REFORM



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The New Mosque in Xi'an, Completed in 1994, Reflects "Islamic" Style.



(Source: Gillette 2000: 70, Copyright © 2000 by the Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Junior University)

One aspect of reform was seen in architecture. The New Mosque in Xi'an expressed a view of Islam different from the architecture of the ancient Great Mosque.

Some local Hui also criticized the traditional mosques for looking “just like Han [Chinese Buddhist and Daoist] temples.” Jiqing, the 70-year-old gatekeeper at the New Mosque, pointed out that not only did many of the local mosques look like [Chinese] temples on the outside, but most had images of dogs, cats, phoenixes, and other animals on the inside, which he objected to as violating the Qur’anic prohibition on making images (Gillette 2000: 96).

Members of the New Mosque spoke enthusiastically about their new complex, describing it as having a . . . “truly Islamic” style. Jiqing characterized it as “exactly the same as [the mosques in] foreign countries.” On one occasion, he pulled out magazine pictures of Middle Eastern mosques . . . for me to examine. “Look” he said excitedly. “Just the same as our mosque!” (Gillette 2000: 98).

7. What features of local mosques did Jiqing object to? Why?

8. Look at the photo. What features of this building make it “truly Islamic?”



Unit U

WANG ZHAOJUN: A TRIBUTE PRINCESS BRINGS PEACE TO THE NORTHERN FRONTIER

Essential Question: What role does the tribute princess play in the relation between agrarian China and the nomads of the northern frontier?

Learning Experience: Students will read a shortened version of *Autumn in the Palace of Han*, a play by Ma Zhiyuan (c. 1250-1324 CE). This play is about Wang Zhaojun, a famous tribute princess. Tribute princesses were palace women sent to marry “barbarian” rulers. In reading her story, students will learn about (1) China’s pre-modern foreign relations; (2) the condition of women in traditional China; (3) the poetic language and imagery used to describe China’s age-old involvement with the northern frontier.

Anticipatory Set: Students read about the legendary tribute princess, Wang Zhaojun. The song and poetry of *Autumn in the Palace of Han* set romance, extreme culture shock, and suicide within the context of China’s relations with its nomad enemy, the Xiongnu empire.

Context: China became a unified empire during the Qin (221-206 BCE) and Han dynasties (202 BCE-220 CE). In 209 BCE, another empire also arose in East Asia, that of a nomadic people whom the Chinese called “Xiongnu.”¹ The Xiongnu came from what is today Mongolia. For much of the Han period, China’s foreign policy was centered upon its relations with these northern nomads. When the Xiongnu raided China’s frontiers, the imperial government would either send armies to punish them, or attempt to negotiate peace. They would give gifts, cash subsidies, and permission for the Xiongnu to trade in frontier markets. “Tribute princesses,” court women sent as brides to the Xiongnu ruler, were another form of exchange in Han-Xiongnu diplomatic relations.

The most famous tribute princess was Wang Zhaojun, who belonged to the harem of Emperor Yuan (r. 48-33 BCE) of the Former Han dynasty (206 BCE-25 CE). Her story, much of it legend, has deeply touched the Chinese for some two thousand years. Wang Zhaojun has appeared in poetry, drama, painting, and even on postage stamps.² Her story was also popular in other parts of East Asia.

According to legend, Emperor Yuan sent out painters to make portraits of candidates for his harem. Many families bribed the painters to beautify their daughters, since having a relative in the imperial harem was highly prestigious. The beautiful Wang Zhaojun, however, had no money to bribe the court painter Mao Yanshou. To get back at her, he didn’t flatter her beauty in his portrait. Although chosen, she was sent to the “cold palace,” the place for neglected wives. After ten years, the emperor accidentally met her and the two became lovers. Some time later, the Xiongnu chieftain demanded a tribute princess from the Chinese. According to one version of the story, Mao Yanshou (who fled China when the emperor discovered his lie) showed the Xiongnu khan a new painting of Wang Zhaojun in all her beauty. The Khan requested her for his tribute princess, but Wang Zhaojun killed herself before reaching the land of the Xiongnu. This is the version told here.

¹ Although “*xiong*” might be the Chinese transliteration of a sound by which the Xiongnu referred to themselves, it also has the Chinese meaning of “savage” or “cruel.” “*Nu*” means “slave.” Many pre-modern Chinese names for non-Chinese peoples (so-called “barbarians”) had similar negative connotations.

² Issued in 1994, this stamp can be seen by visiting http://www.tuttocina.it/Filatelia/SerieAnno/1994/1994_10.htm



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Another version of the story has Wang Zhaojun living among the Xiongnu. As a result, there is peace between Chinese and Xiongnu for the next sixty years. Legend has it that Wang Zhaojun's tomb, now a mound located in Hohhot, the capital of modern Inner Mongolia, remains forever green, a symbol of her love and longing for China.

Autumn in the Palace of Han is a type of drama called *zaju*. *Za* means “mixed” or “miscellaneous”; *ju* means “play.” It was the most important type of Chinese drama from the thirteenth to seventeenth centuries CE. *Zaju* subject matter included history, crime stories, and romance. *Zaju* texts included poetry as well as singing. Music accompanied all performances.

Ma Zhiyuan (c. 1250-1324 CE) is considered one of the greatest *zaju* playwrights. Seven of his plays survive. He came from what is today Beijing and probably held a minor government post. He was also a prolific poet. Perhaps the following poem, called “Autumn Thoughts,” expresses some of the sadness of Wang Zhaojun's story:

Withered vines, old trees, twilight crows.
Small bridge, flowing water, people's homes.
Ancient road, the west wind, gaunt horse.
The evening sun sinks westward.
A man, broken-hearted, on a far horizon.³

Rationale: In combining discussion of (1) women in relation to China's pre-modern foreign policy, and (2) analysis of the play's literary devices, students will see how a major “war and peace” issue in Chinese history was invested with tragic romance and melancholy poetry.

Time: One or two forty-minute sessions. This can be adjusted to meet the needs of the class.

Instructional Resources: Excerpts from a Yuan dynasty (1279-1368 CE) play, *Autumn in the Palace of Han*,⁴ by Ma Zhiyuan.

Some documents are primary sources and some are secondary materials selected from various books and articles. Primary sources are marked with an asterisk. *

Procedure: Go over the vocabulary and literary terms (p. 331); distribute copies of the map of the Han empire (**Map E**) for students' reference. Divide the class up into groups. Ideally, each group should get one batch of questions. The questions are divided so as to give the groups a specific focus vis-à-vis the content of the play:

- Group A: The World of China and the World of the Frontier
- Group B: Emperor and Khan
- Group C: Wang Zhaojun
- Group D: The Tribute Princess

Individual questions are assigned to each group member. As they read, students will take notes in order to answer their questions and contribute to their group's theme

After the class finishes reading, each group discusses its answers with the whole class. Finally, the entire class pools its knowledge to discuss the following broad questions about the play:

³ Translation by Stephen Owen from *An Anthology of Chinese Literature*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1996, p. 740.

⁴ This is a greatly shortened version of the translation by Donald Keene. In some passages, wording has been simplified. Material has also been added to preserve continuity. The entire play appears in: Cyril Birch (ed.). *Anthology of Chinese Literature—from early times to the fourteenth century*. New York: Grove Press, 1965, pp. 422-448.



- How does the play characterize the different worlds of nomad and Chinese?
- What are the character conflicts that develop in the play?
- Although she leads a privileged life, how does Zhaojun typify the inferior status of women in pre-modern China?

Whole Group Reflection: Is Wang Zhaojun a hero?

Instructional Modification: Students can read the play for homework and perform it in class. The text can be taught with the assistance of a literature instructor.

Application: Are there connections to be made between China's way of maintaining frontier peace in pre-modern times and how other nations established peace with their neighbors? How do nations today, including China, establish peaceful relations with other nations?

Excerpts from *Autumn in the Palace of Han**

漢宮秋

HAN GONG QIU

The title of the play in Chinese: From left to right the characters are "Han," "Palace," and "Autumn"

From the Prologue

(The khan and his followers enter.)

Khan *(recites)*:

The autumn winds wander in the grass by my tent; a lonely flute sounds through the moonlit skies. A million brave archers acknowledge me their khan, yet I affirm allegiance to the House of Han.

I am the Khan . . . For many years I have lived in the grassy steppe, and alone rule the north. Hunting is my people's livelihood, and conquest our business . . . I dispatched an envoy to offer tribute and to request that a princess be given me as my bride. As yet I do not know whether or not the Han emperor is willing to renew our treaty of alliance.

Today the heavens are high, the air is clear. Chiefs—would not a round of hunting on the sandy banks be pleasant sport? Truly nomads own no land, no houses; bows and arrows are our only wealth. *(Exits.)*

(Enter the emperor with a retinue of eunuchs and women.)

Emperor *(recites)*:



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China's four hundred counties, the whole world, are mine. The borders long have been secured by solemn vow. At night I sleep in peace, no cares afflict me now. I am Emperor Yuan of the Han dynasty.

. . . Ever since I ascended to the throne, the country in all its length and breadth has been at peace, not because of my own virtue, but thanks entirely to the civil and military officials on whose support I depend. (*Exits.*)

From Act I

(*The painter Mao Yanshou enters.*)

Mao (*recites*):

I'll snatch my fill of gold with both my hands,
And fear no seas of blood nor royal commands.
Alive, I only ask for wealth to spare;
When dead, let men spit on me for all I care.

(*Mao brags about his mission to select girls for the palace. He has become rich because families bribe him to paint flattering portraits. Only Wang Zhaojun's family has no money and gives nothing. He disfigures her picture out of spite.*)

Mao:

. . . I'll disfigure the girl's portrait a little, so that when she arrives in the capital she'll certainly be sent to the palace of neglected ladies. I shall make her lead a lifetime of suffering . . . (*Exits.*)

(*As a result of Mao's false portrait, the beautiful Wang Zhaojun is sent to the "cold palace," the residence for neglected wives. The next scene takes place on the palace grounds. Enter Wang Zhaojun with two maids.*)

Wang Zhaojun (*recites*):

One day by royal command I came to this sad place.
It seems ten years—I've yet to see my sovereign's face. This lovely, lonely evening, who will join my song? My lute alone has brought me joy the whole night long.

I am Wang Zhaojun. My father, the Elder Wang, has been a farmer all his life. When my mother was about to give me birth, she dreamt that moonlight entered her breast and made her fall to the ground. Soon afterwards I was born. When I grew to be eighteen, I was honored by being chosen to enter the women's palace. I did not realize, when I could not give Mao Yanshou the money he demanded, that he would take his revenge by disfiguring my portrait.

(*She plays and sings:*)

My carriage wheels crush the fallen flowers,
A girl in the moonlight puts down her flute.
Some palace lady I have never met
Has aged with grief, and white now streaks her hair . . .

(*As she sings, the emperor enters with eunuchs carrying lanterns. He hears Wang Zhaojun's music. They meet. He falls in love.*)



Emperor (*sings*):

When I see your brows painted with mascara,
Your hair swept up like piles of raven's wings,
Your waist as slim as swaying willow boughs,
Your face as lovely as bright-colored clouds,
I wonder which of all my palace halls
Is worthy of you? . . .

When I see such beauty before me, I wonder why you have never been favored by my visit.

Zhaojun:

At the time of the selection, the commissioner Mao Yanshou asked my father for money, but my family was so impoverished that we could raise none. Mao Yanshou took his revenge by disfiguring the eyes in my portrait. That is why I was sent to the cold palace.

(The emperor orders Mao Yanshou's execution and bestows his favor on Wang Zhaojun.)

***A 1992 Chinese Coin Depicts Wang Zhaojun Holding a Pipa,
a Traditional Stringed Instrument with A Pear-Shaped Wooden Body.
The Small Figures on The Right
Symbolize Her Life As An Elegant Court Lady.
The Camel and The Sheep on The Left Stand for Her New Life among The Nomads.***



(Source: Courtesy of Pacific Atlantic Coin Company) <http://www.pacoin.com/coins/modernissue/china/histfigures/set9/1992nineth.html>

From Act II

(The Khan enters with his followers.)

Khan:

. . . Recently I sent envoys to offer my allegiance to the Han and to ask in return for a Han princess. The Chinese emperor refused, claiming that the princesses of his palace are still too young for marriage. I am most annoyed . . . I intend to raise troops and invade the Han lands to the south. But I fear to destroy the peace of several years' standing. I shall examine conditions and act accordingly.



(Mao Yanshou enters. He has fled China. He shows the khan a true portrait of Wang Zhaojun so that the khan will demand her from the Chinese as a tribute princess.)

Khan:

Is it possible that the world contains such a woman? My wishes would all be fulfilled if I could have her for my queen. I shall dispatch an official and some retainers with a letter to the Chinese emperor asking for Wang Zhaojun. In exchange for the princess, I shall offer peace between our two nations. If the emperor refuses, I shall invade his domains without delay, and he will not find it easy to defend his rivers and mountains. Meanwhile I and my soldiers will make a foray within the Han borders, pretending it is for a hunt, and when we see our chance, we shall strike. *(Exits.)*

(The emperor's palace, a month after he's fallen in love with Wang Zhaojun. The emperor and Zhaojun are together. Enter the prime minister and a eunuch.)

Minister:

I wish to report to your majesty that the Khan of the northern barbarians has sent an envoy here to say that Mao Yanshou presented him with a portrait of Lady Zhaojun. The Khan demands her in marriage as requisite for making peace and ending hostilities. If his demand is refused, he will march south with great numbers of men, and you will not be able to defend your territories.

Zhaojun:

I have been favored by your majesty's great kindness. Now it is my turn to repay you by my death. I am willing to be married to the barbarian. If, because of my sacrifice, swords are not raised, I shall enjoy a good name in the histories to come. But how can I give up the love I shared with you?

Emperor *(sings)*:

Today she will be wedded to the khan
You must be satisfied, my ministers!
The Chinese princess has a country still,
Yet nowhere can she turn. She must go forth
Where the yellow clouds rise not from hills of green.
Reduced to distant gazing, our eyes will strain
To sight a lonely goose cross the autumn sky:
This year, my fate decreed I'd suffer grief,
And Zhaojun suffering and wasting away with sorrow.
Her crown of kingfisher feathers, her sash,
All her Chinese clothes she must now exchange
For brocade hoods and beaded robes of fur.

(He orders his minister to turn her over to the khan's envoy.)



The Mongolian Steppe



(Source: Photograph courtesy of Daniel C. Waugh, 2004)

From Act III

(By the bridge that leads to the road north. Enter the khan's envoy escorting Wang Zhaojun.)

Zhaojun:

. . . I have no choice. I have been sent across the frontier to marry the nomad khan. The winds and frost are cruel in the northern lands. How shall I endure them? Many tales are told from ancient times of beautiful women who have suffered unhappy fates. But I must not resent the sorrows my beauty has brought me.

(Enter the emperor with officials.)

Emperor (*sings*):

Alas, how heavy is this separation!
I know how anxious you must be to leave.
My heart will go before her to the north;
When I return, I'll look for her in dreams.
Oh, never say that great men soon forget.

Zhaojun (*recites*):

Today I lead a Chinese palace life,
Tomorrow I shall be a nomad's wife.
How could I wear your gifts of former days
To flaunt my charms and win another's praise?

Emperor (*sings*):

Caw! Caw! The cries of southward-flying geese:
But all that fills my eyes is sheep and cattle
The sound I heard was but the creaking wheels
Of the felt-covered cart bearing its load
Of sorrow up the slopes of northern hills. (Exits.)



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(Zhaojun lays aside her Chinese court robes and they part. The scene changes to a spot by the Amur River, boundary between the khan's territory and China. The khan has come to escort Zhaojun north. Zhaojun addresses the khan.)

Zhaojun:

Will your highness give me a cup of wine that I may pour an offering while facing the south, and take a last leave of China before my long journey? Mighty emperor of the Han! Now is this life ended. I await you in the next.

(Zhaojun pours the wine out on the ground and then throws herself into the river. The khan tries to save her, but fails.)

Khan *(in tears)*:

Alas, alas. Zhaojun was so unwilling to enter my domains that she threw herself into the river and died. Let her be buried, then, on the bank of this river at a place we shall call the Green Mound. She whom I thought to marry is dead. In vain did I create enmity between myself and the Han . . . I shall resume our traditional alliance with the Emperor of Han, and remain forever to him as nephew to uncle. All may have proved for the best. *(Exits.)*

(The khan sends Mao Yanshou back to China.)

From Act IV

(The emperor awakes after dreaming that Zhaojun has visited him.)

Emperor *(sings)*:

Listen—a wild goose, calling twice or thrice
At Zhaojun's empty palace.
How could it know
Another, lonelier than she, waits here?
Probably it is old and strengthless now;
And must be hungry, bones and feathers light,
It would turn back, but fears for southern nets;
It would go forward, but dreads the nomad bows.
Its mournful notes are like a voice that tells
Of Zhaojun's longing for the Lord of Han:
Sad as the dirges for a fallen hero . . .

(Enter a minister. He tells the emperor that Mao Yanshou has been brought back in chains and that Wang Zhaojun is dead. The emperor orders Mao's execution.)

Emperor *(recites)*:

Leaves fell in the courtyard as the wild goose cried above, bringing to my lonely pillow dreams and thoughts of love . . .



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Student Handout: Questions

GROUP A: THE WORLD OF CHINA AND THE WORLD OF THE FRONTIER

1. How does the use of nature in the Khan's prologue speech make you feel about his frontier kingdom? What does the sound of the flute say about the frontier landscape?

2. What do we learn about the lifestyle of the nomads? What is the relationship between nomads and Chinese?

3. According to the minister, what are the nomad's demands?

4. How does the emperor's speech use clothing to characterize the difference between China and the nomads?

5. What role does music have in the play? Compare the roles of the flute and Wang Zhaojun's lute: What different worlds do they represent?

6. What do wild geese symbolize in the play?



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1. How is the Khan characterized? What is his role as Khan?

2. What is the “solemn vow” of the emperor’s prologue speech?

3. Compare the emperor’s first speech with the Khan’s. How does Emperor Yuan’s domain differ from that of the Khan? How does the Khan’s lifestyle differ from the emperor’s?

4. How does Emperor Yuan characterize his job as emperor? How does he account for the relative peace on the frontier?

5. How does Mao Yanshou manipulate the Khan in order to get revenge? Why is the Khan annoyed at the beginning of Act II?



1. What feelings does Wang Zhaojun have about her position at court?

2. How do the “fallen flowers” and the “palace lady” in Wang Zhaojun’s Act I song describe her own situation?

3. How does the emperor react to Wang Zhaojun when he first sees her? Are his reactions just physical?

4. In his Act I song, what images does the emperor use to describe Wang Zhaojun’s beauty?

5. In Act II, what is the Khan’s reaction on seeing Wang Zhaojun’s portrait?



1. Is Wang Zhaojun's response to the Khan's request heroic? How will her life change when she leaves court?

2. How does Wang Zhaojun feel about leaving the palace?

3. How does the emperor respond to her departure? Who is more level-headed in this situation, the emperor or Wang Zhaojun?

4. In Act II, Wang Zhaojun lays aside her court robes. What does this symbolize?

5. What affect does Wang Zhaojun's death have on the Khan? On his relations with China?



Vocabulary

Frontier: A region that forms the border between settled and unsettled territory.

Khan: A chieftain or person of rank.

Steppe: Dry, almost treeless grasslands that support nomadic tribes and their herds.

Tribute: Payment by the ruler of one nation to another, as protection against attack or in acknowledgment of inferior status.

Glossary of Literary Terms⁵

Allegory: A figurative work in which a surface narrative carries a secondary, symbolic or metaphorical meaning.

Characterization: The process by which an author creates vivid, believable characters in a work of art. This may be done in a variety of ways, including (1) direct description of the character by the narrator; (2) the direct presentation of the speech, thoughts, or actions of the character; and (3) the responses of other characters to the character.

Conflict: The conflict in a work of fiction is the issue to be resolved in the story. It usually occurs between two characters, the protagonist and the antagonist, or between the protagonist and society or the protagonist and himself or herself.

Figurative language: A technique in writing in which the author temporarily interrupts the order, construction, or meaning of the writing for a particular effect. Figurative language is the opposite of literal language, in which every word is truthful, accurate, and free of exaggeration or embellishment.

Foreshadowing: A device used in literature to create expectation or to set up an explanation of later developments.

Genre: A category of literary work. In critical theory, genre may refer to both the content of a given work—tragedy, comedy, pastoral—and to its form, such as poetry, novel, or drama.

Metaphor: A figure of speech that expresses an idea through the image of another object. Metaphors suggest the essence of the first object by identifying it with certain qualities of the second object. For example, "Love is a singing bird."

Plot: In literary criticism, this term refers to the pattern of events in a narrative or drama. In its simplest sense, the plot guides the author in composing the work and helps the reader follow the work.

Prologue: An introductory section of a literary work. It often contains information establishing the situation of the characters or presents information about the setting, time period, or action.

Setting: The time, place, and culture in which the action of a narrative takes place.

Symbol: Something that on the surface is its literal self but which also has another meaning, or even several meanings. For example, a sword may be a sword and also symbolize justice.

Theme: The main point of a work of literature.

⁵ Definitions from Gale Publishing's *A Glossary of Literary Terms* http://www.galegroup.com/free_resources/glossary/



Unit V

TWO MOGAO CAVE PAINTINGS AND TWO JATAKA TALES

Essential Question: How are paintings and stories similar and different in the ways they narrate events and express ideas?

Learning Experience: In reading two Jataka tales and studying the Mogao cave paintings that illustrate them, students will be able to understand how narrative can be translated from one artistic medium to another. They will also compare and contrast two Jataka tales and their respective paintings in terms of themes and narrative techniques.

As part of this, students will answer the following questions: How do the paintings bring to life the stories and themes of the Jataka Tales? How do the Jataka tales depicted on the wall paintings reflect Buddhist values?

Anticipatory Set: Is it true that a “picture is worth a thousand words”? How do pictures differ from words, and words from pictures, as media for expressing ideas and feelings?

Context: The word “*Jataka*” comes from the Sanskrit root “*jan*,” meaning “to be born.” The 550 *Jataka Tales* are believed to be about the former lives of the Buddha. Wherever Buddhism set down roots, the Jataka tales were recited, read, and used as material for theatre and the visual arts.

Dunhuang is an old oasis city in modern-day Gansu province that was brought under Chinese control during the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). It was the gateway to what the Chinese referred to as the “Western Regions” (Central Asia), and the place where the two branches of the Silk Roads met before entering China proper (see **Maps A** and **Map D** as well as the **Color Map**).

Dunhuang was one of the main entry points for Buddhism as it established itself in China during the first centuries of the Common Era. The Mogao caves (in Chinese, “Mogao” means “Peerless” or “None Loftier”) are also called the “Caves of the Thousand Buddhas.” They were begun in 366 CE and created in homage to the Buddha. Eventually, Buddhist monk-painters covered over 46,000 square feet of space with murals depicting Buddhist legends and religious doctrines. Many of the murals are Chinese versions of the Jataka tales.

LESSON 1

THE DEER OF NINE COLORS

The Deer of Nine Colors can be broken down into the following basic elements:



| |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The deer saves a man named Tiao Da from drowning and then asks him not to reveal his hiding place. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the imperial palace, a concubine complains to the king that she yearns for the skin of the Deer of Nine Colors to make herself a cloak. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The king promises a reward to the person who can find such an animal. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hoping to get the reward, Tiao Da tells the king where the deer is to be found. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When the king and his hunting party find the deer, the animal asks the king how he discovered his hiding place. The king names Tiao Da. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The deer tells the king of Tiao Da's betrayal. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The king is so upset that he frees the deer and banishes Tiao Da. |

The painting depicts five parts of the story, but doesn't rely on the chronological sequence of the Jataka narrative. The king, out hunting and encountering the deer, is at the center; the other key incidents flank it on the left and right:

| |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Panel 1 (from the left): The deer rescues Tiao Da. • Panel 1: The Deer tells Tiao Da not to reveal his hiding place. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Panel 2: The king goes to hunt the deer. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Panel 3: Tiao Da reveals the location of the deer. • Panel 4: Tiao Da is banished. |

Why is the story painted like this? Why is the king hunting at the center? Perhaps it's because the king's releasing the deer is an example of compassion for living things: not taking life is one of the central precepts of Buddhism. The flanking incidents show the inevitable results of bad behavior: on the left, Tiao Da is saved and makes a promise to his rescuer; on the right, he betrays the deer and, because of this, is banished.

Rationale: Students will read the Jataka tale entitled *The Deer of Nine Colors*. Through class discussion they will determine the Buddhist values emphasized by the plot. They will also attempt to identify the same story from one of the Mogao cave paintings.

Time: Two forty-minute sessions.

Instructional Resources: Handout: "About Buddhism"; reproduction of Mogao painting; text of Jataka tale.

Some documents are primary sources and some are secondary materials selected from various books and articles. Primary sources are marked with an asterisk. *



Procedure: Before reading the tale and studying the painting, students should read the brief hand-out, “About Buddhism.”

In this lesson, students will read a characteristic Jataka tale, *The Deer of Nine Colors*. After reading it aloud in class, they will spend a few minutes responding to it in their journals, noting the characters, the plot, and the theme of the story. They will also identify Buddhist values as expressed in the story and the painting. The teacher will write these on the board.

This lesson enables students to see how parables—short narratives that depict moral or religious ideas—teach important values.

Later, students will see how artists interpreted the same story in the Mogao cave wall paintings. They will examine the painting entitled “Jataka of the Deer King” and discuss the following two questions in cooperative learning groups:

1. What parts of the story are depicted in the painting?
2. In what sequence does the painting show the events described in the story?

Whole Group Reflection: Responses to the above questions will be used to make notes on the blackboard. This debriefing will focus on how narration in a painting can reflect the intentions of a written story.

Instructional Modification: Each step of the lesson can be written on the board in summary or graphic form. Copies of the story, as well as reproductions of the painting, can be handed out for further study.

Application: Students will draw their own version of the Jataka tale as a cartoon panel.



LESSON 2

THE HAWK, THE DOVE, AND KING SIVI

The Hawk, the Dove, and King Sivi emphasizes the Buddhist vow to never take the life of a living creature. The story can be broken down into the following basic elements:

- | |
|--|
| • The king is relaxing outside his pavilion. |
| • Suddenly, a dove flies to him, seeking protection from an eagle swooping down. |
| • The king shelters the dove under his arm. |
| • The hawk demands that the king let the dove go. |
| • The king finds himself in a dilemma, since he has pledged never to kill a living creature. |



| |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The king is relaxing outside his pavilion. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To let the hawk kill the dove would make him responsible for its death; not to release the dove would force the hawk to starve. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The only solution is to offer the hawk some of his own flesh. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When he starts to cut his flesh, the earth trembles, flowers fall from the sky, and both birds disappear. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The birds, we discover, are two gods who had come to test King Sivi's Buddhist piety. |

The painting depicts only the climax of the story—King Sivi cutting his flesh. The painter chooses an image of self-sacrifice. This idea is also seen in other Jataka stories where the Buddha himself, in a past life, sacrifices himself to a starving mother tiger so she can feed her cubs.

Rationale: With the teacher's guidance, students will observe how the Jataka tale *The Deer of Nine Colors* is depicted in what might be called a “satellite style”—a central image flanked by subordinate images. (Students have already drawn cartoon panels to illustrate the written story, which they can compare to the Mogao painting.)

In cooperative groups, the students will read aloud the second story and discuss its plot and themes. They will study the painting representing the story of King Sivi and discuss its narrative elements, comparing what might be called its “climax style” style with the “satellite style” found in the painting of the *Deer of Nine Colors*.

Another way to compare narrative styles in these works of art is to have the students dramatize “emotional snapshots” of the highlights of each story.

Time: Three forty-minute sessions.

Instructional Resources: Handout: “About Buddhism”; Jataka text and reproduction of Mogao painting.

Some documents are primary sources and some are secondary materials selected from various books and articles. Primary sources are marked with an asterisk. *

Procedure: Before reading the tale and studying the painting, students should read the brief hand-out, “About Buddhism.”

The lesson will start with a review of the plot of *The Deer of Nine Colors* along with a discussion of the Buddhist values intrinsic to the story's theme. After studying the painting of this story, they should identify the “satellite style” that depicts four highpoints of the narrative.

The class then breaks up into cooperative learning groups of four. Each group will read *The Hawk, the Dove, and King Sivi*, then discuss the plot and its Buddhist themes. The teacher will then show the class the cave painting entitled “The Jataka of King Sivi,” asking students to record in their journals the part of the story they recognize in the picture. They will record this information into their journals.



Volunteers will discuss their observations, noting differences in the styles of narration between the two paintings. The teacher then identifies the narrative style of “King Sivi” as the “climax style.”

The next day’s lesson will attempt to reinforce student understanding of the two narrative styles. Divided into cooperative learning groups, students will rehearse dramatizing the stories as “emotional snapshots.” Each group will plan its own “tableau vivant,” depicting one of the stories as a series of four highlights.

Students in each group will depict the four highlights, while a narrator tells the story. This will be followed by one emotional snapshot of the story as told in the climax style and one in the satellite style.

Whole Group Reflection: The third day of the lesson will consist of each group’s performance. An evaluation of the success of each group in depicting the plots and narrative style of each story will follow the performance.

Instructional Modifications: Students can take familiar Western fairy tales and compare how the narrative elements of these stories could be represented using three visual styles: conflicting, satellite, and the styles they see in comic strips and comic books. (Perhaps some students, fans of contemporary comics or Japanese *manga*, will be able to point out narrative techniques more daring than these ancient paintings!)

Students may need further discussion in order to define narrative terms such as “development,” “climax,” etc.

Application: Depict a familiar Western fairy tale in a drawing in two ways: the conflict and satellite styles.



Student Handout:

ABOUT BUDDHISM

According to Buddhism, for a man to be perfect there are two qualities he should develop equally: compassion on one side, and wisdom on the other. Here compassion represents love, charity, kindness, tolerance, and such noble qualities on the emotional side . . . while wisdom would stand for the intellectual side or qualities of the mind (Rahula 1959: 46).

. . . according to the unbroken age-old tradition in Buddhist countries, one is considered a Buddhist if one takes the Buddha, the Dharma (the Teaching) and the Sangha (the Order of Monks) . . . as one’s refuges, and undertakes to observe the Five Precepts—the minimum moral obligations of a lay Buddhist—(1) not to destroy life, (2) not to steal, (3) not to commit adultery, (4) not to tell lies, (5) not to take intoxicating drinks (Rahula 1959: 80).

LESSON 1A: PAINTING OF THE JATAKA OF THE DEER KING (CAVE 257)*

The mural of the Jataka of the Deer King is a single wall painting. The reproductions are divided as follows, from left to right:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|

(1)



(Source: Cultural Relics Publishing House, Dunhuang Institute for Cultural Relics, PRC)

(2)



(Source: Cultural Relics Publishing House, Dunhuang Institute for Cultural Relics, PRC)

(3)



(Source: Cultural Relics Publishing House, Dunhuang Institute for Cultural Relics, PRC)

(4)



(Source: Cultural Relics Publishing House, Dunhuang Institute for Cultural Relics, PRC)



UNIT
5 – V



LESSON 1B: JATAKA TALE—*THE DEER OF NINE COLORS**

Long ago there lived a deity that took the form of a deer. He was a beautiful creature with a sparkling coat of nine different colors and majestic antlers that shone bright white, glittering and translucent like jade. He was known as the Deer of Nine Colors.

One day, as the deer browsed the sweet grasses along the riverbank, he suddenly heard desperate cries coming from the river.

“Help! Help! Mountain god, tree god, dragon god, the gods in heaven, please come to my rescue!”

The deer raised his head and saw a man clutching a log as he was swept downstream by the current. The deer jumped into the river and swam to the man, who clung to the deer’s back as they struggled out of the river onto the safety of the riverbank.

Tiao Da was very grateful and got down on his knees before the deer. “You have saved my life and I am your willing servant until the day I die,” he said.

“No,” replied the deer kindly, “it is my pleasure to help people. Go back to your home and recover. I have only one request of you. Do not tell anyone that you have met me here by the river.

Back at the palace, one night the imperial concubine dreamed of a deer with nine colors. When she awoke the next morning, her eyes glittered with greed. If she had a cloak made of a deerskin of nine colors, she would be the most noble royal concubine of all. But no such coat of nine colors was to be had. The royal concubine became so obsessed by her desire for the cloak and fretted so much that she made herself deathly ill.

When the king heard that his royal concubine was dying, he went to inquire about the source of her illness. The imperial concubine told the king about her dream and urgently implored him to find her the deer with a nine-color coat, for only this would restore her health. The king agreed, promising to give her anything in the world that she desired if it would make her well again.

And so imperial notices were posted throughout the land, announcing that anyone who could capture the Deer of Nine Colors would be given golden bowls and half the kingdom as a reward. No one knew where to find the deer. No one, that is, except Tiao Da. When he saw the imperial notice he ripped it down and rushed to the palace to see the king.

“So,” the excited king said, “you know where to find the deer?”

“I not only know where to find him,” Tiao Da bragged, “I have even seen and spoken to him.”

The man, who was named Tiao Da, led the king and his soldiers to the Henghe River, where they found the deer lying in the grass beside the water. The king’s soldiers surrounded the deer, but just as they were about to shoot their arrows, the deer dashed over to the king.

“I have one request before you kill me,” he said to the king. “Who was it that told you that I was here?”

“It was he,” the king responded, pointing his finger at Tiao Da.

The deer angrily denounced Tiao Da and related to the king how he had saved Tiao Da from drowning in the river.

Raising his voice, the deer addressed the king, “Your Majesty, to have such a base person in your country shames you. He promised never to reveal my whereabouts to anyone, but he broke his promise. He is a mean-spirited person who repays kindness with enmity. That is all; I am ready now to be killed.”

The king was moved by the deer’s story and so embarrassed by the behavior of his subject that he got down from his horse and apologized to the deer. Turning to Tiao Da, he said, “You are despicable. Be gone!”

From that time on, the king proclaimed that all the people in his kingdom would protect all deer, especially the Deer of Nine Colors (Li 1998: 99-101).



LESSON 2A: MOGAO PAINTING OF THE HAWK, THE DOVE, AND KING SIVI (CAVE 254)*



(Source: Cultural Relics Publishing House, Dunhuang Institute for Cultural Relics, PRC)

LESSON 2B: JATAKA TALE—*THE HAWK, THE DOVE AND KING SIVI**

The rich State of Shiei was picturesque and populated by a happy people who were ruled by a humane and fair-minded king. According to the Xian Yu Scriptures, there once were two gods who magically transformed themselves into birds; the god Di Shitian became an eagle, and the god Cishou Jiemo became a dove. One day, while the king of Sivi was relaxing outside a pavilion, he saw a dove wheeling and turning as it tried to evade a hunting eagle. The king waved to the dove, whereupon the bird flew to him and nestled in his armpit for protection. The eagle quickly swooped down and demanded that the king release the dove.

“I am very hungry,” said the eagle ferociously, “and you have my prey. Release it to me.”

“Go somewhere else and try to find some meat,” the king pleaded.

“No,” the eagle screamed, “I haven’t had any food for days. You who are among the well-fed know little of how the starving suffer. Release the dove and let me eat my fill of fresh meat!” the eagle demanded again.

Long ago, the king had made a pledge never to cause harm to any living thing for as long as he lived. Now he was faced with a terrible dilemma: If he didn’t release the dove to the eagle, the eagle would surely die of starvation. But if he released the dove to save the eagle, he would be responsible for causing the dove’s death. What could he do? There was only one thing he could do to save the lives of both birds; the king offered his own flesh to the eagle.

The eagle accepted the king’s offer of sustenance with the condition that the amount of flesh he received from the king be equal to that of the dove. So the king called his officials in charge of imperial weights and measures to attend him. The official arrived wearing his felt hat and high boots and set up his scales, which were made of a beam, pivoted in the middle, with a pan suspended on chains at either end.

The king gently placed the dove on one pan of the scale and then his left foot on his right knee so that the flesh of his thigh was exposed to the knife edge of the eagle’s beak. As the fearsome eagle tore at the king’s flesh, the gods appeared in the sky. Some of the gods wept for the king, others praised his actions, while still others prayed to Buddha. The king was calm and sat absolutely still.

Suddenly the earth began to shake and colorful flowers fell from the heavens; the eagle and the dove disappeared. Miraculously, the king’s flesh became whole again.

The gods Di Shitian and Cishou Jiemo had transformed themselves into the eagle and the dove to test the king’s faith. The king had proved himself a pious man and the gods rejoiced with him (Li 1998:153-155).



UNIT
5 – V



Unit W

THE ARTS TRAVEL THE SILK ROADS

Essential Question: How do art objects and design motifs¹ act as vehicles of cultural diffusion?

Learning Experience: Students will look at three groups of artifacts representing cross-cultural exchange along the Silk Roads: (A) Buddhist Religious Objects; (B) Exotic and Luxurious Things; (C) Symbols of Power and Prestige: The Phoenix and the Dragon. By studying them, they will learn to think critically about art as an agent of cultural diffusion; by closely “reading” these objects, they will also become more visually literate.

Anticipatory Set: Portable objects were one way that art styles and motifs were transported across Eurasia from one society to another. How many things can you think of that have traveled from one culture to another? What effect does modern technology—air travel, television, and the computer, for instance—have on this kind of cultural diffusion?

Context: This unit looks at three groups of artifacts that served as vehicles for cultural exchange along the Silk Roads:

- Objects related to religious practice—Buddhists and the faithful of other religions carried illustrated texts, religious images, and ritual objects.
- Exotic luxuries—merchants traded in metalwork, glassware, textiles, and ceramics over long distances. The small size, light weight, and high value of such things made them ideal trade goods.
- Symbols of royalty—Emperors and kings reserved the right to use certain symbols and motifs to reflect their power and prestige.

Cultural diffusion via the visual arts also involved the movement of craftspeople rather than objects. Sometimes this was voluntary and sometimes whole populations of artisans were resettled by force. This was especially true when the Mongols ruled Eurasia in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Moving to distant places, they brought with them new styles, design motifs, and techniques.

Rationale: In looking at a group of objects both closely, as “art-for-art’s-sake,” and contextually, as things produced at specific times and in specific places, students will learn about the kind of art objects that traveled the Silk Roads and played a role in cultural diffusion.

Time: Two forty-minute sessions.

Instructional Resources: Three groups of images with documents; access to the Internet.

Some documents are primary sources and some are secondary materials selected from various books and articles. Primary sources are marked with an asterisk. *

Procedure: This unit consists of two activities.

- The first activity consists of two Buddhist objects: (1) The colossal Buddha at Bamiyan; (2) A sheet of votive images. Students will look at the objects, read the documents, and answer the questions.

¹ Underlined terms appear in the glossary at the end of this unit.



The whole class provides answers to the questions, the teacher writing down them on the blackboard. The class also attempts a provisional answer to the essential question: How do art objects and design motifs act as vehicles of cultural diffusion? Also, how might religious art differ from secular art in this respect?

- The class is then divided into base groups. One group receives three objects—two from Iran and one from Turkey); the other receives three objects made in China:

Base Groups

| Group 1: Iran/Turkey: |
|------------------------------|
| 3. Sasanian Ewer |
| 6. Phoenix Tile |
| 8. Drawing of a Dragon |

| Group 2: China: |
|------------------------------|
| 4. Phoenix-headed Ewer |
| 5. Jade Phoenix Ornament |
| 7. Jar With a Painted Dragon |

Each student in the group will specialize in one object. Students read the documents and then complete the Artifact Analysis Worksheet (p. 349). Group members can discuss the objects among themselves in order to complete the worksheets.

(It might also be necessary to explain that objects 3-8 are generic examples, that is to say, although they represent cultural exchange, the objects aren't related one-to-one. For instance, the Sasanian Ewer (3) isn't the object that directly caused the Chinese potter to produce (4), the Phoenix-headed ewer.)

After completing this task, new groups are formed. These are made up of “experts” on two objects. The objects are paired according to their role in East-to-West or West-to-East cultural exchange:

| Group 1 | |
|------------------|------------------------|
| From the West: | To the East: |
| 3. Sasanian Ewer | 4. Phoenix-headed Ewer |



| Group 2 | |
|--------------------------|-----------------|
| From the West: | To the East: |
| 5. Jade Phoenix Ornament | 6. Phoenix Tile |

| Group 3 | |
|------------------------------|------------------------|
| From the West: | To the East: |
| 7. Jar With a Painted Dragon | 8. Drawing of a Dragon |

The groups then fill out the Cultural Diffusion Worksheet (p. 349). The answers on both worksheets are to be used to create a one-page catalogue entry on their object for homework.

Whole Group Reflection: The class has (1) analyzed a group of religious objects, and (2) a group of luxury goods, all part of pre-modern cultural exchange along the Silk Roads. After studying the artifacts and completing the worksheets, the class can answer the essential question: How do art objects and design motifs act as vehicles of cultural diffusion?

They should further consider *why* these objects act as vehicles of cultural exchange by comparing the two groups. How does the spread of religious objects and motifs from one culture to another differ from luxury goods, things people acquire because they are exotic, expensive, and fashionable?

Instructional Modification: Students can attach brief essays to their catalogue entries based on internet research.

Application: What modern day objects might be compared to the objects studied in this unit?



A. BUDDHIST OBJECTS

1. The Colossal Buddha at Bamiyan, Central Afghanistan. 4th-5th centuries CE. Destroyed by the Taliban in March 2001



(Source: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute of Art)
http://www.courtauld.ac.uk/sub_index/photographic/conway/bamiyan_buddahs/bamiyan-subs/bamiyan_detail_01.html

Although the colossal Buddha at Bamiyan (175 ft. tall) isn't a portable object, it played an important role in the diffusion of the Buddha image throughout East Asia:

The Bamiyan Buddha, because of its impact on the traveler, was of great importance, for its particular iconography and style were transported both in small-scale “souvenir” objects taken back to China and in the minds of those who saw it . . . the rhythmic geometry of the drapery . . . provided a prototype for numerous images made in China and Japan on both a small and a large scale (Lee 1973: 133).

In the seventh century, the Chinese monk Xuanzang made the long and dangerous trip to India to study, collect Buddhist scriptures, and visit holy sites connected with the life of the Buddha. On his way, he visited Bamiyan in what is now Afghanistan. He described the colossal Buddha in the following words.

To the northeast of the royal city there is a mountain, on the side of which is placed the stone figure of Buddha standing, in height one hundred or one hundred and fifty feet. Its golden colors sparkle on every side and its precious ornaments dazzle the eyes with their brightness (Wriggins 1996: 44)).

The Taliban destroyed the Bamiyan colossal Buddha in 2001, deeming the image as “offensive to Islam” <http://archives.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/asiapcf/central/03/12/afghan.buddha.02/>

1. How has the statue changed since Xuanzang's day?

2. How can it contribute to cultural diffusion even though it can't move?

To learn more about the Bamiyan Buddha, see:

<http://www.photogrammetry.ethz.ch/research/bamiyan/>
<http://www.orientalarchitecture.com/afghanistan/bamiyanindex.htm>

For a vivid computer-generated model of the statue, see:

<http://www.photogrammetry.ethz.ch/research/bamiyan/niches/index.html>



UNIT
5 – W



A. BUDDHIST OBJECTS

(continued from the previous page.)

2. Votive Images of a Bodhisattva*



(Source: © Copyright The Trustees of The British Museum)
<http://idp.bl.uk/GetObjectOverview/40333>

Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE), 800-899 CE
From Dunhuang, Ink on Paper
7 in. high, 4 in. wide
British Museum

The Bodhisattva is central to Mahayana Buddhist belief. “Mahayana” (“Great Vehicle”) Buddhism developed in India during the first centuries of the Common Era and later set down roots in China, Korea, Japan, Mongolia, and Tibet. Bodhisattvas (“*bodhi*” is Sanskrit for “wisdom,” “*sattva*” is “being”) are beings with god-like qualities that remain in the world to help all humankind achieve enlightenment. While the Buddha is depicted as wearing the simple robes of a monk, by contrast, Bodhisattvas wear worldly robes. These are said to symbolize their connection to the material world.

This doctrine of universal salvation is central to Mahayana Buddhism’s appeal: It was no coincidence that Buddhism became part of Chinese culture during a particularly violent and unsettled historical period. Between the fall of the Han dynasty in 220 and reunification under the Sui in 589, China was politically divided and plagued by warfare, famine, and disease.²

What is a votive object? “Votive” means “to express a vow or a wish.” Votive objects are

offered to gods or saints as an expression of thanks or to ask for some favor or blessing. They are a common part of religious life in many cultures, past and present.

These images were made with a wooden stamp. By stamping repeated impressions of the Bodhisattva, the owner demonstrates his religious devotion. In addition, the very process of stamping was a devotional act whereby the doer accumulated merit. Sheets of paper filled with rows of impressions were pasted together to make longer scrolls and often stored within a shrine. The portability of such stamps meant they could travel and transmit image types and motifs.

This piece is from Dunhuang, an important center of Buddhism. The part of the Silk Roads going west out of China split near Dunhuang to go around the Taklamakan desert.

1. Can you name votive objects used by the faithful of other religions?

2. How does an object like this contribute to cultural diffusion?

² The Daoist religion, China’s indigenous faith, also became widespread during the same period.



B. THE EXOTIC AND THE LUXURIOUS*

“Exotic” means something that either comes from a foreign place or catches your attention because it’s colorful and unusual. Sassanian silver delighted affluent Chinese. Chinese potters and metalworkers copied the shapes and decorative motifs used on these luxury imports. Figure 3 is a silver ewer (pitcher) from Sasanian Iran.

3. Sasanian Ewer



Iran, Sasanian,
5-7th century
Silver
14 in. high
Cleveland Museum
of Art

(Source: Cleveland Museum of Art)
<http://www.clemusart.com/explore/work.asp?searchText=ewer&recNo=0&tab=2&display>

The Sasanian empire (224-651) was “one of the most powerful and belligerent regimes ever to control the Iranian plateau and eastern part of the Fertile Crescent . . .” (Farmer 1986: 180). Sasanian textiles and silver were imported all over Asia. In China, weavers and silversmiths adopted Sasanian vessel shapes and decoration. The imperial court in Japan also treasured Sasanian silver, textiles, and glassware.

4. Phoenix-headed Ewer



China, Tang Dynasty
(618-907 CE)
Late 7th-first half
8th century
13 in. high
Earthenware with
Three-color Glaze
Metropolitan
Museum of Art

(Source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of Stanley Herzman, in memory of Adele Herzman,
1991 [1991.253.4] Photograph, all rights reserved,
The Metropolitan Museum of Art)
http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/tang/ho_1991.253.4.htm

The Tang dynasty was one of the most brilliant periods in Chinese history. Its capital at Chang’an was host to Arabs, Iranians, Indians, Turks, Syrians, and Tibetans, as well as Koreans and Japanese. Iranian merchants also lived and worked in China’s south-eastern seaports. The Silk Roads brought luxury goods from western Asia, particularly Iran, into China.

. . . the period from the fifth century CE [onward] was one of the principal times in Chinese history when . . . the decorative arts, especially utensils for eating and drinking, were radically altered in shape, texture and decoration by the introduction of foreign customs and motifs (Rawson 1992: 265).

Although these two objects are made of different materials, both have a characteristic gently curving handle and body. The decoration on the Chinese ewer also includes a mounted archer turning around in the saddle to shoot.³ This was the “Parthian shot,” famous in the ancient world. The Parthians (247 BCE-224 CE) were the Iranian dynasty that preceded the Sasanians.

³ This can be seen better on the Metropolitan’s website—zoom in by clicking on the enlarged image
http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/tang/ho_1991.253.4.htm.



C. SYMBOLS OF POWER AND PRESTIGE: THE PHOENIX AND THE DRAGON*

The phoenix and dragon are two of the most important Chinese mythological animals. Both symbolize the power of the Chinese emperor as “Son of Heaven.” The phoenix is also associated with the empress.

In addition, dragon and phoenix are connected with nature and the seasons. The dragon with spring, when Heaven causes things to grow; the phoenix with summer, when crops ripen.

5. Phoenix Ornament



China, Western Han
(206 BCE - 24 CE)
Jade
Zacke Auktionen & Galerie AG

(Source: Image is courtesy of <http://www.collectorsheaven.at>
<http://www.zacke.at/artikel/AUNF2D014.jpg>)

The bird called “phoenix” in the West is called *fenghuang* in Chinese. Figure 5 is an ornament made of white jade, perhaps meant to be attached to a person’s clothes or belt. One of the things distinguishing the phoenix is its beautiful flowing tail. Notice how carefully it’s depicted in both the tiny jade (Figure 5) and the colorful tile (Figure 6, below).

6. Phoenix Tile



Ilkhanid, c. 1270-80
Islamic, probably made in
Kashan, Iran
Painted Ceramic
Metropolitan Museum of Art

(Source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1912 [12.49.4] Photograph, all rights reserved, The Metropolitan Museum of Art)
http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/ho/07/wai/ho_12.49.4.htm

This Iranian phoenix tile was made in Mongol-ruled Persia and believed to have come from an imperial palace. As a result of the thirteenth century Mongol conquests, Iranian craftsmen took up Chinese motifs such as the phoenix and the dragon. In Persia, as in China, they were symbols of power and prestige.

An important Iranian mythological animal was called the *senmurv*, a combination of dog, lion, and dragon. As cultural and artistic exchange between Iran and China expanded, the *senmurv* was replaced with the Chinese image of the phoenix.



Unlike the destructive European dragon, the Chinese dragon represents creation and change. It is

a symbol of the electrically charged, dynamic . . . force that manifests itself in the thunderstorm. In winter this energy withdraws into the earth; in the early summer it becomes active again, appearing in the sky as thunder and lightning. As a result the creative forces on earth began to stir again (Wilhelm 1950: 7).

As a magic animal, the dragon is able to shrink to the size of a silkworm; and then again it can swell up till it fills the space between heaven and earth. It can be visible or invisible, as it chooses (Eberhard 1986: 84).

In China, the emperor was often described in terms of the dragon. He is said to have a “dragon face,” to sit on a “dragon throne,” and to wear “dragon robes.” The image of the five-toed dragon was reserved for the emperor.

7. Ming Dynasty Dragon Jar



China, Ming dynasty
(1368-1644 CE), early 15th
century
Porcelain painted in
underglaze blue
19 in.
Metropolitan Museum of Art

(Source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Robert E. Tod, 1937 [37.191.1]
Photograph, all rights reserved, The Metropolitan Museum of Art)
http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/ho/08/eac/ho_37.191.1.htm

This painted jar is from Ming China. Ming porcelains were exported all over Asia:

The Central Asians, the Persians, and the peoples of the Middle East prized Ming [1368-1644 CE] porcelains . . . The Persian ruler Shah Abbas (r. 1587-1629) constructed a China house for his magnificent Chinese wares. The Topkapi museum in Istanbul houses over eight thousand Song and Ming porcelains. Some of the Central Asian tribes believed that Chinese porcelains possessed supernatural powers. In Persian miniature paintings of the fifteenth century, “there is hardly a manuscript in which [Chinese] blue and white vessels are not depicted” (Rossabi 1975: 77).



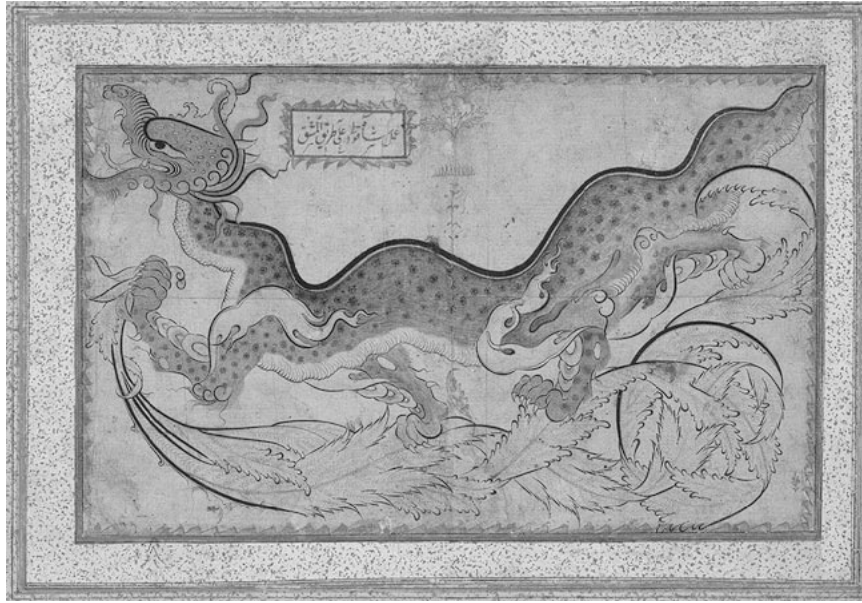
UNIT
5 – W



C. SYMBOLS OF POWER AND PRESTIGE: THE PHOENIX AND THE DRAGON*

(continued from the previous page.)

8. Ottoman Drawing of a Dragon



(Source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Cora Timken Burnett Collection of Persian Miniatures and Other Persian Art Objects, Bequest of Cora Timken Burnett, 1956 [57.51.26]. Photograph, all rights reserved, The Metropolitan Museum of Art)
http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/suly/ho_57.51.26.htm

Ottoman, Mid-16th century
Turkey
Ink, Colors, and Gold on Paper
17 in. wide, 11 in. high
Metropolitan Museum of Art

Made with a reed pen, Figure 8 is from Ottoman Turkey. It was done by a leading painter at the sultan's court. The type of dragon depicted here probably reached Turkey via Iran. By this time, the dragon had been a popular motif in Central and West Asia for centuries.

Artists and craftspeople delighted in the curving form of the dragon's body. Notice how the dragon's shape contrasts with the curving of the leaves on which it walks.

Learn more about the phoenix and the dragon:

<http://www.npm.gov.tw/exhibition/dro0001/english/c1main.htm>
http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/khan4/hd_khan4.htm

For a look at imaginary animals in the art of many cultures, you can go to

<http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hi/a.htm>

(Scroll down to "Animals" and click on "Mythological.")



UNIT
5 – W



Artifact Analysis Worksheet

Name of Artifact: _____

1. Type of artifact: Describe the material from which it was made—bone, pottery, metal, wood, stone, leather, glass, paper, cardboard, cotton, wood, plastic, or other material.

2. Describe how it looks: Shape, color, texture, size, weight, movable parts, anything printed, stamped or written on it.

3. Uses of the artifact:

A. What might it have been used for? _____

B. Who might have used it? _____

C. Where might it have been used? _____

D. When might it have been used? _____

Cultural Diffusion Worksheet

Label each object:

A = The object that contributes the new motif, etc.

B = The object that adopts the new motif, etc.

1. How is A similar to B? (Size, shape, function, material, etc.)

2. How is A different from B?

3. What does A contribute to B?

Glossary⁴

Iconography: The traditional images or symbols associated with a subject, especially a religious or legendary subject.

Motif: A motif is an “individual decorative element in a design.” Motifs are the building blocks of patterns.

Pattern: Ornamental designs composed of repeated or combined motifs.

⁴ Most of these glossary entries are cited (or adapted) from the Getty Art and Architecture Thesaurus on Line (<http://www.getty.edu/research/tools/vocabulary/aat>).

