

New
LIVES
FOR
ASIAN
IMAGES

Samuel K. Parker
David Strand

FEBRUARY 8 – MARCH 29, 2008

The Trout Gallery
Dickinson College
Carlisle, Pennsylvania

NEW LIVES FOR ASIAN IMAGES

Dedicated to the memory
of three Dickinson College Asian studies pioneers

James W. Carson, 1925–2005

Department of History

Donald W. Flaherty, 1921–1986

Department of Political Science

Ralph L. Slotten, 1926–2007

Department of Religion

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Ink and paint on silk, 45¼ x 17"
1967.1.12a, Gift of Hazel Cole

Inside covers: *Mahakala Thangka*, (detail) 18th century, Tibet
Pigment and gold on cloth, 25 x 40"
1991.3, Estate of Milton E. Flower

ASIA AND ASIAN STUDIES AT DICKINSON, 1847–2007

David Strand

Charles A. Dana Professor of Political Science, Dickinson College, Carlisle, Pa.

In 2009 Dickinson College will celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the college's Department of East Asian Studies, the co-sponsor along with The Trout Gallery of the Spring 2008 exhibition entitled "New Lives for Asian Images." The Asian images and objects on display are from the Dickinson collection and all are donations from Dickinson alumni, faculty, staff and friends of the college. A few of the objects have been shown before as part of other Trout Gallery exhibitions. Most are on display here for the first time. Professor Samuel Parker, who inspired and organized this exhibition, observes in his essay in this catalogue that these images can now serve as "cross-cultural ambassadors, speaking directly of other times and places and in so doing, illuminating our own time through comparisons and contrasts." Their new home is a college that includes a major in East Asian Studies, four-year programs in Japanese and Chinese language learning, a multidisciplinary menu of courses, and active study abroad programs in China and Japan. These elements nurture a community of students and faculty from many disciplines and fields who carry on scholarly and artistic projects ranging from senior theses on topics like sports in China and the warrior ethos in Japan to field work in East Asian communities and the study of subjects like politics, literature and linguistics. We also pursue collaborative academic and cultural projects involving Asian scholars, musicians and artists.

"Mother of Missionaries"

Viewing the history of this recent and vigorous rise of interest in Asia on campus through the windows and sliding doors opened by our

"cross-cultural ambassadors" reveals that Asian studies at Dickinson and the college's ties to Asia extend back much farther than the 1984 founding of East Asian Studies. In the mid-nineteenth century Dickinsonians like Robert Samuel Maclay (1824-1907, Class of 1845) joined the first wave of American missionaries to China, arriving in Fuzhou in 1847 with a charge to convert and educate Chinese in that coastal city.¹ Maclay reached Fuzhou only a few years after the Qing Dynasty's defeat in the Opium War and the signing of the Treaty of Nanjing in 1842 which granted foreigners the right to carry out mission work in China.

Dickinsonians were quick off the mark in taking advantage of this new opportunity to journey to Asia for a purpose other than commerce or war. Maclay spent the next forty years as a missionary and educator in China and Japan,



Robert Samuel Maclay
Dickinson College Archives

and became fluent in both Chinese and Japanese. He authored *Life among the Chinese: Characteristic Sketches and Incidents of Missionary Operations and Prospects in China* (1861) as well as a *Alphabetic Dictionary of the Chinese Language in the Foochow Dialect* (1870). Nowadays Dickinson professors help guide their students to study abroad in China or Japan. In Maclay's case we have something like the reverse. Professor Erastus Wentworth (1813-1883), Chair of Natural Philosophy and Chemistry, joined Maclay in Fuzhou in 1854,² and Wentworth was in turn followed in 1855 by his student Otis Gibson (1826-1889, Class of 1854).³

Upon Gibson's return to the United States, the former China missionary served in the Methodist Church's "Chinese Domestic Mission" in San Francisco. Author of the landmark study *The Chinese in America* (1877), Gibson energetically defended Chinese immigrants in the



Erastus Wentworth
Dickinson College Archives

American West against race prejudice and rising xenophobic violence. Gibson seemed to understand earlier than most Americans not only the moral imperative to defend Chinese immigrants against racism but also the danger their ill-treatment in the United States posed to good relations between Americans and Chinese in China.



Francis Gamewell
Dickinson College Archives

Among the most influential early Dickinsonians in East Asia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was Francis Dunlap ("Frank") Gamewell (1857-1950, Class of 1881). Gamewell participated in the second wave of China mission work after the Civil War and remained at various posts in China until the 1930s.⁴

Gamewell won praise from fellow foreigners for bravery and ingenuity during the Boxer Uprising of 1898-1901 when he helped organize defenses for besieged foreigners and Chinese Christians in the Legation Quarter of Beijing, bicycling from post to post with seeming indifference to the gunfire that followed him. After the Boxer conflict and the devastation wreaked by Boxers and the foreign armies that lifted the siege, Gamewell helped rebuild a Beijing church destroyed in the violence which is still active today as the "Chongwenmen Christian Church."⁵

Gamewell rose to become a leader among Americans in China working to expand educational opportunities for Chinese through mission schools, colleges and universities. He was also an early donor of Asian art objects to the college, specifically the gift of "A Chinese Idol"—sadly lost to us—presented to Gamewell, our records tell us, "upon the conversion of the owner." Based on a long history of sending



Chongwenmen Christian Church, Beijing
Photo by David Strand, 2005

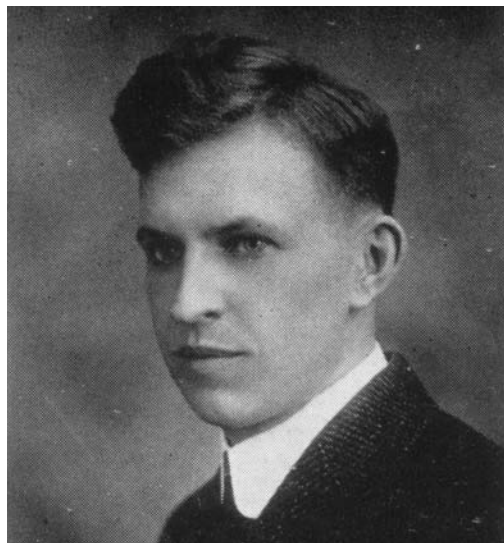
alumni on Christian missions to Asia, many Dickinsonians came to think of their *alma mater* as a “mother of missionaries.”⁶

Dickinson in China

By the 1910s and 1920s Dickinson had joined a small set of internationally-oriented liberal arts colleges like Haverford, Smith, Grinnell, Claremont, Mt. Holyoke, Oberlin, Wellesley, Carleton and Wesleyan in sponsoring education-based mission programs in China, including in Dickinson’s case a “Dickinson Extension in China” (1920-1927).⁷ The commitment was made “in the interest of international good will and the advancement of education and Christian faith and practice by extending the ideals of Dickinson College in the Orient.”⁸ The college raised sufficient funds to support an American professor, Raymond R. Brewer (1889-1963, Class of 1916), at West China Union University in Chengdu, Sichuan Province.⁹ Brewer had served as a chaplain in the First World War and later

earned a divinity degree.

The 1920s was a turbulent time in China with violent clashes among warlords and an explosion of patriotic movements. On May 30, 1925 police in Shanghai under British command fired on demonstrators protesting imperialism and



Raymond Brewer
Dickinson College Archives



West China Union University, Chengdu
Photo by Donald W. Flaherty, c. 1947

warlordism, killing eleven. In what became the May 30th Movement, nationalistic protests roiled six hundred Chinese cities including Chengdu where Brewer was teaching. In a letter written to friends at the college, Brewer defended the contribution Western ideas were making to political and educational progress in China. But he also warned that this same foreign presence “has revealed the weaknesses of the West as well as its greed and materialism. This has led to a deep distrust [among Chinese] which can only be done away with by a new policy of sincere good will and unselfish statesmanship that will reveal the West as a real friend of China.”¹⁰ Comparing the violence in Shanghai that triggered the protest movement to the Boston Massacre of March 5, 1770, Brewer went on to predict with uncanny accuracy that if nothing was done to heal this breach in trust between China and the West “there is the grave and immediate possibility of the Sovietizing of China.” Brewer’s thoughtful and detailed letters reveal a shrewd understanding of contemporary China and strong sensitivity to Chinese reactions to an America that professed friendship while benefiting along with the British and other Western powers—including now the Japanese—from unequal treaties and imperial prerogatives.

Dickinson’s original ties to Asia were largely based on a desire to convert that vast region of

the world to Christianity. As the careers of Maclay, Wentworth, Otis, Gamewell, and Brewer suggest, this proselytizing effort quickly expanded to include educational programs and other service commitments. For example, Julia Morgan, Class of 1911 and daughter of Dickinson professor and president James Henry Morgan, spent most of her career as a medical doctor in China. She went as a medical missionary in the 1920s and soon was practicing in Jinan, the provincial capital of Shandong. She also used her fluent Chinese to good effect teaching medicine and publishing articles in Chinese medical journals.¹¹ By 1931 Morgan had risen to become director of medicine at a Jinan medical college. There she supervised seven Chinese and foreign doctors, eighteen interns and twenty-six medical students while fighting epidemics and caring for swelling numbers of refugees.¹² After the Japanese invasion in the summer of 1937, Morgan evacuated to the interior and spent four “harrowing years” practicing her healing arts in war-torn China. She returned to the United States in 1941.

Asia Enters the Curriculum

The Dickinson alumni presence in Asia produced a long record of philanthropic endeavors, personal epiphanies, and notable works of scholarship. Dickinson missionaries also stimulated a more expansive view of the world back home in Carlisle where members of the Dickinson community closely followed their work and supported their efforts with financial appeals and contributions. At the same time, the college’s turn in the twentieth century toward more secular and ecumenical values led to a new Asian studies presence on campus oriented toward issues of foreign policy and economic and political development. Dickinson also began to attract students from Asia. Beginning in 1917 and through the 1970s, nearly forty Asian students enrolled at the college from Japan, Singapore, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, Cambodia,

Thailand, Indonesia, India and Nepal.¹³ A handful of students from Japan and China came to Dickinson in the interwar period followed by growing numbers from the 1940s on from all over South, Southeast and East Asia.

Reflecting growing belief in the importance of Asia in world affairs, in 1920-21 the college offered its first formal course on an East Asian topic. "Nations of the South and East" was described as a "study of the development of the principal Latin-American countries and Japan, especially in its bearings on the United States."¹⁴ By 1930 a class on "Economic Aspects of Our Foreign Policy" was taught with "particular...attention being paid to the Far East and Caribbean districts."¹⁵ Intensifying political and economic crises in Asia led to a subsequent "Seminar on the Problem of the Far East" and the inclusion of Latin America and Asia in a "Survey of World History, 4,000 B.C. – 1938 A.D."¹⁶ By 1938, East Asia as a topic broke free of Latin America in the curriculum and the first stand-alone Asian history course was offered: "The Far East" with special reference to China, Japan, Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies.¹⁷ Having traditionally looked east to Western Europe for an international perspective, Dickinson began to turn south and west to Asia, Latin America and Africa. In the face of isolationist pressures between the wars Dickinson kept alive a strong interest in the larger world, including Asia.

If one considers the entire range of activities of faculty, students and alumni related to Asia beginning in the 1840s, on and off campus, the college's connections to and consciousness of Asian countries are essentially continuous to the present day even if these ties often were, until recently, overshadowed by a far stronger devotion to American and European subjects, studies and programs. One lesson of the history of Asia and Asian studies at Dickinson, especially if one considers the activism of Otis Gibson in defense of Chinese-Americans, the influence of mission work on the college's ethos of service and commitment to internationalism, the growing pres-

ence of Asian students on campus, or the donation of Asian images and artifacts to the college, is that serious study of the world might begin either at home or abroad but, in any case, is never fully contained by area studies, no matter whether that area is Asia or the United States.

Collecting Asian Images and Creating Images of Asia

A number of the gifts that make up the current Dickinson Asian collection were first acquired by their eventual donors at about the same time that Dickinson was reaching out to Asia with educational and other service programs and initiating curricular changes at home. Many objects in the current Asian collection, and a third of those on exhibition here, were given by Hazel Cole (1889-1972) in the late 1960s.¹⁸ Most of these, however, came into Cole's possession when she as a young woman traveled extensively in Asia beginning in the 1910s. Cole climbed mountains in Java, visited Angkor Wat, journeyed up the Salween River in Burma, and toured China. During her stay in Java she received a tiger claw mounted in gold, as her notation indicates, "from the Sultan of Jogjakarta."¹⁹

The finely crafted piece is on display in the exhibition. Hazel Cole's connection to Dickinson was through relatives and friends who attended the college. Charles Coleman Sellers, library



Hazel Cole can be seen seated on the far right, next to her husband, Dr. Lloyd Gamble Cole, in a photograph taken in 1956.²⁰

Bloss Pennsylvania Postcards

director when Cole made her donations, encouraged her gift partly on the basis of a shared interest in Asian art. Sellers, a prize-winning historian and authority on American painting,²¹ also collected Japanese woodblock prints, three fine examples of which are part of the exhibition.

Joseph Ellis (1902-1987) grew up in Java before pursuing an education in the United States at the urging of Rev. Edgar H. Rue, Class of 1913, when the two met in Singapore in 1922.²² An indefatigable traveler and adventurer, and Golden Gloves boxer, Ellis returned to Java and Bali in the 1930s to collect objects, images and animals—live and stuffed—to enliven Asia-themed lectures he gave in the United States. For a time he toured the country in a Model A Ford with his artifacts and a pet wildcat from Java. The *wayang* puppets from Bali and Java, a Balinese painting and a Javanese Hindu Tantric vessel sample his many gifts to the college.²³ These also included animal skins (including that of a crocodile), coins, clothing and other artifacts. In an entertaining unpublished memoir, Ellis recounts the lengths to which he went to obtain unique and, to American audiences, exotic items by traveling to remote communities throughout the Indonesian archipelago.²⁴ Ellis later endowed two scholarships at Dickinson, including one in memory of Edgar Rue. During the Second World War, Ellis's language skills led to his posting in a U.S. Army interpreter unit.

Among Dickinsonians who served in the Pacific theatre in the Second World War, some developed a fascination with Asia as a result. While a U.S. Army lieutenant, Donald W. Flaherty was stationed in the Philippines. Drawn by the allure of cultural differences he spent what free-time he had exploring local villages and markets in northern Luzon.²⁵ Flaherty returned to the United States after the war planning to take up graduate studies at Syracuse University. But upon hearing of a terrible airplane accident in Chongqing, China that took place on January 28, 1947 and killed eleven missionaries and their family members, including several bound for

Chengdu, Flaherty immediately volunteered to join the Syracuse-in-China program to help take their place by teaching at the same West China Union University where Brewer had taught two decades before. That three members of one missionary family, from Rochester, New York, not far from Syracuse and Flaherty's hometown of



Flaherty at the Great Wall
Dickinson College Archives

Baldwinsville, were killed and that the family's youngest child, an eighteen month old son protected in his mother's arms, was the sole survivor of the crash made a deep impression on Flaherty.²⁶ He arrived in Chengdu to take up his duties on August 26, 1947.²⁷

Flaherty became aware of the Chengdu and West China Union University coincidence when he arrived at Denny Hall in 1952 to begin teaching in the Political Science Department.

I quickly spied on the wall an etching of a Chinese building with a sedan chair parked at the entrance...labeled "West China Union University



Chiang Kai-shek's image hanging from the Gate of Heavenly Peace
Photo by Donald W. Flaherty from a slide

Porch to the Administration Building.” I had been on the porch and in the building many times when I taught at West China Union University for Syracuse-in-China from 1947 to 1949.²⁸

While in China, Flaherty took many photographs of historical interest and ethnographic value, more than 250 of which are now part of Dickinson’s collection. One is on display in this exhibition: Chiang Kai-shek’s image hanging from the Gate of Heavenly Peace in Beijing (soon to be removed and replaced by one of Mao Zedong) as bicyclists whiz by. Flaherty also published a memoir of his experiences in China titled *Broken Bits*. While collecting Asian art and craft objects, he created his own visual legacy of mid-twentieth century China. The photographs are informed by an intense appreciation of details of daily life and human relations often dwarfed by the more dramatic signs of change and continuity posted by governments and leaders.

Flaherty also donated to Dickinson several rare

Song and Yuan dynasty ceramic pieces, one of which is also featured in “New Lives for Asian Images.” After his death, his many East Asian art pieces were bequeathed to friends and family. However, Flaherty made clear his intention that these pottery pieces, among the most valuable in our collection, come to Dickinson.²⁹

Expanding Asian Studies at Dickinson

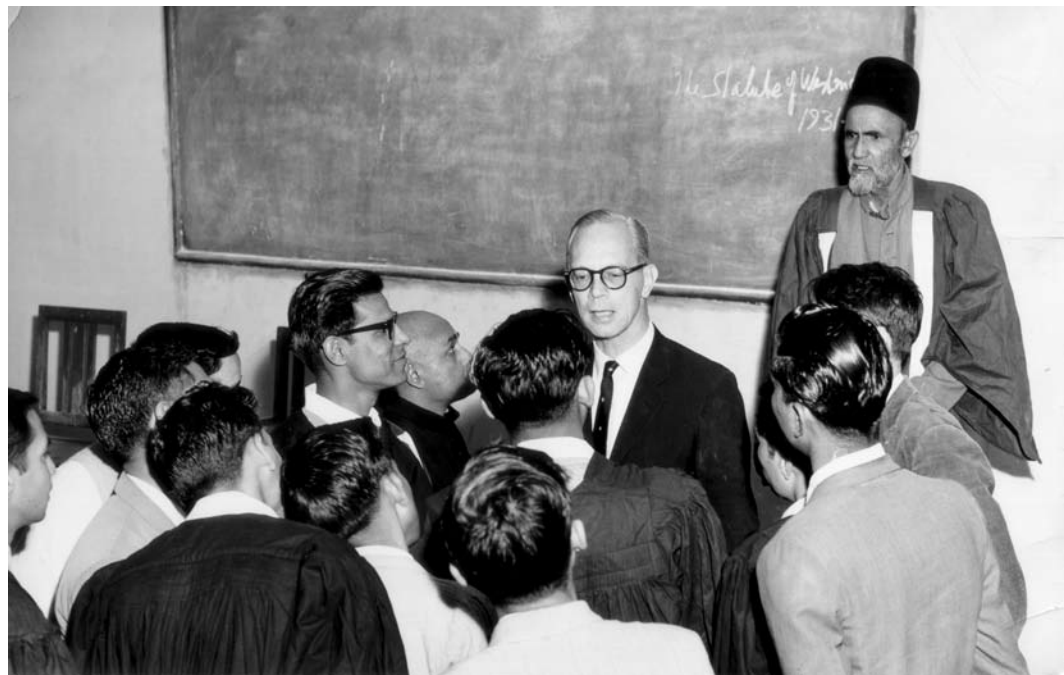
Throughout the 1940s and 1950s new courses on Asian subjects were occasionally added to the Dickinson curriculum including “Philosophy and Life of the Orient” (1944-45) taught by William D. Gould who made extended study trips to Asia both before and after the war, “History of Medieval and Modern India” (1946-47) and Flaherty’s “Far Eastern Governments and Politics” (1954-55). With a return to global conflict in the form of the Cold War and the beginnings of American political and military involvement in the Indochina conflict, attention on campus again turned to Asia, much as it had, and for comparable reasons, in the 1920s and

1930s. With the help of a Ford Foundation grant designed to encourage Asian studies at liberal arts colleges, several Dickinson professors, including James Carson in History, Flaherty in Political Science, Ralph Slotten in Religion, and Wade Seaford in Anthropology, developed team-taught and individual courses on a variety of Asian topics. Ford Foundation support also enabled Dickinson faculty to visit, study and carry out research in Asia during the 1960s. Courses taught on East Asian art, philosophy, and religion by Harry Krebs and on South Asia by Scott Smith further broadened and deepened these curricular offerings.

Professor Milton Flower (1910-1996, Class of 1931), Fine Arts and Political Science Departments, spent three months in Asia in 1962-63 lecturing for the U.S. State Department on topics like civil rights, the U.S. Supreme Court and Walt Whitman. Because of the timing of his assignment, he also had occasion to answer questions posed by a Philippine audience about the Cuban missile crisis. The estate of Milton Flower later donated a number of important works of Asian art to the college, including seven shown

in this exhibition from South Asia and Tibet, acquired during his Asian lecture tour.³⁰ Flower, along with Flaherty and several other Dickinson faculty members, served as advisers and mentors to Asian students at Dickinson.

During the 1960s, showing remarkable foresight, alumni, faculty and other friends of the college began making the donations of Asian art the current exhibition draws upon. Many of the gifts were made even before there was a gallery in which to display them. Donors appear to have predicted correctly that one day the importance of Asia and Dickinson's longstanding commitment to internationalism would claim new uses for the images. Hazel Cole gave her objects to the college in the belief that studying Asia was vitally important for Americans. She wrote in 1966 to President Howard Rubendall that "If the future of our country is toward Asia and its peoples, a better understanding of them might be desirable."³¹ Alumni of Asian heritage have also played leadership roles in providing an Asian presence on campus. Hesung Chun Koh, Class of 1951, designed and donated the Dickinson library's East Asian Reading Room in 2000 on



Milton Flower meets with students and faculty at the University of Karachi, January 1963.
Dickinson College Archives

behalf of her family with a view to introducing a Korean and East Asian aesthetic to the Dickinson campus and advancing Asian studies. The study of our Asian art collection is also supported by the library's extensive collection of East Asian books and periodicals, including materials that help place Asian art in the broadest possible historical and cultural context. The library's Asian collection has been enriched by the donation of many rare books and other documents by the late Norman Jacobs, a noted Asia scholar, and his wife Margaret Ayers Jacobs (Class of 1951). Finally, the college's Archives and Special Collections contains letters, records, photographs and other materials that document Dickinson's Asian experience including, in many cases, the history and provenance of the Asian images in our collection.

In mounting this exhibition we are not only introducing many objects and images never seen before by the Dickinson community or the larger public, we are also reconnecting these cultural gifts, and the traditions and beliefs they represent, to the college's own long tradition of contact with and teaching and scholarship about Asia. Considering the Christian missionary origins of Dickinson's original ties to Asia, there is an element of irony in the fact that many of the images and objects on display in this exhibition embody Hindu, Buddhist or Shinto devotion. As Samuel Parker argues in his essay, objects collected as "idols" and prized as works of art can recover a portion of their original spiritual value when viewed by visitors and members of our community, including those who happen, by heritage or by conversion, to share the beliefs of the makers and original viewers and users of these images. The common thread is a long, intricately braided, occasionally frayed, but never broken connection to Asia crafted by generations of Dickinsonians and friends of the college from all over the world.

- 1 Encyclopedia Dickinsonia, <<http://chronicles.dickinson.edu/encyclo/>>, eds. John Osborne and Jim Gerencser, "Robert Samuel Maclay."
- 2 Ibid., "Erastus Wentworth."
- 3 Ibid., "Otis Gibson."
- 4 Lemieux, Matthew. *The Life of Francis D. Gamewell*, 2005, East Asian Studies honors thesis.
- 5 Lemieux. Guided by Matthew Lemieux's account of this incident, I located the church and attended a service there in the summer of 2005. The church was packed with congregants plainly moved by a sermon on the dangers of materialism given by the dynamic young female pastor.
- 6 *The Dickinsonian* 49:11 (December 2, 1921).
- 7 In 2002 Dickinson participated in a Luce Foundation supported "Workshop on Missionary Archives" at Wesleyan University. The student participant in the workshop, Matthew Lemieux, created a website on "Dickinson in China" in conjunction with this Luce-funded project. <<http://chronicles.dickinson.edu/specproj/dsoninchina/>>.
- 8 *The Dickinsonian* 49:11 (December 2, 1921).
- 9 *Encyclopedia Dickinsonia*, "Raymond Brewer." West China Union University was founded in 1910 by American, Canadian and British church organizations. Brewer was preceded by John W. Yost (Class of 1903) as an instructor there.
- 10 Brewer letter of August 1, 1925; Brewer, "Dangers of the Present Situation," 1925.
- 11 *The Dickinson Alumnus* (February 1948). Dr. Morgan died in 1948.
- 12 Julia Morgan letters to her father James Henry Morgan, September 1931 and February 12, 1933.
- 13 "Dickinson College Foreign Student Program" note cards, October 28, 1975.
- 14 *Dickinson College Bulletin*, 1920-21.
- 15 Ibid., 1930-31.
- 16 Ibid., 1935-36 and 1937-38.
- 17 Ibid., 1938-39.
- 18 Hazel Jennings was born December 12, 1889 in Wellsboro, Pennsylvania and graduated from Emerson College. Prior to her marriage to Dr. Lloyd Cole, Hazel and her first husband, Hewstone K. Raymenton, traveled to Europe and Asia where she collected many of the objects donated to Dickinson. Cole also briefly served as assistant dean of women at Cornell University in the early 1940s. She worked many years for the telephone company near the home she shared with Lloyd in northern Pennsylvania.
- 19 The sultan in question was likely Hamengkubuwono VII (r. 1877-1921).
- 20 "Bloss Pennsylvania Postcards—Blossburg State Hospital" <<http://www.rootsweb.com/~srgp/postcard/blosshos.htm>>.
- 21 *Encyclopedia Dickinsonia*, "Charles Coleman Sellers."
- 22 This information about Ellis was gathered by Dickinson Vice President George Shuman who visited with Ellis in 1976 (courtesy of Patricia Faulkner) and from Ellis's unpublished autobiography.
- 23 Joseph Ellis letter to President Samuel Banks, May 7, 1981.
- 24 The memoir, held by Special Collections, is a recollection of the author's experiences in Asia and in the United States in the 1920s and 1930s.
- 25 Interview with Charles and Tandy Hersh. Charles was Flaherty's fellow-officer in the Philippines.
- 26 Charles and Tandy Hersh. For descriptions of the plane crash and aftermath see *The New York Times* January 30, 1947 and April 11, 1947.
- 27 The date is given on Flaherty's Sichuan Provincial Police Bureau "Foreign Visitor Residence Card."
- 28 Flaherty, "Chinese Civilization Enters the Valley," *Dickinson Magazine* 56:2 (May 1979), p. 5.
- 29 Charles and Tandy Hersh. The Hersh's made sure the college received these items after Flaherty's death.
- 30 Communication from Dr. John Flower, Milton's nephew and Director of Chinese Studies at Sidwell Friends School in Washington, D.C.
- 31 Cole letter to President Howard Rubendall, September 15, 1966.

Acknowledgements

An ASIANetwork and Luce Foundation grant made possible an inventory and evaluation of the college's Asian art collection by Professor Samuel K. Parker, University of Washington, Tacoma. Professor Parker provided the intellectual stimulus for this exhibition and he, more than anyone else, encouraged us to think broadly, deeply and systematically about how to connect the images and objects in our collection to our educational goals and aspirations. We also gained invaluable support and guidance from Professor Joan O'Mara of Washington and Lee University who also evaluated the objects and shared her deep knowledge of Japanese art with us. Professors Frank L. Chance and Linda H. Chance, University of Pennsylvania, kindly consulted with us on plans for the exhibition during a visit to campus. Professor James Robson of the University of Michigan also provided expert advice. Dickinson faculty members Alex Bates, Daniel Cozort, Barbara Diduk and Rae Yang provided important and timely assistance in identifying individual images and objects.

Phillip Earenfight, director of The Trout Gallery, readily agreed to participate in our application for ASIANetwork funding and provided both advice and encouragement, as have Cheryl Kremer and Glen Peterman of the Development Office. Neil Weissman, Provost and Dean of the College, made sure we had sufficient funds to complete both this catalogue and the exhibition. Additional financial support was provided by Susan and Woody Goldberg and the Donald W. Flaherty Asian Studies Fund. Kimberley Nichols and Patricia Pohlman, Office of Publications, beautifully transformed our texts, images and ideas into a published volume. Andrew Bale and A. Pierce Bounds with great skill and care took new photographs of all items in our Asian collection. Harry Krebs originally scanned all of Donald Flaherty's China slides for evaluation and classroom use. Karen Glick managed the delicate technical work of scanning and

enlarging slides used in the catalogue and exhibition. James Gerencser, Malinda Triller, and Deborah Ege of Archives and Special Collections, provided enormous help in tracking down documents related to donors and the history of Asian studies at Dickinson. Patricia Faulkner, Development, provided much-needed information in solving one of our more vexing puzzles.

Our exhibition team was led by Trout Gallery staff members James Bowman and Wendy Pires. James's dedication to preservation meant that the images and objects we had to work with were in the best possible condition. He also expertly designed the installation of the exhibition and provided indispensable advice at every turn. Wendy made sure we had ambitious outreach and educational goals, and her talents and experience enabled us to reach them. Jennifer Huang, Class of 2008 and East Asian Studies and Sociology major, worked the exhibition into her own curricular goals in the form of a semester-long internship. She participated in every aspect of planning, research and execution, and came up with some of our best ideas. Allison Kingery, Class of 2008 and East Asian Studies major, volunteered to help link the exhibition to our East Asian Studies courses during the spring semester and did this with skill and energy. Stephanie Keifer skillfully managed arrangements for the exhibition opening.

Others who provided valuable information and advice on this project include George Allan, Marie Baker, Jim and Dawn Flower, John Flower, Woody Goldberg, Charles and Tandy Hersh, Harry Krebs, Victoria Kuhn, John Osborne, Martha Slotten, Ceceile Strand, Eleanor Strand, and Satsuki Swisher.

NEW LIVES FOR ASIAN IMAGES

Samuel K. Parker

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Dickinson College has accumulated a significant collection of Asian objects, not as the result of a sustained collection plan, but as the consequence of generous gifts from alumni, former faculty, and other friends of the college. For all their diversity, these items, like their donors, were once world-travelers. Today they spend their time in storage at The Trout Gallery, well cared-for, but mostly unseen. At one time, the majority of these works participated in the religious and political lives of their respective communities. They played vital roles in illustrating how the cosmos is ordered. They embodied and explained how human society should be governed. As material products of human manufacture, they also of course had economic value.

What kind of social lives might these objects have today in their new surroundings? What kind of significance will they have for Dickinson students, faculty and the larger community? Obviously as “antiques” they have monetary value in an economically-oriented culture like ours, but what other values do they, or could they, represent?

The cosmological order indicated by these pieces is probably the most fundamental dimension of significance that needs to be considered and questioned. Varying ideas about time and space are major themes in the subject matter of most of the images on display in this exhibition. Time is represented through the signs of one or another system of the zodiac, the passing of the seasons in East Asian paintings, the relation of a glorious past to a problematic present, or the narrative flow of a storyline. In the case of the Tibetan *thangka*, we even have an anthropomorphic representation of time itself, known as Maha Kala, which in Sanskrit literally means “great time.” Furthermore, every one of these



objects exhibits a composition that overtly or implicitly represents orderly spatial relations, such as center and periphery, above and below, inside and outside, and so forth. Not surprisingly, strange things happen to these objects' relation to time and space when they enter a museum collection. Most strikingly, time and space are compressed. In this exhibition for instance, one can simultaneously experience objects made over the course of nearly 2,000 years and a geographic area ranging from Afghanistan to Japan, from the islands of Southeast Asia to the plains of northern China. In gallery space, diverse objects, formal qualities and conceptual themes can be juxtaposed in ways impossible in the past. Stranger still, the status of these objects as contemporary phenomena is obscured through a set of normalized illusions that encourage us to imagine these objects as if they belonged exclusively to—and even in—the past. After all, we commonly exhibit them in part in order to return them, at least in our imaginations, to their points of origin in order to better understand those times and places. The ancient objects kept in a museum are symbolically suspended outside of ordinary time by routine practices of conservation, storage and exhibition. The world of ordinary life goes on while the preserved and protected art object is made as static as the conservator's science can manage. Routine art historical research is also complicit in this illusion by focusing attention on the time and place in which the object was originally created as if that ancient context is the only one relevant to its value and significance. These conditions can generate the entirely common but false impression that the object is now somehow magically detached, or rescued, from the passage of time. It is bathed in a special, semi-sacred atmosphere, protected by locks and alarms, silent, beautifully luminous, removed from the world outside. Like the embalmed body of Mao Zedong in his mausoleum outside the Gate of Heavenly Peace in Beijing, the social lives that once invested these objects with ancient

meanings have seemingly vanished while their outer shells persist in a gallery dedicated to the display of form. Because their significance is no longer imagined as a living, contemporary fact, meanings are re-presented in the abstract form of museum labels and catalogues like this one. We take all this for granted, and I don't mean to suggest that there is anything wrong about such necessary illusions, contrivances a Buddhist might call "fruitful fictions." The institutional framing of objects is simply a taken-for-granted dimension of the culture in which we live.

However, because the museum environment does its job so well, it is necessary for the visitor to be vigilant lest she be lulled into an anesthetic state unwittingly induced by the gallery space itself. Museum conventions preserve and display ancient objects even as they perpetuate the alienation of fine art from the rest of life. Perhaps one can blame the radical modernists and their wealthy patrons for this. They shared a sense of their own superiority over the vulgar bourgeoisie and the aesthetically unsophisticated working classes whose tastes may favor Willie Nelson, hip hop or Thomas Kincade rather than the cutting-edge gestures of artists featured in *Artforum* magazine. In a sense, in being re-classified as "fine art" by Western markets and collectors, these objects were automatically rendered remote and irrelevant to all but the few people of taste, education and refinement who qualify as consumers of high culture.

The present exhibition is premised on the proposition that this need not be so. Because these items reside in the art collection of a liberal arts college, they can instead participate in a renewed social life relevant to their present surroundings. At Dickinson they can be revived to serve as cross-cultural ambassadors, speaking directly of other times and places and in so doing, illuminating our own time through comparisons and contrasts. In playing this role it is their otherness, or alterity, that holds the greatest learning potential for undergraduate students. They are at once at home in and alien to their

present surroundings. They can be seen as occupying an intermediate, relational position that *connects* space and time—past and present, here and there—and as such, can serve as powerful instruments of cross-cultural learning and reciprocal critique. They speak to us about other times and places even as they shed light on the lives that today unfold around them. A simple gesture of juxtaposition exposes both sides of the equation: here and there, present and past, self and other.

Samples of ancient non-Western art are especially useful in this regard because they encode presuppositions about the nature of reality that differ in fundamental ways from the mechanistic worldview and corresponding practices of individualistic personhood that are embedded, and often left unexamined, in the common-sense realism shared among modern peoples of the market.¹ Acceptance of those assumptions is today being globalized at an astonishing rate, to the point that for many Americans the world resembles one gigantic mirror rather than many, alternative modernities. A vast array of standardized, branded imagery puts peoples of the market at exceptional risk of sinking into an unconscious and complacent ethnocentrism. Through their success in colonizing the planet, market-based practices reinforce parochial assumptions about reality now made to seem universal, inevitable and, finally, compulsory. For those who see corporate capitalism as the natural state of things rather than as a constructed and contingent way of life, questioning its global spread may appear futile. Against this prospect, concrete examples of pre-modern and non-Western art can provide liberating places for the contemporary imagination to stand and look back, reflexively, on the realities taken for granted in modern life. This kind of critically-minded juxtaposition not only can delight the eye but also de-naturalize our socially conditioned realities. In the same stroke, the socially conditioned realities of other times and places may seem less exotic and more reasonable. The

realization of this potential takes time, attention, sustained study and a willingness to criticize ourselves even as we cast an informed gaze on these objects. Where else is better suited to this task than an institution dedicated to higher learning and critical thinking?

Art by Metamorphosis, Art by Destination

While the diverse objects exhibited here can all be classified as works of “Asian art,” they have little in common, except a general tendency among most of them to embody assumptions about reality—especially its temporal dimensions—that are quite different from our own. In what sense do they form a coherent category? From a modernist perspective, the “fine art” status of Asian objects resulted from acts of discovery rather than re-classification.² Like all inventions or discoveries in the age of colonial expansion, these were implicitly credited to connoisseurs of European descent who recognized in certain Asian objects the universal and timeless qualities of form believed at the time to mark the essence of fine art.³ Presumably, their status as art was unappreciated by parochial Asians who had no free, competitive art markets, no retail galleries nor national museums, had not yet passed through an Age of Enlightenment and were apparently confused about the difference between the functions of fine art, religion, superstition and displays of social status. Given the tendency among local folk in Asia to neglect sculpture and painting when the purposes for which they were made faded away, scientific collection appeared to be not only legitimate but also a means of rescuing Asian art from perceived Asian indifference.

While the Asian antiquities in The Trout Gallery collection are all today treated as artworks, they are in fact united as a category not so much by the essence of what they are, but by what they are not. They are not Western, modernist or post-modern. Whether or not they are art is a complicated question. While some tradi-

tional non-Western societies may have had linguistic and pragmatic categories that loosely resembled those signified by the English word “art,” these notions were very different in their specifics. The Sanskrit word *kala*, for instance, is used to indicate different kinds of refined and skillful artistry; however, among the sixty-four *kalas* we find not only sculpture and painting, but also barbering and lovemaking. Moreover, the practice of *kala* gives little value to acts of individual creativity. The whole universe is already assumed to be ubiquitously creative and the emphasis instead is on practices of self-cultivation and discipline in which a person becomes attuned to the surrounding forces of nature and society. Nevertheless, regardless of how these objects may have been categorized at the time of their production, all the items in this collection have been subsequently homogenized as “art” through a process that Andre Malraux called “art by metamorphosis,” in contrast to objects that were made to be art in the first place under conditions he terms “art by destination.”⁴

Early in his career Malraux participated in the looting of antiquities in what was then French Indochina. After World War Two, in his role as French Minister of Information, and later as Minister of State for Cultural Affairs, Malraux had deep misgivings about his earlier art-collecting activities. From this soul-searching emerged his useful theoretical distinction between “metamorphosis” and “destination.” The sculpture he appropriated from ancient Khmer temples was never made to be “art” in the modern sense of the word. But it became art through metamorphosis, accomplished by the routine practices of collection, conservation, storage and exhibition. In order for something to be ‘art by destination’ it is necessary to have certain kinds of art institutions in place, including a modern art market in which objects are purchased as aesthetic fetishes created primarily for the visual pleasure they offer. There is scant evidence for the existence of such peculiar contexts in the highly pragmatic societies of ancient Asia where

objects were produced to serve social, ritual and technical purposes and not created as exercises in taste that are ends in themselves.

Malraux’s distinction is useful because it draws attention to the fact that much of the non-Western material that modern people categorize as “art” had become so through acts of appropriation and what a postmodern architect might call “adaptive re-use.” Some have taken political exception to this approach as tainted by the notion that something isn’t art until a Westerner says it is.⁵ However, the distinction Malraux makes is valid if it permits us to ask what may seem at first to be a naïve question: what do we see when we look at this exhibition? “Asian art” is at best a partial answer. Only by recognizing that the image or object wasn’t produced as “art” in the sense that Cezanne, Peggy Guggenheim or Cindy Sherman might have used the word can we even begin to more fully grasp what is in front of our eyes.

The Commonsense World of the Visitor: Globalization and the Category of “Asian Art”

The Asian images and objects in The Trout Gallery became art through the largely market-driven process commonly called globalization. The term globalization is used today to reference a growing sense that the magnitude and speed at which international interactions occur has passed a threshold beyond which the sheer quantity of change has brought about qualitative changes in the ways we see and order the world. The commodification of the past in the form of collectables, the increasing importance of market value over aesthetic values, and the globalization of the category of “fine art” are all furthered by an internationalizing template that insists on professional and bureaucratic standardization. “Best practices,” the measuring of outcomes by audit regimes in which everything must be reshaped into countable form in order to count for anything at all, can be useful instruments for getting things done.⁶ Accounting

and standardization facilitate at least the illusion of centralized control. The sense of mastery that results is increasingly appealing as an ever more complex world threatens to spin out of control.

However, trade-offs are made when efficiency and control are elevated to the level of an ultimate, naturalized value. Measurable standards risk becoming ends rather than means. A language of “goals” and “outcomes” undermines the non-countable, qualitative values that humans otherwise hold dear. What becomes of beauty, wisdom, compassion, insight, self-transcendence, or even meaning itself, in a world ruled by the economizing disciplines of accounting? Such values have their place. But they seem lately to have burst beyond all reasonable limits to become global and totalizing forces.

To question the globalization of bureaucratic and market values is not necessarily to be anti-business but rather to question the unchecked extension of these values into *all* dimensions of existence. Homogenizing forces are strong but, ironically, they are also relentlessly subverted by the same individualizing practices they celebrate. In order to be “free to choose,” a person is presupposed to be a rational, independent agent able to operate largely unencumbered by constraints. Whether or not the consumer buys for self or others, he or she becomes a free individual by choosing one product over another. In such a cultural context the objects in this exhibition are subject to individualized “readings” of the visual texts on display by visitors in ways that celebrate diversity and multiculturalism and challenge the universalizing forces of globalization. The range of meanings that result need not be limited by the original act of authorship nor by modern cultural authorities.

Historical narratives

Each item in “New Lives for Asian Images” tells a unique story, and yet nearly every one can be loosely situated within a four-part narrative. I will use the Chinese chrysanthemum painting in



the collection attributed to Yun Shouping to illustrate the resulting sequence of metamorphoses. First, an object is conceived and made in response to some kind of demand. It is always risky to make generalizations about an area as vast as “Asia,” but one thing that can be said is that these objects each had some kind of social life. Art in Asia was not made simply for its own sake, but rather for human beings and their various purposes. According to Professor Rae Yang, the inscription on the chrysanthemum painting tells us that it was painted in early spring in the Year of the Dog, 1682, by Shouping, who says that it is a copy of a Song dynasty painting in his

family collection by Zhao Chang (early-11th century). The 17th-century painter Yun Shouping (1633-1690) is famous for bird and flower paintings done in the conservative style of the Song and Yuan periods and this painting conforms to his style and reputation. The inscription praises Zhao Chang for his ability to capture the spirit of nature in the manner of the ancients. There are also two seven-character lines of poetry describing autumn frost, wind and flying swallows. The inscription indirectly indicates some of the many and complex reasons that elite Chinese gentlemen practiced the related arts of painting, poetry and calligraphy. The cornerstones of value here are not measurable outcomes, but the experience of past generations and the spirit of nature informing both chrysanthemums and brush stroke alike. Submitting oneself to the discipline of copying the ancients was a conventional act of self-refinement in which one's own vital energies are brought in tune with theirs and indexically signified by traces left by the movement of the brush. In some cases a painting like this might have been "sold" in some sense by its maker. But this would not have been done openly since a public sale would have been the act of a lowly, money-grubbing merchant, not a refined gentleman. More often, works of the brush were given as gifts to signify or create political ties and patronage among elites. This was a cultural context in which self-cultivation, dignity and cementing social relationships were far more valuable than the money one might gain from selling one's paintings. Yun's paintings would have been given away through a sophisticated network of personal reciprocities.⁷ Arthur Waley describes Yun Shouping as "an idealist and aesthete, a man universally praised for the loyalty and simplicity of his nature. There was in his manner 'something of the gentleness that belonged to the Confucianists of ancient days' ... Though poor he never sold his paintings...."⁸

Second, at some point in the past, an object like this painting is removed from the environ-

ment for which it was originally made to become a new kind of commodity, gifted or offered for trade or sale, normally in an antique market of some sort. At this point the object acquires an economic exchange value overlaid on older, sacred, social, ritual, or political values associated with its former life in a temple, palace or household. Because the item, as a commodity, is no longer being used for its original purposes, its older meanings no longer constitute living meanings, but cling to the object in an objectified form that ordinarily needs to be explained in words. For some buyers these older meanings and functions may be of little interest at all. Instead they care only about what the object looks like. Such a perspective is alien to both the pre-modern realm the object originated in and the post-modern context we inhabit now. In both contexts, people were, and are, much more inclined to see a painting or other image in integrated, relational terms.

The precise provenance of this painting is unknown, beyond the fact that it was given to The Trout Galley by Hazel Cole in the late 1960s. Cole, who acquired many works of art while traveling in Asia, purchased this and a companion painting in Massachusetts from missionaries returned from China. The companion painting of a bird, lotus flowers and grasses is also on exhibit here and graces the catalogue cover. In the turbulent politics and sometimes desperate economic circumstances faced by once prominent families in 19th- and early 20th-century China, collections of painting and calligraphy dispersed into an emerging international art market in order to find their way from China to places like Massachusetts or Pennsylvania. Paintings such as this one often ended up with antique dealers who then might sell them to foreigners. The reciprocities that formed the context of its production were replaced at this point with impersonal, standardized financial transactions. The exchange of an image from hand to hand no longer concretely signified personal relationships and the refined qualities spe-

cific to Chinese gentlemen. Those relations and qualities died along with their original owners. The image begins a second career as a “work of art” in the modern, abstracted sense. Earlier relationships and qualities persist only as concepts or meta-meanings. The object’s new significance centers on formal aesthetic properties, historical interest and—especially vital to most new owners—monetary value.

Third, the object is given a new home and new function in the domestic space of the collector, where it may have been stored or displayed among the home’s furnishings as a sign of the personal history of the new owner. An image can speak of foreign travels, or unusual areas of interest and expertise. If the collector has an intellectual bent, she may be able to offer interpretations or stories about the object to visitors. If not, the colors, shapes, lines or other expressive features of the object may simply contribute to the atmosphere of the home in accordance with the collector’s personal tastes. In each of these scenarios the object acquires an additional layer of concrete value. Those who collect objects of Asian art are relatively rare among the citizens of the United States and so the possession of these objects confers a special distinction on their owners which the owner may or may not advertise but will in every case say something about one’s identity. The social context we live in places a high value on differentiating from other persons the self as a unique “possessive individual.”⁹ The primary way modern peoples of the market take possession of the world in this sense is through discriminating choices among commodities: styles of music, clothing, automobiles, books, vacations and just about anything else that one can experience or possess through the power of cash and credit. To the degree that works of art are unique and not mass-produced, they have a special role to play in the practices of individualized selfhood.

In this domestic phase, the chrysanthemum painting was removed from its scroll mounting and placed in a Western-style frame. A matching



frame was provided for the painting of lotuses that carries the signature of Zou Yigui (1688-1772) and two images were made a pair. The two paintings were thus customized to fit a mode of art display conventionally used in Western homes. Hazel Cole placed both paintings in a “Chinese Room” filled with artifacts she created in her home. To complete the desired effect, Cole

designed the space to be entered through an archway made of blue and green glazed tiles taken from old Chinese houses in Malacca.

Fourth, all the objects exhibited here were given yet another home and purpose as donations to an educational institution. They now have the potential to speak to a different audience consisting largely of students and faculty. The images serve as silent teachers and signs of other times and places. Among them, items made for religious and spiritual purposes form images of almost inexhaustible depth. Each carries a constellation of latent, potential meanings. But for these to be realized each image must elicit a human response. In these encounters a crucial variable is the amount and kind of baggage brought by the viewer to the object on display. We have all been conditioned by past experiences to see things in a certain light. In so saying, I do not mean to suggest that art is simply in the eye of the beholder. Art interpretation is a profoundly constrained and public event in which object, viewer, and the viewer's immediate circumstance as a gallery visitor all entwine to generate any number of potential responses.

In The Trout Gallery the chrysanthemum painting and its adopted sibling spend most of their time in climate-controlled storage, safe from the damaging effects of air pollutants, ultraviolet radiation, and extreme temperature and humidity changes. As works of art, their conventional purpose is to be occasionally exhibited and enjoyed. But in the larger context of an institution of higher education, the painting has the potential to be much more.

The Interpretive Imperative

On one hand, the interpretation of the objects in this collection need not be constrained by some mythical idea of a "true meaning" inserted into the object by an author's intention at the moment of creation. On the other hand, in order to be valid, an interpretation must be disciplined by concrete evidence and a humble deference to

cultural difference. Only hubris allows modern interpreters to pretend to occupy the cultural and biological skins of ancient others. Any claim to speak for "the native point of view" should be approached with deep skepticism. Instead, it is more productive to imagine the interpretive challenge as a relational one. How can you learn to appreciate these aesthetic embodiments of "native points of view" while acknowledging that, in so doing, you are constructing yet another point of view that relates to, but can never substitute for them?

Clifford Geertz recommends a "thick" form of interpretation grounded in rich, descriptive knowledge of concrete evidence.¹⁰ Depending on the visitor's cultural background and personal history, his or her relationship to specific objects in this exhibition will already be pre-conditioned to be thicker or thinner. Some objects will speak more clearly than others. Because meaning arises in the union of a sign and a perceiver, and because of the diversity of the points of view from which perception occurs, the significance of any given object cannot be reduced to a final authoritative pronouncement. Attempts to do so in the past have been based on what Michel Foucault calls the "author function," an interpretive tool that is used to try to prevent the proliferation of meanings by appeal to the fixed and final authority of an author.¹¹ However, if the meanings of written words and visual signs are shaped by history, then they are public property, irreducible to the subjective intentions of an author. This is not to say that meaning is what the beholder wants it to be. Indeed it is to say something more complicated. Meaning is always intersubjective and latent in the public spaces surrounding us.

Meanings are not simply essences fixed into a work of art at the moment of creation. They are best understood as historically unfolding potentials that may or may not be realized in any given subject's experience. In the case of a painting or sculpture executed in a rich visual language with great historical depth, the potential for meaning

may be vast, but not lacking specificity and rigorous limits. They are not fixed. Nor are they whatever the perceiver wants them to be. The folk “wisdom” that art is in the eye of the beholder is far past retirement age. It is Exhibit A in the argument that what you get from common sense is more often common than sense. As in the case of spoken languages, the components of a visual language are the products of social agreements that have been continuously formulated and modified over long historical periods. The meanings embodied in visual languages are public property. There is a sense in which I experience the space of meaning as subjective, but what is really subjective about the symbolic media of my thoughts? Unless I am delusional, the contents of my subjective experience are objectively grounded. They’ve come from the world around me. Objects exhibited here have been produced using traditional visual languages, and I am no more free to simply make up my own meanings for them than I am free to arbitrarily choose the meanings of the words I am writing at this moment.

A formalist might hold that what makes an object “art” is purely a matter intrinsic to the object and its appearance, independent of context. From that standpoint the “true meaning” of a work of art would be embedded in what used to be called “significant form” that stands outside of historical change. This is a perspective that allows for the final fixing of authentic meanings by authors, or by experts who appropriate authorial authority (often after his or her death), or by those who gain the status of semi-mystical connoisseurs possessing the rare (and often class-bound) capacity to perceive the universal qualities of “art” directly. This approach to interpretation is intended to kill off the possibility of future investigation with definitive, exhaustive answers. The ordinary viewer is then rendered a passive consumer of meaning, expected simply to match her subjective experience with the objective or true meanings inherent in the object itself.

Such ideas were common in the heyday of modernism when people were generally more primed to have faith in abstraction and ideas of formal purity. These days most would agree with Marshall Sahlins’ observation that there’s no such thing as an “immaculate perception.”¹² Even if the viewer is sympathetic to formalist modernism, there is not a shred of evidence that the makers and users of these objects ever were. I propose we drop the misleading idea that significance and value are intrinsic and replace it with the idea that these qualities are relational. That is to say, meanings are emergent properties of ever-changing relationships, forming, dissolving and variously connecting the object to its surroundings.

From this perspective, everything in this exhibition is in need of interpretation to, and by, modern audiences, without whom they have no living meaning or social life. They were produced using traditional visual languages that were taken for granted by their intended audiences. As Michael Baxandall puts it, “the public’s visual capacity must be his [the painter’s] medium. Whatever his own specialized professional skills, he is himself a member of the society he works for and shares its visual experience and habit.”¹³ Lacking familiarity with the traditional visual codes on display in this exhibition, the contemporary viewer is liable to mis-imagine the pasts that these items belonged to. After all, we always rely on some kind of interpretive frame to make sense of our experiences, and in the absence of cross-cultural learning, we will end up superimposing the presuppositions built into our own language and culture onto unfamiliar objects simply by default. Resorting to the notion that “art is a universal language” only provides the illusion of rescue. Worse, it can be an excuse for ignoring or discounting cultural diversity and legitimizing the imposition of our own cultural frameworks as if they are genuine human universals.

Such ethnocentrism is habitual and normal among human groups, and it is not necessarily a

problem so long as we are aware of it and do not take it to extremes. If we do, we risk the arrogance of naturalizing ourselves, and exoticizing—or at times demonizing—those who, by virtue of their differences, automatically become the opposite of ourselves: ab-normal, un-natural or living in violation of human nature. And any similarity is liable to be taken as a sign that others are really no different from me. This universalizing attitude toward human nature may sound generous on the surface, but in effect it asserts that the humanity of others is dependent on the degree to which they resemble my view of myself as the measure of all things. This is a formula for misunderstanding not only objects, but also the people and cultural contexts that produced them. As in the case of spoken languages, the conventions of Asian visual cultures must be learned. Recourse to universals and ethnocentric mythologies of human nature provide no easy way out. We should ask ourselves the kind of tough questions that are only answerable through study and reflection. What is this object saying? What did it once say to others? How much does my interpretation reflect my own times and life experiences? How much does the message I am receiving reflect the world that produced the object?

Fortunately, the learning of a visual culture is not nearly as daunting as learning another spoken language. In order for an English speaker to have some access to a written Chinese text, one either needs to spend years learning to master Chinese or else the text needs to be translated. By contrast, a visual object is accessible to some degree immediately. The understanding may at first be seriously erroneous or ethnocentric, but that is fine. In fact, heartfelt misunderstanding is far better than the dead-end of apathy and disinterest. As long as one recognizes that any initial interpretive response is bound to be limited and provisional, the way forward remains open. As one's knowledge and familiarity with Asian visual languages grows, so will one's appreciation and depth of understanding.

Interpretation can best be seen as the task of recognizing shifting patterns of relationships generated by an art object in motion through time, and in this exhibition, through space. Seeing these connections is what we sometimes experience as an “aha!” moment of insight. Among the many possible relational patterns one might consider, this essay has stressed the temporal. Significance arises as one contemplates how an art object fits within a narrative or a story line. Good stories are grounded in evidence and are relatively true. Poor stories are bad to the degree that they ignore the constraints of evidence in favor of more arbitrary, self-indulgent interpretations. At their worst, these can degenerate into self-righteous and ideological ax-grinding. The problem of course is that the historical evidence can be both scanty and almost infinite in scope. What facts are chosen as relevant depends on the story line in which they fit. The situation is not hopeless however because the accumulation of contradictory evidence can erode and eventually invalidate a poorly conceived story line.

Conventional symbolism marked by iconography is an important, but relatively small part of meaning. For instance, the lotuses and chrysanthemums appearing in the Chinese paintings discussed above do carry a rich cargo of conventional significance. The chrysanthemum, for instance, is a symbol of fall. It is commonly agreed to represent good luck, a life of leisure, and the vital energy called *yang* which is positive, male, heavenly and bright. A still larger field of meanings and insights opens up when we include indexical meanings. These are not limited by abstract conventional agreements, but are the sort that point, like an index finger, to significant concrete relations between the object and its surroundings.¹⁴ In that regard, the chrysanthemum painting indexes aspects of a way of life once lived by its producer, his patron and specific features of the larger cultural systems in which they functioned. For example, the painting may have been displayed on occasion in a specific location to bring balance to a place

considered to be endowed with an excess of *yin* which is negative, female, earthly and dark. In that role it doesn't simply symbolize *yang*, but concretely generates it. In addition, as the inscription makes explicit, the painting serves to link the painter both with the spirit of nature and the experience of the ancients. Nothing in the conventional symbolism of a flower in nature insists on this important aspect of its significance. Concrete, indexical forms of significance disappear when the object is removed from the actual situations in which it functions as an indexical sign. When the painter is dead, the work itself no longer connects him to the ancients except by reputation; *yin* and *yang* no longer can balance each other when removed from the specific location where the painting may have performed that function. In other words, indexical meanings relate to what the object *does*, as it participates in a constructed human world. Of course, as this exhibition demonstrates, the life of the painting did not end in the Qing dynasty. While the conventional symbolism of Chinese painting may be rooted in the past, the indexical meanings of paintings as concrete objects will always keep up with changing times and contexts. They will keep pointing, perhaps in our direction and to the world we inhabit for the moment. The painting can index subsequent time frames, new owners and new cultural institutions (such as the capitalist art market or the liberal arts college) in which it dwells. These temporal movements and interactions not only shape the evolution of the painting's value and significance, but also modify its visible form. Transformation from a hanging scroll to a framed picture is one obvious example of this. In a more subtle way, the arrangements made for its storage and display and its exposure to different environmental conditions at different times in its career have all conditioned how the painting is experienced. Acts of conservation delay its material disintegration and the painting may well be better illuminated today than it was in a Qing dynasty

scholar's studio. Because of careful conservation efforts, it doesn't look as old as it would have if nature had simply been allowed to take its course.

Indexical Signs of the Sacred

Virtually every pre-modern item in this exhibition points toward some vision of the spiritual. As samples of religious iconography or conventional symbols, their relation to the spirit is at first comparatively dry and abstract. The objects of worship are on display in the gallery but the ancient worshippers are not. However, when considered as indexical signs, their aesthetic vitality and depth of meaning can come back to life vicariously through us.

In the chrysanthemum painting, for instance, the vital energies of the painter are marked by the traces of his brushwork and function largely at the level of abstract convention. The form of the painting implies energy, but it doesn't inherently or literally contain any such vitality. The image still points toward the life force of the painter. But he is long dead. As the inscription tells us, the painting also points toward the spirit of nature, but nothing rendered here literally grows, or fades or moves in the wind. Where is that original spirit? It can only be realized in the *relation* of the painting to a sensitive viewer who is willing to give the time and attention necessary to directly experience what the image is ultimately "about" in a spiritual sense. The spiritual energy indexed by the painting is in you and me. This vitality makes the difference between a living body and a dead one. We can experience it and cultivate it within our bodies if we pay attention. Normally we don't. The body and mind run wildly like an untamed ox here and there and rarely, if ever, calm down to the point that we notice, much less contemplate in any sustained way, the energy that gives body and mind their life. The Yun Shouping painting was an exercise and a meditation on the part of the painter about and with that spiritual energy.

But that action in itself does us no good since we are not the painter. His moment exists for us only in the form of abstract imagination. If we dwell only on that abstraction, we miss the here and now of our own experience. Our moment lies in contemplating this remnant of a long-gone painter's activity as an invitation to feel, within our own bodies, the movement of the brush, the touch of the breeze, the growth of plants, the luminous unfolding of flowers. This is possible because the same spirit that animates these elements is flowing through our bodies right now. Thus, as a collection of conventional signs, this painting dwells largely in the past, but as an index of the spiritual, it finds you and me in the present.



One might say that this is well and good for Chinese painting, but what is spiritual about other objects in the collection, like the commercial weights from Burma? In our world few things could be more distant from the spiritual than the mundane business of money and trade. Our commonsense separation of sacred and secular is liable to produce the false assumption that

ancient Burmese traders approached economic values in the same, strictly secular way business people do today. The weights index the presence of the larger sets to which they once belonged. They are called "royal" weights, because between the 15th and the 19th century each successive Burmese monarch issued his own set of standardized weights and measures to bring order (Buddhist *dharma*) to economic transactions.¹⁵ These sets vary somewhat from one reign to the next, indicating a concrete relation to the governing era of specific monarchs. With few exceptions, the animals sculpted on top are leonine and avian. The lion/tiger is an ancient and conventional symbol of the Buddha, "Lion of the Sakya Clan," whose teachings emanated in the form of the "Lion's Roar" projecting *dharma* toward the four quarters. This is mixed in Burma with Chinese conventions in which the tiger is a terrestrial (*yin*) symbol of the Western quadrant of space. The bird here is specifically identified in Burma as a *hamsa*. This Sanskrit word refers to a mythical bird related to the swan or goose that swims in the water of this world and flies away with dry wings, without getting attached or



bogged down in desire and the virtually unending karmic consequences that follow from earthly passions. As such the *hamsa* on this weight is a conventional symbol of the spiritually liberated being. Here too, in Burma there is an admixture of Chinese conventions, in which the bird, by contrast with the earthly tiger, is a *yang* symbol of the heaven above. In deploying these symbolic conventions, the Burmese monarch positions himself as a link between heaven and earth and the provider of a key instrument for the maintenance of *dharma* among his subjects. Moreover, the weights are significant not just in what they symbolize and indicate but also for what they do. They act as participants in human life to facilitate peace and order. They insert the power of the monarch into each transaction, which in turn brings divine authority and fairness to what otherwise could be potentially a contentious situation. Again, all these are conventional meanings operating at the level of abstractions. If the spiritual is always resident in the here and now, what spirituality is indexed by these weights today?

In contemplating the use of these objects in commercial transactions one can recognize the weights as economic tools that encode for their user a specific relation to political and spiritual power. They indicate and remind the user of the karmic give-and-take informing every business exchange. They also integrate and subordinate the material aims of business with and to the higher aims of life. From a spiritual point of view, the weights challenge us to question whether or not in divorcing the sacred from the secular we have not opened the door to a system in which the economic means of life are no longer subordinated to higher ends, but have rather turned into something resembling ends in themselves. I say “something resembling” because, as economists tell us, we can never get enough of the economic means of life for them to become satisfying ends in themselves. We risk living a life of dis-ease, always hankering after something more, or something else. As our pub-

lic economic institutions are increasingly re-constructed so as to “let the market decide” ultimate questions of being and non-being, the spiritual is degraded to the status of the “merely subjective.” These market-centric notions would likely strike the former makers and users of these weights as strange indeed. A spiritless economy undercuts the foundation of a deeper form of business ethics integral to the act of living in contrast to an economy based on externally imposed sets of invented rules, laws and policies. Lacking an integral relation to the sacred, modern business ethics can end up allowing anything so long as it remains within the bounds of the law. In Buddhism the law provides no such dispensation. If taken to extremes—and seemingly driven there by ruthless competition—a spiritless economy risks setting the ethical bar so low that any act is liable to be deemed acceptable so long as it isn’t criminal. We rarely take the time to contemplate the price that our civilization has paid for treating the spiritual dimension of life as if it is just like any other subjective, market-style choice, to be made freely by each individual.

The weights provided by a king to his people can give us an opportunity to think about such things. To say that Burmese traders were people of the market just like Donald Trump begs the question posed by these weights. Why doesn’t Donald Trump use them in his financial transactions? Does he have more precise tools at hand or does he wish to be unencumbered by *dharma*? The Burmese traders who used these weights certainly sought profit and prosperity, but the tools of the trade themselves were constant reminders of the higher aim of liberation from the bondage of desire and karma, a world of giving and taking in which nobody ever gets away with anything in the long run. Americans sometimes display an intuitive and limited endorsement of karma in notions of just deserts in expressions like “what goes around comes around,” “as you sow so shall you reap,” “an eye for an eye,” or “the mills of the gods grind slow but exceedingly fine.” But our public discourses on ethics tend to

be shaped more by the disenchanting, mechanistic vision of reality presupposed by law and policy than by any kind of internalized sacred cosmology. We Americans are, of course, free to adopt or not adopt anything we like with regard to the sacred, but that is also an indication of how irrelevant these personal choices are to the legalistic ethics that we expect to govern our public institutions.

This is not to say that the ancient Burmese style of Buddhist theocracy (indexically signified by these commercial weights) points toward a path of salvation for contemporary Americans! The point is that in contemplating the contrast between our commonsense world and the alternatives presupposed by the specific forms of these objects permits relational insights to emerge. Out of the juxtaposition, both American and ancient Burmese realities are made clearer, and the interests of wisdom are advanced. Getting beyond a binary opposition in which our version of political-economy is natural and theirs is cultural (or mythological), helps expose the historically constructed character of both. The juxtaposition enables us to recognize the collective choices that have been made, the trade-offs they entail, and the differing advantages and disadvantages of each.

Questions

The usual questions about authorship, provenance, dates, patronage, conventional symbolism and methods of manufacture abound in this exhibition. The answers provided here are far from exhaustive or definitive and there is still much research of a conventional nature to be done on this collection. The preceding discussion of interpretation is offered in order to open up a space for interdisciplinary questions that go beyond the usual ones asked of works of art. The questions I want to raise here are those that relate to the indexical meanings of these objects. Each of them points in many directions toward multiple aspects of the socio-cultural environ-

ments in which they once functioned, as well as to those in which they might function today. That is to say, a painting like Yun Shouping's chrysanthemums not only once had personal, familial, historical, political, economic, cosmological and religious dimensions of significance in the 17th century, it also now has similarly broad meanings today. Depending on the sensitivity, point of view and prior knowledge of the interpreter, the painting suggests diverging paths of interpretation: accenting the conservative or subversive connotations that can arise from making the past a mirror to the present, prizing an elite culture of refinement or celebrating a natural world that has a place in it for all creatures, demonstrating the creative powers of an individual artist or the folly of egoism cut loose from communitarian values.

Traditions are not and never have been static, but in much of the colonial era they were portrayed that way by Western modernists, who saw themselves as the opposite of traditional. If "I" am modern, creative, dynamic and historical, then the traditional "other" must be the opposite of me and as such uncreative, static and without a genuine history. This way of looking at things is as false as it is self-serving. By interpreting ancient objects in light of their contemporary circumstances we are not distorting or corrupting the purity of a static, "true meaning" or "original meaning." Rather, we allow the traditional visual language in which the object is rendered to grow with the changing times. By submitting oneself to the discipline of learning how an unfamiliar, traditional visual language conventionally encodes meaning, the contemporary interpreter also grows in knowledge and empathy beyond the here and now.

There are many things that could be said with some degree of authority about each of these items. But to a greater or lesser degree, each is mysterious. Much of the evidence needed to answer some of the most interesting questions may be lost forever. With sufficient time, money and research skills, some mysteries may yet be an-

swered. In the following catalogue we have tried to formulate questions focused on problems of interpretation that depend less on bemoaning lost evidence and more on imagining the myriad connections between what we know about the objects and what we don't know about ourselves.

- 1 I use the phrase "peoples of the market" to suggest Marshall Sahlins' observation that, for a variety of historical reasons, societies tend to generate privileged sites of symbolic production (personal communication). In the modern United States, economic symbols, generally taking the form of numerical signs representing various economic phenomena, tend to exercise special force due to their location in the foreground of our shared institutions. However, this state of affairs is not universal. In Mao's China for instance, political symbolism exercised privileged power and under the Taliban theocracy in Afghanistan religious symbolism. For the East African Nuer described by E. Evans-Pritchard, the symbols of kinship—tribe, clan and family—trump all else. This is not to say that subcultures have not formed in the United States around the primacy of religion, politics, or kinship, but they do so in tension with, if not active opposition to, dominant institutions. At the level of global culture, the old 20th century struggle between the primacy of political symbols (pushed under the banner of Marxism) and economic symbols (under the flag of free enterprise) seems to have been largely resolved with the latter taking center stage. Meanwhile the instability of free markets has generated various reactionary fundamentalisms in the 21st century.
- 2 James Clifford, "Histories of the Tribal and the Modern," in *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1988).
- 3 Thomas McEvelley, "Art/Artifact," in *Art and Otherness* (New York: Documentext/McPherson, 1992).
- 4 Andre Malraux, *The Voices of Silence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).
- 5 Sally Price, *Primitive Art in Civilized Places* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).
- 6 Marilyn Strathern, editor. *Audit Cultures: Anthropological studies in accountability, ethics and the academy* (New York: Routledge, 2000).
- 7 See for instance Craig Clunas, *Art in China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) pp. 135-169 and 187-194.
- 8 Arthur Waley, "Chinese Philosophy of Art-IX. (Concluded)," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, vol. 39, no. 225 (Dec. 1921), p. 292.
- 9 Crawford Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).
- 10 Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973.) Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" in *Textual Strategies*, J. V. Harari (ed.) (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979).
- 11 Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?"
- 12 Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 147.
- 13 Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy: a Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 40.
- 14 For a revealing analysis of the way in which indexical signs, or "shifters," link speech to concrete aspects of the environments in which conversation takes place see Michael Silverstein, "Shifters, Linguistic Categories and Cultural Description," in K. Basso and H. A. Selby (eds.), *Meaning in Anthropology* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1976).
- 15 Donald and Joan Gear, *Earth to Heaven: the Royal Animal-Shaped Weights of Burma* (Harrow, England: Twinstar, 1992).

NEW LIVES FOR ASIAN IMAGES

Exhibition Catalogue

The images and objects gathered here were originally made and used in Asia. Many were dedicated to the practice of religious belief in homes, temples or other sacred places. Others entertained villagers or townspeople, enabled merchants to weigh goods for sale in the marketplace, educated people about great events of the day, or brought to mind by-gone and better times. They offered the pleasures of beauty and the solace and enlightenment sublime works of craft and artistry inspire. Collected and donated over the years by Dickinson alumni, faculty, staff and friends of the college, these images are cultural ambassadors from other times and other places. They have a great deal to tell us about their past lives. Perhaps they also have something to say about the way we live now.

HOUSEHOLD AND TEMPLE ICONS

Religious images affirm and illuminate the presence of the divine in our lives. In Asia such images can be found on household altars or in magnificent temples, at roadside shrines or in religious processions.



[1] Mandalay style Buddha with two kneeling attendants,
18th century

Burma

Gilded and lacquered wood with glass inlay¹, 41½ x
19 x 5", 18¼" and 17¾"

1984.5.1 and 1965.1.22 & 21, Gift of Dr. David C. Rillin
and Gifts of Hazel Cole

Although these attendants were not made specifically for this particular Buddha image, all three are typical, approximately of the same time and place, and in their standing and kneeling postures display appropriate symmetry and balance. The remote, still, and elongated geometry of the Buddha image stands in stark contrast to the supple, animated feelings implied in the facial expressions and fluid legs of the attendants who are dressed in the costumes of court dancers. The figures encode a relational logic that is both cosmological and political at the same time: above : below :: center :: periphery :: abstract :: sensuous :: superior : inferior. The Buddha stands as if presenting his triangular bodily form to

the devotional gaze (*darshan*) of the devotee. There is no apparent attempt at naturalism. The attendants are more sensuous, yet not naturalistic in the European sense. All three figures are representations of luminous beings, glowing with the reflected light of gold and inlaid glass. Such imagery is a pragmatic response to the material fact that the historical Buddha's earthly body (*nirmankaya*) was cremated over two and a half thousand years ago. Therefore, if the devotee were to see him today, it would be in the form of his radiant subtle body (*sambhogakaya*). Because few possess the spiritual ripeness to have such a vision directly, it is made accessible, though to a lesser degree, through the power of sculpture.

If we recognize the two attendants as more aesthetically engaging than the Buddha image, are there good Buddhist reasons why this should be so, or have we fallen prey to an ethnocentric attachment to sensuality?





[2] Kubira Taisho (Sanskrit Kubera), Kamakura or Muromachi period, 13th–16th century

Japan

Wood and paint, 20 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 8 $\frac{3}{8}$ "

2005.4

One of the Juni Shinsho, twelve guardian generals surrounding the healing Buddha, Yakushi Nyorai. The attribute in his right hand is broken off. But if the animal on his headdress is correctly identified as a rat, then the missing attribute would have been a sword-like *vajra*, or “thunderbolt.” While the Indian image of Kubera shown in this exhibition [31] served as guardian of the north in the implicit *mandala* (circle) surrounding the central deity of a Hindu temple, this Japanese Buddhist Kubira was originally part of a set of twelve guardians, each with one of the animals of the Chinese zodiac represented on his headdress. Where a position in space is emphasized in the Hindu circle, a phase of time is emphasized in the Japanese version. The Japanese Kubira continues to be associated with ideas of wealth and prosperity like his Indian ancestor. However, unlike the sensuous repose of the latter, he embodies the values and spirit of the martial arts.

Absent the Buddha he once guarded and the eleven companions who assisted him, why is this celestial general still a potent image? Can he yet convey values associated with military strength, material prosperity, and the ordering of time itself?



[3] Local Deity, Qing Dynasty, 19th or early-20th century

China

Wood, lacquer, 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ "

1965.1.23, Gift of Hazel Cole

Local deities in China are gods who were once ordinary human beings. Performance of some remarkable service for their communities led to deification after death. The golden armor, animal belt and fish tail “skirt” of this image suggest Guan Yu, a general from the Three Kingdoms era (220–265), who became widely popular as the god of war and patron of success in all endeavors including business and academic examinations. However, the smooth, serene, almost feminine face is not that of the fierce, bearded God of War. This image likely originated in southern China or Taiwan but remains a puzzle complicated by the inevitably local nature of popular religion. Not every deity rises from local obscurity to become a Guan Yu. Without a consecration certificate—normally placed in a cavity in the back of a statue—it is difficult, once removed from his original home in China, to know exactly who this was and is.²

What might have this individual achieved in life to merit such veneration and why do some gods rise to national prominence while others remain bound to the local communities they serve?

[4] Head and shoulders of a U Thong style Buddha,
c. 16th century

Thailand

Bronze, 10¾ x 7"

1996.4.12, Estate of Milton E. Flower

The Theravada Buddhism of Thailand has a modest pantheon in contrast to the Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism practiced in the Himalayas and East Asia. Its primary iconographic focus is on representations of the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni. However, an image like this does not simply portray what the Buddha's physical body looked like. According to the Buddhist theory of the *trikaya* (three bodies), the Buddha had a body of flesh (*nirmanakaya*), a subtle body of bliss (*sambhogakaya*), and a universal body (*dharmakaya*). The first of these was cremated (a few physical relics of that body are said to be preserved in Buddhist monuments in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia). The last of these three is seen all around us, in the form of the universe itself. When the Buddha extinguished his ego, he merged with the totality of the universe, and that has become his ultimate body. This body is symbolized by the form of a monument called a *stupa*, which can be understood as a sculptural rendering of the shape of the universe in the form of a cosmic egg, or "*anda*," the Sanskrit term used for the dome-like mound which is the central feature of a *stupa*. Anthropomorphic images of the Buddha such as this one, then, depict the intermediate body: the radiant, subtle body of the Buddha, which is neither grossly material nor abstractly universal. Thai versions of this body are ordinarily gilded and provided with a flame emerging from the top of the head to better convey the luminosity of that form.

In English such a sculpture would be called a "bust." However, busts of the Buddha were never made for Buddhist ritual. Was this 16th-century fragment discovered in broken form by itself, or with much of the rest of the (presumably) damaged body and then re-fashioned to conform to Western ideas of a proper "bust"? Should we try to imagine it as it once was, or accept it for what it now is as a "piece of artwork"?





[5] Amida Buddha, Edo period, 19th century

Japan

Wood and Lacquer, 13"

1967.1.4a, b, Gift of Hazel Cole

This small image was made for the household rites of Pure Land Buddhism. The pure land is the Western Paradise of Amida Buddha, a heavenly realm promised to those who remember the *nembutsu*, his mantra, *Namu Amida Butsu* (literally, "Name (of) Amida Buddha") with sincerity at the time of death. It sounds easy. The rub is that without a lifetime of practice in stilling the body and mind by meditating on a mantra, it may not be possible to bring the mind into one-pointed focus in the last moments of life. More naïve, popular forms of practice avoid this problem by treating the *nembutsu* as if it is a magic formula. The image's red color is aesthetically evocative of the redness of the setting sun in the west, and the direction of China and India, from which Pure Land Buddhism came to Japan. This image, like most images of Amida produced in the past thousand years, is inspired by the famous prototype carved by Jocho for the Fujiwara Byodo-in temple (c. 1053). Here the coming of Amida at the time of death (Amida Raigo) is hinted through the swirling clouds of his halo, out of which the form of Amida is expected to appear. In spatial terms, the ornate raised throne and symmetrical composition suggest that the body of Amida is an axis, or pivot, around which all of space rotates. This fact is expressed in Buddhist rites in everything from the clockwise circumambulation of Buddhist images and monuments to the clockwise turning of the tea bowl in the tea ceremony. In temporal terms, the perfect stillness of Amida's body, and by expressive implication, his mind and emotions, reach down into the temporal world of death and suffering out of compassion.

This image originally spoke of power and mysteries beyond the threshold of death and offered a solution. The ability to hold body and mind perfectly still in a state of one-pointed concentration is thought to confer on the practitioner the epistemological capacity to transcend the threshold of death while still living. Can this insight and technique speak to us today at a moment so distant in time and space from the image's making?

EPIC TALES OF GODS AND DEMONS

Wayang kulit means “shadow puppets made of leather.” In the skilled hands of performers, a multitude of puppet shapes cast shadows that once told stories of ancestors and later popularized Hindu epics, especially the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, in both Hindu Bali and Muslim Java. Images on display include those made for puppetry as a living tradition of ritual and entertainment and also items crafted for the retail tourist trade in exotic objects. The market for *wayang kulit* as art has carried shadow puppet images and themes into nontraditional media like painting, complicating the question of what is and is not authentic Balinese culture.

[6] Shadow puppet (*wayang kulit*) of the monkey king
Sugriva, 1970s or early 1980s

Bali

Leather, wood and paint, 24 x 8 x ¾"

1985.8.19.5, Gift of Joseph Ellis

One recognizes the monkey king Sugriva by the shape of his crown and red coloring. A leader of Lord Rama's monkey army, he is a relatively minor character by contrast to the great white monkey, Hanuman. This example does not show signs of the wear one would expect if it had been used in performances, and thus it was probably made directly for retail sale.

In today's marketplace a Balinese mask or puppet routinely fetches more if it was made for performance rather than retail sale, even if the retail puppet meets or surpasses the technical and aesthetic standards demanded by a puppeteer. Why? Is this puppet less "real" or exciting because it was made to be sold to a non-puppeteer for transport to a faraway place like Carlisle, Pennsylvania?





[7] Shadow puppet depicting a monkey warrior attacking a demon, late-19th or early-20th century

Bali

Wood, leather and paint, 24 x 8 x ¾"

1985.8.19.3, Gift of Joseph Ellis

This puppet is an old one from a *Ramayana* set that was no doubt used in countless performances before the set was deemed to be excessively worn-out and replaced. It may be as much as a hundred years old or more. The monkey on the back of the demon is designed to be moved up and down to add liveliness to the performance. Shadow puppet performances of the Hindu epics, the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, are important among the various offerings made by the community to the gods in Balinese temple festivals. In recent decades, abbreviated episodes abstracted from these narratives have been adapted for tourist audiences and puppets are offered for sale in retail shops as souvenirs. The same artists who make puppets for temple worship also make them for retail sale. Many are made to the same high standard demanded by the puppeteer. The technical quality of this antique puppet is generally inferior to those made today, including most of those made for retail sales. In addition, local Balinese taste leans decidedly toward the bright, fresh, colorful and new, while foreign tourists seek out objects that appear to have been mellowed by age. Balinese craftsmen have subsequently become experts in the application of shoe polish to give their work an antique patina. Serious collectors hold images made for retail sales in low regard regardless of their technical or aesthetic qualities, instead placing high value on images that were made and used in performances. In the first half of the 20th century tourists were rare enough so that the souvenir trade was easily satisfied by worn-out puppets discarded by puppeteers. As tourism greatly expanded from the 1970s on, old puppets became increasingly scarce and puppet makers began to augment their income by making them directly for retail sales. Puppet making flourishes in Bali today to a degree that would never have been possible without tourism.

If Western tourists' expectations discourage Balinese artists from following the inclinations of their own evolving aesthetic culture, are we, or is "globalism," at fault?

[8] Merdah, one of the *wayang kulit* clowns, mid-20th century

Bali

Wood, leather and paint, 24 x 8 x ¾"

1985.8.19.12, Gift of Joseph Ellis

Clowns in *wayang kulit* project very different personalities. For example, Merdah's father, Tualen, is ponderous and a bit addled while Merdah himself is quick-witted and extremely lively. Clown figures, who may have originated as local deities in Bali, take on important roles in the Hindu-based epics of *wayang kulit* by translating what the principal characters say into vernacular language and offering a more contemporary interpretation of the action. They also, of course, inject humor into the tales.³

Why are clowns or fools, like Merdah, often cast as truth-tellers and in other helpful roles?



[9] Hanuman, leader of the monkey army and loyal servant of Rama, early-20th century

Bali

Wood, leather and paint, 24 x 8 x ¾"

1985.8.19.4, Gift of Joseph Ellis

This image appears once in *wayang* versions of the Ramayana epic in a scene in which Hanuman flies to Lanka bearing healing herbs that will enable the distressed monkey army to rally and turn the tide in their heroic struggle with the demon army.

Why would monkeys be such popular, potent and positive characters in tales and stories throughout Asia?



[10] The Birth of Hanuman, mid-20th century
Bali

Paint on paper, 11 x 8"

1985.8.40.31, Gift of Joseph Ellis

Paintings like this traditionally serve no purpose in Balinese ceremonies. They began to be produced in the 1930s at the encouragement of a group of avant-garde modernists from Europe and the Americas who took up residence in Bali in search of authenticity and inspiration. This image encodes value on at least two distinct registers. On one hand it represents an episode in the life of Hanuman, the monkey god, a much beloved character in Balinese art and theatre. The newly-born Hanuman flies upside down, embracing the sun god Surya, who offers him a lower garment of *poleng*. The black and white checkered textile known as *poleng* is seen everywhere in Balinese ritual. It explicitly references the cosmic principles of light and dark, order and chaos, gods and demons, that provide structure to Balinese art, religion and worldview. Below him is a lush tropical Balinese landscape in which his mother, Anjana, gestures to her son from a throne of aquatic plants. On the other hand, the painting objectifies Balinese culture as a commodity appealing to visiting tourists.

This commodification of Bali's highly refined aesthetic culture enabled the population of the island to enjoy a much higher standard of living than would be possible through agriculture alone. A pencil inscription in Dutch on the reverse explaining the subject matter of the painting reminds us of Indonesia's colonial past.

Many observers decry the transformation of Bali into a "touristic culture."⁴ Would Bali and Balinese culture have been better off if tourists had stayed away?



TIME AND SEASONS

In Asian cultures the date was typically determined by dynasty and the number of years a ruler had occupied the throne. Zodiacs also organized the years in cycles represented, in the Chinese tradition, by animals like the tiger, dog, and rat or, as inscribed on the Tantric ritual bowl, by symbols familiar in the West like the scorpion. The passing of days and years that leads to the deaths of all mortal creatures took bodily form as the fearsome Tibetan Mahakala or “Lord of Time.” In a Chinese painting the natural world itself registers the passage of time as chrysanthemums bloom to announce autumn while the camellia flower points to same the season in a Korean print of frolicking birds and animals. Time as both seasonal change and human history appears in the form of colorful female and male figures on an 18th-century Japanese screen welcoming the advent of spring in a scene that also celebrates a remembered golden age of aristocratic elegance.

[11] Mouse eating a persimmon, Meiji period, late-19th or early-20th century

Japan

Lacquered wood, 1¾ x 2¾ x 2"

1965.1.37, Gift of Hazel Cole

This small sculpture affectionately portrays its subject with a Buddhist sense of compassion for the small and meek, combined with a Confucian pragmatism toward its food-seeking behavior. The bushy tail is characteristic of the Japanese dormouse, which resembles more what Americans might classify as a chipmunk than a mouse. The sympathetic feeling expressed in visual form here is eloquently portrayed in Zen Buddhist literature in the *Nezumi no Sōshi*, or “Tale of the Mouse.”⁵ The image skirts the edge of a Japanese aesthetic principle called *kawaii*, or cuteness, that is ubiquitous in contemporary Japanese pop culture, but that can also be seen as a long-standing cultural tendency within ancient Japanese visual culture as early as the clay *Haniwa* tomb sculptures of the 6th century.

What was this sculpture made for? It has some of the qualities of miniature netsuke carving. However, its size and form indicate that it is not a netsuke. In the mid- and early-19th century netsuke toggles were used to secure sagemono: items that were suspended from the obi (or sash) by a silk cord. As Japanese men adopted Western style clothing in the late-19th and early-20th centuries, the market for netsuke carvers dried up. Is this an example of a netsuke sculptor exploring new opportunities by producing objects for sale that have no other purpose than to be “art”?





[12] Autumnal flowers and rock, 17th century

Signed Shouping (Yun Shouping, 1633–1690)

China

Ink and paint on silk, 38½ x 17¼"

1987.19, Gift of Hazel Cole

According to Professor Rae Yang, the inscription on the chrysanthemum painting tells us that Shouping painted it in early spring in the Year of the Dog, 1682. The artist adds that it is a copy of a Song dynasty painting in his family collection executed by Zhao Chang. The inscription goes on to praise Zhao for his ability to capture the spirit of nature in the manner of the ancients. There are also two seven-character lines of poetry describing autumn frost, the wind and swallows in flight. Yun Shouping is considered to be one of the six masters of the Qing dynasty.⁶ He is famous for bird and flower paintings done in the conservative style of the Song and Yuan periods and this painting conforms to his style and reputation.⁷ The chrysanthemum flower symbolizes fall and also good fortune, a life of leisure and the *yang* principle which is male, heavenly and bright.

How does the fact that the painting has been set into a wooden frame in the Western manner rather than mounted on a scroll modify the way this image is experienced? In China paintings would be given as gifts and kept rolled-up in scroll form to be taken out and occasionally viewed by friends or visitors. Does the way this painting and its companion are displayed make our encounter with them less intimate and less social?

[13] Bird, lotus and grasses
Signed Zou Yigui (1686-1772)
China
Ink and paint on silk, 45¼ x 17"
1967.1.12a., Gift of Hazel Cole

According to Professor Rae Yang, this painting was signed Zou Yigui in the Year of the Rat, 1744. Zou Yigui was a prominent Qing dynasty painter serving the court of the Qianlong Emperor.⁸ He is known for a colorful, conservative style of flower and bird paintings inspired by the Song dynasty academy. However, he also painted landscapes and narratives in more ancient historical styles. The inscription also includes two lines of five-character poetry expressing themes of summer: fish sporting beneath lotus leaves and young girls singing songs of Southern China.

Do the two paintings convey to us the contrasting moods of autumn and summer?





[14] Painting of birds, a cat and puppies, Chosŏn dynasty, 18th–19th century

Korea

Woodblock print, 14 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 7 $\frac{3}{8}$ "

1985.2.6, Gift of Col. and Mrs. R. Wallace White

Stylistically this painting is typical of certain bird, flower and animal paintings executed in the Chosŏn period.⁹ The strong colors and emphasis on abstract form leans in the direction of so-called Korean “folk” painting (*minhwa*), which flourished in the Chosŏn period in intimate association with more scholarly styles.¹⁰ Here, two puppies, one apparently holding a feather in its mouth, prowl beneath a flowering camellia bush indicative of the autumn season. A cat in the bush looks down at one of the dogs while two birds fly excitedly nearby.

Why would a painter be attracted to folk art in a tradition that also prizes aesthetic refinement?

[15] Geisha reading, holding a hair pick in her hand, late-18th or early-19th century

Japan

Surimono woodblock print, 7 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 6 $\frac{3}{8}$ "

2003.2.1, Gift of Charles Sellers



This is a *surimono*: a class of small, exceptionally fine prints, often embossed, and privately commissioned as formal greetings, gifts and announcements. It depicts a geisha with a bound text in her lap wearing a beautiful kimono. The taste of the sophisticated townfolk of Edo (modern Tokyo) under the Tokugawa shoguns rivals the keen fashion-consciousness that visitors to Tokyo are likely to witness today. Professor Joan O’Mara has detailed for us the beautiful print pattern of this kimono: four *chirashi* (scattered) characters are seen on the robe, two with tie-dye inserts against a background patterned with cobwebs and bush clover (*hagi*), indicating an autumnal theme.¹¹ In her right hand the geisha delicately holds a large hair pick as she looks back over her left shoulder as if in response to someone, or something, located beyond the picture frame.

The geisha’s backward glance subtly hints at some nearby commotion, the nature of which is left a mystery by the artist. What might the disturbance be? What kind of gift or announcement was the occasion for a picture that gestures toward someone or something unseen?

[16] Japanese six-fold screen, Edo period, 18th century

Japan

Gold leaf and paint, 48⅞ x 95¾"

1996.1.2, Gift of Richard Stuart

Court ladies in colorful kimonos are shown enjoying an outing in early spring. According to Professor Alex Bates, this screen, in Heian era (794-1180) *Yamato-e* style, is a copy of the *Sumiyoshi monogatari emaki*, a Kamakura period (1185-1333) picture scroll. The upper half of the painting, including gold cloud formations, was added by the artist to extend the vertical dimension in a manner appropriate to a screen.¹² The original scroll tells the story of a young girl, Himegimi, whose stepmother threatens her marriage prospects. In the scenes depicted here, Himegimi and her entourage are picking young pines in a ritual celebrating spring. An aristocrat of the Shōshō rank discovers Himegimi's beauty despite the efforts of the step-mother to hide her away. As he spies upon Himegimi (from the lower left), the young man composes a poem:

<i>Haru kasumi</i>	<i>The spring mists</i>
<i>Tachi hedatsuredo</i>	<i>veiled the moor,</i>
<i>nobe ni idete</i>	<i>Yet I went out</i>
<i>matsu no midori wo</i>	<i>and glimpsed this day</i>
<i>kefu mitsuru kana</i>	<i>the young green of the pine!</i> ¹³

The Shōshō alludes to the difficulty of seeing Himegimi and compares the beauty of the maiden to that of the young pines. Nature imagery conveys meaning in a fashion characteristic of classical Japanese poetry. The placement of male and female figures creates a strong impression of gendered space and emphasizes the transgressive nature of the Shōshō's gaze.

The size and design of this screen suggests that it was once owned by a wealthy Edo merchant. Invoking an aristocratic culture pre-dating samurai rule, the artist and his patron celebrate an ancient, golden age of taste and refinement imagined to outshine the Tokugawa present.

Do the boundaries between men and women, rich and poor, and villager and city resident depicted in the painting imply criticism or acceptance of these differences?





[17] One of the 12 Juni Shinsho guardians, 19th century
Japan

Surimono woodblock print, 8½ x 7⅞"

2003.2.5, Gift of Charles Sellers

This delicately colored *surimono* print shows one of the twelve Juni Shinsho guardians, another of which is also depicted above in the sculpture of Kubira Taisho [2]. One clue to the identity of this figure is the presence of the white rabbit as zodiac symbol. Magora Taisho (Mahoraga in Sanskrit) is associated with the year and hour of the rabbit (or the monkey). His color is white and he normally carries an ax. In other lists of the twelve guardians of the healing Buddha, Anchira Taisho (Andira in Sanskrit), is the one who appears with a rabbit. His color is normally green and he carries either a mallet or a flywhisk.

Why would a heroic figure like this be given a rabbit as its sign of potency?

[18] Jurojin, geisha and child, c. 1800–1810

By Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849)

Japan

Surimono woodblock print, 5 x 7⅞"

2003.2.6, Gift of Charles Sellers



Hokusai is perhaps the most well-known *ukiyo-e* artist in the United States because of the fact that one of his 36 views of Mount Fuji, the *Great Wave of Kanagawa*, has been endlessly reworked and appropriated

in popular American visual culture in recent decades. This *surimono* depicts an elegant woman wearing the clogs, kimono and hairstyle of a geisha offering her breast to the large-headed god of longevity, Jurojin. Clinging to her back is an agitated child. This image apparently belongs to a *mitate* (parody) series, poking fun at the 24 Confucian paragons of filial piety.¹⁴ The image exudes complex levels of irony, insofar as the geisha, hardly a paradigm of maternal virtues, offers to nurse the elderly Jurojin rather than the child to whom she has turned her back. The Japanese name of Jurojin, Fukurokuju, adds further significance, as it combines *fuku* (happiness), *roku* (wealth) and *ju* (longevity), hinting that the “floating world” (*ukiyo*) of the geisha prefers to nurse these values rather than those represented by the child. Thus, on one hand, while the image seems to skewer the Confucian virtues promoted by the Tokugawa shoguns, it can also be read as a subtle dig directed toward the floating world as well.

Irony, satire and parody have long been potent forms of cultural critique. In a Japanese context, the juxtaposition of beauty, youth and old age inevitably references a constellation of perfectly sincere Buddhist propositions about value and time. Does some kind of profound meaning lie beyond the joke? Can humor bestow wisdom equal to that of a serious sage like Confucius?

[19] Hindu Tantric ritual bowl with 12 signs of the zodiac, Kadiri kingdom (1049–1222)

East Java

Unknown metal, 3¾ x 5⅝"

1985.8.13, Gift of Joseph Ellis

A bowl almost identical to this one (with its original lid still intact) is considered to be one of the great, inherited treasures (*pusaka*) of the National Museum of Indonesia.¹⁵ Its imagery is an early example of the East Javanese *wayang* style, in which the older, more three-dimensional approach to sculpture was giving way to the two-dimensional aesthetics of the shadow puppet theatre. This connection is a natural one for a society in which there is no dividing line between ritual and theatre. Around the lower part of the bowl are 12 signs of the zodiac mostly recognizable today by anyone familiar with the Western traditions of astrology. This system can be traced back through India and Greece to ancient Babylon. But it is not the only ancient zodiac known. An indigenous system based on 27 fixed stars (*nakshatras*) continues to be used in India in combination with the Babylonian system. The Chinese zodiac is based on cycles of 60, symbolized by a series of twelve animals, like the rabbit, rat and dog depicted or referenced in other images in this group, that function independently of the constellations. Around the upper register are animals, inscriptions and curiously striped anthropomorphic figures.

The Kadiri period is a little-known era, and its Hindu Tantric practices were most likely as secret then as they are in many contexts today. How did the bowl serve these secret rituals? What do the striped human figures represent and what kind of strange creature is figured on the inside bottom of the bowl?



FROM GOD TO GODDESS

Images of the divine help carry religious belief across the borders of cultures and can themselves change in the process. Sometimes these changes appear in small but important decorative details. In other cases a more profound transformation takes place. As Buddhism spread east from India to China and Japan, the South Asian typically male bodhisattva of compassion Avalokiteshwara became the female bodhisattva Guanyin in China and Kannon in Japan. Paradoxically, the same compassionate answer to the universal problem of suffering also appears in the wrathful guise of the Mahakala.



[20] Avalokiteshwara Bodhisattva, c. 2nd century
Gandhara (modern Pakistan and Afghanistan)

Schist, 6 x 4½ x 3"

1996.4.1, Estate of Milton E. Flower

A lotus bud with three visible petals descends from his hands indicating his identity as Avalokiteshwara, the male bodhisattva of compassion. He sits in *padmasana* (the "lotus" position of yoga) with his hands held in *dhyana mudra* (a hand gesture signifying meditation). The sculpture of Gandhara integrates a provincial Roman style with formal and conceptual elements indigenous to South Asia. This particular male Bodhisattva is a direct ancestor of the Chinese figures of the female Guanyin.

The chisel marks on the front of this piece of stone were made 1,700-1,800 years earlier than those on the back. Is the image important because of its religious nature, its great age and the many epochs that have marked and lent meaning to it, or simply because of its beauty?

[21] Bodhisattva (Avalokiteshwara?), style of 6th century Northern Qi dynasty

China

Painted wood, 36½"

1966.2.1, Gift of Hazel Cole

This image appears to be Bodhisattva Guanyin (Avalokiteshwara in Sanskrit; Kannon in Japanese), the same bodhisattva as the one represented by the carving from Gandhara. The white color is consistent with Guanyin. However, the hand gesture is not among the standard ones, nor does the flower in hand appear to be a lotus. The figure is rendered in the so-called “columnar style” of the 6th century Northern Qi dynasty. The only surviving examples of the Qi dynasty columnar style are rendered in limestone and wooden images of the era are unknown. Wooden images do survive in some numbers from the Liao dynasty (907-1125), and they often adopt ancient styles, especially of the Tang. However, this does not look like sculpture of the Liao period.¹⁶ The blue hair on the sculpture is a feature of the peaceful deities of Vajrayana Buddhism, especially popular in the Yuan and Qing periods. Benjamin Nerio, Director of the John Young Museum at the University of Hawaii reports that in the early years of the 20th century, wooden statues in the columnar style were produced in China for sale to foreign visitors.

This sculpture is not what it first appears to be. Is it fair to think of it as a possible forgery, or simply a copy meant to inspire or enchant the viewer?



[22] Ivory Guanyin (Avalokiteshwara) with teak stand, Ming or Qing dynasty c. 14–18th century

China

Ivory, 11"

1966.2.5, Gift of Hazel Cole

The iconography of Guanyin (also known as Avalokiteshwara) is unmistakable here: a lotus is held in the right hand and the image of Amitabha Buddha is seated in the headdress. The left hand addresses the viewer with the “boon-bestowing” gesture (*varada mudra*), in accordance with the power of compassion embodied by this particular Bodhisattva. That the icon is not especially feminized, combined with the exquisite and complex detail, the subtle suggestion of fleshy anatomy on the exposed chest, and the overall impression the form conveys, suggests the possibility that this may be a Japanese carving of a Chinese image. These features could also point to a relatively early Ming dynasty date in which the gender of Guanyin is not yet completely female.

A comparison of this image to its more ancient prototypes, like the Avalokiteshwara from Gandhara also on exhibition here [20], nicely demonstrates the feminization of the Bodhisattva of compassion, Avalokiteshwara. Is there any significance to the fact that visual signs of gender in both of these instances are more polarized in East Asia when compared with their older, South Asian equivalents?





[23] Mahakala Thangka, 18th century

Tibet

Pigment and gold on cloth, 25 x 40"

1991.3, Estate of Milton E. Flower

Tibetan *thangka* painters of the 17th and 18th centuries developed a practice of painting in gold on red backgrounds.¹⁷ This example represents a form of Mahakala, literally, the great (*maha*) lord of time (*kala*). The initial explanation for his wrathful form is that he is a protective deity. However, the matter goes a lot deeper than that. Consistent with the Buddha's first noble truth that existence is suffering, time is portrayed here in a horrific form. While the future may hold for us some fleeting pleasures and temporary material gains, this image reminds us that degeneration, loss and death are also what time inevitably holds in store for us. Seeing our fear and suffering in the face of relentless change, the Buddha was moved with great compassion. In his role as the "Great Physician" he offered humanity both a diagnosis and cure, based on an understanding realized through his experience of enlightenment. In Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism the Buddha's compassion is anthropomorphically symbolized by the Bodhisattva of compassion, Avalokiteshwara (also known as Guanyin and Kannon in East Asia), who manifests himself in various forms, including the fearsome image of Mahakala.¹⁸ In some contexts Mahakala is considered to be an emanation of the five Dhyani Buddhas.¹⁹ In Hinduism, Mahakala is an emanation of Siva, who embodies the cosmic principle of change, which inevitably entails temporal disintegration and destruction. Thus, in both Hinduism and Buddhism alike, time (*kala*) is envisioned as the emanation of a superior state of being that transcends change and its attendant suffering.

Can compassion be conveyed by such a wrathful and frightening apparition?



CHARISMATIC OBJECTS AND CULTURAL RELICS

To enhance the power of an image, a “charismatic object” such as a relic or other precious item like a jewel is sometimes placed in a secret compartment in an image.²⁰ The statue of the Mahakala has such a hidden device. Some of the objects on display in this exhibition may also have a kind of charisma as cultural relics that radiate the brilliance of a civilization’s past. The jewel-like artistry of the four items in this case suggests that kind of power: a Song bowl representing the height of Chinese ceramic art, a Koryŏ celadon vessel influenced by Song culture but also embodying a unique Korean cultural achievement, a tiger claw in a Chinese-style gold mount once owned by the powerful Sultan of Jogjakarta, and the head of a Buddhist divinity richly formed from the confluence of South Asian, Hellenic and Roman civilizations.

[24] A form of Mahakala, 16th-17th century
Nepal or Tibet

Brass, silver, semi-precious stones, paint, 5½ x 3½ x 1"
1996.4.7, Estate of Milton E. Flower

Himalayan images are typically either wrathful or peaceful. The former have orange hair, intense expressions and rampant postures, while the latter display blue hair, tranquil expressions and composed postures. Here is a form of Mahakala with fangs, bulging eyes holding a blood-filled skullcap (*kapala*) and trampling on a corpse. These signs are consistent with his status as a wrathful, protective deity. However, in this case he also exhibits iconographic signs of the Bodhisattva of Compassion Avalokiteshwara (also known as Guanyin): blue hair and a meditating image of Amitabha Buddha seated in his headdress. This is unusual for an image of Mahakala even though it is consistent with his identity as an emanation of Avalokiteshwara.

The sculpture has a secret compartment sealed into its base containing unknown objects. These commonly include yantras (mystic diagrams), mantras (mystic syllables), gemstones, sandal paste, perfumes and other items believed to be ritually potent. They are routinely installed as a kind of engine, intended to instill ritual life and power into the image. Exactly what items are concealed within this piece remains a mystery. The power of a mechanical engine can be measured. How might we understand the power of such hidden objects as they work on the emotions and consciousness of the ritual practitioner who believes in them?





[25] Celadon bowl, Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279)
China

Porcelain-celadon, 7½ d. x 2"

1987.23.2, Gift of Donald W. Flaherty

This bowl is a fine example of Song dynasty Yingqing ware produced at the Imperial kilns of Jingdezhen.²¹ The Song dynasty is considered to be a golden age for the production of celadon in China. This example is noteworthy for its design depicting fish swimming in the bowl's interior. The glossy glaze, cool, blue-green color and the inscribed fish metaphorically combine in elegant fashion to suggest the liquid that bowls like this one would have contained.

What can we intuit about a civilization's "golden age" from a single work like this and why are such pieces of great monetary and aesthetic value today?



[26] Celadon vessel, Koryŏ dynasty (918–1392)²²

Korea

14½ x 8"

1983.12, Gift of Col. and Mrs. R. Wallace White

Koryŏ celadon was inspired by the Chinese celadon of the Song and Yuan dynasties. However, Koryŏ celadon is unique for its color and detail. The potter makes extensive use of a technique of inlaying the clay body with a light colored slip in repeating designs that show through the transparent celadon glaze. Here, the lobed body of the vessel displays rows of intricate floral patterning.

Does this piece help us understand how Korea could be both influenced by China and also maintain its own cultural integrity?

[27] Head of Buddhist divinity, c. 3rd–4th century

Hadda, Gandhara (modern Pakistan)

Stucco, 2½ x 3½ x 5"

1996.4.3, Estate of Milton E. Flower

Without body or architectural context it is not possible to say if this represents a Bodhisattva or a Buddha. The introspective expression is common for South Asian Buddhist sculpture of the 3rd–5th centuries. The upper part of the face exhibits typical South Asian metaphors: eyes in the shape of lotus buds, eyelids as lotus petals, and a bow-shaped brow line. In contrast, the mouth and chin show a tendency toward a descriptive naturalism derived from Roman art. This is consistent with the historical fact that this part of South Asia, generally known as the Punjab (land of the five rivers), maintained close political and cultural links to the Mediterranean from the time of Alexander the Great until the fading of Roman power in the middle of the first millennium.

The blunt nose of this image is the only feature uncharacteristic of the Hadda style. With the Taliban's demolition of the huge, 1,500 year old Bamiyan Buddha in 2001 still fresh in our minds, we cannot help but wonder if the nose was blunted by the passage of time or deliberately broken or cut by someone offended by graven images and also acting in a manner once used in West and South Asia to punish a foe. Was the tip of this nose originally found in a broken condition or subsequently re-cut or abraded into its present shape before being offered for sale on the antiquities market?



[28] Tiger claw ornament with Chinese style setting, mid-19th century

China or Java

Tiger claw in gold mount, 3 x 2"

1965.1.25, Gift of Hazel Cole

Exotic tiger claw pendants from India mounted in gold were popular in Victorian England.²³ Accession records identify this piece as “royal Javanese” and a gift to Hazel Cole from the Sultan of Jogjakarta.²⁴ The object does appear fit for a king. Because the complex filigree and stylization of the dragon are typically Chinese, it was probably imported from China or made in Java by a Chinese jeweler sometime in the mid-19th century. The Victorian demand for Indian tiger claw ornaments set in gold is commonly associated with the royal connotations of the tiger hunt, a symbolic/recreational practice of Indian Maharajas since antiquity and enthusiastically adopted by wealthy British in India in the spirit of English blood sports. In that context the presentation of an exotic tiger claw ornament to a Victorian woman by her heroic, victorious husband served as a simultaneous sign of colonial power, the division of gender roles, and the heroic subjugation of the natural world by courageous, rational European men. However, this particular tiger claw in its Chinese setting cannot be precisely explained in those terms.



What did such a gift to an American woman by a Javanese sultan signify? What can we intuit from the design and likely use of this object about the influence and appeal of Chinese culture in Southeast Asia?

HEAVENLY AND EARTHLY POWERS

Asian traditions tend not to distinguish between sacred and secular realms but rather assume that humanity is part of one divinely infused cosmos. For example, Krishna creates and sustains the world through the ceaseless flow of heavenly music and dance. Heavenly powers like Buddhist deities were complemented and assisted by earthly powers resident in sacred mountains and married rocks, Burmese kings and Chinese emperors. Although heaven, earth and humankind were sometimes imagined as separate planes of existence, human institutions, especially government and the family, were assumed to work as smaller versions of the larger cosmos. The images here suggest some of these older ideas and also the arrival of the secular state as a new kind of earthly power which, however, did not entirely break free from traditional values of hierarchy and cosmic connections.

[29] The Married Rocks of Futami, late-19th or early-20th century

Japan

Painting on silk, 19½ x 14"

1966.3.1, Gift of Hazel Cole

This painting depicts an important Shinto pilgrimage site sacred to the supreme *kami* (nature spirit), the Sun Goddess Amaterasu, where offerings are made to the rising sun.²⁵ These husband and wife rocks are located off-shore from a cave in which the sun goddess is said to have

retreated in response to the unruly behavior of her younger brother, the wind god Susa-no-o. The music and dance deployed to entice her from the cave in order to bestow life-giving sunlight to the crops is paradigmatic of Shinto strategies of worship. Due to these associations, this is a popular spot to wait for the sunrise on New Year's day.



Two rocks serve as signs of the presence of the male and female kami (spirits) residing at Futami. Their relationship is further symbolically clarified for the visitor by a rope linking the two. A painting like this one can take us there with the help of our imaginations but we cannot be there to reap the ritual benefits. Does this fact expose the power or the limits of art as we understand such media?

[30] The Meiji emperor atop a hierarchy of early East Asian generals and rulers, late-19th or early-20th century Japan

Color lithograph, 20 x 26"

2003.2.10

This image is one of eight scenes of the first Sino-Japanese war (1894-5) in The Trout Gallery collection. Asian dignitaries are arranged in the hierarchical manner of a Buddhist pantheon in which degrees of superiority are marked by spatial location. The victorious Meiji emperor of Japan is characterized as superior to his colleagues, including the Chinese emperor and the Korean king situated one level below, by his larger size and upper/central location. The Japanese monarch and his nine ministers, generals, admirals and diplomats all but surround the Qing Emperor Guangxu and his chief minister and negotiator Li Hongzhang and King Kojong of the Chosŏn Dynasty and his father and former regent Taewongun.

This lithograph is an example of antique “commercial art” and political propaganda. How persuasive is this picture of the East Asian political world at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries? What might be the response of a Korean, Chinese or Japanese then or now? Is the image of Chiang Kai-shek on the Gate of Heavenly Peace a Chinese rejoinder made in a comparable, cosmic spirit to Japanese or other non-Chinese claims to power in East Asia?



The figures by row from left to right are:
 Yamagata Aritomo, Arisugawa Taruhito, the Meiji Emperor, Itō Hirobumi, Ōyama Iwao
 Taewongun, King Kojong, Emperor Guangxu, Li Hongzhang
 Ōshima Yoshimasa, Kabayama Sukenori, Ōtari Keisuke, Nozu Michitsura, Saigō Tsugumichi ²⁶



[31] Kubera, c. 8th–9th century
 Madhya Pradesh, Northern India
 Sandstone, 6 x 4½ x 3"
 1996.4.4, Estate of Milton E. Flower

One of the guardians of the 8 directions (*ashtadikpalaka*), Kubera protects the north. He belongs to a class of ancient folk deities called *yakshas*, who were adopted by Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism. He represents, in anthropomorphic form, the power of monetary wealth. He conventionally holds a bowl or pomegranate in his right hand and a moneybag in his left. A mongoose that has the power to vomit a wish-fulfilling gem normally accompanies him.

How is this anthropomorphic rendering of the generative power of wealth different from Adam Smith's "hidden hand"? Does capitalism also have believers who fear offending gods of money and wealth by interfering with the actions of the marketplace?

[32] Venugopala Krishna, c. 18th–19th century
 Bengal, India
 Bronze, 6 x 3"
 1996.4.5, Estate of Milton E. Flower



The small size of this image suggests that it was made for household rites. The worn upper face is an indexical sign of countless daily applications of sandal paste, vermillion and other substances to the forehead. These rites are a stylized form of hospitality done in remembrance and gratitude toward the Supreme Being, portrayed here as a playful Krishna. His posture is that of a dancer playing a flute. At one level this is a simple reference to the values of the theatre. However, at a deeper level, dance and music are a traditional Hindu medium for explaining the nature of the cosmos. For most Hindus the world truly is a vast theatre. Through an unending stream of divine music the supreme power creates and then sustains the creation. Temporal patterns of night and day, winter and summer, sleeping and waking, living and dying and living again, are all aspects of the divine dance performed by that power. In short, the universe is the *lila* (literally "sport," or "play," in both the theatrical and recreational senses) of the Supreme Being.

Peoples of the Book (Jews, Christians and Muslims) share the Old Testament prohibition against graven images or idolatry. This image was made and used as an instrument for cultivating love and devotion (bhakti) for an otherwise unknown and distant Supreme Being. Would it still be idolatry if the personalized image of divinity—whether it is Krishna, Jesus, the Goddess, Allah, Elohim, or Whomever—is created only in the imagination instead of metal, wood or stone? Indian philosophical and religious traditions can also imagine the ultimate as an impersonal power best approached through yoga and meditation. Is such a representation still an idol in the Old Testament sense if it is conceived more as an instrument for developing love rather than an object of love per se?

[33] Royal commercial weights, 18th–19th century

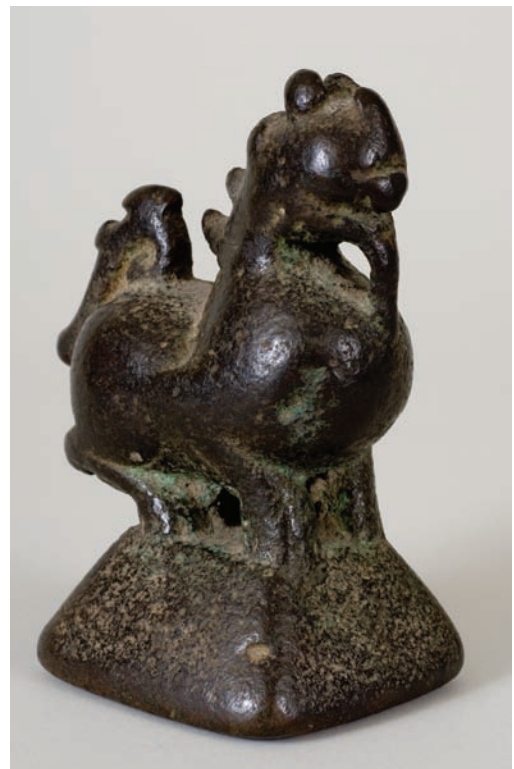
Burma

Copper/lead alloy, 4¾ x 3 x 3", 4½ x 3 x 3"

1965.1.26-7, Gift of Hazel Cole

These weights index the presence of the larger sets to which they once belonged. They are called “royal” weights, because between the 15th and the 19th century each successive Burmese monarch issued his own set of standardized weights and measures to bring order (Buddhist *dharma*) to economic transactions.²⁷ These sets vary somewhat from one reign to the next, indicating a concrete relation to the governing era of specific monarchs. With few exceptions, the animals sculpted on top are leonine and avian. The lion/tiger is an ancient and conventional symbol of the Buddha, “Lion of the Sakya Clan,” whose teachings emanated in the form of the “Lion’s Roar” projecting *dharma* toward the four quarters. This is mixed in Burma with Chinese conventions in which the tiger is a terrestrial (*yin*) symbol of the Western quadrant of space. The bird here is specifically identified in Burma as a *hamsa*. This Sanskrit word refers to a mythical bird, related to the swan or goose, that swims in the water of this world and flies away with dry wings, without getting attached or bogged down in desire and the virtually unending karmic consequences that follow from earthly passions. As such the *hamsa* on this weight is a conventional symbol of the spiritually liberated being. Here too, in Burma there is an admixture of Chinese conventions, in which the bird, by contrast with the earthly tiger, is a *yang* symbol of the heaven above. In deploying these symbolic conventions the Burmese monarch positions himself as a link between heaven and earth, and the provider of a key instrument for the maintenance of *dharma* among his subjects. Moreover, they are significant not just in what they symbolize and indicate, but also for what they do. They act as participants in human life to facilitate peace and order. They insert the power of the monarch into each transaction, which in turn brings divine authority and fairness to what otherwise could be potentially a problematic, if not contentious, situation.

Why would successive monarchs issue new sets of weights and measures more-or-less similar to those of his predecessors despite the inconvenience and inefficiency of doing so? What was gained and what was lost when more standardized and universal weights in the 19th century (ounces, pounds and later, kilograms) replaced animal weights with their combined economic, sacred and aesthetic values?



[34] Gate of Heavenly Peace, c. 1948

Donald Flaherty

Photographic print from color slide

Gift of Donald W. Flaherty

Former Dickinson College professor Donald Flaherty took this photograph while living in China in the late 1940s. It is extraordinary because it depicts a large image of Chiang Kai-shek above the Gate of Heavenly Peace (Tiananmen) in the location most modern observers associate with a similarly imposing photograph of Chairman Mao. While both leaders represented revolutionary movements determined to break with China's imperial past, both also laid claim to the central symbolic space from which ancient imperial power emanated.

Does this important historical document qualify as a work of art on the grounds that it happens also to be a rare and deeply meaningful image? Is a photograph taken in Asia by an American who lives in Asia an Asian image or a Western image?



- 1 Otto Karo, *Burmese Buddhist Sculpture* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1991).
- 2 James Robson provided very helpful guidance in sorting through possible interpretations of this image.
- 3 "Bima Suarga: A Balinese Shadow Play as Performed by Ida Bagus Ngurah," trans. and with an introduction by C.L. Reed, *Asian Theatre Journal* 3:1 (Spring 1986), pp. 1, 2 and 10.
- 4 Michel Picard, *Bali: Cultural Tourism and Touristic Culture* (Singapore: Archipelago, 1996).
- 5 D. E. Mills, "The Tale of the Mouse, *Nezumi no Soshi*," *Monumenta Nipponica*, vol. 34, no. 2 (1979), pp. 155-168.
- 6 Aida-Yuen Wong, "A New Life for Literati Painting in the Early Twentieth Century: Eastern Art and Modernity, a Transcultural Narrative?" *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. 60, No 2. (2000) p. 312.
- 7 Wen Fong and James Watt, *Possessing the Past: Treasures from the National Palace Museum, Taipei* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1996).
- 8 Zou Yigui's treatise on painting has been translated into German but not English. Gunther Debon and Chou Chun-shan (trans.), *Lob der Naturtreue des Tsou I-Kuei (1686-1722)* (Weisbaden: Harrassowitz, 1969).
- 9 P. Cambon and L. U-Fan, *Nostalgies Coreennes: Peintures et Paravents du XVII au XIX Siecle* (Paris: Musee Guimet, 2001) pp. 168-171. A similarly composed painting of cats and sparrows can be seen in Margaret Shenfield (trans.), *Korean Painting* (New York: Crown, 1963) p. 23. Frank L. Chance alerted us to the Korean identity of this painting.
- 10 For a discussion of the problematic category of "folk" or minhwa painting in Korea see Eom So Yeon, "Minhwa: A Precious Look at Traditional Korean Life" in *Koreana: Korean Cultural Heritage*, vol. 1 Fine Arts (Seoul: The Korea Foundation, 1994) pp. 84-91.
- 11 This description of the kimono design has been adapted from the notes made by Joan O'Mara when she examined The Trout Galley collection in April of 2006.
- 12 Thanks to Wendy Pires for noting this nuance.
- 13 Poem translated by Alex Bates. The story, translated by Harold Parlett, can be found in *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan* 29:1 (1901).
- 14 I am grateful to the notes made on this print by Joan O'Mara in her arts consultancy visit to Dickinson in April 2006, and to the information provided to her by Hokusai expert Roger Keyes in identifying and dating this image.
- 15 Haryati Soebadio (et al), *Art of Indonesia: Pusaka* (Singapore: Archipelago, 1998) p. 114.
- 16 Marilyn Gridley, *Chinese Buddhist Sculpture Under the Liao* (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture and Aditya Prakashan, 1993).
- 17 A similar image identified as Begtse Mahakala from central Tibet can be seen on p. 272 of P. Pal, *Desire and Devotion: Art from India Nepal and Tibet* (London: Phillip Wilson Publishers, 2001). This painting was previously published and exhibited in *Imagination and Enlightenment: Tibetan Tantric Art*. (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Trout Gallery, 2000). *A Treasure Chest of Recent Gifts to Dickinson College's Art Collection* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Trout Gallery, 1991); and *A Decade of Giving: The Trout Gallery, 1983-1993* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Trout Gallery, 1993). For a more complete description and sectarian interpretation of the details of this image, see these two earlier catalogues.
- 18 Marilyn Rhie and Robert Thurman, *Wisdom and Compassion: The Sacred Art of Tibet* (New York: Abrams, 1991), pp. 293-7.
- 19 Benoytosh Bhattacharya, *Indian Buddhist Iconography* (London: Oxford University Press, 1924), pp. 120-2.
- 20 Robert H. Sharf, "On the Allure of Buddhist Relics," *Representations* 66 (Spring 1999), p. 82.
- 21 Exhibited and published in *Vessels: Permanent Selections from The Trout Gallery* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Trout Gallery, 2000). *A Selection of Recent Acquisitions* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Trout Gallery, 1998), no. 2; *Ceramics from the Permanent Collection* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Trout Gallery, 1991), no. 19; and *A Decade of Giving*, no. 37.
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- 23 Christie Romero, *Warman's Jewelry* (2nd ed). (Des Moines Iowa: Wallace-Homestead, 1998), p. 31.
- 24 Refined jewelry exhibiting a combination of Indian and Chinese influences has been produced in Java since remote antiquity. Some fine examples can be seen in Haryati Soebadio (et al), *Art of Indonesia: Pusaka* (Singapore: Periplus, 1998).
- 25 Matsumae Takeshi, "The Origin and Growth of the Worship of Amaterasu," *Asian Folklore Studies*, vol. 37, no. 1 (1978) p. 4. I am also indebted to the notes provided to The Trout Gallery by Joan O'Mara.
- 26 Allison Kingery assisted in identifying the figures shown here.
- 27 Donald and Joan Gear, *Earth to Heaven: the Royal Animal-Shaped Weights of Burma* (Harrow, England: Tinstar, 1992).

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