

The Art of China

The Chinese have a long history of being highly creative. Two thousand years before the invention of the seismograph, they were recording earthquakes. Long before the first Texas oil wells were drilled, they were drilling holes 2000 feet deep. The compass and kite are two other early Chinese inventions.

Added proof of the Chinese gift for creating can be found in their art. In this lesson you will learn about the important contributions they have made.

MODERN CHINESE CULTURE

The "modern" period of Chinese civilization is thought to have begun with the Han dynasty. This dynasty lasted from 206 B.C. to A.D. 220. To this day, the Chinese still refer to themselves as the "Han people."

During this period a new religion came to China, called Buddhism (**boo-diz-uhm**), which stressed the oneness of humans with nature. An important part of Buddhism is meditation, focusing one's thoughts on a single object or idea. This experience allows the person to know the inner beauty of the object or idea. Chinese art of the last 2000 years has been greatly influenced by Buddhism and meditation.

Scroll Painting

The Chinese were the first people to think of "picture painting" as honorable work. This was because many artists were also scholars. They wrote with brushes that could make thick and thin lines. They used the same brush and line technique to paint pictures. They painted fans, pages of books, and scrolls. A **scroll** is a long roll of illustrated parchment or silk. Some scrolls were meant to hang on walls. Other scrolls were made of long rolls of silk or paper. They were meant to be unrolled a little at a time and read like a book.

Like other Chinese artists, scroll painters began a work only after a long period of meditation. The work itself was an attempt to capture a feeling, not an image. Shapes and figures were limited to the barest essentials. The artist included only those lines and shapes needed to capture the mood of the scene. (See Figure 5-3 on page 70.)

Landscape Painting

The earliest Chinese paintings were filled with images of people illustrating the beliefs that people should live together peacefully and be respectful of their elders. With the influence of a new religion, the focus of painting began shifting away from humans and toward nature. By around A.D. 1100, the landscape was the main theme of Chinese painting.

The work that opened this chapter on page 66 is a landscape painting. Look closely at the work. Can you find a covered deck, or pavilion (**puh-vil-yuhn**), nestled within the hills? Studying the painting more closely still, do you see two small shapes inside the pavilion? These are meant to be seen as the heads of people. What statement is the artist making about the place of humans in nature?

Sculpture

For many centuries important people in China were buried in tombs with objects they could use in the afterworld. These figures were made from clay. Many, like the horses in Figure 5-1 were of animals. Notice how the artist uses line and movement to create the feeling of action.

After the collapse of the Han dynasty, China fell into chaos. It remained this way until the mighty T'ang (**tahng**) dynasty rose to power some 400 years later. It was during this new dynasty that Chinese sculpture flourished.



▲ Figure 5-1 Both the ladies and horses are shown in action in this work. Centuries ago they played similar games to what we do today.

Four Ladies of the Court Playing Polo. Tang Dynasty. A.D. 618-906. Painted terra cotta. Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri.

Crafts

The T'ang dynasty was followed in A.D. 960 by another powerful dynasty, the Sung (**soong**). Landscape painting soared to new heights during the Sung dynasty. So did the making of **porcelain** (**pore-suh-luhn**), a fine-grained, high-quality form of pottery. Porcelain is made from a fine and fairly hard-to-find white clay called kaolin (**kay-uh-luhn**).

Work in porcelain reached its highest point ever during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644).



▲ Figure 5-2 The blue pigment came from Persia. Unless the timing was precise, the blue could turn black or brown during the firing.

Pair of Vases, Meiping. Reign of Xuande. Ming Dynasty. 1426-1435. Porcelain with underglaze blue decoration. Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri.

STUDIO EXPERIENCE

Chinese artists, you have learned, began a work only after long meditation on an object. This helped the artist capture the mood he wanted to show. In other cultures artists approach subjects of works in a similar way. They train themselves to **perceive**, or *look deeply at the subject*. This allows them to think about and study the properties of the subject that might otherwise go unnoticed.

Bring a natural object, such as a leaf, rock, or pine cone, to class. Sit silently for five minutes and study the object from every angle. Notice the object's lines, form, and textures. Do the lines curve around the form? Is the object rough or smooth? Are there shiny highlights? Now place the object out of sight. Using brush and ink, draw what you perceived on a sheet of paper.

The remarkable matched vases shown in Figure 5-2 date from this period. The painted dragon designs are protected by a *glass-like finish*, or **glaze**, on these Ming porcelains. What kind of balance does each of the vases have? What kind of balance do they have as a matched set?

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. Name two inventions credited to the early Chinese.
2. What religion was introduced to China during the Han dynasty?
3. What is meditation? What has been its role in Chinese art of the last 2000 years?
4. What are scrolls?
5. What art form flourished during the T'ang dynasty and during the Sung dynasty?
6. What art form reached its highest point during the Ming dynasty?

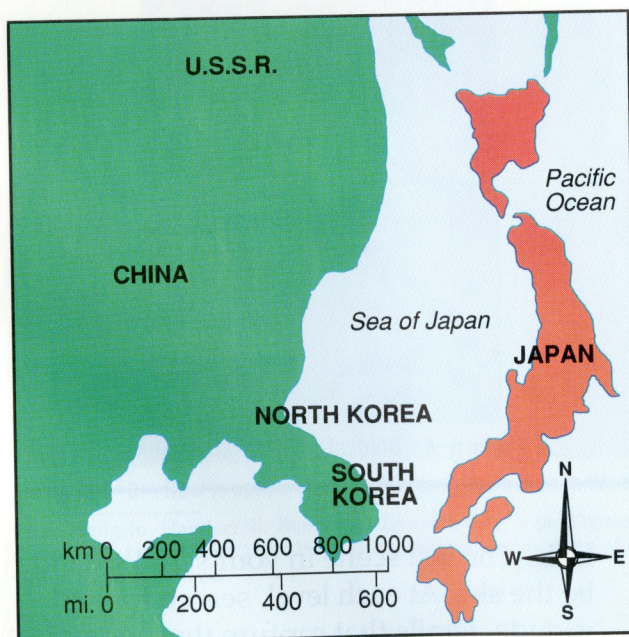
The Art of Japan

The history of Japanese art began around 5000 B.C. In the years that followed, art influenced every aspect of Japanese life. In this lesson you will learn about the one-of-a-kind culture and art of the "floating world" called Japan.

JAPANESE CULTURE

Japan makes its home on an island group in the South Pacific. Find Japan on the map in Figure 5-5.

In most civilizations, art follows culture. In a sense, the reverse is true of Japan. In A.D. 552 the ruler of a kingdom in nearby Korea sent the Emperor of Japan a gift. The gift was a piece of art. More specifically, it was a bronze figure of the Buddha (**bood-uh**), the founder of Buddhism. Along with the sculpture came priests to spread Buddhist teachings. Eventually the people of Japan came to accept this new religion. They also learned



about different ways of making art. For the next 250 years Japanese art would show strong traces of Korean, Chinese, and other Asian styles.

Architecture

Before the arrival of the bronze Buddha, the only Japanese art worth noting was pre-historic. Clay objects created by artists of the ancient Jomon (**joh-muhn**) culture are thought to date as early as 3000 B.C.

The first important Japanese art of "modern" times began being created in A.D. 594. These were magnificent Buddhist temples like the one shown in Figure 5-6. These temples were designed by Chinese or Chinese-trained architects and show a strong Chinese influence. Since the islands have little usable rock, wood was the main building material, except for the roofs which were made from tile. One of the most interesting features of early Japanese temples was the **pagoda** (**puh-gohd-uh**). This is a tower several stories high with roofs curving slightly upward at the edges. Figure 5-7 shows a pagoda from one of the greatest temples of the day. It is exactly like the first pagoda built at this temple. What does this fact reveal about the design of the building and how the Japanese feel about the past?

Figure 5-5 Japan.



Figure 5-6 At least 10,000 pieces of the art of the period have been stored at this temple for over a thousand years.
Nara Todai-Ji Temple. c. A.D. 600. Japan.

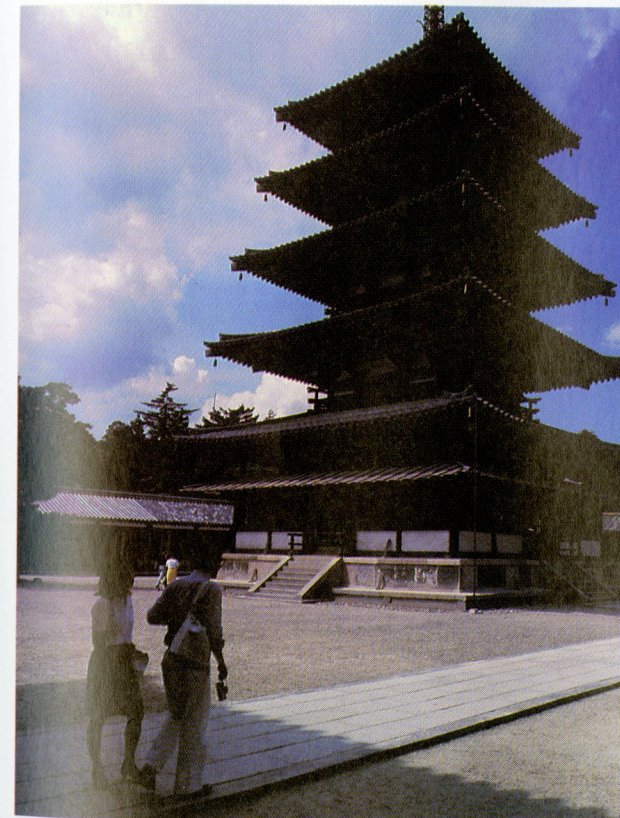


Figure 5-7 Structures like these were used to store religious items.
Nara Horyu-Ji Temple Pagoda. A.D. 700. Japan.

Sculpture

The Japanese of this early period modeled small sculptures out of clay. They also carved images of wood and cast them in bronze. Most, like the one in Figure 5-8, featured the figure of the Buddha. As a new emperor came into power he would order a new Buddha to be cast. Each emperor would order his Buddha to be made larger than before to emphasize the emperor's own importance.



Figure 5-8 Why do you think sculptures like this are found outdoors?
Bronze Buddha of Todai-Ji. Japan.

Painting

In 784 Japan entered its golden age of art. During this period, which lasted some 400 years, countless new temples were built. The period also witnessed, around 898, the birth of a new painting style. Its name, **Yamato-e** (yah-mah-toh-ay), means *pictures in the Japanese manner*. Paintings done in this style were the first true examples of pure Japanese art.

Figure 5-9 shows a Yamato-e painting. The work is a scroll. What scene is shown in this painting? In what ways is the work different from a Chinese scroll painting? In what ways is it similar?

Another important form of painting was the decoration of screens. A **screen** is a *partition used as a wall to divide a room*. The use of screens made it easy to rearrange a house and use space efficiently. Most screens were painted with Chinese subjects.



▲ Figure 5-9 This scroll shows an important person of the day, an ambassador, on a journey. Which figure do you think is the ambassador? Explain your answer.

Unknown. Illustrated Handscroll of *Minister Kibi's Trip to China* (Kibi diajin nitto emaki). 12th Century. Ink and color on paper. 32.2 x 244.2 cm (12 7/8 x 96 1/8"). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts. William Sturgis Bigelow Collection.

Printmaking

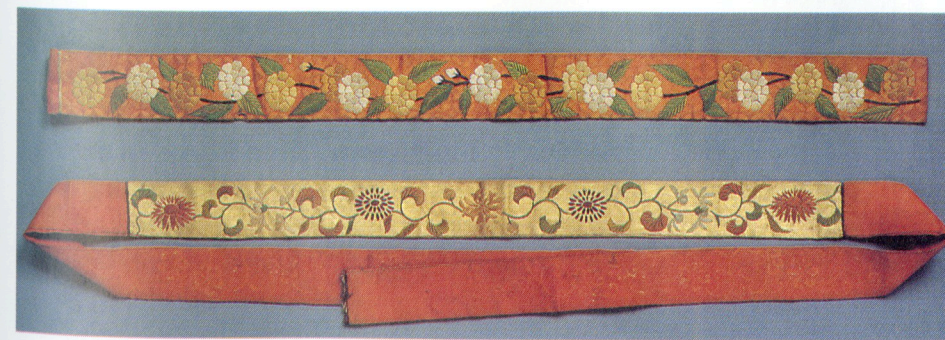
The outbreak of civil war brought the golden age to an end in 1185. Japan remained in a state of political unrest for the next 430 years. The art of these stormy times focused both on the harsh realities of war and on escaping those realities. When peace came at last, another new style of art came with it. This style was called **Ukiyo-e** (oo-kee-yoh-ay), meaning *pictures of the floating world*. These pictures show different ways the Japanese enjoyed life.

The demand for art works in the new style was great. To meet this demand, artists used the technique of **woodblock printing**. This is *making prints by carving images in blocks of wood*. The prints, or woodcuts, were made by a team of artists and craftspeople. Figure 5-10 shows a woodcut in the Ukiyo-e style. Notice the artist's use of strong lines and flat areas of color. Both were typical of such works. Equally typical was the balance shown here. What kind of balance has the artist of this print used?



▲ Figure 5-10 Can you find the figure's feet? Can you find the artist's signature?

Torii Kiyotada. *An Actor of the Ichikawa Clan*. Woodcut, hand colored. 28.6 x 15.2 cm (11 1/4 x 6"). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York. Harris Brisbane Dick Fund.



◀ Figure 5-11 What do you think the purpose of these headbands might have been? What is the purpose of headbands today?

Headbands for Noh costumes. Japanese. Edo Period. 1615-1867. Embroidered in silk on satin., 40 x 3.2 cm (15 3/4 x 1 3/4"). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Teigi Ito.

STUDIO EXPERIENCE

The print in Figure 5-10 is of a Kabuki (kuh-boo-kee) actor. Kabuki is a form of popular Japanese theater. Notice the richly decorated costume. Another Japanese stage tradition with even more spectacular costumes is the Nō (noh) drama. Figure 5-11 shows the type of headbands worn by a Nō actor. Notice the highly decorative pattern in the headband. Design a decorative pattern related to an important activity in your life. If, for example, you are in the school band, the pattern might be made up of musical notes. If you are in the math club, the pattern could be made up of mathematical symbols. Using school acrylic paint, transfer the pattern to a headband made of paper or cloth.

✓ CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. What important event in the history of Japanese art happened in A.D. 552?
2. What is a pagoda?
3. When did the golden age of Japanese art begin? What painting style came into being during that period?
4. What is Ukiyo-e? What technique was most commonly used for Ukiyo-e art works?

BUILDING VOCABULARY

Number a sheet of paper from 1 to 9. After each number, write the term from the box that best matches each description below.

glaze	scroll
pagoda	Ukiyo-e
perceive	woodblock
porcelain	printing
screen	Yamato-e

1. A long roll of illustrated parchment or silk.
2. A fine-grained, high-quality form of pottery.
3. A glass-like finish on pottery.
4. Look deeply at a subject.
5. A tower several stories high with roofs curving slightly upward at the edges.
6. An art style which means "pictures in the Japanese manner."
7. An art style which means "pictures of the floating world."
8. Making prints by carving images in blocks of wood.
9. A partition used as a wall to divide a room.

REVIEWING ART FACTS

Number a sheet of paper from 10 to 15. Answer each question in a complete sentence.

10. With what dynasty is the "modern" period of Chinese civilization sometimes connected?
11. What was the goal of Chinese scroll painting?
12. During which dynasty did work in porcelain reach its highest point?
13. Who sent the Emperor of Japan a gift in 552? What was the gift?
14. What date is associated with the earliest Jomon examples of Japanese art?

15. What culture strongly influenced the design of the first Buddhist temples in Japan? Where did the architects who designed these temples come from?

THINKING ABOUT ART

On a sheet of paper, answer each question in a sentence or two.

1. **Interpret.** Review the three aesthetic views that you studied in Chapter 3 (see page 37). Tell how art critics of the three different views would each react to the painting that opened the chapter (see page 66).
2. **Analyze.** It has been said that no artist works in a vacuum. Name three events or happenings you read about in this chapter that support this statement. Explain your choices.
3. **Analyze.** Look at the scroll painting in Figure 5-3. Review the four stages of work in the art historian's job (see page 41). Then describe the scroll painting.

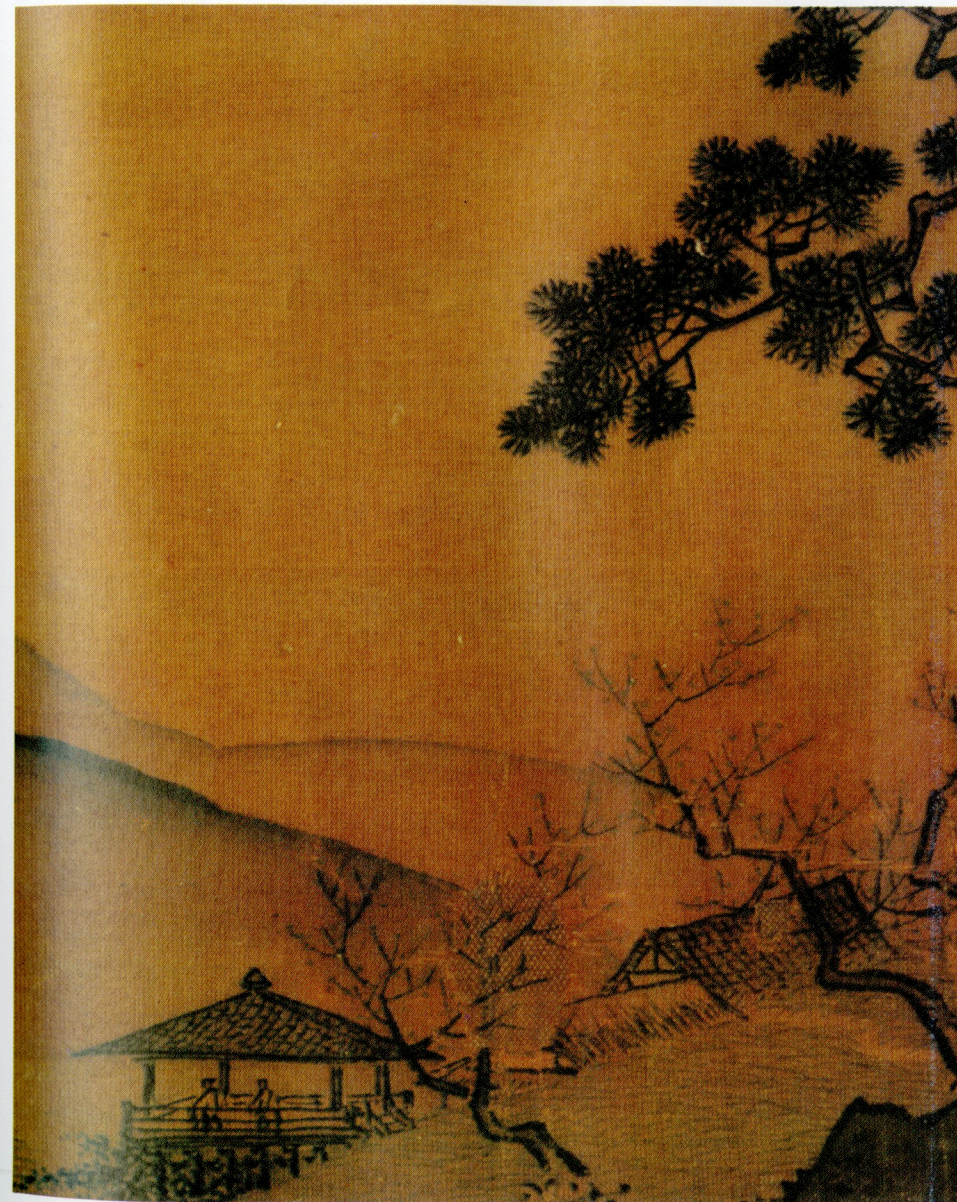
MAKING ART CONNECTIONS

1. **Language Arts.** A type of Japanese poetry called haiku is influenced by meditation on subjects in nature. Look in the library for some examples of haiku. Find out the style and form of a haiku poem. Try to create some haiku of your own.
2. **Social Studies.** Look in the encyclopedia or history books to learn about the Great Wall of China. Find out when it was constructed and why. Prepare a short oral report for your class. Explain some of the features of the Great Wall, such as how and where it was constructed.

LOOKING AT THE DETAILS

The detail shown below is from the Chinese painting *Evening In Spring Hills*. Study the detail and answer the following questions using complete sentences.

1. Do you think that the time period in which the artist lived influenced the subject matter of this work? Explain your answer.
2. How do you think Buddhism influenced this artist's choice of color?



3. In what way does negative space reveal something about the beliefs of this artist and his/her culture?
4. Look at the entire work on page 66. Notice how the proportion of the negative space compared to the objects in the painting provides balance. What type of balance is this called?

Unknown. Fan Mounted as an Album Leaf. *Evening in Spring Hills*. Southern Sung Dynasty. 1127-1278. Ink and color on silk. (Detail.) 24.8 x 26.1 cm (9 3/4 x 10 1/4"). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York. Gift of John M. Crawford, Jr., in honor of Alfreda Murck.