

BELZ MUSEUM

of Asian & Judaic Art

AT PEABODY PLACE

Chinese Society & Art Secondary Tour (Suggested Grade Level 6-8)

Tour length: 30-45 minutes

Goals:

1. Provide students with a greater understanding of Chinese art and culture.
2. Illustrate how art is influenced by society and predominant belief systems.

Objectives:

1. Art reflects the philosophies of the society in which it was created. During the Qing dynasty, art reflected the views of Daoists, Buddhists and Confucians.

Vocabulary:

The following is a list of vocabulary terms that are frequently used during museum tours. It may be helpful to introduce them to your students before their visit and to reinforce the terms they have learned after the tour.

The **Qing Dynasty** (pronounced Ching) began in 1644 when the Manchu minority took China and ruled the Han majority. Ending in 1911, the Qing dynasty was it was the last imperial dynasty of China. A great deal of art in the museum was made during this time.

Buddhism is a religion that originated in India based on the Four Noble Truths and spread through China along the Silk Road. Buddhism represents the search for Enlightenment.

Daoism comes from the teachings of the fundamental *Dao De Jing* classic text written by Laozi. Daoist principles focus on nature, harmony, and moderation.

Confucianism was established by the teachings of Confucius and concerns social responsibility. Confucianism is more community-oriented than Buddhism or Daoism. A dominant principle in Confucianism is that self-fulfillment can be found through helping others.

**These two organized belief systems are best viewed as complementary rather than competitive. While Confucianism concerns itself with the social and moral side of life, Daoism focuses on the individual, spiritual life.*

Ancestral Veneration seeks to honor the deeds and memories of the deceased. In China, this is a fusion of the teachings of Confucius and Laozi rather than a religious ritual.

The Manchus come from an area known as Manchuria, found in the northeast of modern China. They are a separate ethnicity from the majority Han Chinese, with their own dress, culture, and writing system. The Manchus took over Beijing in 1644 and began the Qing Dynasty, which lasted until 1911.

The Mongols are an ethnic group that comes from the area now known as Mongolia. Famous Mongol rulers such as Ghengis Khan lead conquests all over Asia, Russia and Eastern Europe. Mongols controlled China during the Song Dynasty.

The Eight Immortals are a group of Taoist immortals who symbolize longevity and prosperity. Each is represented with a different attribute.

The Eighteen Luohan are a group of famous Buddhist figures who have reached the Buddhist state of nirvana, or enlightenment. Sometimes they are referred to as the eighteen disciples of Buddha.

The Silk Road was a massive trade route extending over 4,000 miles spanning from southern Europe all the way to China. The Silk Road was important not only in the trading of goods, but also in cultural exchange between European, Indian, African, and Middle Eastern cultures.

The Monkey King was a character created by a Buddhist monk named Xuan Zang (602-664). Monkey King traveled west to India to attain the Sutras, or Buddhist holy book. His adventures became the subject of many stories that were later rewritten into the Chinese classic *Journey to the West*.

Jade is a popular material in Chinese art. Jade measures 7 out of 10 on the Mohs scale of hardness. It must be carved with materials which rank 7 or higher. Diamond-tipped tools are often used for the abrading process. It comes in two forms: jadeite and nephrite.

Guan Yu was a war general during the Three Kingdoms period of China. His character became fictionalized in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (some even call him a god), and he usually represented with his guandao weapon named Green Dragon Crescent Blade, a red face, and a long beard.

Guan Yin is the Buddhist goddess of mercy and compassion. She is a major subject of Chinese art, often represented by a moon.

Scholars were male Chinese officials who had passed the civil service exam and proved themselves to be knowledgeable in the Chinese literary classics and practiced the high arts. Scholars held great respect and power in traditional China and were an educated and elite group.

High Art Forms

Calligraphy is considered the highest art form in Chinese culture. Chinese calligraphy uses brushes and black ink to write Chinese characters in an artistic manner, similar to the idea of cursive-writing in English. There have been over 30,000 documented calligraphy characters.

Painting was traditionally done by scholars with black or colored inks. Popular scenes included landscapes, nature scenes, traditional folk tales, and royal life.

Poetry is one of the most respected art forms in Chinese culture and was a necessary study for taking the civil service exam. Often, calligraphy, painting and poetry were combined in a single work of art.

Classroom Discussion:

Why is the material an object is made of an indicator of its value to the society for which it is made?

The material an object is made of may be difficult to extract, requiring time, energy, and skill to obtain. The amount of labor involved in obtaining the material usually affects the value of an object.

If an object is made of a scarce material, that material is often in limited supply and the object made from the material is therefore rare.

If an object is made of a material that is difficult to work and therefore requires a skilled artist to execute the work, the object is usually considered valuable.

Jade was a very important and highly valued material to the Chinese. Confucius compared the qualities of jade to that of a gentleman. Read the following quote aloud to the class and discuss the different characteristics of jade.

The wise have likened jade to virtue. For them, its polish and brilliancy represent the whole of purity; its perfect compactness and extreme hardness represent the sureness of intelligence; its angles, which do not cut, although they seem sharp, represent justice; the pure and prolonged sound, which it gives forth when one strikes it, represents music. Its color represents loyalty; its interior flaws, always showing themselves through the transparency, call to mind sincerity; its iridescent brightness represents heaven; its admirable substance, born of mountain and of water, represents the earth. Used alone without ornamentation it represents chastity. The price that the entire world attaches to it represents the truth. To support these comparisons, the Book of Verse says: "When I think of a wise man, his merits appear to be like jade."

In China, the ideal artist was an amateur, not a professional. The scholar/official was a painter and calligrapher. The people who created the magnificent Chinese ceramics, jades and bronzes were artisans. Discuss the differences in these two groups.

Generally, painting, especially landscape painting, was considered the highest form of art because of its connection to writing. Writing was done by educated people. Artisans were respected, but were generally regarded as people who made things with their hands.