

# “Asian Art in the Undergraduate Curriculum”

## An ASIANetwork project funded by the Henry Luce Foundation

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In 2004, ASIANetwork submitted a successful grant proposal to the Luce Foundation, seeking funds to develop an Asian art project specifically designed to highlight the collections at various liberal arts institutions around the country and utilize these collections to assist in teaching about Asia. Below we are sharing the abridged **Introduction** and **Goals** sections from the proposal in the hope that readers may find the material useful for understanding both the thinking behind the project and the subsequent developments with the project that have been taking place since ASIANetwork received the grant.

**Introduction:** The art of any civilization has much to teach about the culture that produces it. Rather than existing at the peripheries of such a culture, it can instead function as a visual gateway to understanding the culture, reflecting developments in history, social and political structures, literature, philosophy, and religion, and making such developments concrete for students of that culture.

Asian art historians are keenly aware of the ways in which the Asian art they present relate to its surrounding culture, and Asian art history courses regularly reflect this awareness. The existence of such linkages may be less fully realized, however, by those in other disciplines of Asian Studies. This proposal seeks to tap the Asian art and material resources that exist on ASIANetwork campuses by utilizing art historians or museum professionals as consultants who will identify Asian art resources in liberal arts college archives and museums. Once these resources have been located, a book that analyzes this art and shows teachers effective ways to integrate the art into classroom instruction will be written. This book will be modeled on the ASIANetwork publication *Asia in the Undergraduate Curriculum* (M. E. Sharpe Publishing, 2000). A DVD with digitized

images from these collections will accompany the book.

**Goals of the Project:** The project will function in several related ways.

One major goal of the proposed consultancies will be to offer the assistance of experts trained in Asian art to ASIANetwork colleges and universities where no such expertise exists. For those institutions, the consultancies will help bring to light previously underutilized or unknown Asian art and items of visual culture. In addition, having a consultant survey these collections and uncover their Asian origins will lead the participating ASIANetwork institutions to a deeper understanding and appreciation of their own historical connections with Asia. The project will help instructors of Asian courses integrate the Asian art at their institutions into their curriculum.

A second goal will be to share the results of the project locally, regionally, and nationally. Beyond the benefits for audiences at their home institutions, neighboring institutions will have access to additional works of Asian art. This possibility is especially important for colleges and universities outside of large metropolitan areas that have major museums housing Asian art collections.

Third, the project will bring these works to the attention of a wider national audience through the planned book *Asian Art in the Undergraduate Curriculum*, which will present Asian art and objects of visual culture for use in classes across the liberal arts curriculum.

The project will focus attention on significant but less widely known works of Asian art and visual culture in the collections of liberal arts colleges. Integral to the proposal is the consultancy program that will bring to selected campuses scholars who can assist in documenting, analyzing, and contextualizing the Asian art and objects in these colleges. Colleges

with on-campus experts in Asian art history that do not need a consultancy may apply for a subgrant to support their research and documentation. The subgrant will also facilitate the process of digitizing and submitting images for the DVD.

### *Where We Are Now*

In pursuit of the above principles and goals, the Steering Committee for the project (Drs. Joan O'Mara and Paul Nietupski as editors, Karil Kucera for technology implementation, Mary-Ann Milford as Board liaison, and Stan Mickel as Project Administrator) created three annual rounds of competition in which ASIANetwork member institutions could apply for one of the eight on-campus consultancies available each round. The Steering Committee assigns an art expert to the successful campus to examine the institution's Asian art and items of visual culture. The primary goal for each consultant is to nominate 30 or more pieces of art and items of visual culture that might be included in the end-product book and/or DVD. A side benefit of the consultancy is that some ignored or forgotten but worthy pieces have been re-discovered. Another side benefit is that many of the consultants also give talks on Asian art while on campus, a distinct plus for schools that do not have art experts on staff.

The first round of competition was carried out in 2005-2006. Institutions that received a consultancy were: Beloit College, Connecticut College, DePauw University, Dickinson College, Earlham College, Eckerd College, Guilford College and Wittenberg University. The second round is being carried out in 2006-2007. Schools that have received a second round consultancy are: College of Wooster, Fairfield University, Luther College, Marietta College, Ohio Wesleyan University, St. Lawrence University, Union College, and Washington and Lee

University. The third and final round is being created for 2007-2008 – the application deadline is January 8, 2007. The next major step will be to begin the writing process in summer, 2008. The final step is to have the book and DVD printed and available in the spring of 2009.

Below are five photographs that give samples of the kinds of art and items of visual culture that might be included in the book and/or DVD. Photos # 1 and #5 were nominated primarily for their aesthetic quality but also have pedagogic value. Photos #2 and #3 are items of visual culture chosen for what we can learn about the culture they come from combined with an aesthetic value that enhances the everyday item. Writing about items in the book has not started, so please understand that information given here about these submissions will be greatly improved upon as we move towards completion in 2009. ●

Figure 1: *Silk embroidery depicting Ouyang Hai pushing an artillery-laden horse off the track before an on-coming train.*(Wittenberg University collection)



Silk embroidery is today supported by the Chinese government. As in the past, it is not unusual for an existing painting to be copied in embroidery. In this instance, the painting represents one of the mythical heroes of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), Ouyang Hai. He reputedly shoved a frightened horse laden with artillery off the tracks in front of an on-coming train. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), PLA heroes, actual or fictitious, became part of the government propaganda machine and were to serve as role models for the people. To advertise their heroic deeds, they were commemorated in all artistic media: paintings, prints, sculptures. This particular depiction of Ouyang Hai was originally created as a painting in 1964 by Yang Shengrong. Comments written by Dr. Ellen Laing

Figure 2 *Chinese imperial bronze bell dated AD 1711.* (Wittenberg University collection)

This bell is dated by the inscription on a cartouche as having been made in the 50<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of the Kangxi Emperor, i.e., 1711. The bell was evidently meant to be part of a larger set of bells; thus it represents a continuation of the ancient practice of producing sets of bells that were



suspended from a rack. Each bell was specifically manufactured to produce a particular note in the Chinese musical scale. The inscription on the opposite side of the bell has three characters indicating (as I understand it, but this should be checked with a knowledgeable musicologist) which musical note the bell produces when struck. In addition, this bell is an excellent example of superior quality, imperial-level bronze casting. Comments written by Dr. Ellen Laing



Figure 5: *Two pairs of shoes for bound feet (one pair light green, the other bright red).* (Wittenberg University collection)

These two pairs of embroidered shoes for bound feet of Chinese women would appear to come from South China. Comments written by Dr. Ellen Laing

Figure 3: *Colored landscape by Guo Shiqiang (Qing Dynasty);* (Eckerd College collection) ca. 1828 or 1888 (the year of *dinghai* in the Chinese calendar); a vertical Chinese scroll painting; ink and light polychrome on paper;... landscape with pavilions on stilts in river with rocks and trees. Guo was a native of Hubei province near the Yangtze three Gorges. This painting reflects Guo’s known style and subject matter; it is a good example. Comments written by Dr. Diana Chou



Figure 4: *Street scene in moonlight by Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1797-1861)* (Eckerd College collection) [not confirmed authentic due to



framing]; horizontal Japanese Ukiyo-e print, two panels from probable triptych. Subject is a samurai being restrained by retainer with an antagonist (?) and geisha (?) displaying a long scroll (bill?); various seals of Kuniyoshi, including “Ichiyosai” (a style name of Kuniyoshi). This artist is known for his depictions of heroic episodes in Japanese history. In his later work he tended to have a taste for the bizarre and the ghoulish, including remarkable, posed skeletons. His work is influenced by European models, and in this work, the background has some degree of vanishing-point perspective. The works of Kuniyoshi are housed in many museums around the world, including the Metropolitan Museum of New York, The British Museum, and museums in Boston, Honolulu, and San Francisco, to name a few. Comments written by Dr. Diana Chou