A Teacher’s Sourcebook for Japanese Art & Culture

Featuring the Japanese Art Collection of the Peabody Essex Museum
Salem, MA
Why Learn About Japanese Art and Culture? 1

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Works of art on front cover
Clockwise from left:

View of Mount Fuji
Meiji era (1868–1912); late 19th century
Hand-colored albumen photograph
Collection of Peabody Essex Museum

Amida, Buddha of the Western Paradise, or the Pure Land
Kamakura period (1185–1336); 12th century
Wood, gold leaf, and crystal
Gift of William Sturgis Bigelow
E18195

Gakubiwa (lute for gagaku performance)
Edo period (1615–1867); 17th–18th century
Various hardwood, leather, silk, ivory, and brass
Museum Purchase.
E1874
What comes to your mind when you hear the word “Japan”? Images of sword-wielding samurai and kimono-clad women? Scrumptious sushi with a hint of spicy wasabi? Or perhaps anime-cartoon characters with giant sparkly eyes? What about the contemplative tea ceremony? Or Sony gadgets and Toyotas? An economic powerhouse that rivals the United States? Japan is indeed all of the above and a lot more! Ask your students what associations they may have with Japan.

Four major islands, Honshu, Kyushu, Shikoku, and Hokkaido, plus the Ryukyu Islands and about 7,000 additional islands, make up Japan. As of 2001, the population of the country was about 127.3 million, making it the ninth most populous nation in the world. It is, however, barely the size of California and thus one of the most densely populated countries. Most of the people live in metropolitan centers such as Tokyo, Yokohama, Nagoya, Osaka, Fukuoka, and Sapporo.

Mountains and forests cover 70 percent of Japan’s geography. The tallest mountain, Fuji (12,385 feet), has a distinct conical shape and is considered an auspicious symbol of Japan. Thousands of Japanese climb the mountain each year during the months of July and August when it is open for travelers. It is a pilgrimage that many hope to make once in their lifetimes, as a spirit or kami resides there, according to native Shinto beliefs. This sourcebook will provide information about both the indigenous religion of Shinto and the imported religion of Buddhism and how they are integral to the cycles of daily life in Japan.

The four seasons are distinctly felt in most areas of Japan. Nature and seasonality affect the culture in profound ways, and this is reflected in the nation’s religion, art, and cuisine. Imagery associated with the seasons is common in Japanese art, and poetic descriptions of natural elements are often found in haiku. Among the lesson plans in the section following the sourcebooks are two lessons on haiku that will emphasize being in tune with nature and one’s surroundings.

The Peabody Essex Museum’s collection of Japanese art and culture is the earliest and among the largest in the United States. The first objects were brought back from Japan by Salem sea captains who traveled to the nation for trade purposes about 200 years ago. In addition, Edward Sylvester Morse (1838–1925), one of the first directors of the museum, was influential in the growth of the collection and generating interest in Japanese art. Key objects from Peabody Essex Museum’s collection of more than 20,000 works have been carefully chosen for this sourcebook to assist educators in teaching about Japan.
ca. 10,500 – ca. 300 BCE  Jomon period
ca. 300 BCE – ca. 300 CE  Yayoi period
ca. 300 – 552  Kofun period
552 – 645  Asuka period
645 – 710  Hakuho period
710 – 794  Nara period
794 – 1185  Heian period
1185 – 1333  Kamakura period
1333 – 1573  Muromachi or Ashikaga period
1336 – 1392  Nambokucho period
1573 – 1615  Momoyama period
1615 – 1867  Edo or Tokugawa period
1868 – 1912  Meiji era
1912 – 1926  Taisho era
1926 – 1989  Showa era
1989 – present  Heisei era

Timeline of Japanese History

![Map of Japan, Korea, and China]
Shinto and Buddhism have been practiced in Japan alongside each other for many centuries. Shinto is indigenous to Japan and is related to Izanami and Izanagi, who are considered the creators of the Japanese isles. Buddhism came to Japan from India via China and Korea in the 6th century.

Due to the intrinsic characteristics of Shinto and Buddhism, each came to serve distinct functions within Japanese culture. For example, since the idea of purity and cleansing is paramount in Shinto belief, a plot of land will be blessed by a Shinto priest prior to construction or a new car will be blessed at a Shinto shrine. Since Buddhist doctrine emphasizes reincarnation and the afterlife, funerals in Japan almost always follow Buddhist rituals.

**SHINTO**

*The Creation Story of Japan*

In the beginning, there was chaos. Soon the sky and heaven separated, and the first gods and goddesses were born. Brother and sister gods Izanami and Izanagi were instructed to create an island nation by stirring the oceans with a jeweled spear. The isles of Japan were created from the brine that dripped from the spear.

After this Izanagi and Izanami consulted together saying, "We have now produced the Great-eight-island country, with the mountains, rivers, herbs, and trees. Why should we not produce someone who shall be lord of the universe? They then together produced the Sun Goddess . . . called Amaterasu.


Amaterasu, the sun goddess, was deemed the supreme deity and ruler of the universe. It is said that "The resplendent luster of this child shone throughout all the six quarters [north, south, east, west, above, and below]." The moon god, Tsukiyomi, was created to rule the night, and the storm god, Susano-o, ruled the seas (Aston, p.18).

Amaterasu and Tsukiyomi ascended to the sky, but the ill-tempered Susano-o wreaked havoc on the land. He destroyed Amaterasu’s rice fields and covered her residence with excrement. Amaterasu, enraged, retreated to a cave, which resulted in total darkness both in the heavens and on earth. The other gods and goddesses tried to entice her out of the cave by using a sacred mirror, holding festivities, and performing sacred music and dances. Finally, Amaterasu emerged, and light, harmony, and order were restored.
Ninigi, Amaterasu’s grandson, was sent from the heavens to rule the earth. He brought with him three sacred objects: a bronze mirror (symbol of Amaterasu and of purity), a sword (symbol of courage), and a necklace of curved beads (to ward off evil spirits). Japan’s first emperor, Jimmu (ca. 600 BCE), is believed to be Ninigi’s grandson, thus establishing the members of the Japanese imperial family as direct descendants of the sun goddess. The three sacred objects became symbols of imperial rule; the sacred mirror is housed at the family shrine of the imperial lineage, Ise Shrine.

**SHINTO Key Ideas**

- Shinto is indigenous to Japan. Some of its shamanistic aspects are related to those practiced in Korea.
- The term “shinto” literally translates to “the way of the gods.”
- It is believed that kami (deities or spirits) can reside within natural landscapes, such as a waterfall, cave, rock, or tree. Shinto is a reflection of the respect for nature in everyday life.
- The goddess Amaterasu is the principal deity of the Shinto pantheon. The first emperor of Japan, Jimmu, is believed to be a descendant of Amaterasu’s grandson, Ninigi. Members of the imperial family of Japan are therefore considered to be direct descendants of Amaterasu. Following Japan’s defeat in World War II during the U.S. Occupation, Emperor Hirohito renounced this heavenly lineage, proclaiming that he and members of the imperial family were “ordinary humans.”
- Shinto rites are often conducted for the purification or blessing of a person, place, or thing.
- Annual rituals and festivals, usually associated with the agricultural cycle, are held at Shinto shrines.
- The Buddha is considered a kami according to Shinto belief. Conversely, the various kami are believed to be manifestations of the different Buddhas and bodhisattvas.
- Shinto was originally focused on nature worship and headed by Amaterasu, the sun goddess. Shinto scriptures did not exist until after Buddhism reached Japan in the 6th century, when Buddhist teachings of sutras contained texts and images.
- Shinto shrines are sometimes located within Buddhist temple grounds. For example, a kami can reside in a particular waterfall within the grounds of a Buddhist temple, and a Shinto shrine may be erected for this kami in front of the waterfall.
- Traditionally, weddings were conducted at Shinto shrines. Many couples today prefer to marry in chapels in Western dress.
Upon entering the sacred grounds of a Shinto shrine, one should cleanse the mouth and hands.

Shinto wedding
A couple in a Shinto wedding. Integral to the ceremony is the san san kudo (three three nine) ritual, which symbolizes the marital union. Three sakazuki, or flat sake cups, are filled and stacked. The groom takes three sips from each cup. The ritual is repeated by the bride, his parents, and her parents.

Western wedding
Still shot from *A Changing Heart* by Emmy award-winning independent filmmaker Leigh Devine. In the documentary, Devine examines how attitudes toward marriage have changed in Japan since the 1950s, when most marriages were arranged by parents and matchmakers.

Torii gates separate the mundane world from sacred grounds. Vermillion is believed to be a color that wards away evil.
Mirrors play an important role in Shinto, often representing the physical embodiments of deities. The mirror symbolizing Amaterasu is enshrined at Ise, one of the most important Shinto shrines in Japan. These mirrors are smooth and reflective on one side and ornamented on the other. A circular mirror, as well as a sword and a curved-jewel necklace, were considered sacred regalia and symbols of imperial rule.

Mikoshi, or portable shrines, are used to symbolically parade deities through neighborhood streets during festivals. Often occurring in the summer months, these festivals usually involve the carrying of portable shrines by mostly male members of a locale. Shrines may be plain or elaborately decorated with colorful textiles and other ornamentation. The hanging of white zig-zagged sheets of paper on the shrine designate the space within as sacred and symbolizes the presence of a deity.

Festivals, or matsuri, are held at shrines throughout Japan in honor of gods and goddesses and as prayers for protection, a good harvest or to commemorate historic events. These festivals are integral to the annual calendar and play a prominent role in bringing members of a community together.
Specialists of the Haneda section of Ota City, Tokyo, instructed Japanese students in constructing this portable shrine. It was presented to the Peabody Essex Museum in 1996 to commemorate the twelfth anniversary of the friendship between the Ota Folk Art Museum and PEM. Ota City and Salem have been sister cities since 1991.

This portable shrine, or mikoshi, was presented to the Peabody Essex Museum in 1996 and was carried from the Salem Common to the museum. This photograph captures the unique way that men carry the portable shrine in the coastal town of Haneda: It is not held horizontally flat; the men take turns bending at the knees to emulate the undulating waves of the sea.

Mikoshi (portable shrine)
Showa era (1926–1989); 1977–1978
Painted and lacquered wood, brass and silver-copper alloy, straw, and paper
Haneda Mikoshi Preservation Society
E300158

Photograph courtesy of Keiko Thayer
GOING TO OMATSURI

Izumi Tanaka, Yokohama, Japan

Omatsuri (festival) in my neighborhood is held at the local Shinto shrine, Hie Jinja where I actually attended preschool. The road leading to the shrine, probably a mile or so in length, would be closed off in the evenings for three days during the omatsuri, where stalls of all kinds of vendors would line up. Everybody in the neighborhood came out for omatsuri. Although I would surely climb the steps to the shrine to give my little osaisen and pray for blessings, what I mostly remember or associate with my memories of omatsuri was the vendors.

Scooping goldfish, kingyo suki, was my favorite of all. You buy a little paper-lined scooper for ¥10 or so and scoop as many goldfish out of a tub of water as you can before the scooper gets saturated and tears. That was always thrilling.

Then there were all those food items! Takoyaki (octopus balls), okonomiyaki (Japanese-style pancakes with veggies and meat), and yakisoba (fried noodles) are all associated with omatsuri for me. And there was always cotton candy or mint suckers shaped like all kinds of popular characters for dessert.

I would dress up in my yukata (cotton summer kimono) to meet my friends to cruise up and down the street sampling all these goodies. As the omatsuri in my neighborhood took place in early August while we were out of school, it was fun to run into some friends from school I hadn’t seen all summer.

These are my memories of omatsuri from Japan.
The origins of shimenawa go back to when the sun goddess, Amaterasu, created chaos by retreating into a cave in response to storm god Susano-o’s poor behavior. It is said that when she was finally enticed to emerge from the cave, a straw rope was placed across the entrance to the cave to prevent her return. Shimenawa demarcate sacred areas, which can be as large as a whole shrine complex, as small as a household shrine, or a component or area within nature such as a rock or a waterfall.

Shimenawa sizes vary depending on their purpose and placement. At the new year, they are placed at entryways to homes following the cleaning of the house, metaphoric of sweeping away all the evils and negativity of the past year. The size of the shimenawa shown here indicates that it probably hung at the entryway to a house or was placed on a household shrine as part of New Year decorations. This shimenawa has a stack of miniature bales of rice, symbolizing prayers for a good harvest in the coming year.
Small votive plaques called *ema* (horse pictures) were originally created as substitutes for actual horses and presented as offerings at Shinto shrines. In the beginning, the plaques were images of horses, but over time, the tablets pictured a variety of human desires and aspirations. *Ema* are painted on wood, and the simple structure emulates the slightly peaked roof and supporting pillars of Shinto shrine architecture.

Today, one can purchase an *ema* and decorate it with drawings and writings expressing wishes for good health, marriage, children, success in business, passing entrance examinations, wealth, and so on. The *ema* is then left hanging at a designated spot at the shrine. A dragon is painted on this *ema* because it was made in 1988, which was a year of the dragon according to the Chinese calendar.

*Ema* (votive plaque)
Showa era (1926–1989); 1988
Polychrome on wood
Gift of Beth and John Grimes
E77238

People visit a Shinto shrine and write their wishes on *ema*, especially at the beginning of a new year.
The kamidana is a simple unpainted structure that echoes Shinto shrine architecture. Although originally built as temporary structures for festivals, today they have become permanent fixtures in many households. Kamidana enshrine talismans that represent local protective deities or those purchased on pilgrimages to famous shrines. The fishing rod and fish help identify the figure on one of the talismans of this kamidana as Ebisu, the god of fishermen and one of the “Seven Lucky Gods and Goddesses.” The other talismans are for Amaterasu, the sun goddess, and for a specific shrine.

This kamidana is adorned with other common features, such as sakaki tree branches in plain white vases and white offering dishes. Daily offerings of rice, fruit, fish, and wine are made at the kamidana. When making such offerings, one would clap twice, bow, and silently speak to the deity, just as when visiting a Shinto shrine. The initial clapping of hands is believed to get the attention of the deity.

Many Japanese homes will have both a kamidana to honor the local protective god and a Buddhist altar for ancestral worship. They are often located in two separate parts of the house: The kamidana can be in the kitchen to express prayers for a good harvest and an abundance of rice; a Buddhist altar honoring ancestors can be placed at the side of a room where family members spend time together.
Memories of New Year’s Day
Masaru Shima, Tokyo, Japan

My memories of New Year’s Day from childhood have always been warm, cheery ones to share with a large group of people. As a child, I was sent to my mother’s home each year, where extended families gathered for the festivity, filled ourselves with specially prepared foods, all fresh and local, and stayed awake throughout New Year’s Eve. We discussed resolutions for the coming year and updated each other on the past year’s occurrences.

Just past midnight, when we heard the shire’s bell toll, or joya no kane, we would all sit up to bow to each other and say, “Akemashite omedeto gozaimasu” (happy New Year). Then we’d prepare to go out with heavy coats and flashlights (or torches) and visit the local shrine together. On the way, we would meet familiar faces from the neighborhood, talk loudly and merrily in the dark streets, wish each other a happy New Year, and hear mingles of voices repeating the same words from different directions in the dark.

The small shrine, which was normally quiet, became flooded with people during these hours, and the narrow stone steps in the woods seemed to last forever in the cold winter day. Everyone greeted each other even on the steps—no wonder it seemed forever to get through the path. At the shrine, while queuing to get to the main altar, my aunt would always remind me to think of what I wanted to say to the kamisama (god) and give me a few osaisen (offering coins) to leave as offerings for the deity. Being a small child, I was excited to be awake so late at night, to see so many people outside, and also to be able to receive an omiki (libation) before the exit of the shrine. This was a special treat that was offered indiscriminately to everyone who came to hatsumode (first visit to shrine), from young to old and it made me feel like a grown-up to be part of the community.

After coming home, the adults would return to their sake cups and continue the festive night with more food and drink. I used to always try to stay up with them despite my drowsiness to see the hatsu-hinode (the first dawn of the year) to send another prayer to the deities and my ancestors.

It was one time of the year when I felt close with distant family members and locals who had known my mother as a child, like paying homage to my mother’s childhood and connecting to my own roots.
Shinto’s Presence in Sumo
Gerald Marsella, Beverly, Massachusetts
(Resided in Tokyo, Japan, from 1985 to 1993)

I was an avid sumo fan when I lived in Japan in the 1990s. Not only did I know who all the wrestlers were, their ranks, styles, and other things, but the myriad points of tradition sumo carries—things intrinsically Japanese about it—fascinated me. Some of those [traditions] have Shinto philosophy at their roots.

One example is the purification of wrestlers and the ring in which matches take place. There is a whole series of actions that both wrestlers go through before they fight, and Shinto is behind several of them. Upon arriving at the ring for a match, the wrestlers take a mouthful of water, rinse it around in their mouths, and spit it into a bucket. This is to purify their bodies. They then take salt (with right hand only) and throw it into the ring, to purify the space where they will battle. They will do this several times before actually wrestling, because following each throw, they square off in the ring to size each other up and try to gain the psychological upper hand.

This prelude to the match tends to be intensely boring to many Westerners but entertaining and engaging to many Japanese. While much about the way a wrestler behaves before the competition begins is codified, throwing the salt is one small place where personality and mental approach to the match come out. Some men take just as much salt as they can hold in the grouped tips of their fingers and spray it quickly and smartly over the ring in a sort of side-handed flick with a look of concentration on their faces. Others toss a light handful onto the ring with a noncommittal expression.

There are those, though, who make their use of salt a trademark of their professional persona. I remember one wrestler, Mitoizumi, who was well over 6 feet tall and close to 300 pounds, a big guy. At each of the several salt intervals, he would grab the largest handful he could manage and pitch it into the air over the ring with a fierce, intent look on his face. This never failed to get great cheers from the spectators, regardless of the fact that they knew he’d do it every time.
Another aspect of Shinto presence in sumo is the rope tied around the waist of wrestlers occupying the sport’s highest rank, the yokozuna. It is a highly exalted slot to hold, not only in sumo but also in Japanese society. If a man is elevated to yokozuna, it is because he has proven he’s not only the best there is in terms of winning matches but much more. He has plumbed the depths of his physical and mental strength, enduring a long and arduous path to consistent, dependable excellence. He has competed against himself under the toughest possible circumstances and has won. And somewhere in that process, he has perfected wrestling techniques and also developed the mind-set to be merciless in the ring yet a good sportsman. He knows himself, and his calling, to a depth few ever do. In short, he has become the embodiment of the spirit of sumo.

The rope worn by a yokozuna signifies his rare and precious accomplishment, the spark he carries. It is an all-white modification of the shimenawa one sees at Shinto shrines, made specifically for the man who will wear it by his underlings. The men make the rope in the yokozuna’s presence, wearing white gloves. The intended owner is the only one who ever actually touches the rope. He wears it for his ring-entering ceremony on each day of a tournament, when it is put on him and tied tightly by the men who made it. The paper strips that hang from it are inserted and removed each time he wears it. Each January, the shimenawa is burned, and a new one is made.

Whenever a wrestler is promoted to yokozuna, one of his first public activities is a ring-entering ceremony performed at Meiji Shrine in Tokyo. The spirit enshrined here, that of the emperor who reigned from 1868–1912, has also been designated the patron kami of sport. The new yokozuna pays his obeisance before his first match. The event typically takes place in early to mid-afternoon and only lasts a few moments. Still, the grounds of the shrine fill from morning onward with people who want to see the yokozuna, and news crews tape the event.

During the time I lived in Japan, there were four new yokozuna, and I went to Meiji Shrine to see each of them. As I learned how crowded it gets, I’d go earlier in the day until I reached the point of taking the entire day off work and standing there from 8 or 9 am just to make sure I had a good vantage point. The yokozuna would come with an entourage comprised of the head of the Japan Sumo Association, his own coach, and all of the other stable heads. (Wrestlers live and train together in a dormitory-like setting called a “stable” in English; each stable is run by a former wrestler, who is the last word there in coaching.) They arrive in formal black and gray traditional attire and attend a ceremony in the main building for the blessing of the rope.
While this is going on, those of us outside, crowded into areas stanchioned off by the police, can hardly see anything. When the ceremony finishes and they all file out, the wrestler and his attendants (a *yokozuna* has at least eight low-ranking wrestlers to attend him) enter a side building to change. Eventually, the new *yokozuna* comes out in his ceremonial wrestling apron and the modified *shimenawa*, flanked by two lower-ranked wrestlers wearing similar aprons, as ceremonial attendants. When the man of the hour draws close to the main shrine, the attendants stay back a few paces, and he performs the ring-entering ceremony. Then he turns around, the attendants rejoin him, and they pace out of the main courtyard just as proudly and stately as they had come in two minutes previously.

For all their brevity, though, these events were potent to me as they were chances to see these great wrestlers at close proximity—much closer than the seats I could afford in the arena for the actual matches. At times, I could even smell the oil that holds the wrestler’s hair in the topknot dictated by tradition.
The Buddhist faith originated in India in the sixth century BCE. Over the centuries, Buddhism spread throughout Asia, and today, it is practiced around the world. Buddhism was about 1,000 years old when it was introduced to Japan via China and Korea. According to the Chronicles of Japan, King Song Myong of Korea presented the Japanese Emperor Kimmei with a gilt-bronze sculpture of the Buddha Shakyamuni, several sutras, and other objects. In the following decades, monks, nuns, a sculptor, and a temple architect from Korea brought additional images and scriptures.

In Japan, Buddhism was assimilated with preexisting Shinto beliefs. For example, Shinto deities became seen as manifestations of different Buddhas. Shinto beliefs, including the creation stories of Japan, were recorded in text form for the first time. This was inspired by the fact that Buddhism was a well-organized religion with many sculptures, ritual objects, images for worship, and texts.

Today there are over 80,000 Buddhist temples in Japan and more than 90 million Japanese people who practice some form of Buddhism. Mahayana Buddhism has been especially popular in Japan since the 8th century. There are many branches of Mahayana in Japan, such as Jodoshin, Nichiren, and Zen Buddhism. Different kinds of buddha are worshipped in Mahayana, such as Amida of the Western Paradise and Yakushi, the healing Buddha. The historic Buddha or Siddhartha Gautama is known as Shaka in Japan.

**The Story of Shakyamuni, the Historic Buddha**

Siddhartha Gautama (ca. 563–483 BCE) lived in northwestern India or present-day Nepal. Prior to his birth, his mother, Queen Maya, dreamt that a white elephant with six tusks touched her with a white lotus flower that contained a brilliant jewel at its center. This was considered a sign that a great son would be born to her. A few days later, Queen Maya was walking in a garden when she began to feel the earth move. Siddhartha was miraculously born from her right side as she held onto a flowering tree branch for support.

As a child, Prince Siddhartha enjoyed a life of wealth and comfort. He was not quite content, though, and pondered life. According to tradition, when he was about 29, he came upon an old person, a sick person, a dying person, and a corpse. He was in despair over the suffering he witnessed. Upon meeting a wandering ascetic who described his spiritual quest, Siddhartha decided to leave his family in search of the truth. He wanted to find out what could be done to avoid suffering in the world.
Siddhartha renounced his status, deserted the material pleasures and luxury of palace life, and began life as an ascetic. He cut off his long black hair, removed his royal jewelry, and changed to a simple saffron robe. With a begging bowl in hand, he began his new life as a spiritual seeker.

Under a pipal tree (ficus religiosa) in the town of Bodhgaya, Siddhartha sat in meditation for many long days. The evil king Mara tried to subvert him in many ways: by tempting his thoughts, sending warriors and beautiful maidens to distract him, and affecting his senses. Siddhartha was able to resist all forms of temptation brought on by Mara. After 49 days, he reached enlightenment, or nirvana, at dawn on a day that followed a full moon in the month of May. At that moment, he touched the earth with his right hand, signaling the earth to witness the event. He became known as the Buddha, or the enlightened one.

Siddhartha never meant to deify himself. Rather, his message was that anyone who followed his teachings could reduce his or her own suffering living in the world and stop the cycle of rebirth through meditation.

**The Teachings**
The Buddha gave his first sermon after reaching enlightenment at Deer Park in India:

_There is a middle path, a path which opens the eyes and bestows understanding, which leads to peace of mind, to the higher wisdom, to full enlightenment. What is that middle path? Verily it is this noble eightfold path: that is to say: Right views; Right aspirations; Right speech; Right conduct; Right livelihood; Right effort; Right mindfulness; Right contemplation._

_This is the truth concerning suffering. Birth is attended with pain, decay is painful, disease is painful, death is painful, union with the unpleasant is painful, separation from the pleasant is painful. These six aggregates which spring from attachment are painful._

_This is the truth concerning the origin of suffering. It is that thirst accompanied by starving after a gratification or success in this life, or the craving for a future life._

_This is the truth concerning the destruction of suffering. It is the destruction of this very thirst, the harboring no longer of this thirst._

_And now this knowledge and this insight has arisen within me. Immovable is the emancipation of my heart. This is my last existence. There will now be no rebirth for me._

◆ Mahayana Buddhism was founded in India in the 1st century. Emphasis was placed on personal devotion and merits, and Buddhahood was attainable by all. One did not have to enter into monastic life to obtain freedom. Mahayana Buddhism is practiced mostly in Japan, China, and Korea.

◆ In Mahayana, there are bodhisattvas that can also help us reach enlightenment. Bodhisattvas postpone their own absolute enlightenment to remain on earth to protect and help others achieve salvation or enlightenment.

◆ Theravada Buddhism is practiced today in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos. The teachings of Theravada Buddhism are considered by many to be closest to those of the original Buddha. It emphasizes a monastic form of devotion and a renunciation of the material world.

◆ The Indian patriarch Bodhidharma founded Zen Buddhism, known in Chinese as Chan and Son in Korean. It was introduced in Japan around the 13th century. One can achieve enlightenment in Zen Buddhism through meditation.

◆ The Buddha’s death is called *parinirvana*, or final nirvana. It is the moment when he departed from his physical form and was released from the cycle of birth and rebirth forever. He was 81 at the time.

◆ Buddha summarized life as *The Four Noble Truths*, which state that:
  1. There is no escape from suffering in this world.
  2. Suffering is caused by desires.
  3. One must seek an end to suffering.
  4. One must follow the Eightfold Noble Path in order to end this suffering.

◆ The Eightfold Noble Path includes: right views, right intentions, right speech, right actions, right livelihood, right efforts, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

◆ *Karma*, or the law of cause and effect states that both good and bad actions from previous lives and this life predetermine the next life within cycles of death and rebirth.
Amida, Buddha of the Western Paradise, or the Pure Land

It was predicted that, upon the historical Buddha’s physical death, his teachings would undergo three periods of degeneration, with the final phase in the year 1052. This belief led to the popularity of the Buddha Amida, especially among the nobility during the Heian period (794–1192). According to Amidism, reciting and believing the devotional phrase “namu-Amida-butsu” (adoration to Buddha Amida) gave followers entry to the Pure Land or Western Paradise. Images of Amida were produced in great quantities at this time. The True Sect of the Pure Land (Jodoshin-shu), is the largest Buddhist denomination in Japan today.

Some of the 32 common attributes of the Buddha can be seen in this sculpture of Amida:

- The Buddha has curly hair in the form of snail shells.
- The ushnisha or protruberance on the Buddha’s head symbolizes his vast knowledge and wisdom.
- The urna or tuft of hair on the Buddha’s forehead illuminates the world.
- He has elongated earlobes, a reminder that he was once a prince who wore heavy royal earrings and that he renounced his wealth and status in search of truth. They also imply that he can hear all cries for salvation.
- The downcast eyes show the Buddha in a state of meditation.
- The Buddha wears a simple monk’s robe.
- The Buddha’s hands are always in mudra or symbolic positions. This Amida’s mudra conveys that he is a teacher delivering the dharma.
- He is seated on a lotus, a symbol of the Buddhist faith itself. This beautiful flower grows from muddy, murky waters. The white flower is a metaphor for the purity of the Buddhist faith, and the murky waters represent the impurities of this earthly realm. The lotus is also symbolic of the soul’s purity and the ability of an individual to attain enlightenment despite the negative environment of the world.

Then he thought, “These locks of mine are not suited for a mendicant. There is no one else to cut the hair of a future Buddha, so I will cut it off myself with a sword.” Then, taking his sword in his right hand, and holding the plaited tresses, together with the diadem on them, with his left, he cut them off. So his hair was thus reduced to two inches in length, and curling from the right, it lay close to his head. It remained that length as long as he lived, and the beard the same. There was no need at all to shave either hair or beard any more.”

The Bodhisattva Jizo

Bodhisattvas are beings who have achieved enlightenment but vow to postpone their own *parinirvana* so that they can help those in this world attain salvation. The worship of the bodhisattva Jizo (or Ksitigarbha in Sanskrit), is especially popular in Japan as he is the guardian for travelers and, most importantly, of children. Jizo, known for his compassion, also possesses the special power to rescue beings sent to hell.

Traces of gold leaf can be seen on the surface of this sculpture. Numerous sculptures and paintings from the period were ornamented in elaborate ways, reflecting the patronage of Buddhism by the wealthy and powerful. Jizo’s physical attributes include a shaved head, a decorative monk’s robe, and a staff with three rings. In the left hand, the figure would have been holding a wish-granting jewel in the form of a small ball with a pointed top.

Plain, stone sculptures of Jizo can be found all over Japan, from cemetary and temple grounds to city streets and rustic roads. They are almost always clothed in handmade bibs and baby bonnets, because people pray that Jizo will save deceased children from the torments of hell.

*The Bodhisattva Jizo*
Kamakura period (1185–1336); 1279
Wood, gold leaf, lacquer, bronze, and crystal
Gift of Charles Goddard Weld, E12068
Commonly known as the “death of the Buddha,” this painting illustrates the Buddha’s entrance into Nirvana, or his final release from the cycle of rebirth. It is said that the Buddha passed away at the age of 81 in north central India amidst a grove of sala trees on a cloudy evening with a full moon.

The Buddha is depicted lying on his right side facing north. His begging bowl can be seen on the left, hanging off one of the sala trees. His mother, Queen Maya, and her attendants have arrived from the heavens on a cloud.

The Buddha is surrounded by a variety of beings ranging from bodhisattva to guardian kings and sages. Even demons and animals have gathered for this occasion. Enlightened beings such as bodhisattva are supposed to comprehend that this is not a sad occasion but a transition. In the painting, however, even the bodhisattvas cannot hide their feelings of grief and loss.

Parinirvana paintings of this type have been especially popular in Japan since the 14th century. It is one of the three moments of the Buddha’s life which are celebrated—his birth, enlightenment, and the final passage or Parinirvana. Today in Japan, the Parinirvana of the Buddha is mostly celebrated in Zen Buddhist temples. A painting of this type would be used for such celebrations, which are held on the anniversary of the Buddha’s death on the 15th day of the second or third month of the lunar year.

When the Blessed One died, of those of the brethren who were not yet free from the passions, some stretched out their arms and wept, and some fell headlong on the ground, rolling to and fro in anguish and thought: “Too soon has the Blessed One died! Too soon has the Light gone out of the world.”

But those of the brethren who were free from the passions bore their grief collected and composed at the thought: “Impermanent are all component things.”

Memories of Buddhism in My Life

Keiko Thayer, Ozu city, Shikoku

For most Japanese, Buddhism is associated with death. Funerals and memorials on anniversaries for the deceased are held at temples and in homes.

Those are sad and tearful times. Therefore temples for many Japanese children are not joyous places. And unless you are student of Buddhism and becoming a monk, ordinary people will not visit temples the way Christians may go to church every Sunday.

However, there is one occasion that I can think of in the spring each year that children look forward to. It is the Buddha’s birthday celebration, or Bussho. It is also known as the Flower Festival or Hanamatsuri, because many places of Japan are decorated by cherry blossoms in full bloom at this time of year.

On this day, every Buddhist temple observes the baptism of the Lord Buddha, called Kanbutsue. In the temple courtyard, a miniature temple called Hanamido (Flower temple) is temporarily built over a statue of the infant Buddha about 8 to 12 inches tall. It is beautifully decorated with different flowers.

The infant Buddha is represented standing in the floral basin pointing to heaven with his right arm and to the earth with his left, because the moment when he was born, it is said that he stood up and walked seven steps saying, “I am the only lord in heaven and under heaven.” The faithful will visit the statue and pour sweet tea, or amacha, over it. Then each will receive a small bottle of tea to bring home and share with family members, for it is believed to have medicinal values.

When I was growing up in a small town in southern Japan, I did this with my family and friends, and these are very sweet memories of my childhood related to Buddhism.
Japan and the West

Japan’s first direct contact with the West began in the middle of the 16th century when Portuguese maritime explorers reached the small island of Tanegashima off the coast of Kyushu. Soon thereafter, the Jesuit leader Francis Xavier (1506–1552) arrived in Japan via China to commence missionary activities. Other Europeans such as the Spanish, Dutch, and English also visited Japan in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Just as in China, these Europeans came to be known as namban, or “southern barbarians,” based on their sailing patterns of reaching Japan from the south.

When the warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–1598) succeeded in unifying Japan, Christian activities in Japan slowed down. By the beginning of the Edo or Tokugawa period (1615–1867), Christianity was deemed a threat and banned. Especially after decades of warfare, the government was concerned with any potential threats to the stability of the nation. A series of edicts were passed, including the National Isolation Policy in 1639, which stated that the only foreigners allowed to trade with Japan were the Dutch, Chinese, Koreans, and people from the kingdom of Ryukyu. The Dutch were the only Westerners granted this exclusive agreement, as they were not interested in proselytizing and were there for the sole purpose of trade.

Around 1800, French troops led by Napoleon were at war with the British, and this created complications for the Dutch. The Dutch were French allies and British warships were on the lookout for Dutch vessels. Therefore, in order to maintain their monopoly as the only Western nation trading with Japan, the Dutch commissioned ships from neutral countries such as the United States to go to Japan. Several American ships were chartered between 1797 and 1809 under these circumstances. Salem captains James Devereaux and Samuel Derby led two of them—the Margaret and Franklin.

Although only the Dutch were officially allowed entry to Japan, there were Russian, British, and American vessels that reached Japanese waters anyway. Some reached Japanese shorelines inadvertently, while others such as the Russians sought trade relations with Japan. By the time the American Commodore Matthew Gailbraith Perry and his fleet came to Japan in 1853, the Japanese were becoming aware that keeping their doors closed might not be in their best interest. Perry returned several months later in 1854 and successfully procured the Treaty of Kanagawa with the Japanese, and the two ports of Shimoda and Hakodate were open for trade.

The arrival of Commodore Perry and his fleet resulted in a flurry of related woodblock print and painting production by Japanese artists. Images of the Americans and the unusual commodities they brought were made to document the momentous event. Japan entered into a period of rapid modernization that was in essence, synonymous with Westernization.
Christianity was introduced to Japan in 1549 by the Portuguese Jesuit missionary Francis Xavier (1506–1552). For the first ten years or so, his activities were limited to the southern domains in Kyushu, where Westerners usually landed. As the proselytizing extended into central Japan, the number of Japanese Christians increased. By 1582, there were approximately 150,000 Christian adherents in Japan.

The Japanese interest in Western Christians was twofold—on one level, they were the faithful. On another level, the daimyo (lords) of Kyushu saw the Christians as a great resource for trade. Many Japanese converted to Christianity to secure trade relations with the Jesuits. For example, the daimyo who presided in the port of Nagasaki was a converted Christian who opened that city for trade in 1570.

In a matter of decades, however, Christian activity was brought to a halt. Although the Japanese wanted to continue trading with the Portuguese, their successful Christian proselytizing was seen as a threat by the Japanese central government. Also by this time, the Spanish Franciscans were competing with the Portuguese Jesuits for a foothold in Japan, further creating alarm for the Japanese central government.

Six missionaries and 20 of their converts were crucified in 1597, offsetting four decades of Christian conversion. The first anti-Christian edict was issued in 1587, and executions of both Japanese and western Christians continued for the next five decades.

This tabernacle is patterned after a southern European model but was created in Japan. Sculptural representations of the Virgin Mary and Jesus would have been housed in such a structure. Although the object is of European inspiration, its decorations are distinctly Japanese. For example, the bird-and-flower inlay motif is similar to those found on other Japanese lacquer objects of the time.
Despite the European subject matter and style of painting, this altarpiece was used in Japan. Jesuit missionaries needed devotional images and icons for use in services. These objects were also presented as gifts. For example, it is known that Queen Catherine of Portugal sent a painting of the Virgin Mary and Jesus as a gift to a daimyo (lord) in Japan in 1561.

In 1583, the Italian Jesuit painter Giovanni Niccolo (1560–death dates unknown) established the Academy of Saint Luke in Nagasaki. There, he taught Japanese converts Western art techniques such as oil and fresco painting, engraving, and the use of the printing press. One can see the combination of Western and Japanese techniques in this altarpiece. The work was created using Western tempera paints, and the decoration of the frame is in the elegant and beautiful Japanese lacquer of the period.

Popularly known as a namban screen, this painting depicts Portuguese and Spanish traders and missionaries arriving at Nagasaki Harbor. This type of screen was generally produced between the 1570s and 1640, when the Portuguese were trading with Japan.

Screens such as this one often came in pairs; the left screen would depict a ship sailing from a foreign land such as China. The right screen would show a foreign ship arriving at Deshima in Nagasaki Harbor. The Westerners are depicted larger in size than the Japanese, and their foreign facial features are exaggerated.
A series of official edicts from 1639 banning travel to or from Japan led the country to a policy of isolation. Once the edict was finalized, the only Westerners allowed to conduct trade with Japan were the Dutch, who were confined to the man-made island Deshima in Nagasaki Harbor.

Although the Westerners had limited mobility during their time in Japan, many Japanese people were curious about who they were and what they brought. For example, there were officially sanctioned artists that specialized in painting the lifestyles of the Dutch in Deshima for documentary purposes.

Once the ban on imported European books was lifted in 1720, Western sources became available to some Japanese artists, who were enamored with what they saw. They were exposed to images that revealed a totally different way of drawing by using, for example, single-point perspective and shading to create an illusion of three-dimensionality. Some Japanese artists experimented by integrating aspects of these Western techniques into their own work.

Around 1800, several American ships sailed to Nagasaki Harbor in lieu of the Dutch. Captains Devereux and Derby of the Franklin and Margaret, respectively, brought back objects from Japan, which are now among the collections of the Peabody Essex Museum. These items were created specifically on commission to meet the tastes and needs of the American captains.
Kawahara Keiga (1786–after 1860)  
*View of Nagasaki Harbor and the Frigate Cornelia and Henriette*  
Edo period (1615–1867); 1840  
Panel; ink and color on silk  
Museum purchase  
M20148

This painting gives a birds-eye view of Nagasaki Harbor, where foreign vessels were required to enter Japan. The largest boat in the bay is the Dutch frigate *Cornelia and Henriette*. To the left of it is Deshima Island, where foreigners were confined during their stays in Japan.

The painter uses Western techniques to depict the harbor as realistically as possible. The image is contained within a border, and the title is written across the bottom in script, following in the tradition of European landscape prints. Although the pigments used are Japanese, Keiga has applied them in large areas of color that cover the entire surface of the image. He has incorporated the horizon and cumulous clouds above, features not normally seen in Japanese landscape painting.

Kawahara Keiga was a Nagasaki painter known for his interest in painting in Western styles. He was employed by the German physician Philipp Franz von Siebold (1796–1866) and often painted scenes of the doctor’s daily life at Deshima.
The family depicted in this painting is probably that of Jan Cock Blomhoff (1779–1853), one of the directors of the Dutch trading post at Nagasaki. Foreign women were not allowed to reside at Deshima, but we know that Blomhoff’s wife and children did travel to Japan with him in 1817. They departed from Japan after a four-month stay while Blomhoff continued to reside in Japan until 1823.

Captain Derby of Salem commissioned Japanese artists to create this large tray showing the American eagle. It seems, however, that the Japanese artists were unfamiliar with the eagle and created a bird resembling a dove instead.

The Western ship captains typically remained in Japan for approximately six months while waiting for the tides to shift in order to sail back to Sumatra. During that time, the captains placed orders with Japanese artists for specific objects.
Foreigners had to stay within designated areas of Deshima during their stays in Japan. This image is a detail from a set of two handscrolls that depict the Chinese and Dutch settlements. Japanese artists were interested in visually recording the differences in lifestyles that they observed between the two cultures.

The work presents a glimpse into the lives of the Dutch while they were at the settlement. In the room at the right, we see some men gathered at a table for a meal. The men have taken off their hats and have hung them on the walls. In the adjoining room, a samurai has joined the men for a beverage, and everyone is enjoying Western music. Chairs, tables, dishes, utensils, and instruments brought from Holland are visible in the scene.
Several American vessels had sailed to Japan before Commodore Matthew Perry. Chartered American merchant ships and whaling vessels reached Japanese shores on occasion as well. However, Perry’s arrival was quite different, since he was sent on a mission by President Millard Fillmore (1800–1874) specifically to open trade negotiations with the Japanese.

Informed by the Dutch, the Japanese were aware of developments in the West, especially in regard to military and naval technology. The Japanese were quite alarmed at the unexpected arrival of Perry’s fleet of four warships in Uraga Bay, relatively close to the capital city of Edo (current-day Tokyo). The ships were spewing black smoke from their steam engines and thus came to be known as “the black ships.”

The Treaty of Kanagawa was signed between the Japanese and the Americans on Perry’s second trip to Japan in 1854. Two ports, Shimoda and Hakodate, were opened, and the first U.S. consul was sent to Japan. Japanese artists were quick to respond to this landmark occasion by producing numerous woodblock prints of Perry, his crew, and the vessels. Artists also painted these subjects in a documentary manner, including items such as a steam engine that was given to the Japanese as one of the gifts presented in formal ceremonies between the two nations.

After Japan was open again for trade with other countries, the Meiji government aggressively pursued the modernization of Japan, which was in essence synonymous with Westernization. Westerners were invited to Japan as advisers to assist in areas such as transportation, communication, and education. To encourage trade, many spectacular works of ceramics, textiles, lacquerware, and metalwork were made and displayed at world expositions.
This type of woodblock print of Perry would have circulated among the curious residents of Edo, since only a handful of people would have actually seen the commodore and his crew. The characters located across the top read from right to left, “A North American Figure” and “Portrait of Perry.” The artist, perhaps rendering a Westerner for the first time, exaggerated Perry’s features—the oblong face, down-turned eyes, bushy brown eyebrows, and large nose.

A North American Figure/Portrait of Perry
Edo period (1615–1867); ca. 1854
Woodblock print; ink and color on paper
Museum purchase M17145

H.A. Adams served as a vice envoy to the U.S. president and was the adjutant general for Perry’s sojourn in Japan.

In addition to woodblock prints, numerous sketches of the Americans on Perry’s expedition were made. In some cases, it is not known who rendered these sketches; even when they bear an artist’s signature as in B, many are by artists that we know nothing further about. Often, such images were created by artists who had not met the actual men. For example, in image A, the figure looks like a combination of a Japanese and a Western man: almond-shaped eyes, curly flowing hair, and a long, pointed nose.
Perry’s trip to Japan was documented as a report and presented to the American Congress in 1856. Although there were several personal journals that were kept during the expedition, Perry required them all to be turned in for fear that accounts would vary. Perry initially requested that the popular Salem author Nathaniel Hawthorne prepare a manuscript, but he declined. In the end, three volumes based on accounts by Perry and his officers were published with illustrations by William Heine, the official artist who accompanied the expedition.

This painting depicts the entourage of Townsend Harris, the first U.S. consul in Japan, making the journey from the port of Yokohama to the capitol, Edo (current-day Tokyo). When the foreigners arrived at Nagasaki Harbor, they were required to make the sojourn to Edo to meet the shogun. It is difficult to tell at first glance that this entourage is indeed that of an American, as the accompanying men are all Japanese. The flag bearing red stripes is perhaps a Japanese rendition of the U.S. Stars and Stripes. The
title of the image, American Consul on His Way to Edo, is written in the cartouche at the bottom right. Above it, in the white circle, is an eagle, the symbol of the United States.

Important people would have been carried in palanquins followed by their gifts and luggage. Similar entourages of local Japanese lords were a common sight along the roadways, as these individuals were required to make annual visits to the capitol during the Edo period.

The first delegation of Japanese officials visited the United States in 1860. They were sent by the Tokugawa shogunate to negotiate the Treaty of Amity and Commerce. Harper’s Weekly published a number of illustrated articles related to the visit, including ones devoted to the delegation’s meetings with President Buchanan at the White House and the welcoming reception at the Willard Hotel. Just as the Japanese woodblock prints satisfied the curiosity about Americans in Japan, these articles disseminated information about the Japanese to American readers.

**Cloisonne vase**
Meiji era (1868–1912); ca. 1892
Cloisonne and enamel
Gift of Eleanor Webster
E83908

This exceptionally large and beautiful vase was on view at the World’s Fair in Chicago in 1893. Many world expositions were held in cities such as Paris and Chicago in the late 19th century. The Japanese government enthusiastically sent ceramics, metalwork, lacquerware, and textiles to these expositions to encourage trade with the Western world.
The Peabody Essex Museum has an unusually long history with Japan. The objects collected by the captains of the East India Marine Society, the founders of the museum, form the earliest collections of Japanese art in this country (see Japan and the West p. 23). Edward Sylvester Morse (1838–1925), director of the museum until his death, is almost a household name in Japan. Since 1996, Ota city of Tokyo, and Salem, Massachusetts, have been sister cities, and a student exchange program for middle schoolers takes place every summer.

Morse was one of the first Americans to visit Japan when the country became accessible to foreign travelers. He made his initial trip in 1877 as a biologist in search of a specific type of brachiopod, or lamp shell. In his autobiography, Japan Day by Day, he says of this initial trip, “Finally the boat grounded, and I jumped out on the shores of Japan tickled enough to yell, which I mildly did.” (Japan Day by Day, p. 2)

In Morse’s day, the port of entry for foreigners was Yokohama. While Morse was on a coastal train ride from Yokohama to Tokyo, he noticed some clay hills or shell mounds from his window. What he discovered were ancient discarded shells, bones of small animals, tools, and pottery—traces of Jomon culture (10,000 BC–300 AD). He is respected in Japan today as the “father of modern archaeology.”

There are two great collections of Japanese art in Massachusetts: one at the Peabody Essex Museum and the other at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Both museums owe their collections of Japanese art in large part to Morse. While in Japan, he collected more than 20,000 works representing Japanese art and material culture that are now in the Peabody Essex Museum.

During his second trip, Morse’s physician advised him to take daily walks to alleviate stress. One day while on a walk, he came upon a ceramic in the shape of a shell. His purchase of this object, with help from other donors, led to the gathering of a large collection of Japanese ceramics. Five thousand works of ceramics are now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Peabody Essex Museum has a collection of more than 2,000 ceramics.

Hand warmer
Meiji era (1868–1912); 1878
Glazed stoneware and brass
Collected by Edward S. Morse
E2654
Morse’s legacy lives on with the sister city exchange program between Ota city of Tokyo and Salem. The shell mounds that Morse discovered are in Ota, and a stone monument has been erected at the site in his honor. Every summer at the end of July, a group of 29 teenagers, one representing each public middle school in Ota, arrives in Salem. They live with host families with children of similar ages and experience a week of American life. American students from the area, in turn, go to Japan in early August.

Exchange students from the middle schools of Ota come to Salem every summer. The students are seen here participating in the Japanese obon dancing event held at PEM at the end of July. Elaine Fong of Odaiko New England is playing the taiko drum.

Mrs. Komai and Edward S. Morse, June 22, 1923
Collection of Peabody Essex Museum

Edward S. Morse, May 1901
Collection of Peabody Essex Museum
Charles Goddard Weld traveled to Japan in 1885 with his friend, Charles A. Longfellow, son of the famed poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Both had their backs tattooed: dragons on Weld’s back and a carp on Longfellow’s. Weld was also a great supporter of Morse and purchased and donated many works on Morse’s behalf.

Morse was influential in stirring interest in Japan among key Bostonians who were instrumental in building the collection of Japanese art at the Peabody Essex Museum and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. He recommended Salem native Ernest Fenollosa to the faculty of the newly established Tokyo University. Inspired by one of Morse’s lectures, the Boston physician William Sturgis Bigelow traveled with him to Japan in 1882. Morse, Bigelow, Fenollosa, and Weld, among others, gathered together a large collection of Japanese art for the Museum of Fine Arts.
Manjiro Nakahama was only 14 years old when he and his friend were shipwrecked 300 miles off the coast of Japan. He became the first Japanese to set foot in America when he was rescued by an American whaling boat captain and brought to New Bedford, Massachusetts. This was a time when Japanese citizens were prohibited from leaving the country, and therefore Manjiro would have faced persecution if he had returned to Japan.

Nakahama took the name John Manjiro, learned English, and studied navigation and shipbuilding while in New Bedford. Manjiro returned to Japan eventually. Policies had changed with the arrival of American commodore Perry, and Manjiro’s English language skills were useful in many diplomatic situations.
### Religion and Spirituality in Japan

**Amaterasu.** The sun goddess, and one of the most important deities of the Shinto pantheon. It is believed that her grandson was the first emperor of Japan. She is enshrined at Ise Shrine.

**Amida (Sanskrit: Amithaba).** Lord of Infinite Light who presides over the Western Paradise according to Pureland Buddhism.

**bosatsu (Sanskrit: bodhisattva).** An enlightened being within the hierarchy of Buddhism who, with boundless compassion, postpones his or her own final salvation to save others.

**Buddha.** The historic Buddha was the Indian sage Siddhartha Gautama (ca. 563–483 BCE), also known as Sakyamuni or the “sage of the Sakya kingdom.” As Buddhism developed, the term “Buddha” evolved to include other awakened beings who had achieved perfect enlightenment, such as Amida of the Pureland sect of Mahayana Buddhism.

**Buddhism.** One of the world’s major religions, founded by the historical Buddha, or Siddhartha Gautama, in about the 6th century BCE. Buddhism came to Japan via China and Korea about 1,000 years later.

**dharma.** The law or truth of Buddhist doctrine; also refers to the teachings of Sakyamuni Buddha.

**ema.** Literally means “picture horse.” Votive wood plaques that originally depicted horses in lieu of using real ones as offerings. Today, other images, such as the 12 animals of the Chinese zodiac, are depicted on one side of these plaques. On the other side, people write wishes, especially during New Year celebrations, and the plaques are hung at designated areas at shrines.

**Ise Shrine.** Considered the most sacred of all shrines in Japan; dedicated to the sun goddess Amaterasu. It is also the family shrine for the Japanese imperial family.

**Izanagi and Izanami.** The brother and sister creators of the Japanese isles, according to the creation myths in Kojiki and Nihon shoki (see definitions).

**Jizo (Sanskrit: Ksitigarbha).** This bosatsu or bodhisattva is revered in Japan as the savior of beings in hell, travelers, warriors, and especially children. He is usually shown in the guise of a young monk with a shaven head, carrying a staff and wish-granting jewel.

**kami.** Usually translated as “deity” or “god,” the Japanese term for spirits and divinities, which can include mythological and religious figures, powers, and places within nature.

**kamidana.** Shinto altars for the home. Shrines sell amulets which are placed in kamidana at home for worship. Offerings of fresh leaves, water, and sake are traditionally made on the first and 15th of each month.

**Kojiki (Record of Ancient Matters).** Completed in 712, along with the Nihon shoki, it is the source for Japanese history, legends, and customs.
lotus. An aquatic plant that grows from the muddy bottom of a river or pond and blossoms above the water with large pink or white flowers. A symbol of purity, goodness, and rebirth in Buddhism and a metaphor for people to emerge from negativity.

Mahayana Buddhism. Founded in India in the 1st century CE, Mahayana Buddhism placed an emphasis on personal devotion and merits, and Buddha-hood was attainable by all. Mostly practiced in north and east Asia in countries such as Tibet, China, Japan, and Korea.

Mara. Known as the evil one, Mara tried to seduce the historical Buddha away from his spiritual enlightenment with visions of beautiful women and temptations in different forms. Mara exists in the realm of desire.

matsuri. Shinto festivals that are held throughout the year. The term is derived from the word matsuru, which means “to worship.”

Maya. Mother of Buddha.

mikoshi. Portable shrines used to symbolically house deities during matsuri, when they are carried out of their home shrines and joined with neighborhood festivities.

mudra. Symbolic hand gestures seen in images of Buddhas and some bodhisattvas that represent qualities such as teaching, fearlessness, and giving. Mudras are also used in some religious practices and sacred dance traditions.

nehan (Sanskrit: nirvana). State of enlightenment or Absolute Reality, attained when all illusions and desires are extinguished.

Nihon shoki or Nihongi (Chronicles of Japan). Together with Kojiki, it is one of the primary sources of Japanese history, legends, and customs, compiled during the first half of the 8th century.

parinirvana. Literally meaning “beyond nirvana,” it is the final nirvana, or death. It is not a sorrowful event but a release from the cycle of death and rebirth.

shimenawa. Bundled and twisted cords of rice straw placed over entrances of shrines, altars, household shrines, and other areas designated as purified or sacred. They are used for various festivals, especially during the New Year celebrations. Strips of white paper called shide can also be hung from them.

shogatsu. These important New Year celebrations usually last from January 1 to 5 at most shrines. People make their first shrine visits during this period to pray for health and prosperity throughout the year.

sutra. Sacred Buddhist texts that are based on Buddha’s teachings.

torii. Placed at entryways of Shinto shrines, they mark the boundary between the sacred and the mundane. They can be made of plain wood or painted a vermilion color, which is believed to have power to ward away evil spirits.
urna. A tuft of hair between the eyebrows that is one of the 32 symbols of a Buddha. The feature can also be seen on bodhisattvas and other deities.

ushnisha. The protruberance or cranial bump on the Buddha’s head that is a symbol of his great wisdom, spiritual power, and complete enlightenment.

Zen (Chinese: Chan; Korean: Son). A sect of Mahayana Buddhism that emphasizes meditation to reach personal enlightenment. It was founded by the Indian patriarch Bodhidharma in the 6th century and introduced in Japan by the monk Eisai (1141–1215).

**Japan and the West**

Batavia. Current-day Jakarta on the island of Java, Indonesia. During the 17th century, it was the Dutch East India Marine Company’s stronghold for trading with China and Japan.

Commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry (1794–1858). Sent by U.S. President Millard Fillmore (1800–1874) to open trade negotiations with the Japanese, Perry and his fleet of “black ships” first arrived in Japan in 1853. The Treaty of Kanagawa was signed on his second trip the following year.

donmyō. Lords of the different domains of Japan from the mid-15th century onwards.

Samuel Derby. U.S. captain of the ship Margaret, chartered by the Dutch to sail to Nagasaki in 1801.

James Devereaux. American captain of the ship Franklin, chartered by the Dutch to sail to Nagasaki in 1799. The Franklin was the first American ship to return with cargo from Japan in 1800. Many of the objects brought back to Salem were presented to the East India Marine Society and are on display today at the Peabody Essex Museum.

Deshima or Dejima. Man-made island built in Nagasaki Harbor; the only place where Dutch traders were allowed to trade with Japan from 1640 onward. Their residences and activities were limited to the island, except when they had to make the obligatory trip to visit the shogun in the capital, Edo.

East India Marine Society. An association of captains and supercargoes established in 1799. Members had to have sailed around either Cape Horn or the Cape of Good Hope to faraway lands such as Africa, Asia, and Oceania. The captains shared information about sailing routes and business transactions at the various ports. They brought back objects from these lands that constitute the earliest accessioned works in the Peabody Essex Museum collections.

Edo or Tokugawa period (1615–1867). See Tokugawa period.
kurobune or black ships. Term given by the Japanese to coal-fired American ships, spewing black smoke and painted black, led by Commodore Perry. Four ships—the Mississippi, Plymouth, Saratoga, and Susquehanna—sailed into Uraga Harbor off the Kanagawa coastline of Japan in 1853.

Meiji period (1868–1912). The 45-year reign of the Japanese Emperor Meiji. After being ruled by the Tokugawa family members during the preceding period, power in name was restored to the Emperor but actually held initially by a group of elite oligarchs. The first decades of the Meiji Restoration were marked by the rapid modernization or Westernization of Japan.

Nagasaki Harbor. The only place in Japan where foreign Chinese, Korean, Ryukyuan, and Dutch ships were permitted to sail during the Edo or Tokugawa period.

namban. Literally meaning “southern barbarians,” the term was first used for the Portuguese and Spaniards who arrived in Japan in the 16th century. The term is also used to describe screen paintings that depict Westerners arriving in Japan around 1600 and works of art produced with Western artistic influences.

National Isolation Policy (sakoku seisaku). A series of edicts issued between 1631 and 1639 that established Japan as closed to the rest of the world. The Japanese were not allowed to travel out of the country, and the only foreigners allowed to trade with Japan were the Chinese, Koreans, Ryukyuan, and Dutch. The policy abruptly came to an end with the arrival of Commodore Perry in 1854.

Giovanni Nicolo (1560–death dates unknown). Italian Jesuit painter who established the Academy of Saint Luke in Nagasaki. He taught Japanese Christian converts Western art techniques such as oil and fresco painting, engraving, and the use of the printing press.

samurai. Warriors of preindustrial Japan. During the Edo period (1615–1867), the samurai were at the top of a four-tier class system. By this time, they were no longer warriors engaged in battles but were instead bureaucrats. They became learned men who practiced martial arts as an avocation and cultivated artistic pursuits such as painting and calligraphy.

shōgun. Term for the effective leader of Japan from the Kamakura period or the late 12th century to the Meiji period in 1868. Head of the most powerful military family of the day, the shōgun acted in the name of the emperor, who was mostly a figurehead.

Tokugawa or Edo period (1615–1867). A period of unprecedented peace in Japan, when a succession of leaders of the Tokugawa family lineage ruled the country. Known as a time when Japan was closed to the world, the Japanese were not allowed to travel abroad, and trade was limited to China, Korea, the Kingdom of Ryukyu, and the Dutch. The Dutch were the only Westerners with the agreement, since they were not promoting Christianity and were only interested in trade. The capital during the period was in Edo, or current-day Tokyo.
Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–1598). One of the three military rulers of the late 16th century, whose efforts led to the unification of the country and the establishment of the Tokugawa or Edo period (see definition). Like many of the other samurai rulers, Hideyoshi came from humble origins and rose to power. Although he originally supported Christianity, he came to consider it a threat. He prohibited Christianity in 1587, and expelled Jesuit missionaries from Japan. Hideyoshi was instrumental in the development of cultural pursuits such as the wabi tea ceremony. Also infamous for leading two invasions of Korea in 1592 and in 1598.

Treaty of Kanagawa. A treaty signed in 1854 between Commodore Perry and the Japanese that opened the ports of Shimoda and Hakodate. Consequently, the first U.S. consul, Townsend Harris, was sent to Japan.

Francis Xavier (1506–1552). Portuguese leader from the Society of Jesus who was the first to start Christian missionary activity in Japan. He lived in Japan from 1549 to 1551.
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