



Decorative Arts Across The Indian Ocean

Presentation by SQCC

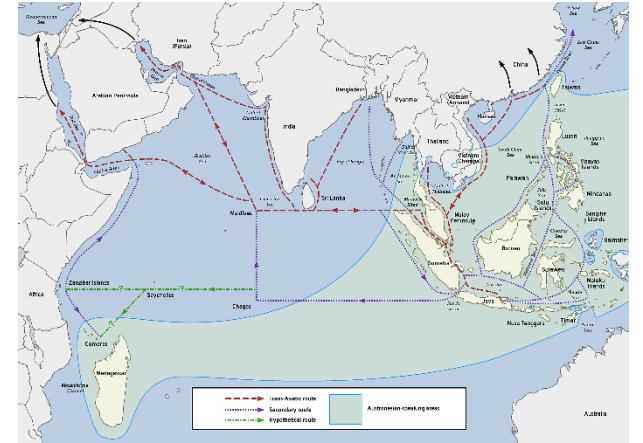
What are decorative arts?

- Decorative arts refers to objects designed with concern for both aesthetics and utility
- As opposed to fine arts such as painting and sculpture, decorative arts are used for a variety of practical purposes
- Some examples of decorative arts include clothes, furniture, dishware, and carpets
- The usage of decorative arts spans across cultures and eras
- Many traditions have spread to the West through trade along the Silk Road and the Indian Ocean



What can we learn from decorative arts?

- **Art** – Gain a better understanding of specific processes and pieces of decorative art
- **Geography** – Get to know the different regions of the world and the physical landscapes that led to the creation of particular decorative art styles
- **History** – Connect the role of decorative arts and world trade via the Silk Road and the Indian Ocean
- **World Cultures** – Learn about different cultures as expressed through the designs and functionalities of the decorative arts they produced



Brief Overview: Geography

China



- **Climate:** Varied; ranges from subarctic in the north to tropical in the south
- **Terrain:** Diverse; mountains, river deltas, plains, deserts, jungles, etc.
- **Natural Resources:** Rich in both mineral resources, flora, and fauna

Middle East



- **Climate:** Mostly hot and arid; milder climates in Iran and by the Mediterranean
- **Terrain:** Primarily deserts and mountains; some cultivated land along major rivers (e.g. Nile and Jordan)
- **Natural Resources:** Metals such as copper and gold as well as natural aromatics such as frankincense and myrrh

Southeast Asia



- **Climate:** Primarily hot, humid, and tropical
- **Terrain:** Mostly tropical rainforests; also mountains, volcanoes, plateaus, and valleys
- **Natural Resources:** Particularly rich in flora with notable exports such as timber and rubber

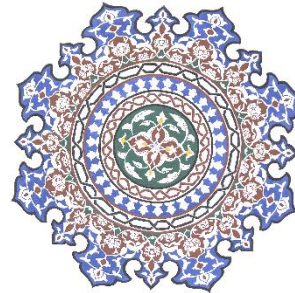
Brief Overview: Culture + Art

China



- **Nature** – As Chinese society was mostly agricultural, art often focused on the forces nature and living in accordance with it
- **Society and Morality** – Popular local religions influenced art to focus on the depiction of moral examples and warnings
- **Symbolism** – Chinese culture is steeped in metaphor and allegory; symbols as expressed in Chinese art are typically imbued with multiple meanings

Middle East



- **Religion** – Islam fostered the development of a distinct culture that heavily influenced the art of the Middle East
- **Aesthetics** – As Islam prohibits the depictions of living beings, art from the Middle East was centered on the creation of awe-inducing designs such as the notable Islamic geometric patterns

Southeast Asia



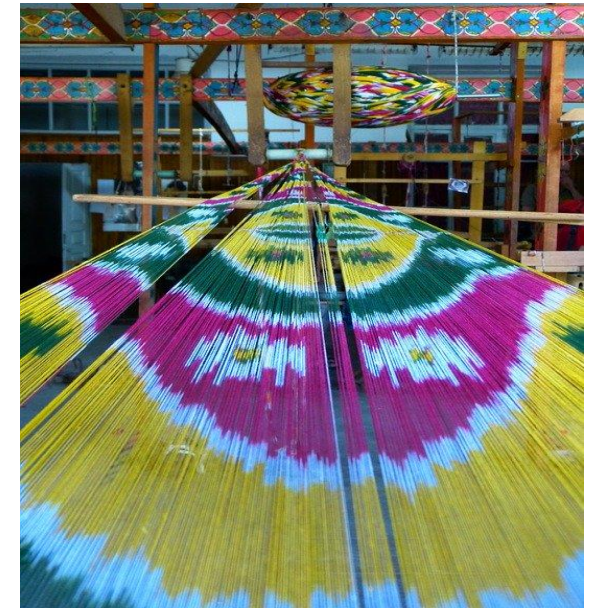
- **Divine World** – Much of the art from Southeast Asia depicts prominent figures and scenes from Hinduism and Buddhism
- **Cultural Synthesis** – Given the region's Chinese, Indian, and Middle Eastern influences, the design often combines foci on religion, morality, nature, and aesthetics

China



Silk

- Silk cloth was first produced in China over two millennia ago from the filaments of cocoons made by silkworms
- These filaments can be unspooled, spun, and woven into a usable textile
- This luxurious item was exchanged on a series of overland trade routes known as the “Silk Road” and across the Indian Ocean extending as far west as the Middle East and the Mediterranean Sea
- Silk is a multipurpose textile used for clothing, furnishings, and even as paper



Porcelain

- Porcelain is a ceramic material that was first made in China around the 8th century CE from firing kaolin clay mixtures at very high temperatures (1400° C)
- Shaping, painting, and glazing the porcelain soon became an art form with many different styles – including the distinctive blue and white design which originally comes from Iraq
- Common goods made of porcelain include vases, teapots, and tableware



Lacquerware

- Lacquerware typically refers to carved objects made with a shiny resin, lacquer, that provides a smooth coating that is resistant to heat and humidity
- Production of lacquerware has been around for over 3,000 years in China and has gone through various artistic transformations
- The distinctive red color in many pieces of Chinese lacquerware comes from cinnabar, a type of mercury sulfide
- Common lacquerware goods include cups, boxes, tables, and vases



Cloisonné

- Cloisonné is a metal-working technique that originated in the Middle East (likely Egypt) two millennia ago that became popular in China through trade around the 14th century
- Thin strips of copper or other metals are soldered (fused) into different partitions and are then filled with colored enamel before being fired in a kiln
- Common goods designed with the cloisonné technique include vases, jars, and jewelry



Folding Screens

- Folding screens are room partitions traditionally made from wooden blocks that are connected together with cloth or leather hinges and covered with images designed on paper
- They were originally made in China approx. two millennia ago and became popular in Japan shortly thereafter
- In the 1500s, Portuguese traders arrived in Malacca and used the screens primarily for teaching purposes
- These screens were later imported to major European cities in the 1800s where they became widely popular



The Middle East



Persian Carpets

- Persian carpets were first produced over two millennia ago typically out of wool, silk, and cotton
- The process of weaving the carpet often exceeds a whole year
- Carpet designs vary between regions and ethnic groups across Iran
- Persian carpets were popular among the upper echelons of European societies starting in approximately the 15th century CE
- Even today, Persian carpets remain one of Iran's largest non-oil exports generating upwards of \$500 million per year



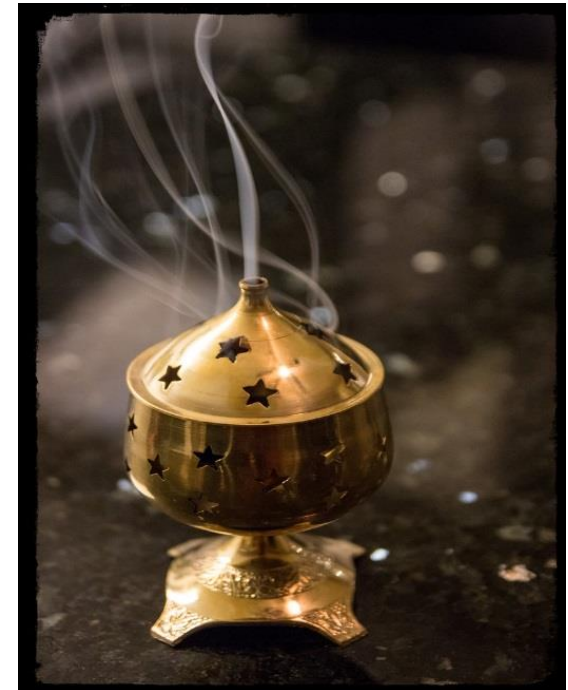
Lusterware

- Lusterware refers to ceramics coated in an iridescent glaze made from metallic oxides
- This decorative dates back to the 9th century CE where it was first created by potters in the Middle East (likely Iraq)
- It gained particular popularity throughout the Egypt during the Fatimid era (approx. 11th-12th centuries CE)
- The lusterware technique influenced Hispano-Moresque and majolica wares that were popular in Spain and throughout Europe



Incense Burners

- The creation and usage of incense burners date back numerous millennia and were traditionally made in both the Middle East and China
- Incense burners come in many types including ceramic and metal and are also heated via charcoal or hot metal plates
- Trade influenced the spread of incense burners, especially given the popularity of various Middle Eastern aromatics such as frankincense and myrrh
- Middle Eastern usage of incense burners particularly influenced their usage in Eastern Orthodox and Catholic churches



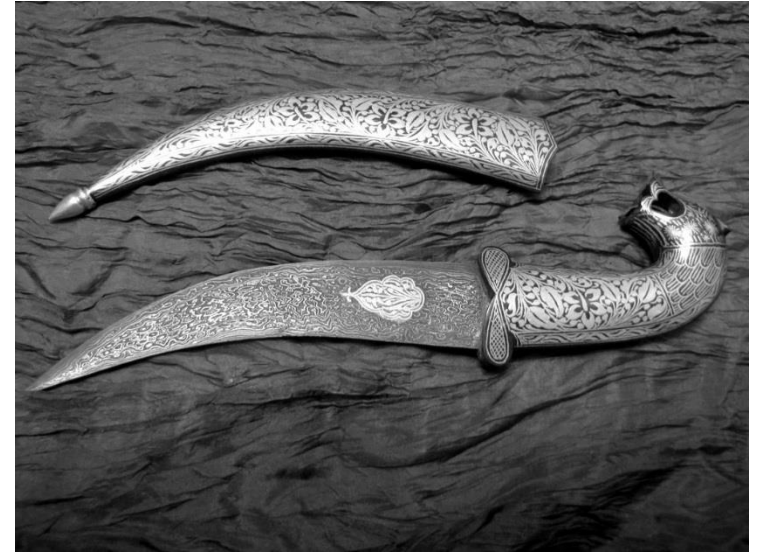
Doors

- In Islamic architecture, doors are typically a building's most elaborately decorated feature
- Various cultures have distinctive doors from Morocco to Oman
- Doors are constructed through a variety of techniques including wood carving and ironwork
- Many feature Arabic scripture, intricate floral designs, or arabesque patterns



Metalworking

- Metalworking is a very old decorative art form more than 5,000 years old
- Traditional metals used include silver, iron, and copper
- One famous form of metalworking in the Middle East is the creation of Damascus blades created from Indian-developed Wootz steel
- This decorative art form is used for a variety of purposes including candlesticks, weaponry, and incense burners

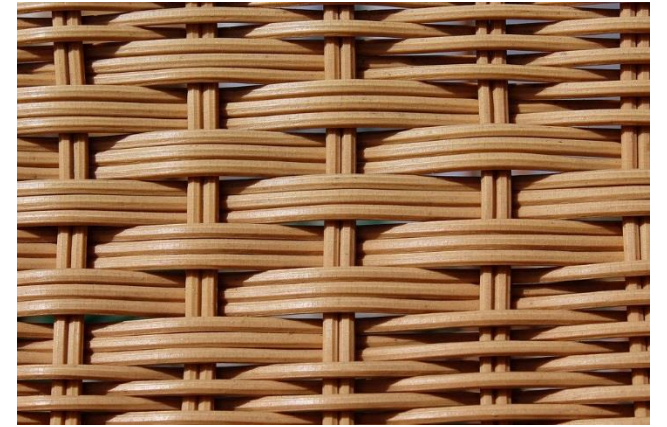


Southeast Asia



Rattan Furniture

- Rattan furniture is made from a tropical palm tree that grows primarily in the islands of Southeast Asia
- The fibers of the rattan are woven together to create durable everyday objects
- Originally, rattan was woven to make baskets, mats, and even musical instruments
- It gained incredible popularity in Britain towards the end of the 19th century during the Victorian Era due to its functionality as outdoor furniture for hot summer weather



Batik

- Batik refers to fabric designed by painting wax on cloth before it gets dyed
- This technique is found in many cultures around Asia and Africa, but is most commonly associated with Indonesia
- Batik fabrics are typically worn as garments including sarongs, skirts, and headscarves
- Patterns are influenced from a variety of cultures including Chinese, Indian, Middle Eastern, and Western
- It gained popularity towards the end of the 19th century after the introduction of fine imported cotton and the creation of new tools that make creating batik simpler



Wood Carving

- Wood carving has been an artistic tradition in Southeast Asia since ancient times
- The primary type of wood used is teak
- Jepara, a wood carving center on the island of Java (Indonesia), has been an important hub for wood carving exports for over a millennium
- Although traditionally used for religious architecture and sculpture, wood carving has over the last couple of centuries been used in furniture design



Kites

- Kites are believed to have first been flown in the Malay Archipelago more than two millennia ago
- They were originally constructed for military purposes including for distance measurement and weapon transfer
- Over the course of two millennia, the uses for kites have now expanded to include fishing, meteorological research, and entertainment purposes



Gamelan

- Gamelan is a traditional instrumental ensemble from Indonesia consisting of percussion instruments typically made of bronze and wood
- It developed into its current form during the Majapahit Empire in the medieval era
- When first brought to Europe, it influenced numerous classical composers including Debussy and Bartok
- Today, gamelans are regularly used in movie and scores including Atlantis: The Lost Empire (2001) and The Golden Compass (2006)

