

# Where is Korean Art in American Art History Textbooks and Curriculum?

Presented by:

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Professor Robert Stevenson

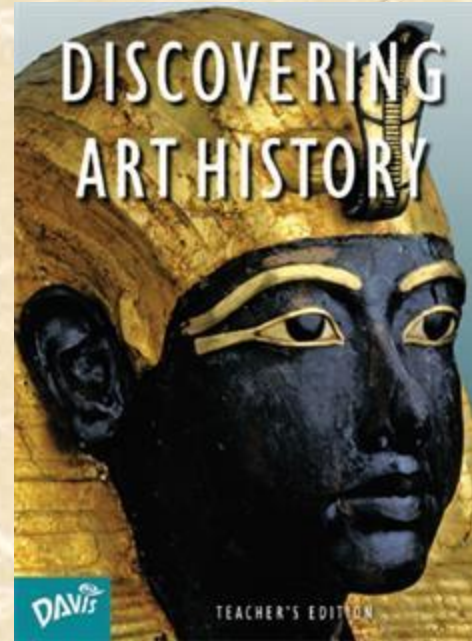
# Where is Korean Art in American Art History Textbooks and Curriculum?

- Not present (in most of the general art history textbooks and curricula)
- Present as a very brief transition between Chinese and Japanese art (in newest art history textbooks and curricula that have slightly bit more non-western art included)
- Present in some Asian art theme textbooks (these books mainly focus on Chinese and Indian art)

# American K-12 Art History Textbooks That Do Not Mention Korean Art

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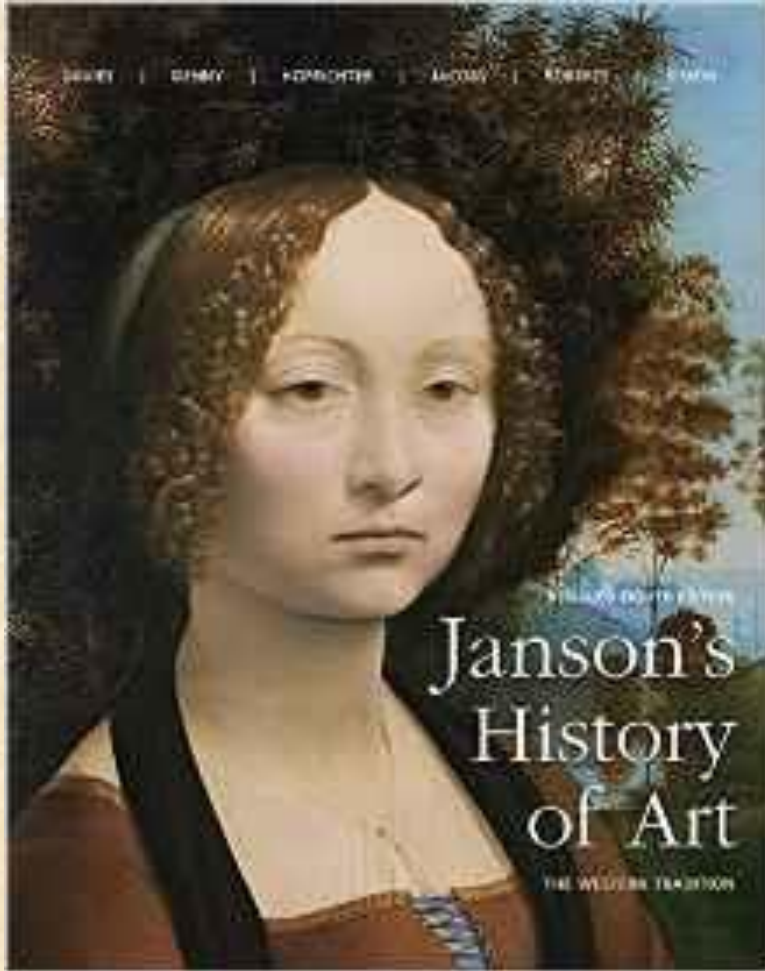
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- *Discovering Art* Korean art is one of the most popular textbooks for advanced placement art history courses in American High Schools.
- This text includes only one chapter dealing diversity in art entitled “Art of the Non-Western World”, and Korean art is not discussed.

Brommer, G. *Discovering Art History*, 2006, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed. Davis.

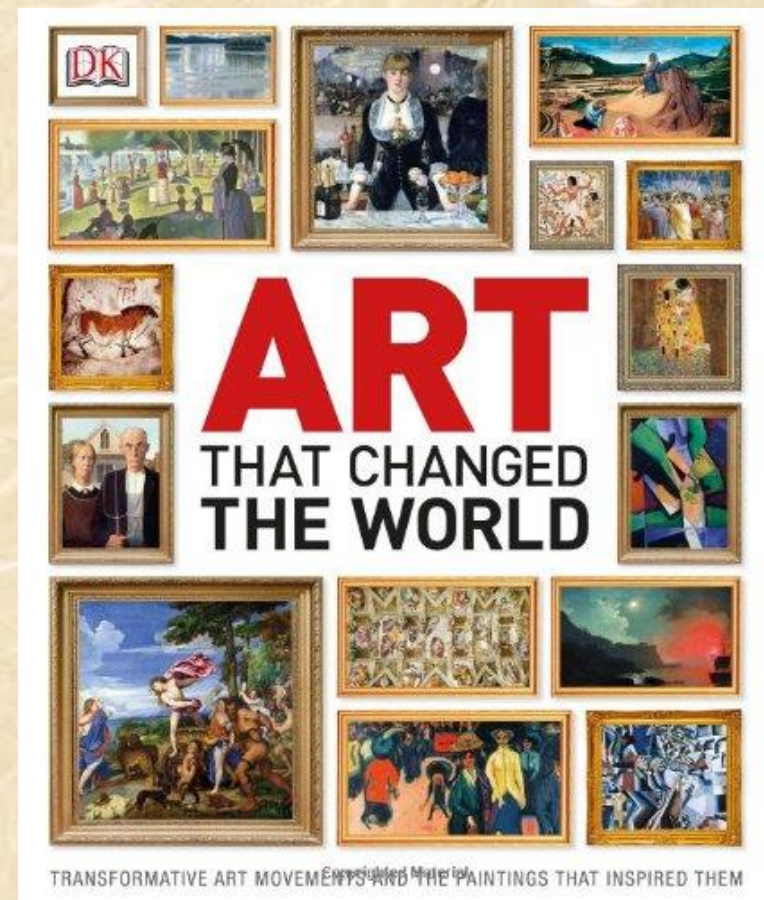
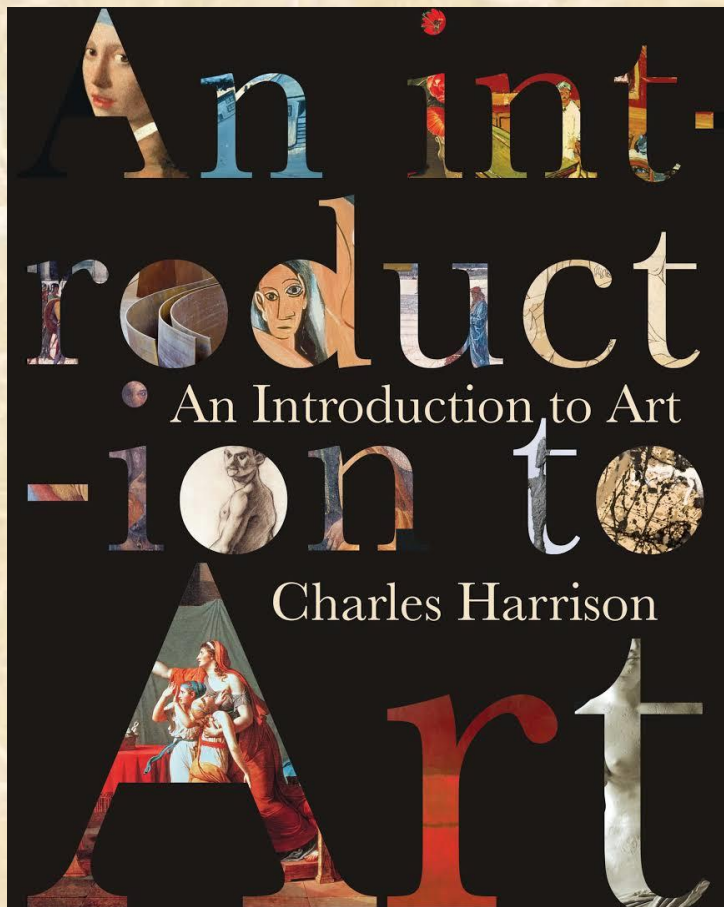
# American Art History Textbooks Without Korean Art



- First published in 1962, Janson's *History of Art* has set the standard for art history textbooks in US and Europe.
- Focus on Western art, Western point of view, and artworks displayed in famous Western European and American museums.
- No mentioning of Korean art at all (in most of the editions).

Janson, H. W. *History of Art: The Western Tradition*, 2015, 8<sup>th</sup> Ed.

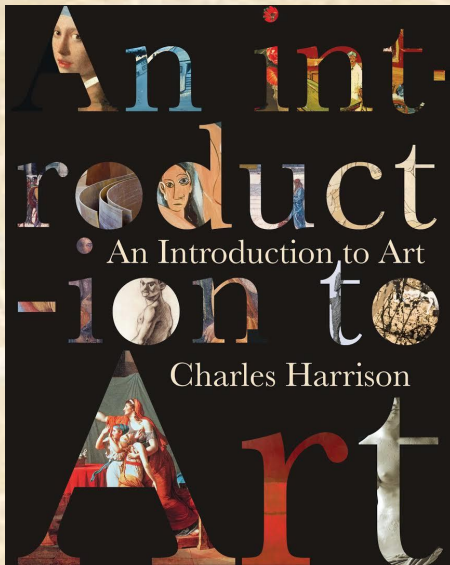
# American Art History Textbooks Without Korean Art



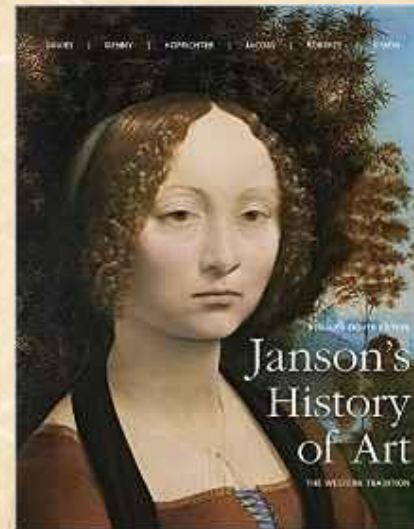
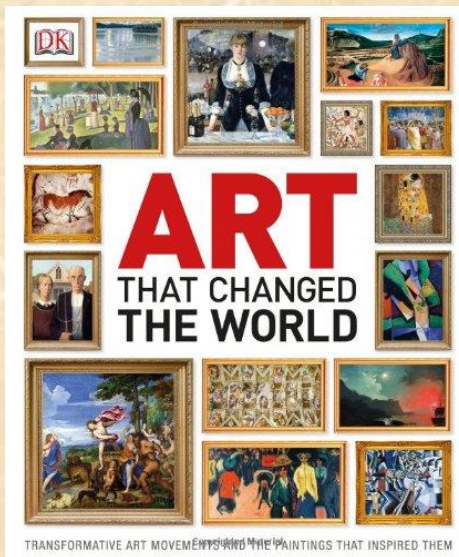
Harrison, C. *An Introduction to Art*, 2009, Yale University Press. 335 pages.

Zacek, I., Chilvers, I., Welton, J. *Art That Changed The World*, 2013, DK Publishing. 400 pages.

## A closer look:



- While the titles of these textbooks refer to general, world art history, these textbooks focus only on western art.
- If any non-western art is included, it is discussed only in relations to western art.



Janson, H. A. *History of Art: The Western Tradition*, 2015, 8<sup>th</sup> Ed.

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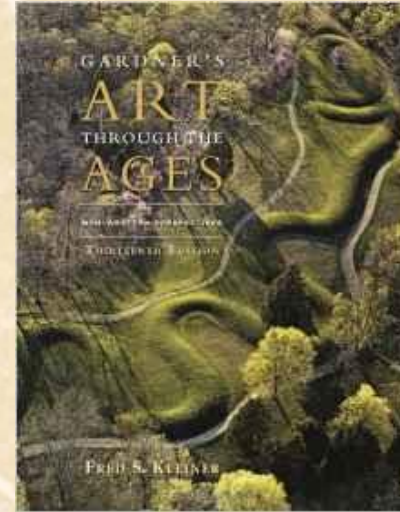
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# American Art History Textbooks That Mention Korean Art



- In *Gardner's Art through the Ages: Non-Western Perspectives* Korean art is combined with Chinese art.
- None of the chapter subheadings are specific to Korea
- Only 2 pages per section specifically address Korea, a total of 4 pages in a 288 page text.

Kleiner, F. *Gardner's Art through the Ages: Non-Western Perspectives*, 2010, 13<sup>th</sup> Ed. Wadsworth

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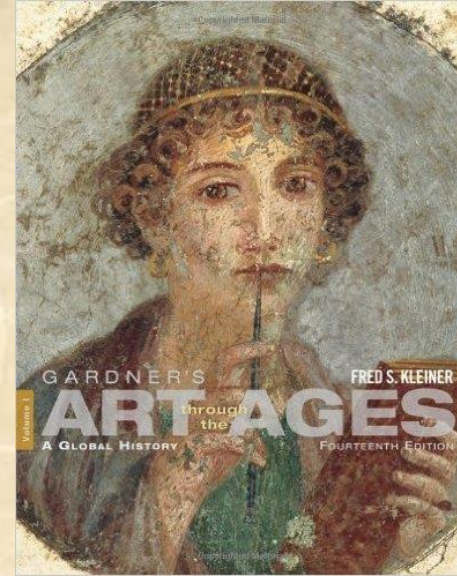
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- In *Gardner's Art through the Ages: A Global History* Korean art is again combined with Chinese art.
- Again, none of the chapter subheadings are specific to Korea
- Only 2 pages per section specifically address Korea, a total of 2 pages in a 608 page text.



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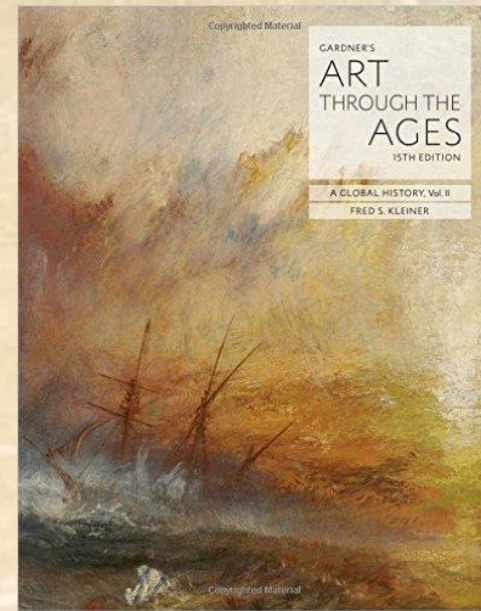
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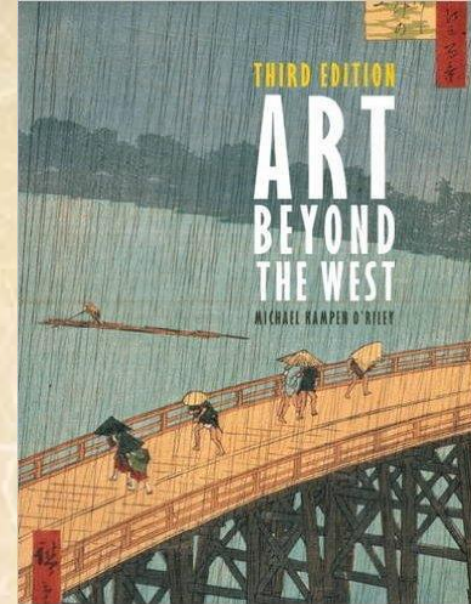
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- In *Gardner's Art through the Ages: A Global History* Korean art is again combined with Chinese art.
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- In *Art Beyond the West* Korean art is combined with Japan.
- Chapter subheadings are specific to Korea, integrated on a chronological basis with Japanese art.
- Each area addressing Korea specifically in only 1 or 2 pages, a total of approximately 5 pages in a 368 page text.

O' Riley, F. *Art Beyond the West*, 2012, 3rd ed.. Pearson.



5.5 Crown from north mound, Tomb 98, Kyongju, Korea. Old Silla period, 5–6th century CE. Gold, height 10 3/4" (27.5 cm). Kyongju National Museum

the most important "activity" of the artist and observer. The state of inactivity is designed to stimulate the imagination and bring the observer into the world of the artists who created the images and buildings illustrated in this chapter. The eternal affection the Japanese have held for seemingly simple but deceptively complex arts that stress essential forms and acts of contemplation is linked in spirit to their veneration of the Shinto kami and remains a poignant symbol of the Shinto base of Japanese art and thought.

### KOREA: THE THREE KINGDOMS PERIOD (57 BCE–688 CE)

The Korean peninsula, midway between northern China and Japan, transmitted many elements of Chinese art and culture to Japan. However, after arriving in Korea, Chinese art interacted with the native Korean traditions to create Korean styles of ceramics, sculpture, metalwork, and painting that are distinct from those of mainland Asia and Japan.

The Koreans learned the techniques of agriculture and metal working from the Chinese and became part of their Han empire in 108 BCE. After the fall of the Han, in the Period of Disunity (220–589 CE), the Chinese gradually withdrew from Korea, leaving behind their philosophies of Confucianism and Buddhism (which arrived in 372 CE) as well as the Chinese system of writing. During this time, the Three-Kingdoms Period, Korea was divided into the Koguryo kingdom in the north, the Paekche kingdom in the southwest, and the Silla kingdom around the Nakdong River drainage area facing the Sea of Japan.

Of these three kingdoms, the Silla was the most remote from China, both geographically and aesthetically. Many of the most important Korean works of art come from this area. Kyongju, the Silla capital for almost a thousand years, is dotted with huge tumuli marking the tombs of the rulers. The golden crowns, earrings, necklaces, bracelets, and belts from these royal graves indicate that the Silla were some of the most accomplished and innovative gold artists in eastern Asia in the fifth and sixth centuries CE. The gold crowns, made of thin hammered and cut sheets of embossed gold, are too delicate for regular use and may have been created for some special ceremonials, such as inaugurations, or they may have been made specifically as grave goods for spirit use. The headband in FIG. 5.5 supports antler and tree-shaped projections decorated with small gold disks and curved, comma-shaped pieces of jade. The Old Silla gold artists may have learned their techniques of goldworking via works of art that arrived from the Mediterranean world along the Silk Road.

Sculptors of this period, working shortly after Buddhism had become the official religion of the country, created the most famous surviving Korean Buddhist statue. It is an image of the bodhisattva Maitreya, the Buddha of the Future, who would come to the earth and bring enlightenment to everyone (FIG. 5.6). Maitreya was a favorite of an elite group of young aristocratic warriors, the Flower Youths, whose leader claimed to be an incarnation of the bodhisattva. Like the historical Buddha Shakyamuni, who discovered enlightenment through prolonged meditation, Maitreya is far removed from this world and deeply absorbed in a state of meditation. All the formal elements contribute to this sense of inner peace and oneness. The manner in which the sculptors have organized Maitreya's pose and

created his body parts emphasizes this ideal of otherworldly thought. The refined beauty and harmonious interplay of Maitreya's high-arching eyebrows, the long crescent lids of his downturned eyes, the thin, delicate nose bridge, and the gentle set of his lips convey a sense of utter serenity. Also, the rhythms in the neatly spaced and folded cloth falling in vertical lines and dove-tail pleats over the chair, lying in patterns of hyperbolic curves on his left leg, reinforce this ideal of quiet introspection, the slowed-down pace of deep meditation.

The pose itself expresses this ideal of strength within beauty. It is organized around the strong horizontal line of the figure's right leg, which divides the image in half, separating the vertical lines of the other leg and drapery below from the softer lines of Maitreya's torso, head, arms, and the long tube-like fingers with which he touches his cheek. This effortless gesture, symbolizing deep thought, engages the viewer with the bodhisattva's otherworldly thoughts as he transcends the terrestrial and celestial realms to exist in oneness with all creation. Although the style owes much to sixth-century Wei sculpture in northern China, the smoothness of the forms and the abstraction of Maitreya's features reflect the work's Korean heritage. Of the surviving Korean images of Maitreya and the Buddha, this work best summarizes the Korean contribution to Buddhist sculpture in Korea itself and in Japan. In the centuries to come, Korean art continued to be important on its own terms and contributed to the later development of Japanese art, and we will return to Korea to look at additional works in the periods to follow.

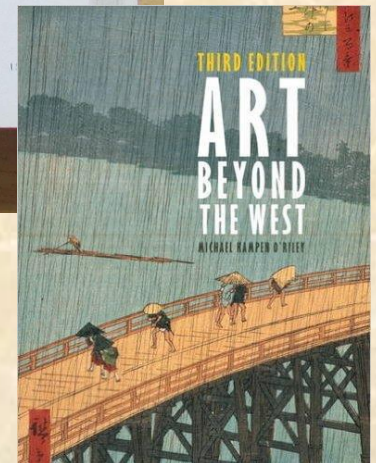
### THE ASUKA PERIOD (552–645 CE) AND HAKUHO PERIOD (645–710 CE)

The Asuka period, named for a Japanese capital of this time, is also known as the Suiko period; after the powerful empress who reigned from 593 to 628. It was a time of great change as new Korean forms of art, technology, and religion totally transformed Japanese society. The period begins in 552, the year the Buddhist ruler of the Paekche



5.6 Maitreya. Old Silla or Paekche period, 6–7th century. Gilt bronze, height 30" (76 cm). National Museum of Korea, Seoul

In this format Korean Art is used in a transitional way, here creating the link between the Japanese burial mounds and the Shinto Tradition and the Japanese Asuka period.



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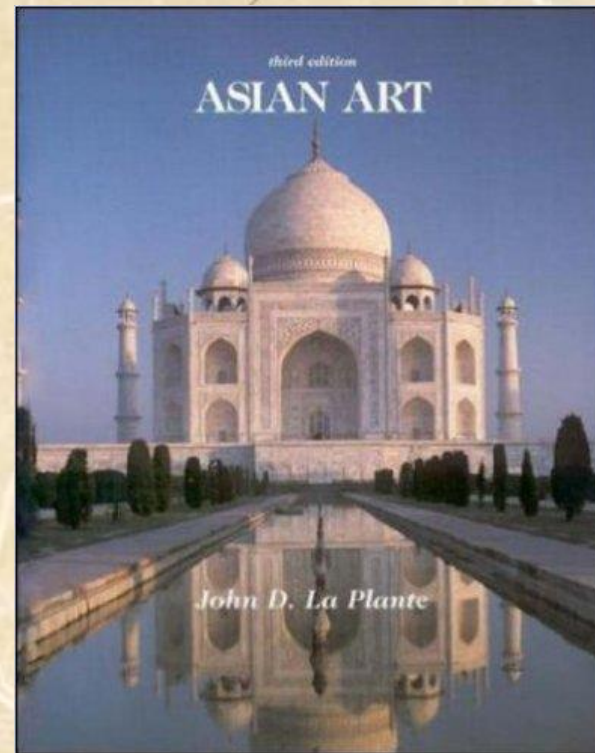
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- In the 1991 text *Asian Art* Korean art is not addressed, not even in the transmission of Buddhism from China to Japan.
- There is no mention of Korea in the table of contents or even the glossary.

La Plante, J. *Asian Art*, 1991, 3rd ed.. McGraw Hill Education.

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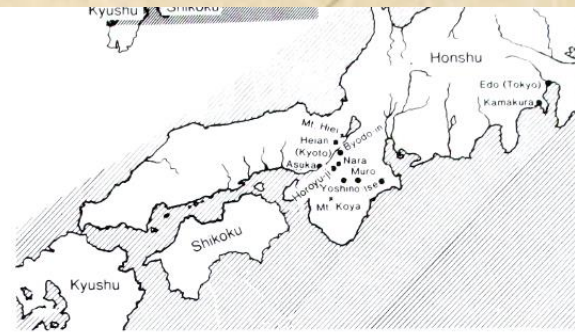


Figure 22.1 Japan.

### THE ASUKA PERIOD (A.D. 552–645)

When Buddhism was introduced into Japan from Korea in the middle of the sixth century A.D., it met a simple people who, unlike the Chinese, had had little experience in the vagaries of metaphysical argumentation. It was not the doctrine so much as the accompanying ritual and splendor of the temples and images that first impressed the Japanese. To them Buddhism represented an advanced way of life that they were eager to adopt.

During the Asuka period under the reign of the empress Suiko (593–628), Buddhism received the support of the court; but the person most directly responsible for the rapid growth of Buddhism was her nephew, the crown prince Shotoku (572–622). He was quick to adopt the Chinese language and wrote explanations of the Buddhist *sutras*, which had come to Japan with the Buddhist monks. In 607 he and his aunt established the Horyu-ji west of Nara, at that time simply a pleasant country area, with the court located at Asuka, present-day Nara Prefecture (fig. 22.1).

There are two parts to the temple at Horyu-ji, the west compound and the east compound. The first is on axis with the long south–north approach; the second is to the east. The west compound contains a five-storied pagoda and an image hall, while the east compound contains a single octagonal building. Each compound is surrounded by a covered gallery.

The Horyu-ji was built by Korean architects and other craftspeople and artists who were sent in the hundreds from Paekche (Kudara) and settled in the region. The temple is of the Kudara plan of which no example remains in Korea.

### IMAGE HALL AND PAGODA

The Horyu-ji is the world's oldest extant wood construction (fig. 22.2). Records indicate that a fire in 670 destroyed some sections. Instead of the usual north–south axis, the image hall and pagoda are on an east–west axis (fig. 22.3). The architectural style reflects that of sixth-century China (fig. 22.4). As in the Chinese tradition the buildings are placed on raised platforms.

- There are no examples of Korean Art, and Korea is limited to passages such as this.

## PART ONE

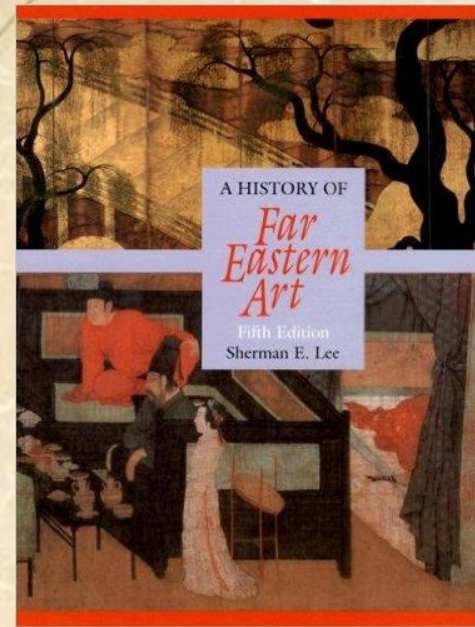
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- In *Art Beyond the West* Korean art is combined with other Areas of East Asia.
- Chapter subheadings are specific to Korea, placed as transitions between China and Japan.
- Each area addressing Korea specifically in only 2 to 4 pages, a total of approximately 10 pages in a 304 page text.

Lee, S. *Far Eastern Art*, 1994, 5th ed.. Prentice Hall.



*Western Paradise of Buddha Amitābha*, c. 570 CE, stone sculpture, Northern Qi Dynasty from Cave 2 in southern Xiangtangshan, Freer and Sackler Galleries, Washington D.C. Photograph by Robert Stevenson.



*Western Paradise of  
Buddha Amitābha, c. 570  
CE, stone sculpture,  
Northern Qi Dynasty  
from Cave 2 detail.*

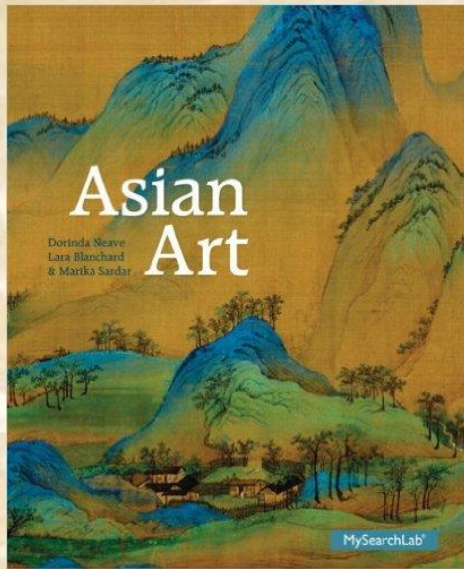


*The Descent of Amitabha Buddha, 14<sup>th</sup> century  
CE, paint of silk Koryo Dynasty, Leeum  
Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul from  
“Amitabha Triad”; Virtual Collection of  
Asian Masterpieces ;  
<http://masterpieces.asemus.museum>, 2013.*



*Raigo of Amida (Amitabha) and  
Twenty-five Attendants, 13<sup>th</sup>  
century CE, color on silk,  
Kamakura Period, Kyoto  
National Museum, Kyoto from  
“Masterpieces of KNM”;  
Kyoto National Museum;  
[kyohaku.go.jp](http://kyohaku.go.jp), n.d.*





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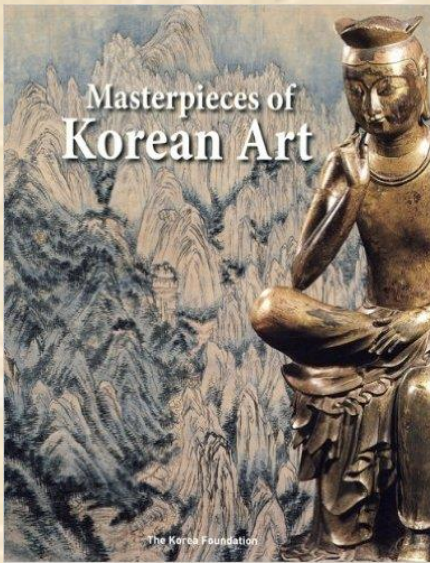
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# Recent Improvement

- In *Asian Art* is a text which explores South, Southeast, and East Asian Art.
- Again Korean art is combined with Japan.
- In the section exploring Korea and Japanese art Korea is treated specifically, but in only 1 out of 5 chapters.
- The Chapter “An Unknown Land, A People Divided: Korean Art from Prehistory to the Present” is 33 pages in a 432 page text.

Neave, Blanchard & Sardar. *Asian Art*, 2014, 1st ed.. Pearson.



## A need for new direction in American textbooks

- General art history textbooks that will have world art focus and that will also give enough space to Korean art.
- Art history textbooks that will focus only on Korean art, its uniqueness, and its distinction from Chinese and Japanese art.
- Art textbooks (art history, art theory, art techniques manuals) that will focus on specific art periods, styles, genres that will include valuable Korean art examples pertinent to the topic (e.g. the book I am writing - a textbook for the class I have developed and teach - Eco Art and Design).



Lee, K. *Masterpieces of Korean Art*, 2010, Korean Foundation.

Amirsadeghi, H., Joseph, M. Ed. *Korean Art: The Power of Now*, 2014, Thames & Hudson.