

# Asian Odyssey

A National K-12 Interdisciplinary Curriculum Model

## PORCELAIN AND TRADE ECONOMICS

### Grade Level

This lesson was created for grades 5-8.

### Purpose

- To describe the process of importing and exporting
- To explore why wealthy Europeans wanted Asian luxury goods and how they obtained them.

### Concepts

- Cultural diffusion: The spread of cultural elements, such as ideas, techniques, and objects, from one area or group of people to others.
- International trade is defined as trade between two or more partners from different countries (an exporter and an importer).
- Law of supply and demand: In general, when goods are traded in a market at a price where buyers demand more goods than companies can supply, this shortage (or excess demand) can lead to an increase in the price of the goods. Those buyers who are prepared to pay more will bid up the market price. Conversely, prices will tend to fall when the quantity of goods exceeds demand (i.e., when there is a market oversupply).

### Key Ideas

- Porcelain is a type of ceramic made from clay and fired at much higher temperatures than ordinary earthenware. Porcelain is unique because of the addition of a special type of clay, known as kaolin, so that when fired porcelain is not only delicately thin, but translucent and waterproof.
- Chinese potters invented porcelain as they had both large deposits of kaolin and the technical expertise to build high-temperature kilns. The techniques of making porcelain were kept a closely guarded secret for many centuries. Archaeologists have found Chinese porcelains that can be dated to the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE; the secret of making true porcelain was not discovered in Europe until the 18<sup>th</sup> century.
- Starting in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, Chinese porcelains were exported along the overland trade routes of the Silk Road to Central Asia and the Mediterranean and by the maritime sea route to Korea and Japan. This sea route is sometimes called the Porcelain Road.
- The Chinese traded for cobalt blue pigments from Persia, and blue-and-white porcelain became the most popular type of ceramics, especially for export.

- The Japanese also began manufacturing Chinese-style porcelain exports reached Venice and quickly became extremely popular throughout Europe.

## Materials

*Gao zu* (“high footed”) bowl, 1426-1435 (Chinese), CMA 1964.168

*Vase with Cover*, late 16<sup>th</sup> century-early 17<sup>th</sup> century (Chinese), CMA 1954.574.a-b

*Vase: Kutani Ware*, 1800s (Japanese), CMA 1941.573

*Pair of Hexagonal Jars: Kakiemon Type*, late 1600s (Japanese), CMA 1964.27.1-.2

*Portrait of a Family Playing Music*, 1663 (Dutch), CMA 1951.355

*Wine Glass and a Bowl of Fruit*, 1663 (Dutch), CMA 1962.292

*Silver Wing Jug, Ham, and Fruit*, early 1660s (Dutch), CMA 1960.80

Outline map of Europe and Asia, pencils, paper

## Procedure

1. For homework, ask the students to look at the labels of what they wore yesterday and bring in a list of the countries where the clothing was made.
2. Ask students how they think these items got to the United States and into local stores. What is it called when we buy products from a foreign country and bring them here? What do we send overseas? When did this exporting and importing begin?
3. Write the words “import” and “export” on the board and ask students if they know what they mean. After a period of discussion, add the class definitions to the board. Ask students if they can name any other items they own that were imported from foreign countries (perhaps cameras or electronic equipment).
4. Explain to the students that trade has existed since the beginning of recorded history. The first trade was called bartering when people with more of one item swapped this item with someone who had a surplus of another item.
5. Show students a map of Asia. Explain that a network of overland trade routes called the Silk Road existed as early as the Han dynasty (206 BCE-200CE). Goods were by camel caravans from China to destinations as far away as Europe and Africa.
6. Show the images of Chinese and Japanese porcelain from the CMA. Have students research how porcelain, cobalt (for the blue color) had to be imported from Persia. Have them locate Persia on the map (modern-day Iran).
7. The majority of the porcelain that traveled from China to Japan was carried over the sea route. Why do you think this was so? Suggest that it was safe, goods did not have to be traded to middlemen, and as porcelain was delicate, it could be packed more carefully and handled less when going by sea.
8. Show students the images of the three Dutch paintings; make sure that the students notice the blue-and-white Chinese export porcelain that appears in each of these painting.

9. Group student in pairs and have them make a list of what they see. Start with the *Portrait of a Family*. Ask students what kind of a family they think this is. Where do they live? How are they dressed? Are they well off? Describe the way the house is furnished.
10. Ask them to examine the other two Dutch painting and add the results to their lists.
11. Begin to discuss how these wealthy families from Holland were able to acquire Chinese or Japanese porcelain items. This again should lead to a discussion of exports and imports.
12. Remind your students where Holland and China and Japan are on the outline map. How do you think goods were transported between the two? (Point out where the Silk Road would be and ask if they can find a faster way.) Ask the students why the Dutch might have wanted to acquire Chinese or Japanese porcelain. (Europeans did not yet have the technical knowledge to make porcelain so ownership of Asian porcelain was a status symbol and sign of wealth.)
13. Have the students create their ideal still life with their most prized imports.

### **Evaluation**

- A. Write a formal paragraph on the following: “What made Japanese and Chinese products so popular with the wealthy in European society? Explain your answer with examples from today’s world.”

### **Enrichment**

- A. Have students look at the CMA website ([www.clevelandart.org](http://www.clevelandart.org)) to find examples of other exports or imports found in paintings. Why are they shown?
- B. Students could use the web to research the exporting of products today. They could create a list of exports from China or Japan to America today or exports from America to Japan and China. Compare and contrast these exports.
- C. Describe the trade imbalance between China and Japan with the United States today. Why do we have an imbalance?

### **State of Ohio Standards**

1. Explain reasons that people, products and ideas move from place to place and the effects of that movement on geographic patterns.
2. Analyze the ways that contacts between people of different culture results in exchanges of cultural practices.
3. Explain how the endowment and development of productive resources affect economic decisions and global interactions.
4. Explain why trade occurs and how historical patterns of trade have contributed to global interdependence.

**This lesson plan was developed by D. Garth Holman, Beachwood City Schools, Beachwood, Ohio.**