



Artists & Art in Civilization

Zachary Baldi

Author's Biography



Hi everyone! My name is Zachary Baldi. I'm 20 years old and in my sophomore year of college. I plan to transfer to UC Davis for a B.S. in Cognitive Science. I enjoy playing volleyball and spending time with friends.

<https://culturedeepdive.blogspot.com>

Introduction to Theme

In this presentation, I will be focusing on the theme of the role of both artists and their art in civilization. The concept of art has been present for thousands of years, taking various forms as the technology and ideas of the times have shifted and changed.

Art from each civilization not only becomes the inspiration for art for others, but also allows us to get a closer look into the lives, ideas, values, and more of the people who lived before us.

This presentation will analyze how the theme of artists & art has perpetuated throughout multiple civilizations and helped to prolong the influence of their ideals to future generations.



Buddha of Medicine
Yuan dynasty
Metropolitan Museum



Introduction to Theme

This presentation will discuss the art, ideas, skills, and institutions of multiple civilizations through the lens of the theme mentioned previously. The time periods discussed will be the Indus Valley Civilization, Hinduism, Buddhism, Ancient China, the Silk Road, and Medieval Japan.

Focus Questions:

To what extent is the art reflected in the arts of the chapter?

To what extent is the art reflected in the ideas of the chapter?

To what extent is the art reflected in the skills of the chapter?

To what extent is the art reflected in the institutions of the chapter?



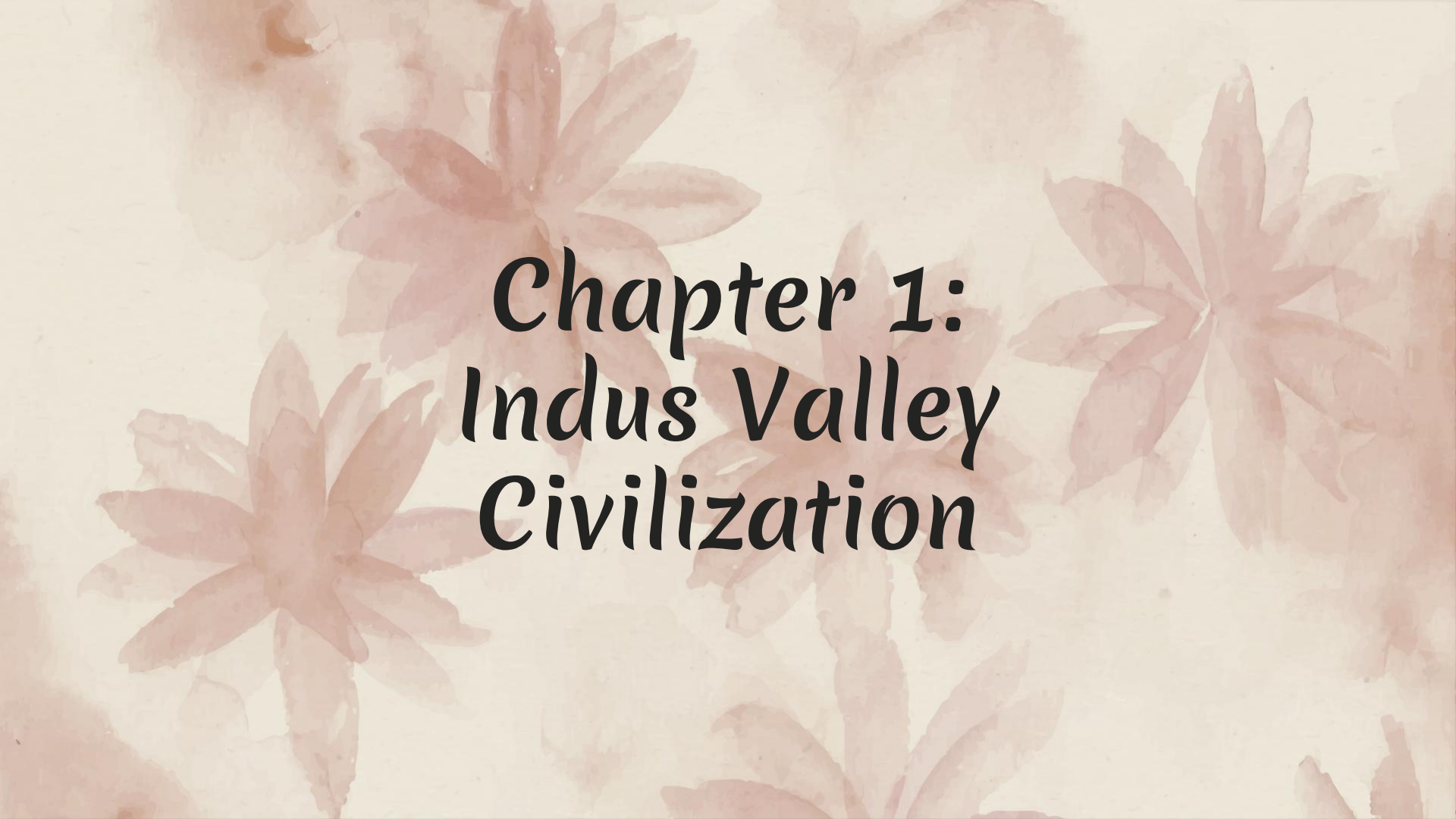




Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-------|
| Title page..... | 1 |
| Author's Biography..... | 2 |
| Introduction to theme..... | 3-4 |
| Table of contents..... | 5 |
| Chapter 1; The Indus Valley Civilization..... | 6-11 |
| Chapter 2: Hinduism and the Bhagavad Gita..... | 12-17 |
| Chapter 3: Buddhism..... | 18-23 |
| Chapter 4: Ancient China and the Early Historic Period..... | 24-29 |
| Chapter 5: Dunhuang, Trade, and the Silk Road..... | 30-35 |
| Chapter 6: Ancient and Medieval Japan..... | 36-41 |
| Conclusion..... | 42-43 |

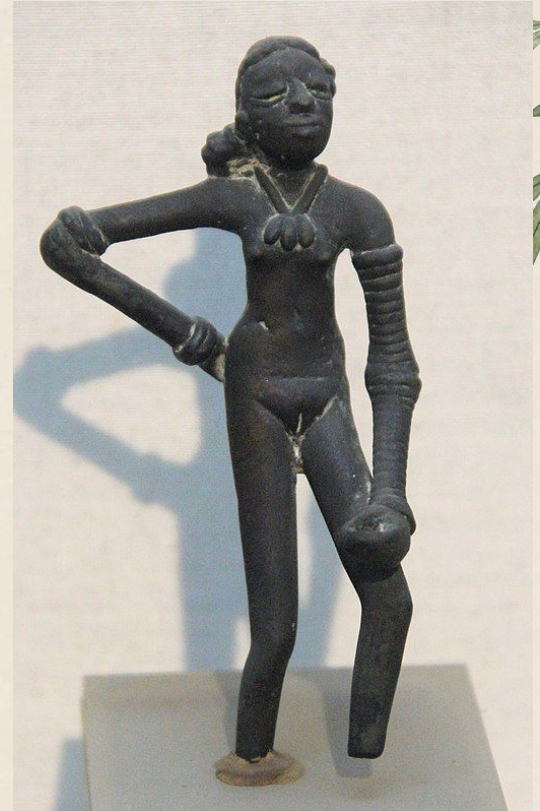


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**Chapter 1:
Indus Valley
Civilization**

Art

The Indus Valley Civilization was one of the earliest civilizations of the world. The various forms of art found there included sculptures, seals, pottery, and terracotta figures. While the tools used to make different kinds of art in the civilization weren't very advanced, the ingenuity of the Indus people allowed them to create many pieces of art that, today, display an impressive amount of creativity and craftsmanship. Terracotta figures such as *The Dancing Girl* give a good insight into what art was like at the time.



Dancing Girl
Indus Valley Civilization
2300-1750 BCE
National Museum, New Delhi


Ideas



Many ideas implemented during the time of the Indus Valley Civilization allowed the people to thrive as are largely responsible for the survival of the civilization. Numerous advancements enhanced the quality of life for the people, allowing for the creation of more art.

Cities contained public granaries and baths. Waste-water drainage systems and trash collection systems could also be found. Many ideas from the Indus Valley civilization inspired ingenious technological advancements.

Urban planning was another idea from the Indus Valley Civilization that allowed the Indus people to use their land efficiently, allowing settlements and communities to develop in a cohesive and natural way.




Skills



One skill prevalent in the Indus Valley Civilization was architecture. An art form in its own right, the architecture of the Indus people proved to be both effective and creative.

The Harappans demonstrated advanced architecture in the form of warehouses, protective walls, granaries, and dockyards. While the Indus people did not build extremely large structures such as grand temples or palaces, their knowledge and skill in both architecture and infrastructure allowed them to innovate in exciting ways. One of those innovations being the world's first known urban sanitation system. Skills such as hand-carving also gave the Indus people a way to create figures and sculptures to express the ideas of the civilization.



Institutions

While archaeological records show no definitive proof of a single center of authority within the Indus Valley Civilization. There are theories that have developed regarding Harappan government institutions .

One theory suggests that there was a single state encompassing all the communities within the civilization. This theory is largely supported by the evidence of planned settlements and similarities in artifacts throughout the civilization. Besides the theories behind the governmental institutions and structure of the Indus people, there is little know regarding other institutions.

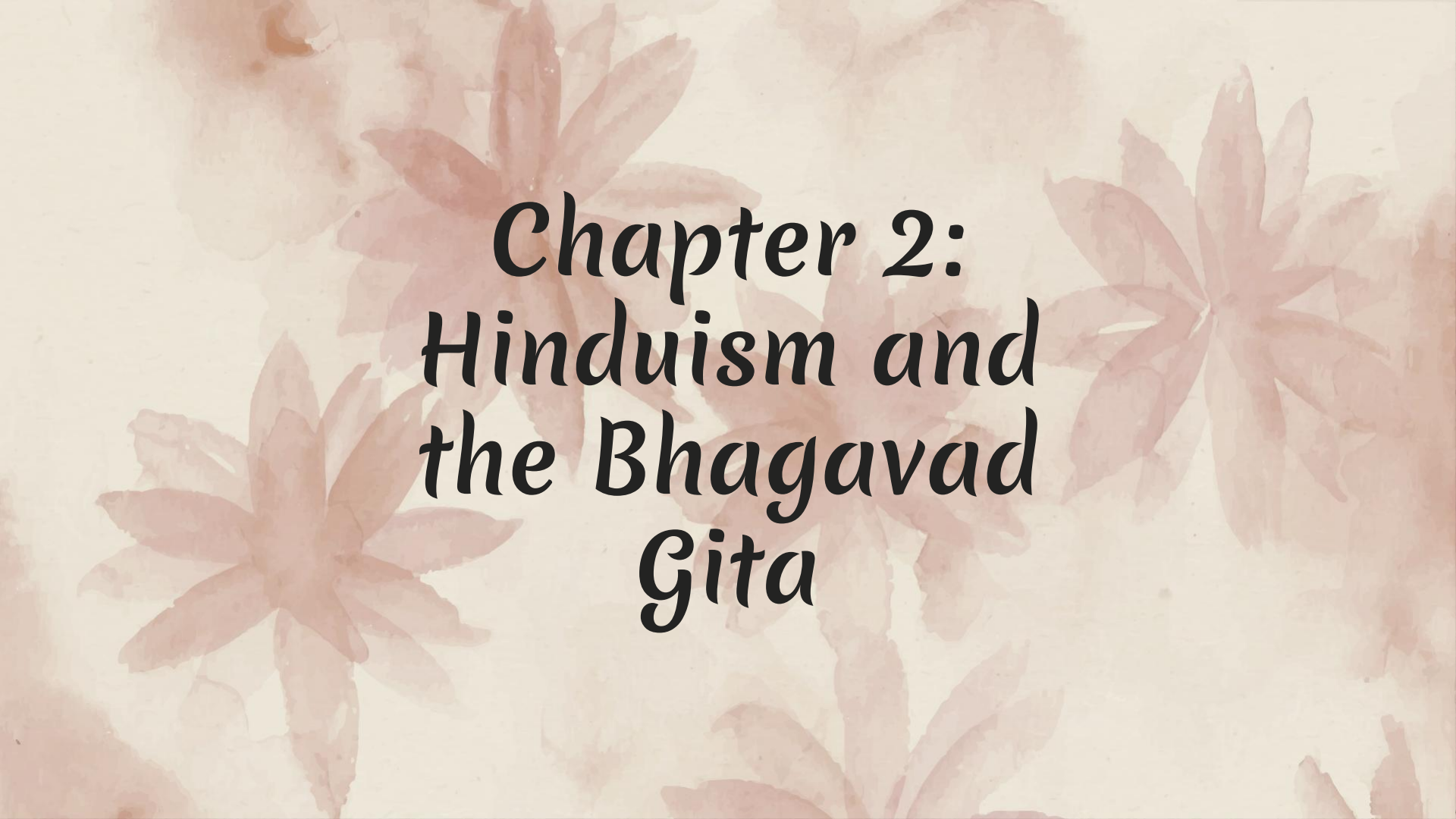
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**Chapter 2:
Hinduism and
the Bhagavad
Gita**

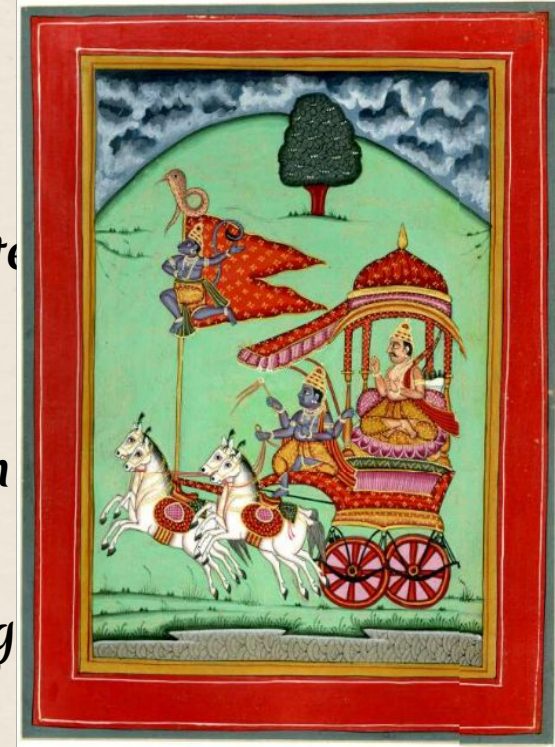
Art

Hindu art largely includes sculptures and temples typically devoted to a number of various deities. The art of the time period represents a plurality of beliefs that has heavily influenced sculpture, painting, and architecture of the Indian subcontinent.

Symbols such as the lotus flower often recur in Hindu sculpture. There is a vast influence of religion in much of the art from the time period which is reflected in the devotion in a majority of the art to religious figures such as Krishna and Arjuna from the *Bhagavad Gita*, a 700-verse Hindu scripture that is part of the epic Mahabharata. Paintings of these characters were also commonplace at the time.

Ideas

One major piece of text, previously mentioned, is the *Bhagavad Gita*. The *Gita* consists of the dialogue between the Pandava prince Arjuna and his charioteer Krishna, an incarnation of the deity Vishnu. In Arjuna's conflicted state of mind, Krishna offers him advice regarding his tenuous situation, serving as the guidelines of a proper life according to the Hindu belief system. The *Gita* introduces a number of ideas such as *Karma*, the causal law in which actions determine one's future, and *Dharma*, one's individual duty they must uphold through action. These ideas would go on to influence generations to come, being studied and practiced by many even today. The *Bhagavad Gita*, in of itself, is a form of art that has influences the lives of countless throughout the years.



*Arjuna and Krishna on
Chariot
Artist Unknown*

Skills

Similar to the people of the Indus Valley Civilization, those who lived during this time period has extraordinary skill and technique when it came to architecture.

Unlike the people of the Indus Valley Civilization however, this skill was used to create large temples devoted to various deities.

Skills in craftsmanship and sculpture-carving also saw advancements during this time period with more detailed sculptures crafted. Paintings would become increasingly detailed as they portrayed events discussed in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Institutions

The most obvious representation of institutions relating to the theme of art were the vast temples discussed previously. The earliest Hindu temples were conceived around 400 to 500 CE. Among these was the Dashavatara Vishnu temple in Deogarh India which built around 500 CE.

Hindu temples typically consist of a “garba griha”, or womb chamber, the inner sanctum housing the idol of the deity and a congregation hall. There were multiple styles of temple including the Nagara style, more square with multiple projections, and the Dravidian style, progressive smaller stories of pavilions.

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The background of the slide is a soft, watercolor-style illustration. It features several large, stylized flowers in shades of light pink, peach, and pale orange. The petals are layered and have a delicate, painterly texture. The overall color palette is warm and gentle, creating a serene and artistic atmosphere.

Chapter 3: Buddhism

Art

In the earliest forms of Buddhist art the Buddha was not at all represented in human form. Instead his presence would be largely represented through artist symbolism and signs. The first human representations of Buddha were of a more youthful Buddha with hair arranged in curls slightly resembling some Roman statues. Buddha was the central piece of many forms of art during the time period where, once again, religion has strong influence on and representation in art.



Buddha
Artist Unknown
15th Century, Ming
Dynasty
Smithsonian Institution

Ideas

Buddhism is largely divided into two great traditions. Theravada Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism. The term "Buddhism" implies that the followers of Buddhism had formed behind a defined movement, but this was not true. In the time of Theravada Buddhism, the followers of Buddha's teachings never encountered the concept of Buddhism. So while the teachings of Buddha continued to spread, it would not be accurate to say that "Buddhism" was defined at the time.

Buddhism encourages its people to avoid self-indulgence but also self-denial. Buddha's most important teachings, known as The Four Noble Truths, are essential to understanding the religion. Buddhists embrace the concepts of karma (the law of cause and effect) and reincarnation (the continuous cycle of rebirth).

Skills

The most notable skill of the time period was the incredible architectural technique employed in the design of many of the religious Buddhist temples and stupas.

The stupas were designed in such a way that they symbolized the Buddhist concept of the universe. They had solid dome tops that rose from the circular base which was meant to represent the Earth.

The techniques developed in architecture during this period allowed the people to create increasingly complex building designs more closely representing their beliefs.

Institutions

The institution of the Buddhist religion would play a pivotal role in the life of the people, similar to the art and ideas of the time. Buddhist temples and stupas were beautifully designed with the intent of divine representation. Their artistic designs help us to understand the ways in which the ideals were perceived.

There were three main kinds of Buddhist structures:

- 1) stupas: bell-shaped structures that contain a holy relic or scripture
- 2) temples: a place of worship somewhat similar to a church; and
- 3) monasteries: which contain living quarters and meditation cells for monks

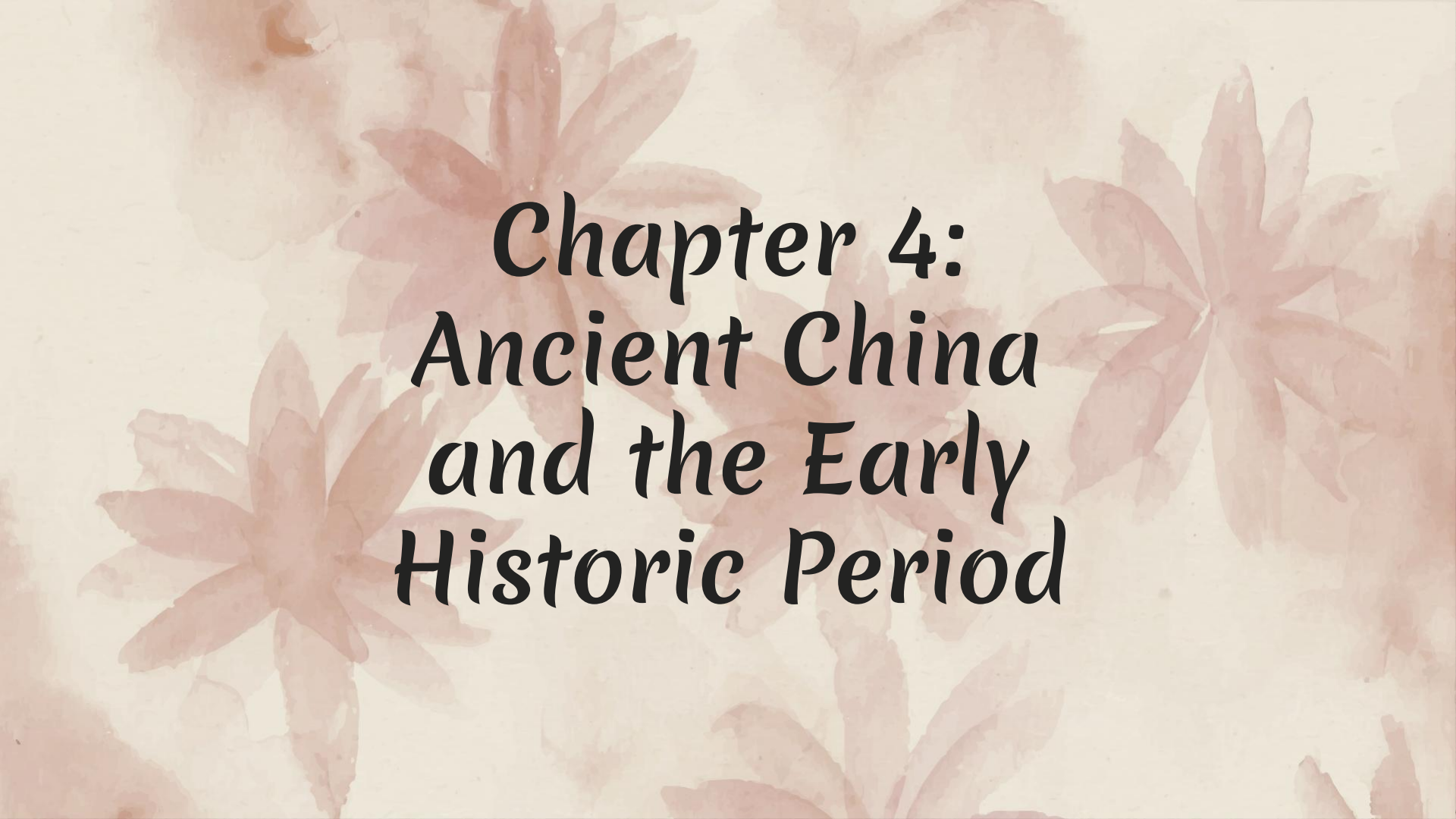
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***Chapter 4:
Ancient China
and the Early
Historic Period***

Art

Ancient Chinese art was a means for the artists to attempt to both to capture and present the philosophical approach to life which they highly valued. Much of the art of the time was heavily inspired by the belief system in Ancient China. Confucianism and Daoism would inspire a significant portion of the art at the time. Calligraphy and painting were the two most common forms of ancient Chinese art. Many students of Confucius would also write poetry and other literature of their own inspired by his teachings.

A belief that art should somehow benefit the viewer led to a relatively strict set of rules surrounding art creation at the time. Regardless, the landscape paintings and calligraphy created by artists offers a closer look into both the philosophy and the land of ancient China.

Ideas



Life of Confucius
Artist Unknown
Late Qing dynasty (1644–1911)
Metropolitan Museum

Philosophical thought was a extremely prevalent topic in Ancient China. Confucianism is one of the most influential religious philosophies in the history of China. It largely focuses on the importance of personal ethics and morality. Whether it is only or a philosophy or also a religion is debated. Confucianism, no doubt, laid the foundation for much of Chinese culture and has had an immense amount of influence on and representation in Chinese art.

Skills

Metallurgy had an important role in the society of Ancient China and thus saw a number of advancements throughout the time period.

Bronze casting allowed for complex metal designs that were implemented in a number of religious and philosophical works of art. These beautifully designed decorative/ceremonial pieces allowed for people to feel a deeper connection with the gods at the time.

Ancient Chinese metallurgy also included the creation of a number of weapons which would see use in warfare. Its role in art, however, is what would ultimately influence much of life in civilization.

Institutions

In the ancient Chinese institution of government was mostly run by the civil service. Thousands of civil servants throughout the empire would report to the Emperor. The highest ranks among them were ministers who reported directly to the Emperor and worked in the palace. Ministers were wealthy and powerful government officials.

The institution that reflected the most artistic influence was certainly religion. As previously stated, much of the painting/calligraphy, the two most prevalent forms of art at the time, were directly inspired by Confucianism and Daoism.

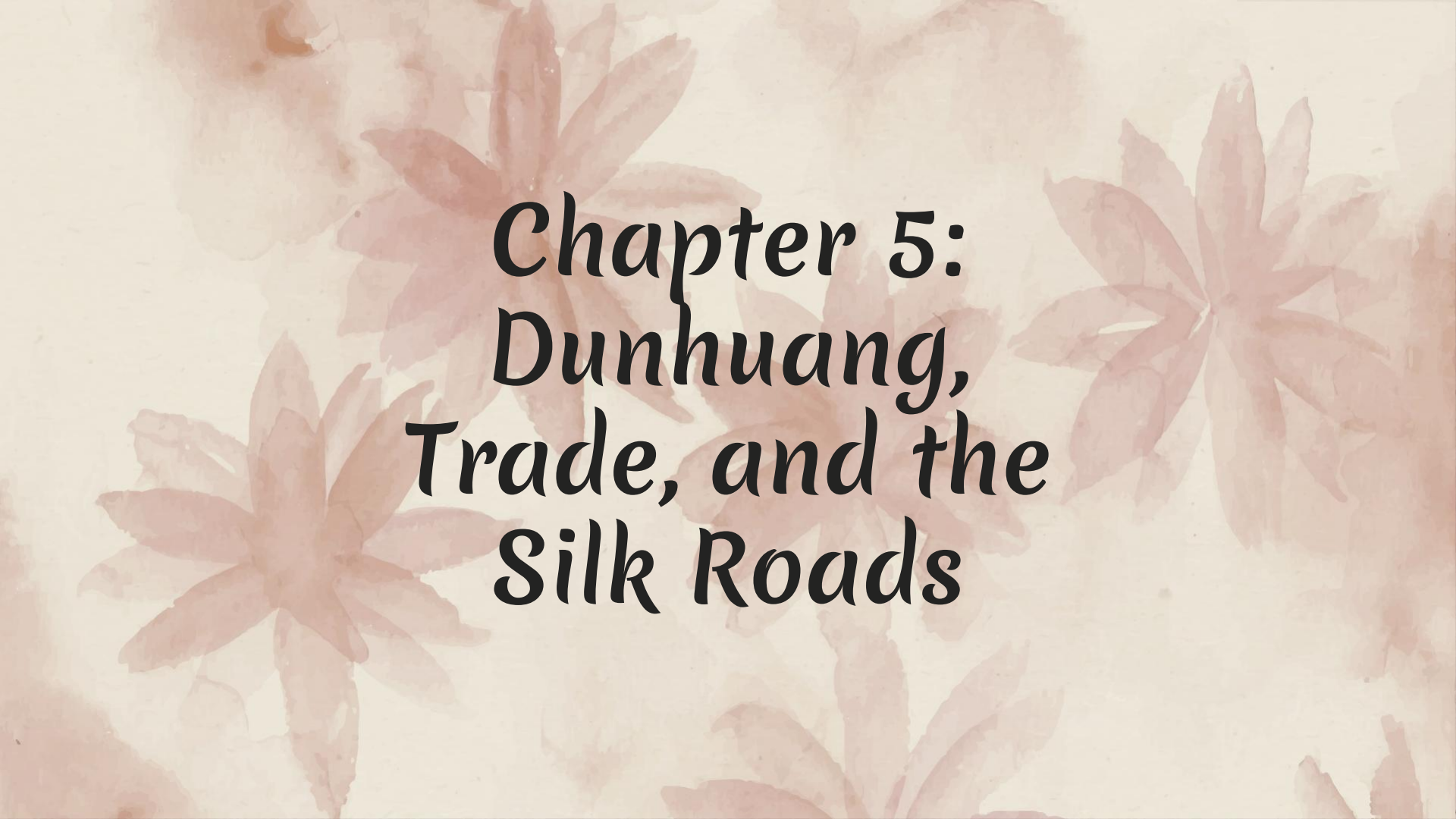
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The background of the slide is a soft, watercolor-style illustration of several large, multi-petaled flowers in shades of light pink and peach. The flowers are scattered across the page, with some appearing more prominent than others. The overall aesthetic is gentle and artistic.

***Chapter 5:
Dunhuang,
Trade, and the
Silk Roads***

Art

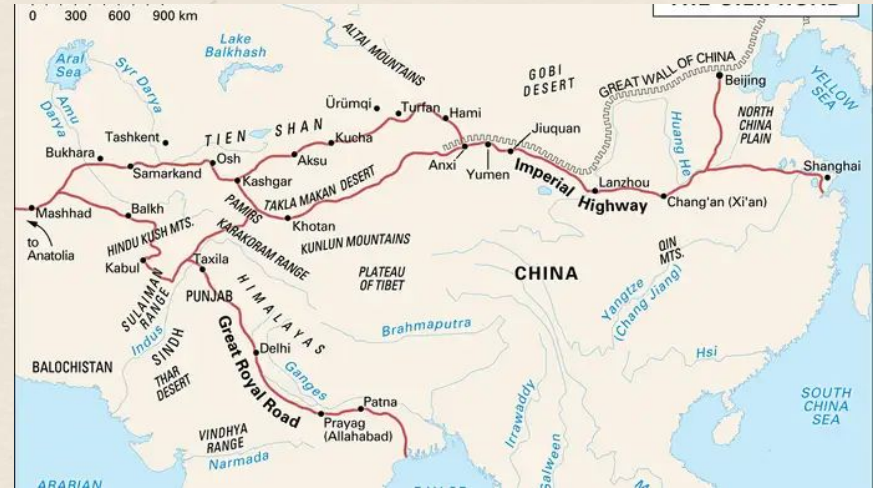
Dunhuang art, continuing from the work of prior artists, consisted mostly of painting and calligraphy. However, additional forms of art would also see an increase in popularity such as stucco sculpture, music and dance, and embroidery.

The artistic styles and techniques during the time of Silk Road were largely inspired by the travel of beliefs, ideas, and technology. The art from the time helps us to better understand how certain aspects of civilization may have affected each other at the time. As religion is a common influencer of art everywhere, much of the art of of the Silk Road was religious in origin, similar to the art of civilizations discussed prior. Art forms such as glassware would become increasingly popular in China following continued imports.

Ideas

The Silk Road was an ancient trade route that linked China with the West, carrying both goods and ideas between the two great civilizations of China and Rome. This exchange had a massive influence on the art of both civilizations and pieces created during this time tell the story of the cultural diffusion between them.

The Silk Road did not only promote commodity exchange but also cultural. Religions and philosophies such as Buddhism would spread due to the exchange of ideas.



Map of the Silk Road
Britannica.com

Skills

Numerous goods were traded along the Silk Road which allowed for the enhancement and development of new techniques. For example, the cooking techniques employed by the people of different civilizations were drastically affected by the trade of various spices and other food items.

Aside from this, the exchange of ideas also led to an increase in technical knowledge that allowed for technological advancement for multiple civilizations. These ideas would also appear in the art of various artists in civilizations affected by the trade along the Silk Road.

Institutions

Key cities along the Silk Road provided environments where the exchange of ideas, goods, and arts could take place. It was in these cities that people of different civilizations would first interact. As people learned of different cultures and arts, their curiosity and desire to experience more of new civilizations grew.

Among these key cities were Xi'an, China; Merv, Turkmenistan; Samarkand, Uzbekistan; Damascus, Syria; Constantinople, Turkey, and more.

The Silk Road allowed for communication and communion that would not have otherwise been possible, allowing the lessons/teachings found in various art forms to spread across multiple distant civilizations.

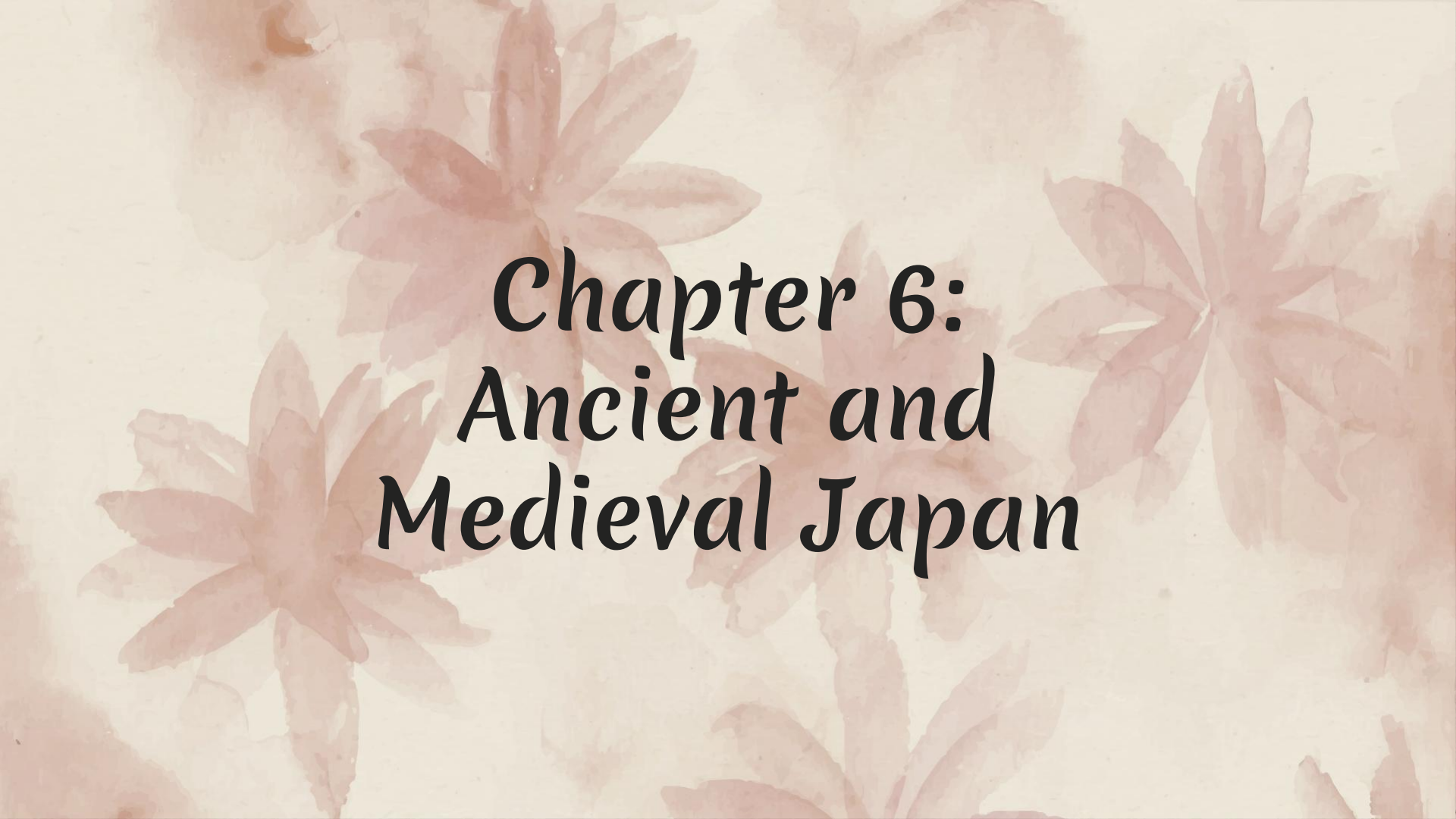
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***Chapter 6:
Ancient and
Medieval Japan***

Art

Medieval Japan saw the creation of many influential calligraphy scripts, picture scrolls, landscape/nature paintings, poetry, literature, and more. Paintings were defined by both realistic and religiously inspired styles that tell the stories of medieval Japan today.

The time period saw artists take and integrate the arts of Chinese literature, Confucian studies, the ritualized consumption of tea, ink monochrome paintings, garden design, and calligraphy.

Art forms such as the zen garden would be conceived during this time, symbolizing the way of life of the people. Meant to invoke tranquility, calmness, and inner peace, zen gardens were an important part of ancient Japanese life and art.

Ideas



*Portrait of Zen
Master
15th Century,
Medieval Japan
Metropolitan
Museum*

As previously mentioned, the concepts of tranquility and inner peace held high importance within the philosophy of medieval Japan. The rise of Zen Buddhism, a Japanese school of Mahayana Buddhism, would characterize much of the religion and philosophy of the civilization.

These subjects would become the inspiration for much of the literature and art conceived during the time period. The goal of the art, for many, became to accurately portray the ideas discussed in philosophy through imagery. Many pieces surviving today help us to understand the ideologies of ancient Japan.

Skills

One of the most famous skills found in medieval Japan was blacksmithing. The metalworkers in ancient Japan were known for the meticulous craftsmanship and expertise in creating decorative weapons.

The most well-known among them being the katana. Wielded by samurai during the time period, the katana was meant to be an extension of the body, representing both the blade and soul of the warrior. These pieces of art were said to be extremely capable in combat while maintaining an elegant beauty that has influenced metallurgy for generations.

Institutions

Medieval Japan was known as the time of the shogun, which means “general who quells barbarians,” an ancient military term that was adopted in the twelfth century for the dominant warlord who held political and martial power in Japan while the emperor in Kyoto maintained his position as figural head of state and cultural leader.

Shogun and samurai were often heavily invested into the art of the time, being patrons of Zen Buddhism and related arts. They held positions of authority and are likely responsible for the spread of the religion and philosophy held by many at the time to some degree.


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Conclusion

Having researched and studied the various aspects of civilization from multiple civilizations in Asian history, I can confidently say the role of art and artists is similar in civilizations throughout time. Art grants artists the ability to preserve the rich history, culture, religion, skills, and ideas of a civilization and influence the people after them. Through research on the Indus Valley Civilization, Hinduism and the Bhagavad Gita, Buddhism, Ancient China and the Early Historic Period, the Silk Road trade, and medieval Japan, I can say the art of each time period is not only reflected in the arts, but also both takes influence and influences the skills, ideas, institutions, and other aspects of civilization.



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