

## Theme 3 Traces of Belief: Making Values Tangible Through Word and Image

Symbolic representations of one's faith or images of saints or gods and goddesses help devotees remember teachings, focus their worship, and gain comfort. Images of people we admire and want to remember can serve a similar function.

Through images of both the bodhisattva Guanyin and Confucius, *Traces of Belief* offers students a chance to begin to appreciate the pluralism of beliefs of the Chinese as well as ways they have been able to harmonize seemingly conflicting ideas, particularly Confucianism and Daoism, two indigenous beliefs, along with Buddhism, which became preeminent in China during the first millennium C.E.

This unit allows students to examine not only what Confucius taught but also the ideas of some of the contemporary competing schools of thought and how they were later reconciled. Studying Guanyin's image, and the way this bodhisattva who "Hears the cries of the world" changed from a man to a woman as he/she traveled, illustrates how ideas travel and are adapted by different cultures.

The background essay, "**Chinese Belief Systems: From Past to Present and Present to Past**," briefly summarizes various Chinese beliefs including ancestral rites and divination, Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, as well as belief systems in China today. In looking closely at Guanyin, the first activity, **The Power of the Image**, asks students to consider symbolism, including ways of visually expressing sacred time and space as well as Buddhist values. The second activity, **A Sage of China**, introduces students to the basic teachings of Confucius.

**Portrait of the Bodhisattva Guanyin, Portrait of Confucius**



**Portrait of the Bodhisattva Guanyin (left)**

Purportedly Tang dynasty (618–907), undated.

Woodcut illustration; traditionally attributed to Wu Daozi (689–759), probably Ming (1368–1644) or Qing (1644–1911) dynasty.

Hanging scroll, ink rubbed on paper, 109.1 x 54.9 cm.

Date of rubbing unknown, Qing dynasty.

**Portrait of Confucius (right)**

Purportedly Tang dynasty (618–907), undated. Attributed to Wu Daozi (689–759). Hanging scroll, ink rubbed on 2 joined sheets of paper, 194.0 x 62.1 cm. Date of rubbing unknown.

**Introductory Questions**

- These two images are rubbings. After the original paintings were executed, someone traced the lines in a woodcut, then applied ink, and laid the paper on top to create a rubbing. What are the advantages of this method?
- What are the similarities in the way these two figures are presented?
- What are the differences in presentation?
- What does each figure appear to be feeling?

### **Portrait of the Bodhisattva Guanyin, Portrait of Confucius**

- Do you feel one or the other is more approachable? Why?
- Both of these images are thought by some to be by the famous Tang painter Wu Daozi, known for his use of dynamic, fluid line. Do you think one image looks more dynamic and fluid than the other?
- Would an artist in China be likely to paint both a Confucian and a Buddhist image? (See background essay.)