



# *Talismans of Protection from Chōson Korea: Antique Locks, Latches, and Key Charms*

September 3 – December 22, 2011

University of Wyoming Art Museum 2011  
Educational Packet for K-12 Teachers

**Purpose of this Packet:** To provide K-12 teachers with background information on the exhibition and age appropriate suggestions for exploring the concepts, meanings, and artistic intent of artwork before, during, and after the museum visit.

**Curricular Unit Topic:** To examine the cultural, social, and political significance of talismans, or protection, in Chosŏn Era Korea and around the world. Then they will consider the work, the artists and their ideas, form and function of the locks, keys, latches, and key charms, and the time period reflected in and through the work.

The focus of this educational packet and curricular unit is to **observe, question, explore, create and reflect.**

**Observe:** Students will observe the locks, keys, latches, and key charms found in this exhibition. They will look closely at craftsmanship, paying specific attention to the colors, patterns and designs used.

**Question:** Students will have an opportunity to read, write, sketch, and listen to teachers and museum educators, and then, to come up with questions about the work they see and the people who used them. How are these works used? Who used them? What are talismans? Why are animals symbols used?

**Explore:** They may explore the social, cultural, and political history of Chosŏn Era Korea and consider the use and function of the locks, latches, and key charms.

**Create:** Students will be given time to practice sketching and drawing, and may create their own patterns or designs that reflect the style of the artwork on exhibit. Work on art projects may occur either in the Shelton Studio or in their school art room.

**Reflect:** Students will evaluate their final products with other students, teachers, and museum educators. They will receive feedback on the artwork and the concepts behind its creation. After this process, students may write an essay about their art, the concept of talismans, or their museum experience.



Key Charm with a Medallion and Commemorative Coins, Late Chosŏn, Brass, silk, 12 x 9 inches, Courtesy of The Korea Society and The Lock Museum

## Talismans of Protection from Chosŏn Korea: Antique Locks, Latches, and Key Charm

**Introduction:** The Chosŏn Dynasty (1392-1910) was the last and longest reigning imperial dynasty of Korea. The period was heavily influenced by Confucian ideology and emphasized artistic, scientific, and cultural advances. In the late 16th and early 17th century, Korea was invaded by Japan and then by several neighboring nomadic people. These invasions had long-term economic, social, and military consequences, including an increase in the merchant class and an emphasis on scholarship. A self-imposed isolationism brought stability to the country.

Artists during the Chosŏn period were not permitted to take the educational examinations that would qualify them for higher civil service. Along with physicians and military officers, artists were of a lower social rank than the elite aristocratic yangban, who used their education to secure political and economic positions of power. However, the arts did flourish as is evident by the artistry of the objects included in this exhibition. Objects that were once solely functional took on decorative and symbolic importance.

Locks, initially made to secure personal property and valuables, became adornment for furniture and wedding boxes. More importantly, they served as a symbolic warning to not touch another's belongings. Common shapes to Korean locks include the drum and Deegut (ㄷ). Patterns were added through a variety of techniques such as inscribing and stamping. Locks also take on the shape of auspicious animals, such as a dragon, which has the ability to exorcise evil spirits, or a turtle, which represents immortality. Those in the shape of fish, an animal with eyes that never close, were thought to provide constant protection. Locks are symmetrical in order to be harmonious with the piece of furniture they were meant to secure.

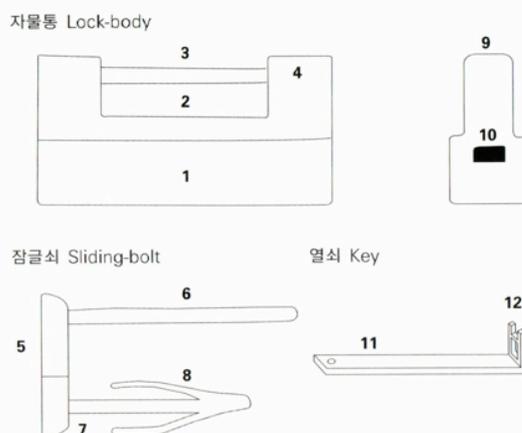
Latches were used as locking devices on the hinged gates outside traditional Korean homes. It typically consisted of a wooden bar that spanned both sides of the gate and passed through the decorative elements. Although latches were also made in the form of fish and swallows, all the latches in this exhibition are in the most common form of a turtle, considered one of the four everlasting animals along with the dragon,

phoenix, and giraffe. With their lifespan believed to be 3,000 years, the turtle came to be a symbol of protection, long life, fecundity, and prosperity. Turtles do not release prey from their mouths once caught and symbolize the security of the latched gate.

Key charms hold and hang keys and originally were simple tablets made out of wood or antler. Over time, they became more decorative and included objects like commemorative coins, silk string, and tassels. They represent hopes of comfort and happiness. Mothers often gave decorative key charms to daughters on their wedding day, symbolizing a family's hopes of unlocking blessings and locking what needs protection.

The artistry, decoration, and symbolism of the locks, latches, and key charms of the Chosŏn Dynasty demonstrate that the arts flourished in this 500-year time period of both upheaval and peace.

**Korean Locks: 'ㄷ'** (*Digeut*, the third letter in the Korean alphabet)-shaped Lock – A basic lock in Korea during the Joseon period (1392-1910), named for the shape of the front of the lock.



- 1 몸통 barrel
- 2 고리걸이 경자 nut of the ring-hook (lock catch)
- 3 고리걸이 ring-hook (lock catch)
- 4 귀퉁이(용마루) side ridges (youngmaroo)
- 5 바깥경자(잠글쇠) outside nut (locking metal)
- 6 훑대(잠글대) ring-hook (lock catch)
- 7 날름쇠 훑대 stem
- 8 속칭(발살축·날름쇠) split spring
- 9 바깥경자 outside cover
- 10 열쇠구멍 key hole
- 11 열쇠대강이 key beam
- 12 열쇠촉(역쇠끝) key point (key end)

*Talismans of Protection from Chŏson Korea: Antique Locks, Latches, and Key Charm*

The Digeut Lock consists 3 parts, a lock body, a key, and a sliding bolt in the lock body. To open the lock you insert an 'L'-shaped key into a key hole at the side of a lock body, then pull a sliding bolt to the other side. A 'V'-shaped split spring in the sliding bolt plays an essential role in opening and locking. Some locks have broad, flat keys and are called drawing bow-type locks



*Secret Lock* – The Secret Lock features a complex structure and mechanism. Unlike traditional locks, the key hole is concealed with an additional plank. To locate the key hole, two to seven buttons on the lock body must be pressed in a specific sequence. This lock was usually used on safes by aristocrats.



*Object-shaped Lock* – The locks in this category were modeled after animals or plants. Commonly used animals include bats, fish, and turtles, all of which represent certain things in Korean culture.



Bats are believed to drive away an evil spirit. Fish represent security and fortune. Because fish spawn many eggs, they also stand for fertility. For this reason, locks with fish patterns were often used on furniture in kitchens and inner rooms for women.



*Dragon-shaped Lock* – Exquisitely decorated dragon heads are on each end of the lock body. During the Goryeo period (918-1392) in Korea, the dragon decoration was only used in royal households. However, by the Joseon period dragon-shaped locks were widely used by noblemen. A dragon is a simple yet elegant symbol, reflecting scholarly pursuits.



*Drum-shaped Lock* – Also called 'Dukkeobdaji' in Korean, these locks are primarily intended for decoration and often have elaborate patterns. Among drum-shaped locks are the circular Taiji(Tae Geuk)-patterned locks. They often have a pattern that symbolizes ying and yang, or heaven and earth.



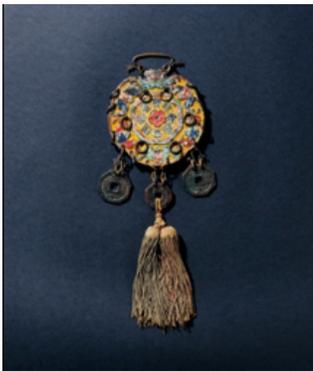
*Straight-shaped Lock* – This lock stands vertically. It is also referred to as a "Mouse-tail Lock." It works by sticking a spoon or a bar vertically into a door ring.



## *Talismans of Protection from Chōson Korea: Antique Locks, Latches, and Key Charm*

**Key Charms:** Key charms are a sort of key holder tied with an antler or a seal and decorated with coins, medallions, needlework and knots. The lady of the house held the key with a charm detailing the owner's name, address, etc. and she handed it down her daughter-in-law along with household management responsibility.

A key charm decorated with commemorative coins was generally not for daily use, but a marriage gift from a mother to her daughter in high society. The medallions had engraved auspicious signs or motifs. Usually, these elaborate key charms were adornments hanging on the wall or furniture and were used for prayer. A key charm with needlework was also a marriage gift and embroidered with various auspicious signs and patterns.



**Latches:** Main gate latches were usually made of wood. It included a cross bar, called a 'Bitjang' (latch) and a hinge panel, called a 'Bitjang Geori' or 'Dunte.'

Common people used simple shuttle latches, but rich noblemen preferred turtle-shaped latches, which imply longevity and protection. Although some turtle-shaped latches have necks that do not move, most turtle necks move and double as a secondary lock.



**Lesson Overview:** Students will learn about the locks, latches, and key charms in the exhibit, considering the people who used them and the political, social, and cultural context of Chosōn Korea. Students will explore ways artists are influenced by the world they live in,

and how they express artistic ideas through functional objects. They will discuss the relationship between the work and the material used.

Students and teachers may research and engage in conversations about the culture of Korea, talismans, or functional art before arriving at the art museum. While at the Art Museum they will spend time in the galleries closely observing the work, discussing it, writing about it, and sketching it. In the Shelton Studio students will have the opportunity to make art, choosing from a variety of materials: metal foil, sculpture materials, fabric, and more. They will begin conversations about the purpose and process behind the work, which will lay groundwork for pursuing these ideas back in the classrooms.

### **Essential Questions:**

#### **Grades K-6**

- What is art? What is functional art?
- How do artists turn their ideas into art?
- What are locks and how do they work?
- When and why do we use locks?
- What images of nature are in this exhibit?

#### **Grades 6-12**

- What are talismans?
- What words describe the art in this exhibit?
- What political, cultural, economic, and societal factors influenced these artisans?
- What talismans would you make?

### **Art Questions to Consider:**

#### **Grades K-6**

- What do you see?
- What shapes and forms do you see?
- What colors do you see?
- What is the function of the art in this exhibit?
- What colors, shapes, and patterns would you use to make a work in this exhibit?

#### **Grades 6-12**

- What techniques can you name in the artwork?
- How would you use these techniques to make something new in art?
- How do form and function work together in art?
- What materials would you use to create protective sculpture based on your experiences?

## *Talismans of Protection from Chōson Korea: Antique Locks, Latches, and Key Charm*

**Pre-visit Activities:** In order to prepare students and extend learning, we suggest the following activities:

- Students research form and function, design, and/or the history of locks.
- Students explore talismans and ideas of protection around the world.
- Students explore relationships between society and the functional art produced during that time.
- Students explore significant political, economic, and historical events of Chosŏn Era Korea.

**Prerequisite Skills/knowledge:** Museum educators will work with teachers to ensure all projects are age and skill appropriate. Teachers may also wish to review the following terms with students:

**Grades K-6:**

Shape  
Color  
Lines  
Pattern

**Grades 6-12:**

Form  
Function  
Design  
Talisman  
Artisan  
Craftsmanship

**Museum Activities:** These activities are suggestions. Museum educators will work with teachers to carefully tailor all classes to their students' needs, in support of classroom goals and district and state education standards.

**Part 1 – Time frame: 45 minutes**

- Students will closely observe the locks, keys, latches, and key charms on exhibit in the art museum.
- They will identify lines, shapes, forms, patterns, repetition, color, technique and style in the existing work.
- Students will discuss what they see with museum educators.
- They will explore the styles of art practiced by the artisans and metalsmiths represented in this exhibit.
- They will explore the concept of protection.
- Using worksheets, students will respond in writing or drawing to the work they see by recording their observations and their own thoughts about the work.
- Students will answer questions on a museum worksheet that engages them in new thinking about the art work, such as: What do you think this work protects? What talisman would you create and why?
- Students will engage in discussions about their observations and their answers and sketches with one another and with the teachers.

**Part 2 – Time frame: 45 minutes (minimum)**

The following projects may be considered individually, or combined, or museum staff will work with teachers to develop specific projects that support ongoing classroom work.

- Students will explore the concepts of talismans/protection (both literal and metaphorical) and think about how many cultures examine this idea.
- Students will create a talisman or protective sculpture using a wide variety of materials.

## *Talismans of Protection from Chōson Korea: Antique Locks, Latches, and Key Charm*

**Post visit activities:** We have found that students achieve maximum benefit from a museum visit when time is scheduled for post-visit activities. Here are some suggestions:

- Students discuss or write about their museum experiences, reviewing what they have learned, what has special meaning for them, and how they will use new information and skills.
- Students continue to research locks, talismans, design, and functionality in art or similar concepts (an essay, artwork, research paper).
- Students create their own drawings, mixed media, or sculptural works to explore new ideas, design, or the concept of protection.

**Suggested use in the curriculum:** The study of form and function in art; social, cultural, political, and historical context of functional art around the world to tie multiple curricular areas together such as art, history, social studies, writing, reading, math, geography, and philosophy. Museum staff will work with teachers to address specific Wyoming Teaching Standards and to align museum projects with ongoing classroom curricular units.

**Some recommended resources:** These are just a few of the many resources available. We welcome other suggestions that teachers and students find helpful which can be added to this list.

- UW Art Museum website: [www.uwyo.edu/artmuseum](http://www.uwyo.edu/artmuseum)
- Sources of Korean Tradition, Vol. 1, edited by Peter H. Lee et al
- Discovering Korea website, <http://discoveringkorea.com/2010/03/06/the-lock-museum>
- Internet and library searches on the Chosŏn Era or Korea.

**Materials to be supplied:** The Art Museum provides selected materials for Shelton Studio projects.

**Assessment and Documentation:** In order to ensure that our museum tour program is meeting the needs of teachers and students, we ask participants to complete evaluation surveys. Surveys may be distributed to teachers and students, but they are also available on-line as a pdf file to be downloaded, or they may be requested via e-mail ([wbredehft@uwyo.edu](mailto:wbredehft@uwyo.edu)).

1. Students may self-assess using a quick survey that asks them to consider their response to the gallery discussions and research, and their studio experience.
2. Teachers may assess the overall visit by completing a quick survey that asks for their observation and assessment of students' experiences, as well as assessment of the overall process of the museum visit.
3. Museum staff and artists/teachers will record their observations and assessments.
4. When studio time permits, we will ask students to briefly discuss their art work completed in the Shelton Studio visit.
5. Museum staff may take photographs of students and teachers to document the learning taking place and the work produced during a museum visit. These are available upon written request to teachers who would like to use them as art of teaching and student portfolios.