

May 2026

# Treasure House News

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## President's Message

It is hard to believe that we only have about 2 months left in our touring calendar for this year. Thank you to all the docents who have signed up and supported the museum. The annual luncheon this year will be at the Santa Anita Race Track on June 11. Please RSVP if you have not already done so. The restaurant has a most amazing backdrop - the San Gabriel Mountains.

The upcoming Rubin Exhibition has also released some vital information on their collections. The digital platform that they are providing to support the exhibition is extremely helpful, and it contains a lot of information which you can use to customize your own tour. We will be releasing the information to you very soon.

As you all know, in June we will need to select our committee membership for next year. It is being proposed to the Board that we have nine committees next year instead of eleven: Exhibition and Training Committees have requested to combine, and it is suggested that Library and Historian Committees also combine. If approved by the Board, the Guidelines for these two new committees will be presented for your approval at our May Docent Council Meeting. Hopefully, this will make your committee selection easier for next year.

Yvonne  
Docent Council President

## IMPORTANT DATES

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**May 5 at 10:00 am**

Docent Council Board Meeting  
(Board members only)

**May 12 at 10am**

Docent Council Meeting  
● Election of 2026-27 Officers  
● Discussion and Approval of new Guidelines  
● Docent Special Recognition Recipient Selection  
Lecture by: Dr. Young Min Choe (UCLA)  
Topic: Introduction to popular Korean culture

**June 11 at 11:30**

Docent Council Annual Luncheon  
FrontRunner Restaurant at  
Santa Anita Race Track

## Gallery Showcase

# Shapeshifters and Tricksters

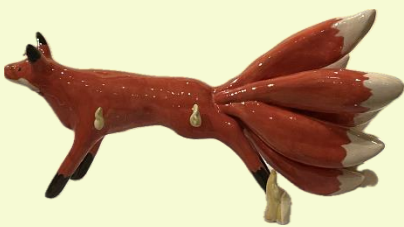
By Annette Drey



Across Asian mythologies, shape-shifters and tricksters occupy a vivid space between the human and the supernatural. They transform their bodies, cross boundaries, and challenge fixed ideas about identity and reality. Stories of figures like the fox spirit are not simply entertaining tales; they are reflections on change, perception, and the fluid nature of life itself.

One of the most widespread shape-shifters in East Asian folklore is the fox spirit. In China it is known as the *huli jing*, in Japan as the *Kitsune*, and in Korea as the *kumiho*.

Each culture tells the story a little differently, but the fox spirit almost always represents intelligence, seduction, and transformation. As you move through the exhibition **Mythical Creatures**, the fox appears and reappears in different galleries—each time with a slightly different meaning.



In Chinese folklore, the *huli jing* grows additional tails as it ages, eventually gaining nine tails after a thousand years. These tails symbolize immense power and wisdom. In Korean *kumiho* stories, fox spirits can transform into beautiful women, using their intelligence and charm to influence the human world. The *kumiho* is represented in the contemporary digital artwork in the “Forest,” where its shapeshifting nature is brought into a modern context.

In Japan, the *Kitsune* is more ambiguous: sometimes a loyal guardian or divine messenger, other times a mischievous trickster who delights in illusion. He appears twice, once in the “Restaurant” and again as a 3-D printed model in the “Village”.

These fox spirits remind us that appearances can deceive, and that people and situations are often more complex than they first appear. For immigrants especially, this metaphor can feel deeply resonant. Survival often requires code-switching, navigating between cultures, and holding layered identities at once. Like the mythological shapeshifters, they may feel as though they never fully belong to either world.



China, Korea, Japan,  
Fox shape-shifters and tricksters,  
East Asian folklore.

kmm



# Asian Tradition of Home Altars

By Annette Drey

Several home altars appear in the “Restaurant” gallery of the current exhibit, and I’ve included photographs of them with this article. While they may be unfamiliar to many Americans, home altars have long been a meaningful part of daily life in many Asian cultures, particularly within Buddhist and East Asian traditions. Found in homes across China, Vietnam, Korea, Japan, and India, these altars create a dedicated space for honoring ancestors, expressing spiritual beliefs, and connecting family life with religious practice. Although their forms vary by culture, they share a common purpose: bringing the sacred into everyday living spaces.



In many Asian societies, religion is not limited to temples or formal ceremonies. Spiritual practice is woven into daily routines, and the home altar serves as a focal point for that connection. Altars often include statues or images of the Buddha or other deities, incense burners, candles, flowers, and offerings of food. A central feature in many households is the honoring of ancestors. By maintaining an altar, families express respect for past generations and affirm the importance of family continuity. Even families who do not consider themselves strictly religious may keep a small altar as a cultural tradition.



Chinese home altars are historically central to family life and typically combine Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian elements. Ancestor tablets or photographs are placed alongside images of deities such as *Guanyin*, the bodhisattva of compassion. Influenced by Confucian values of filial piety, these altars serve as a daily reminder to honor one’s ancestors. Vietnamese households share a closely related tradition. Nearly every traditional Vietnamese home includes an ancestor altar positioned in a place of honor. Offerings of fruit, tea, and prepared foods are common, and caring for the altar remains a key expression of Vietnamese cultural identity.

*Asian home altars,  
Buddhist, Hindu, Confucian,  
Home/Spirit mixture.  
kmm*



In Korea, home altar practices are closely tied to Confucian ancestral rites known as *jesa*. While permanent altars may be less visible in some modern homes, families often arrange ritual tables during memorial ceremonies and major holidays. Buddhist Korean households may also maintain statues of the Buddha or bodhisattvas for personal devotion.

Japanese homes frequently contain one or two types of altars: the *butsudan*, a Buddhist household altar honoring ancestors and the Buddha, and the *kamidana*, a Shinto shelf shrine dedicated to local deities.



In India, home altars often called *puja* rooms or *mandirs*, are primarily dedicated to Hindu deities such as *Vishnu*, *Shiva*, *Lakshmi* or *Durga*. Daily worship includes lighting lamps, offering flowers and food and reciting prayers.

Across these cultures, home altars reflect a shared belief that spiritual and everyday worlds are deeply connected. Despite modernization and changing living conditions, the tradition of home altars endures, preserving cultural heritage while adapting to contemporary life.



## April Docent Heroes - Another month in the books!

Yvonne Lee, Rose Lee, Lorenzo Vargas, Melissa Patton, Jane Hirschowitz, Susan Sides, Jon Sides, Randy Quinton, Lisa Koizumi, Evelyn Xu, Fran De La Rosa, Eiko Kubota, Candace Siegle, Chuck Woo, Jin Sook Jung, Richard Ewell and Paige LaCombe

*Thank you all!*



# Docent Musings

By Karen Margolis

## "Take me to Pasadena" 🎵 🎵 🎵 🎵

(Sung to the tune, "Take me out to the Ballgame")

*Take me to Pasadena,  
That's where I want to be,  
Asian-American history,  
Fabulous tales of mystery.*

*Take me to Pasadena,  
That's where I want to be,  
Asian-American history,  
Fabulous tales of mystery.*

*An old scroll with strange "yokai" creatures,  
Check out their magical features,  
Sit in a room with seats from a plane,  
Where we are going, I cannot explain.*

*A story of parental sacrifice,  
New Asian American art to entice,  
Many in search of gold mountain,  
Or maybe a magical fountain?*

*A fox that becomes a female,  
Another has more than one tail,  
A Cambodian structure may cause you to gape,  
Fabricated from criss-crossed tape.*

*A room filled with a gang's graffiti,  
Nouveau art reflects society,  
AI cameras cause transformation,  
See how you look as an Asian.*

*This immigrant's story's culmination,  
Causes quite a tremendous sensation.  
Magical phoenix made of silver and gold,  
In a room surrounded by mirrors, I'm told.*

*So, please take me to Pasadena,  
This request is all I implore,  
It's a one-of-a-kind exhibition,  
Great fun for all to explore!*

kkm

# Docent Spotlight

By Richard Ewell

Richard Ewell was born and raised in the San Francisco Bay area. He received his BS in Mechanical Engineering from UC Davis. Subsequently, he moved to Seattle to work for Boeing Commercial Aircraft and obtained an MS in Aeronautics and Astronautics from the University of Washington.



While in the Seattle area he enjoyed the outdoors doing a lot of hiking, climbing, and skiing. While climbing near the top of Mt. Rainier, Mt. St. Helens erupted. He was able to get a full view of the eruption with all the associated lightning and when ash started to fall, he hurried back down the mountain without reaching the summit.

Following graduation, he moved to Altadena and worked at the Jet Propulsion Lab for the next 40 years. There he worked on the electric power systems for most of the Mars Rovers and Landers. He met his wife, Rosie, while taking ceramics at PCC. They have two sons, both of whom live in Southern California, with four grandchildren. They traveled extensively visiting most of the US, Canada, and Mexico and have traveled to 75 countries around the world. Their most amazing trip was to Papua New Guinea, where they had a chance to interact and stay with the indigenous people. These travels resulted in his interest in Asian cultures, arts, and religions.

Following retirement, Richard is a docent at The Huntington and the Pacific Asia Museum and still travels, makes ceramics, plays golf and walks his dog daily.

# Touring Topics: "What Do You Know About ..."?

## Activating Prior Knowledge

*By Fran. De La Rosa*



"Good Morning! Welcome to our museum. What brings you here today?" These words are most likely said by every Docent who tours groups in museums around the world. Depending on the age, makeup, and purpose of the tour group, the answers will vary. These few minutes help set the tone of your tour; they help you connect with the visitor and, in some cases, put visitors at ease. Another important goal of this time should be to assess prior knowledge: "What do you know about ..."?

The human brain is truly remarkable. Consider all the information you have gathered throughout your life, even if only briefly. Is any of it accessible to you? Humans can think of the brain as a mental file cabinet that tends to group information based on common characteristics, a process known as "schema." Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget developed the theory of "cognitive schema" to explain how children learn. A cognitive schema is a method of organizing information about the world around us; it serves as a filing system in the human brain that stores and uses information to support ongoing learning.

The question, "What do you know about ..."?, helps the brain go through the mental file cabinet, searching for connections between what is stored and what is about to be discovered. As children grow and learn, they constantly gather new information and match it with prior knowledge, leading to new understandings. This process, called activating prior knowledge, is a cornerstone of learning. There are many types of schema that are accessed when a learner is presented with new information. These cognitive schemas are described, along with examples here: [Examples](#).

So, how do we facilitate this process? First, establish your goal. What do you want the visitor to learn? Next, plan your tour so you can link the objects to your goal. Ask pointed questions that require deeper responses than just surface replies; dig into the answers if necessary: "How do you know that?" or "What makes you think that?" If, perchance, you come upon something that can be useful later to further visitor understanding and help you meet your goal, don't hesitate to point it out and discuss it. Use a phrase like "keep that in mind," or "make a mental note of this, it may come up later."

To summarize, prior knowledge refers to the information and experiences a person already possesses before learning something new. Careful, pointed planning can shape how new information is interpreted, understood, and retained. Activating a visitor's prior knowledge can deepen learning and foster connections to new materials, and should be part of every tour.



# Yongle Encyclopedia (永樂大典)

By Bruce Cristol



For nearly 600 years, the **Yongle Encyclopedia (永樂大典)** was the largest encyclopedia ever created, a distinction it held until 2007, when Wikipedia surpassed it in total content. Compiled during the Ming Dynasty, the Yongle Encyclopedia remains one of the most remarkable achievements in the history of knowledge preservation.

The project was commissioned by the Yongle Emperor (portrait above) who ruled from 1402 to 1424. Work began in 1405 and was completed just three years later in 1408, involving more than 2,000 scholars from a wide range of disciplines. The scale of the encyclopedia was extraordinary: 22,937 chapters (*juan*) bound into 11,095 volumes, containing approximately 370 million Chinese characters. Rather than organizing information by subject, it followed a phonetic system based on rhyme, reflecting traditional Chinese scholarly methods and making it easier to navigate for contemporary readers.

Unlike modern encyclopedias that summarize knowledge, the Yongle Encyclopedia functioned as a vast archive. It preserved entire texts and excerpts from thousands of earlier works, covering subjects such as history, philosophy, literature, medicine, astronomy, and geography. Many of these original sources have since been lost, making the encyclopedia an invaluable record of China's intellectual heritage. Notably, it was never printed and existed only as a handwritten manuscript.

The creation of the encyclopedia was not purely scholarly. The Yongle Emperor had seized the throne in a contested succession and sought to legitimize his rule. By sponsoring such a cultural project, he aligned himself with Confucian ideals and gained the support of scholar-officials. The encyclopedia thus served both as a symbol of imperial authority and as a means of consolidating traditional knowledge under state control.

Despite its grandeur, the Yongle Encyclopedia suffered significant losses over time. The original manuscript is believed to have been destroyed during the wars that led to the fall of the Ming Dynasty in 1644. A duplicate copy, produced in the 16th century, survived for a time but was gradually diminished. During the Second Opium War, many volumes were burned or looted. Further destruction occurred during the Boxer Rebellion, when a fire destroyed or scattered many of the remaining volumes. Even before these events, neglect and theft during the Qing Dynasty had already reduced its size.

Today, only about 400 volumes survive, scattered across institutions worldwide. One notable example is held by the **Huntington Library**. It is a 1562-1567 handwritten manuscript rediscovered in 2014, and part of the duplicate copy commissioned under the Jiajing Emperor. Rescued during the Boxer Rebellion by Reverend Joseph L. Whiting and later donated in 1968, it contains sections related to the *Book of Rites* and has since been digitized.

Although much of the Yongle Encyclopedia has been lost, its legacy endures. It represents not only the largest compilation of knowledge of its time but also a powerful example of how scholarship and political authority were intertwined in imperial China.

[Huntington Digital Collection](#)

# Around Town

By Maureen Nyhan



## Save the Date

for our Annual Luncheon

**Thursday, June 11th**

at the Santa Anita Park's

FrontRunner Restaurant

### USC PAM



#### Market Place@PAM: Creativity and Tradition

**DATE:** Sunday, May 18, 2026 | Opening Hours

**LOCATION:** 46 N Los Robles Ave, Pasadena, California 91101

**PRICE** – Free - [Tickets](#)

Shop handmade crafts, textiles, jewelry, ceramics, and artisan foods as you hear the personal stories behind each craft.

#### Gateway to Himalayan Art: Second Educator Workshop

Live Zoom workshop with faculty on teaching using Project Himalayan Art, exhibition, book, and curriculum guides.

Date: Wednesday July 8 | 11:00 – 12:00 pm

[Reservations at Evenbrite](#)

#### Chinese American Museum - DTLA



#### The Icon: Anna May Wong

The Icon: Anna May Wong, open from May 16, 2025 – August 30, 2026. Pays tribute to the trailblazer and icon who challenged conventions against all odds. [Information here.](#)

### USC US-China Institute

Online Seminars – Open to the Public:

#### Contemporary China

**Dates:** Tuesdays, April 30–June 4, 2026

(4/30, 5/7, 5/14, 5/21, 6/4)

**Time:** 4:00–5:00 PM

**Format:** Zoom Webinar (Lecture + Q&A)

[Register](#)

#### The Tea Ceremony, Samurai Aesthetics and Japanese Garden Traditions During the Edo Period

**Dates:** Tuesdays, April 21–May 19, 2026

(4/21, 4/28, 5/05, 5/12, 5/19)

**Time:** 4:00–5:00 PM

**Format:** Zoom Webinar (Lecture + Q&A)

[Register](#)

#### K-POP Demon Hunters Webinar:

Explore Contemporary Korean Culture Symbols

**Date:** Wednesday, May 13

**Time:** 3:30–5:00 PM

**Format:** Zoom Webinar (Lecture + Q&A)

[Register](#)

#### More Online:

#### Chinese Historical Society of So California

How L.A. Rose From Obscurity to Become the Chinese Food Capital of the U.S.

Time: Wednesday May 6 – 7:00 pm

David Chan is a writer and observer on Chinese food in the United States, weaving in aspects of Chinese-American history into today's Chinese foodie world.

[Reservations at Evenbrite](#)

#### [Tibet Textiles](#) (Always available)

Short film about Gina Corrigan, a long-time travel Guide in China and Tibet who has spent a number of decades collecting clothing and textiles in Tibet, contributing to an official collection of Tibetan dress for The British Museum.

#### Event - New Art Space in Pasadena:

**Pasadena Institute of Art** (no website)

**Opening Night:** Friday, May 9 | 5:00 – 10:00 PM

The opening night features an 11-piece afro-Cuban ensemble, many art pieces are interactive so dress casual. **130 E. Colorado Blvd. Old Pasadena.** Free.