

*Silla Korea and the Silk
Road: Golden Age,
Golden Threads*

A lesson book for world history, world
geography and Asian studies classes
(published by The Korea Society)

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- Project Director: Yong Jin Choi
- Consultants: Jong-wook Lee, Bangryong Park, Richard D. McBride II, Gari Ledyard and Ned Shultz
- Curriculum Writers: Marjorie Wall Bingham and Yong Jin Choi
- Editor: Frederick F. Carriere
- Editorial Assistants: Rebecca Brabant, Grace Chon and Delmas Hare
- Mini-Lesson Writer: Ane Lintevedt
- Graphic and Book Designer: Seho Kim
- Power Point Presentation: Mary Connor and Yong Jin Choi

Objectives of the Silla Korea and the Silk Road Lesson Book

- Expand the view of the Silk Road, international trade, and cultural exchange found in most world history textbooks and classes.
- Update maps, timelines and descriptions of the Silk Road, including Korea's integral involvement in the Silk Road trade and the transmission of Silk Road ideas and goods from Korea to Japan.

Globalization: Then and Now

- The lesson book examines whether or not Silla benefited from international connections along the Silk Road.
- Through adoption of *Silla Korea and the Silk Road*, students come to understand that some of today's issues of globalization were also present for past cultures.

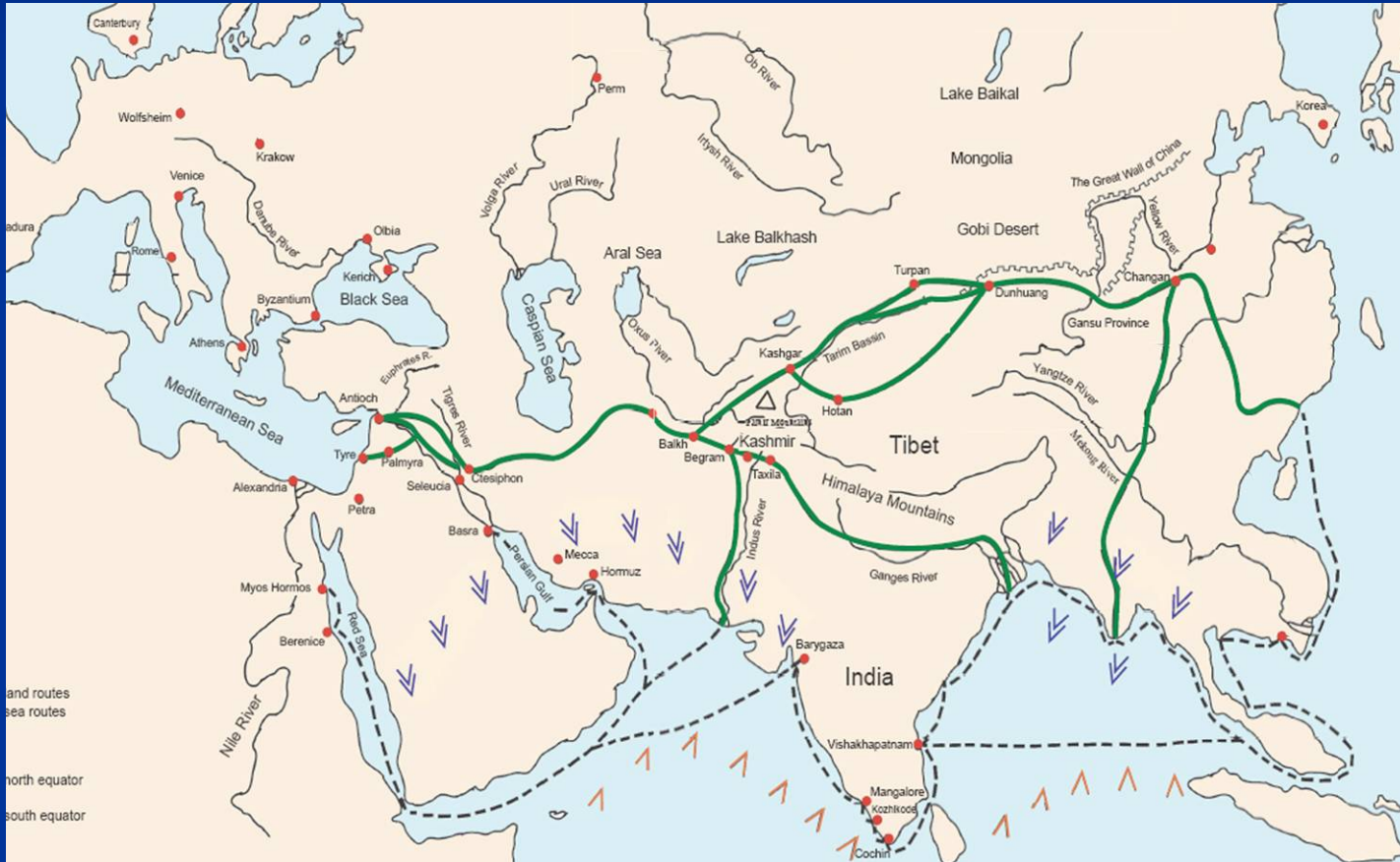
The Silk Road

- The Silk Road was a group of ancient trade routes that stretched over 6,000 miles from the Mediterranean Sea across Central Asia to East Asia. It flourished primarily from 100 BCE to 1,500 CE.
- The Silk Road was the “center of the world” in terms of commerce and culture.
- Towns along the Silk Road provided food, water and rest as well as opportunities for cultural and commercial exchanges.

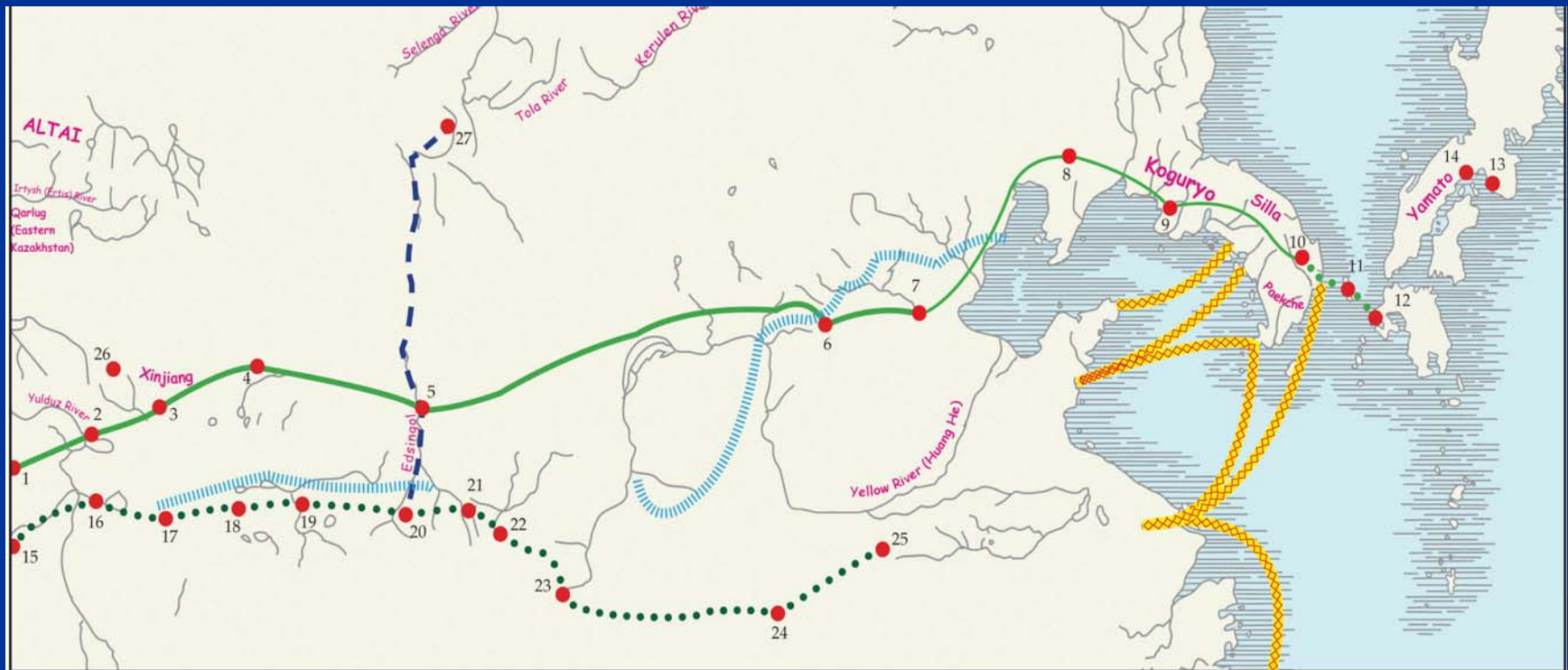
The Silk Road

- Camel caravans and pack horses carried most goods across dry, harsh regions. Spectacular mountain ranges, huge wind-blown deserts with 1,000 foot dunes, and vast, stony, waterless tracts posed great obstacles for the traveler.
- In the market towns, traders experienced a rich mixture of languages, foods, dress, customs and religious ideas.
- By 800 CE, traffic on the Silk Road began to decrease as traders started to travel by safer sea routes.
- A final period of heavy traffic occurred during the 13th and 14th centuries when the Mongols ruled Central Asia and China. During this time, Korea was forced to accept Yuan suzerainty. Through the vastness of the Mongolian Empire, Korea became even more open to cultural and technological influences.

Traditional Map of the Silk Road: Routes do not include to Korea or Japan



Northern and Southern Silk Road Routes with Korean, Japanese and Maritime Connections



Silla and the Silk Road

Students rarely have the opportunity to study the impact that traded goods and exchanged ideas had on peoples from different cultures. A study of Silla is significant because it shows an Eastern instead of a Western view of Silk Road trade and deals with a time period that produced one of the world's "Golden Ages."

Background Information

- The Korean peninsula was divided into Three Kingdoms: Koguryo (37 BCE-668 CE), Paekche (18 BCE-660 CE) and Silla (57 BCE-668 CE). These kingdoms frequently fought each other.
- Eventually, Silla united the Three Kingdoms to form the Unified Silla Kingdom (668 CE-935 CE). Silla laid the foundation for the historical development of the Korean people.
- The Silk Road contributed to Silla's Golden Age, a fascinating period that includes great architecture and sculpture, lofty ideas, new trade routes and a unique political system that allowed women to rule. All of these topics are covered in the Silla lesson book.

Early Cultural/Technological Exchange

- Early in the first millennium BCE, distinctive bronze objects that incorporated animal motifs were found all across the northern frontier of Northeast Asia.
- In the Mediterranean and Middle East, technicians smelted ore in small furnaces and formed animal-shaped objects with smithing methods on an anvil. Nomadic Scythians carried their knowledge into eastern Siberia by 700 BCE. The Chinese invented smelting techniques on their own and made iron tools by 500 BCE. By 400 BCE both Scythian and Chinese methods were available to residents of the Korean peninsula.

Scytho-Siberian Influences on Early Silla, 4th-6th Centuries

- The number of metal relics and personal ornaments excavated from the Silla royal tombs, indicate cultural elements transmitted from the northern Scytho-Siberian culture that became part of the indigenous society of Silla.
- A “rhyton” is a Hellenistic horn-shaped drinking cup made from tusk, horn or silver. Iranians of the Sassanian Dynasty made pottery rhytons in the shape of an animal’s head. Rhytons with these Iranian adaptations were brought to China and Korea through Central Asia.

Tiger- and Horse-Shaped Bronze Belt Buckles from Oun-dong, Yongch'on

- Early 1st Century – Belt buckles unearthed in Korea reflect Scythian modeling and vitality.



Animal Head-shaped Pottery

- Horse head-shaped pottery rhyton from Pusan, 4th century CE.
- Sheep-headed rhyton, Iran, 6th century BCE.



Bronze Rhyton



- Discovered at Kumgwan Tumuli in Kyongju
- Similar one discovered from Kul-Oba tomb in the steppe regions

Siberian and Manchurian Influences on Silla

- Objects from burial sites include mandolin-shaped, Manchurian-style bronze daggers, polished stone arrowheads, cylindrical beads made of jasper, and exquisitely polished comma-shaped ornaments made of precious stone.
- Early Siberian (1,500 BCE) and Manchurian (100 BCE) artifacts continued to influence Korean artisans and were found in the imposing mound tombs in Kyongju, the capital of Silla.

Shamanism

Shamans were common in the ancient cultures of Siberia and northern Asia, and Korean shamanism was most likely introduced by these people. Tomb relics seem to confirm the link between Silla to the ancient cultures of Siberia and northern Asia prior to the Silk Road and that shamanism flourished among the ancestors of the Korean people before they first learned of Buddhism or Confucianism.

The Mounted Warrior with Twin Horn Cup



- The images of the mounted warrior and the horn-shaped cup are each independent motifs, but are joined together as one.

Jade-inlaid Gold Dagger with Ornamental Sheath



- This dagger was excavated from Tomb No. 14 in Kyongju.
- It is the only one of its kind known today throughout northeast Asia.
- The arabesque designs can be found on artifact from the western Turkestan or from the steppe region.
- Dated from 5th or 6th century.

Details of Jade-inlaid Gold Dagger



- Close-up of the dagger
- Round and floral designs made with gold wire and inlaid with red agate
- Similar to those depicted in the Kizil murals
- Below is a gold ornamental dagger unearthed from Borovoje in Kazakhstan



Comma-shaped Jade



- This glass necklace was excavated from King Mich'u's tomb, dating to the 5th-6th century CE.
- The comma-shape jade also reflects early Manchurian influences
- One of the beads reveals a Western face. The technique of glass eye-beads showing human faces has been observed in Mediterranean regions around the 4th/5th centuries BCE.

Detail of Necklace with Inlaid Non-Asian Face



Middle East Influences on Silla

- Glass was first produced in Mesopotamia in about 3,000 BCE, and transparent glass was made in the Roman imperial period.
- The earliest glass found in Korea dates from the 2nd century BCE. Glass beads were then regarded as more precious than gold or silver.
- Glass beads and curved jades were commonly placed in tombs, but have also been found in dwelling sites.

Phoenix Head-shaped Glass Bottle



- The phoenix head-shaped glass bottle was excavated from a 4th/5th century CE tomb in Kyongju. The bottle's shape has Syrian origins and was exported from the Middle East to Korea over the Silk Road.

Further Middle Eastern Influences

These cups with a base or cut glass are similar in shape and manufacturing technique to the cut glass of Iran. They probably came to Silla via the Silk Road in the 5th/6th century.



Bowl-Shaped Silver Cup



Detail of the Bowl-Shaped Silver Cup



- Unearthed from the north tomb of the Great Tumulus of Hwangnam, early 5th century.
- Covered with bas-relief designs of animals, and a human figure with a round buckle in her belt, wrinkled pants and a pomegranate-shaped item held in her hand
- Anihita figure of Iran, 6-7 century

Silver Shin-Guard



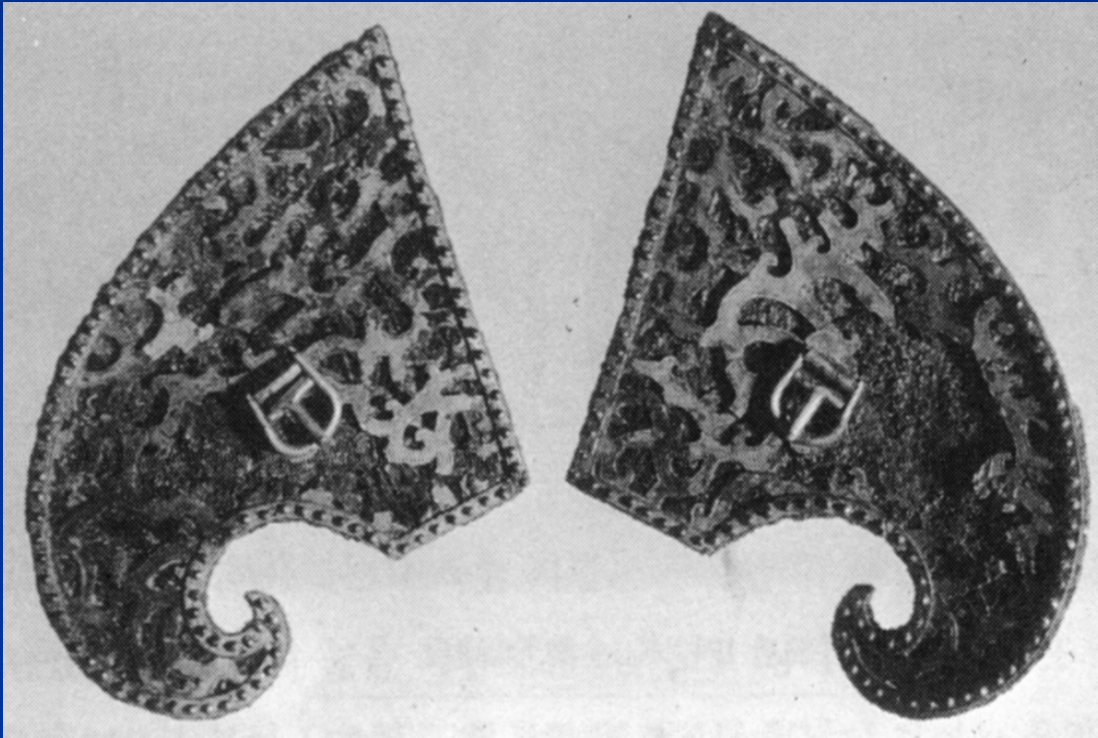
- Discovered in the south tomb of the great Hwangnam Tumuli
- Bronze shin-guard from the Chonma Tumuli, too

Gold-Plated Shoe Sole



- Discovered from Sikri Tumuli in Kyongju
- Elaborate design is popular during the Sassanian Kingdom, 5-6 century

Gold-Plated Horse Saddle



- Discovered in the south tomb of the great Hwangnam Tumuli
- Decorated with the wings of Emerald Ash Borer

Silla Gold Crown, 5th Century CE



- This Silla gold crown unearthed in Kyongju would seem to indicate links to Siberian influences. Silla crowns, often in the shape of deer antlers or trees reaching toward heaven, reflected shamanistic beliefs.

Gold Girdle



- Earrings, caps, shoes, belt buckles, and plaques fashioned from precious metal were probably a Middle Eastern or Greek practice that the Chinese spread to Koguryo, Paekche and Silla.

Heavenly Horse Painting, Kyongju, 5th Century



- Silla's kings were buried with horses and horse trappings. This ornamental saddle guard was the painting of a heavenly horse in Korea and reflects early Siberian and shamanistic influences.
- A similar image was discovered in the Gansu (Hexi) region in Central Asia, which was the Silk Road gateway to Asia and an indication of continuous cultural exchange along the Silk Road.

Sarira from Songnim Sa, 334 CE



- Lotus leaves on the side of the relics symbolize of Buddha. The fringe of triangles hanging down resembles the fringe of a Central Asian tent. Box is designed in the shape of a Chinese Buddhist temple.

Sarira Box from Kamun Sa, 682 CE



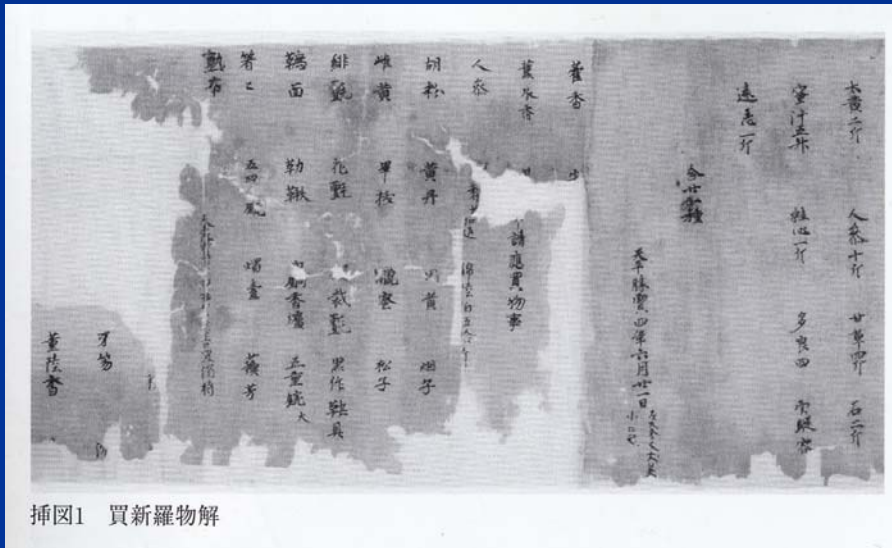
- The image of the Four Heavenly Kings resembles Hercules.
- Four bronze figures playing musical instruments show cultural transmission through the Silk Road.

Cultural Transmissions to Japan

- While Silla imported many materials and ideas that had traveled along the Silk Road, it also served as a conduit to Japan for the same goods and concepts.
- Buddhism was transmitted via the Silk Road from China to Korea and then to Japan. Late in the 4th century, rulers of Paekche sent monks and scholars who brought books on Confucianism written in Chinese characters.
- During Unified Silla, Korean artisans created sculpture and built temples, Shinto shrines and castles in Japan, thus extending the Silk Road across the East Sea.

Japanese Purchase Order Sheet, 8th Century CE

- Purchase orders from Nara indicate that the Japanese imported perfume, medicine, ceramics, silver, silk, brassware, musical instruments, ink sticks, scissors, spoons, ginseng, Buddhist sutras, and numerous other items from Silla.



挿図1 買新羅物解

Japan Treasures Silla Imports

Silla brassware was very popular among the Japanese. They called the brassware, “silla,” just as the British called porcelain, “china.” Japanese nobleman sought after luxurious items from Silla, sometimes paying in advance to secure their purchase. Only the top five noblemen in Japan had the right to purchase articles from Silla.

Example of Silla Exports to Japan: Candle-snuffers

- Anap-chi, Korea



- Nara, Japan

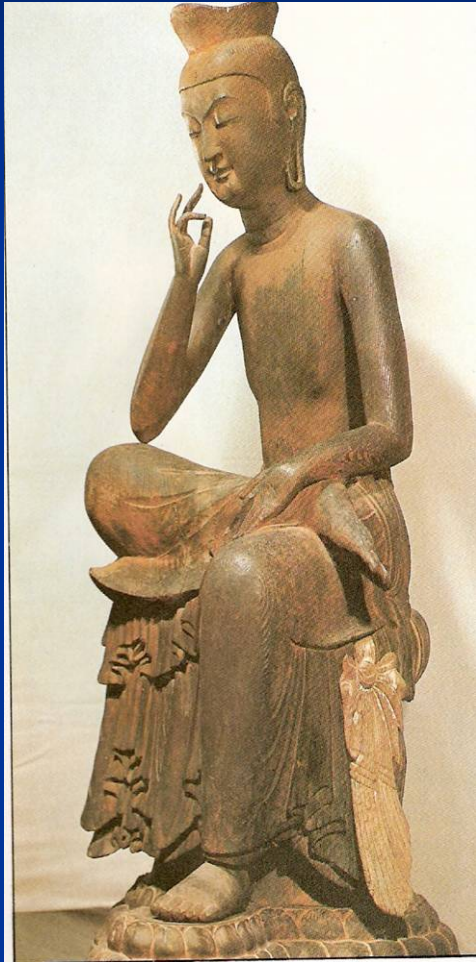


Example of Silla Export to Japan: Brassware: Bowl and Spoon



- Left: The Shosoin at the Todaiji in Nara has 346 set of spoons and sets of bowls in brass.
- A small spoon (oldest one) was discovered in a sarira box in the west pagoda at Kamun Sa in Korea.

Buddhist Statue Exported to Japan



- Left: The Maitreya (Buddha-of-the-Future), Koryu-ji, Japan. Records indicate that it was exported from Korea in the 7th century.
- This Maitreya is slightly larger than its “almost twin” at the National Museum in Seoul and is definitely Silla in style.

Sillans in China

- Koreans may well have been the most numerous foreign people in China during Unified Silla and had worked their way into Chinese life more thoroughly than most.
- Many monks and scholars traveled to China and settled there for many years. Some Sillans took the civil service exam and also served in the Imperial guard. Flourishing communities of Korean traders lived along the eastern coast of China. Some moved inland and became farmers.

The Silk Road and Buddhism

- Despite initially resisting Buddhism, Silla eventually made Buddhism its state religion. Many Silla monks went to China to study and some went as far as India to gain more insight into Buddhism. Silla monks also traveled as missionaries to Japan.
- Buddhist temples, which were inspired by Chinese and Indian designs, changed the face of Silla's architecture, and Gandhara art greatly influenced Silla's Buddhist art.

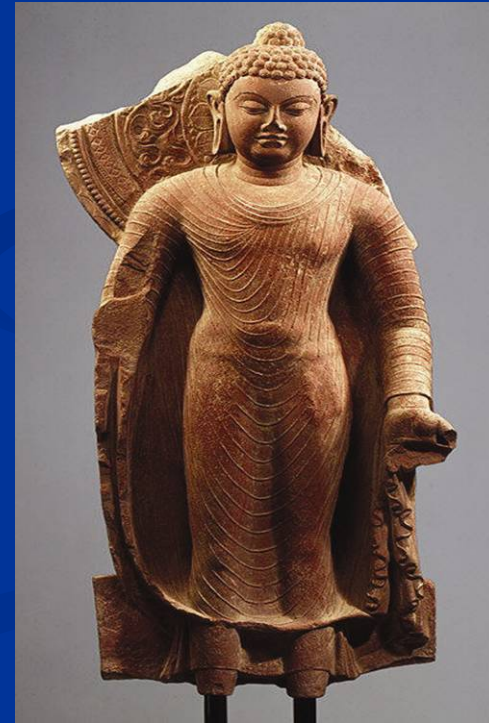
Gandhara Art

- In the Gandharan region (what is now northwestern Pakistan), the Buddha image in the style later to be known as Gandhara first appeared. It combined Greek, Indian and Iranian elements.
- The Buddha's face reveals Hellenistic influences, and his eyes, elongated ear lobes, and oval-shaped face reveal Indian iconography.
- It was Gandharan art, instead of the original Buddhist art of India, that brought the message of Buddha into China via the Silk Road and to the Korean peninsula.

Gandhara Art



Left: Buddha 8th century
Kyongju. Lower right: 5th
century, India.

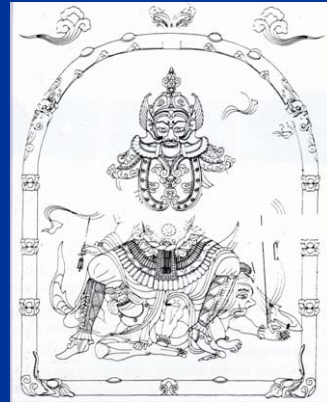


Enlarged Kyongju Gandhara Buddha

The enlarged image of Buddha is shown with straight, sharply chiseled nose and brow, classical lips and wavy hair, all Hellenistic features. He wears a toga-like robe instead of a loin cloth. His eyes are heavy-lidded and protruding, the lobes of the ears elongated, and the oval-shaped face fleshy - all characteristics of Indian iconography. This image of Buddha moved along the Silk Road and gradually absorbed new influences in China and Korea.



Buddhist Sculpture with Central Asian Influences



- Supposed to be made by Monk Yangji in 7th century
- Remains of the green-glazed tiles of Four Guardian King images from Saach'onwang Sa, 679

Four Guardian King Image

- Remains of the green-glazed tiles of Four Guardian King images from Saach'onwang Sa, 679



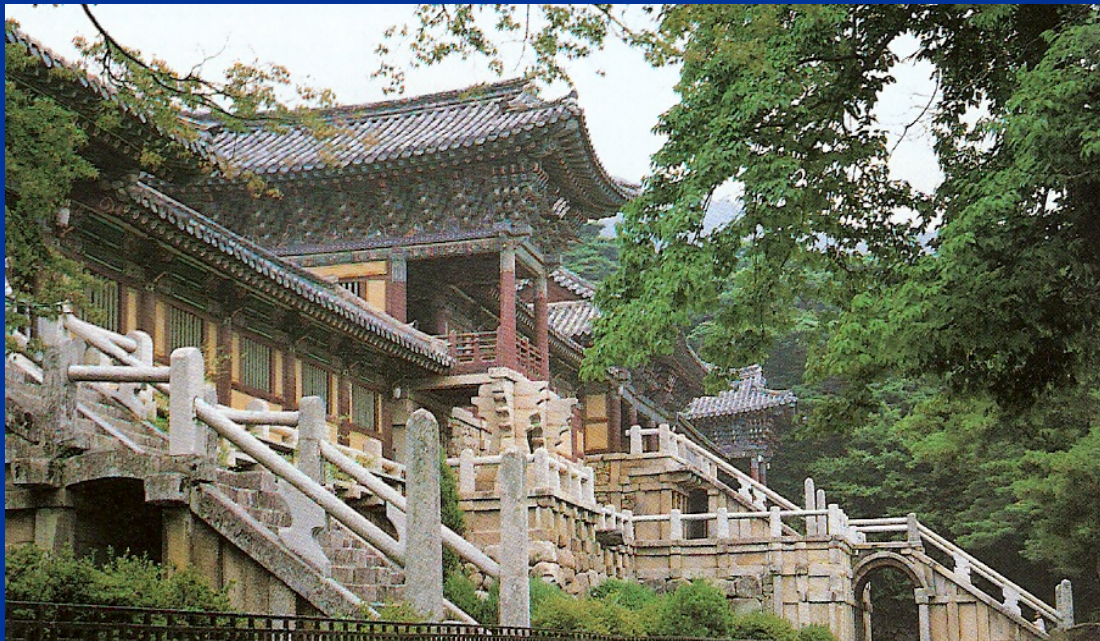
Sokkuram Grotto, Kyongju (751 CE)



- The grotto contains one of the most famous statues of Buddha in Asia.
- Some art historians think that the precise measurements of this Buddha and travel accounts of a 7th century monk reveal that this figure was modeled after a Buddha at Mahabodhi Temple at Bodhgaya, the place of Shakyamuni's enlightenment in northeastern India.
- Pulguksa and Sokkuram Grotto were the crowning achievements of Unified Silla.

Pulguk Temple, Kyongju (751 CE)

The builder of Pulguksa borrowed ideas from Buddhist temples in China and additional Silk Road sources, but created distinctively Korean works of architecture.



Middle East Influences in Kyongju

- The tomb of King Wonsong (reigned 785-798 CE of Silla) shows guards with Central Asian features.





- The stone statues of the civil officers resemble the Uighur with square jaws, protruding noses, full beards, and large eyes.

Military Stone Guard



- The nine-foot military stone guards have Central Asian features (Bagdian) with deep-set eyes, high nose ridges and headbands that resemble those worn by Iranians during that time.

Sillans in China

- Commerce between East China, Korea and Japan was, for the most part, in the hands of men from Silla.
- After serving Tang China, Chang Pogo returned to Korea, recruited a private army and navy of 10,000 patrolled Silla's coastal waters, ended the depredations of Chinese pirates, and became master of the Yellow Sea.

Conclusion

- This slide presentation has only touched one theme covered in the lesson book – cultural transmission along the Silk Road during early Silla (57 BCE- 668 CE) and Unified Silla (668-935 CE) during a Golden Age.
- The concluding exercise explores whether international trade hurts or helps a culture. It provides arguments suggesting that Silla was hurt as well as helped by its connections to international trade.
- This discussion may well lead to a classroom debate related to the United States and the benefits and challenges posed by globalization today.