

## THE BELIEF SYSTEMS OF ANCIENT KOREA: A CASE STUDY OF CULTURAL DIFFUSION IN THE FAR EAST

**GRADE:** 9

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**TOPIC/THEME:** History, Literature

**TIME REQUIRED:** Two 50 minute classes or one 90 minute class plus homework assignment and follow-up.

**BACKGROUND:** Confucianism and Buddhism arrived in Korea through diplomatic and trade relations with China. Confucius (c551-479 BCE) and Siddhartha Gautama (c583-463 BCE) developed their philosophies at roughly the same time, and although Buddhism was native to northern India, it spread along the Silk Road trading routes to China where it established deep roots. Confucianism was native to China, and deeply influenced social and political development. In Korea, the two philosophies were mutually influential and were important shapers of Korean cultural, spiritual, political, and social life.

An incident during the transition from the Koryŏ to the Chosŏn Dynasty highlights the role that both Confucianism and Buddhism played in Korean political, cultural, and social life. Jŏng Mong-Ju was a Confucian scholar who remained loyal to his Koryŏ king in the face of a coup and dynastic change. The establishment of the Yi Dynasty (Chosŏn) was successful, and Jŏng was killed for his knowledge and unwillingness to participate in the coup. A poem written by Jŏng clearly articulates his Confucian loyalty to his lord (king) as well as the prominence of Buddhism in Korean outlook. The poem was written in a traditional Korean form called a *sijo*, which, like *haiku* in Japan, is three lines although with 44-46 syllables.

**CURRICULUM CONNECTION:** This lesson can be taught after Buddhism and Confucianism have been introduced during a unit on East Asian (or specifically Korean) history. Content around Ancient China and the Silk Road should also have been introduced prior to teaching this lesson. This lesson can be used to consolidate understanding about East Asian civilization and the common elements that link the East Asian region. Some documents in the Document Based Question (DBQ) serve to briefly remind students of the central tenets of Buddhism and Confucianism. Additionally, this lesson could be part of a unit on world literature in accompaniment to *haiku* in Japan.

**CONNECTION TO STUDENTS' LIVES:** The concepts of loyalty to a king and reincarnation may be difficult for students in a westernized culture to comprehend, and this lesson seeks to bring those concepts to life for the students – indeed the moral training to make the right decision regardless of cost to one's self is important in a democracy as well. Analyzing documents to find and write about how oppositional philosophies can fuse together to create a unique world-view is an important skill for students to develop. Compromise, in our partisan political world today, is a vital appreciation for difference and diversity of experience and thought.

Additionally, the form of *sijo* is a vehicle for students to express their own sense of virtues and loyalty. Poetry, and written work in general, are powerful forms of self-expression; expression

within a set form specifically is an important cognitive challenge that can engage different patterns of thought that lead to deeper learning.

**OBJECTIVES:** As a result of this lesson, students will practice analyzing documents in order to extract evidence from documents; use evidence to respond to content-specific questions; apply evidence to develop their own understanding of the material.

Specifically, students will:

1. Be able to explain how Confucianism and Buddhism were transmitted to Korea
2. Be able to identify the cultural elements in a sijo
3. Be able to discuss the influence of Confucianism and Buddhism during the dynastic change from the Koryŏ to the Chosŏn dynasty from the viewpoint of an historical individual and themselves

**NATIONAL AND STATE STANDARDS:**

**Objective 1.** Students will be able to explain how Confucianism and Buddhism were transmitted to Korea

**NCSS Standard:** Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions: social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of interactions among individuals, groups and institutions.

**Virginia Standard:** WHI.4d: students will describe the origins, beliefs, traditions, customs and spread of Buddhism.

**Objective 2.** Students will be able to identify the cultural elements in a sijo

**NCSS Standard:** Theme 1: Culture: social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity.

**Virginia Standard:** WHI.4f: students will describe the impact of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism.

**Objective 3.** Students will be able discuss the influence of Confucianism and Buddhism during the dynastic change from the Koryŏ to the Chosŏn dynasty from the viewpoint of an historical individual and themselves

**NCSS Standard:** Theme 4: Individual Development and Identity: social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of individual development and identity.

**Virginia Standard:** WHI.1a.: Students will identify, analyze, and interpret primary and secondary sources to make generalizations about events and life in world history.

**Common Core Standards:**

RI 1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

RH 1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information

RH 2 Determine the central ideas of information of a primary or secondary source

WHST 1 Write arguments focused on discipline-specific context

WHST 2(a-f) Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events

**MATERIALS REQUIRED:** The documents for this assignment are included in the DBQ attached to this lesson plan. The Teacher Key is also included at the end of this lesson plan. Additional readings and resources that could be used are related sections of student textbooks on Korean history, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Resources that may be helpful for teachers are listed in the resources section (below).

**PROCEDURE:****THE DELIVERY OF THE CONTENT:**

1. The homework assignments in advance of this lesson should be reading about ancient Korea in a relevant section of the textbook.
2. Have students do a warm-up activity, either by themselves or with a partner, where they answer the following questions: “In your life today, how do you communicate your ideas to others?” A second question to follow this up would be: “Does the form of communication matter? Is there a situation where a phone call is better than a tweet?”
3. With a map of Korea and China available, explain to students that they will be learning about how Koreans and Chinese exchanged information in the Koryŏ and Chosŏn periods – have students provide (or the teacher could provide) a brief review of their homework reading – as well as how to do a DBQ.
4. Briefly review/explain what a DBQ is. Based on student familiarity with this type of assignment, be as in-depth or brief as the teacher needs to be.
5. Have students get in small groups of three, and pass out the DBQ. Read the directions with them, and have them work on reading and analyzing the documents together. They should first work on finding the main idea of each document, and writing it down *on the paper* in the margins. The main idea should be one or two sentences that do not simply restate anything from the document itself. After this is completed, the students should complete # 1 (**Understanding the Evidence**).
6. Come back together as a class to share interpretations of each document, and go over the responses to the questions from # 1 as a class.
7. Several adaptations could be made at this juncture: if this is a shorter class, have students outline a response to # 2 (**Using the Evidence**) and respond to # 3 (**Applying the Evidence**) for homework; if this is a longer class, have them work

individually to outline # 2 in class and respond to # 3 for homework. If students are already familiar with how to write DBQ essay responses, have them write their response to # 2 for homework (or in class) and have them do # 3 as a warm-up activity for the following day. This is entirely up to the teacher's discretion.

### **THE APPLICATION OF THE CONTENT:**

1. One way to actively engage students is to examine the *sijo* in greater detail, and compare it to the Japanese *haiku* form of poetry if that aspect of Japanese culture has been discussed in class previously.
2. An extension of this assignment would be to have students write their own *sijo*. In line with the warm-up activity, it might be best to have students prepare a *sijo* for class that expresses one of the Confucian values they find has some meaning in their own lives, or something else they ascribe value to in their own lives (religious values, political values, family values etc).
3. Encourage students to use the *sijo* form, but they can also write about a situation in which they also had a serious choice (life and death, as in the case of Jōng Mong-Ju, might be a bit extreme for many students). If calligraphy, or penmanship, has been discussed, have them make a formal, handwritten copy of these *sijo*, and post them around the room for display.

### **ASSESSMENT:**

Assessment of student attainment of the objectives will be determined by the DBQ assignment. A Key is attached to guide teacher evaluation. Informal rubrics are also provided within the Key for the open ended responses.

### **RESOURCES:**

- Lecture notes and resources from Professor Mark Peterson (BYU). July, 2011.
- Cumings, Bruce. *Korea's Place in the Sun*. New York: Norton, 1997
- Gross, Larry. "The Sijo"; *Asian Poetry: The Sijo*. 5 October 2001; Accessed 28 July 2011.  
<http://thewordshop.tripod.com/Sijo/sijo-ndex.htm>

**DBQ**  
**The Belief Systems of Ancient Korea:**  
**A Case Study of Cultural Diffusion in the Far East**

**Introduction**

In this DBQ, you will explore the culture of ancient Korea, focusing on the belief systems that guided Korean society and government. Through its diplomatic and trade relations with China, ancient Korea learned of, and eventually adopted, both Buddhism and Confucianism as major belief systems to guide the work of the State and the relations of individuals within society. This DBQ asks you to examine ancient Korea at a moment of dynastic change—a time when some people within the society were dissatisfied with the ruler and sought to overthrow him. To understand the role that Buddhism and Confucianism played in guiding people’s behavior, you will also consider a sijo (a Korean form of poetry) that expresses the views of one high government official.

Assignment:

1. **Understanding the evidence:** Examine each document and respond to the questions that follow.

Document 1: Timeline

Document 2: Confucianism

Document 3: Buddhism

Document 4: Jōng Mong-Ju and the Fall of the Koryŏ Dynasty

Document 5: Sijo by Jōng Mong-Ju

Document 6: Map of Silk Road

2. **Using the evidence:** Cite specific facts from at least four of the documents to answer the following question: *To what extent was Korea influenced by Confucian and Buddhist beliefs?* Be sure to cite the documents as you refer to them in your response.

3. **Applying the evidence:** Reflect on what you have learned and write a personal response to the following question: *If you were Jōng Mong-Ju, would you have remained loyal to the king, knowing it would result in your death? Why or why not?*

## Document 1

### *Timeline*

#### **Three Kingdoms Period**

- CE 57-676** Period of the Three Kingdoms (Paekche, Koguryŏ, and Silla) in Korea, where Chinese cultural influences were felt through constant political and military contact.
- 372** Buddhism adopted the Koguryŏ Kingdom
- 384** Buddhism adopted by the Paekche Kingdom
- 527** Buddhism adopted by the Silla Kingdom

#### **Silla Dynasty**

- 648-668** Silla forms an alliance with the T'ang Dynasty of China, conquers Paekche and Koguryŏ.
- 676** Silla defeats Chinese forces and unifies much of the Korean peninsula

#### **Koryŏ Dynasty**

- 936** Koryŏ defeats the Silla Dynasty; Buddhism established as the state religion
- 956** King Gwangjong institutes Confucian examination systems in Korea
- 918-1392** Korean scholars visit China and return to impart the knowledge of Confucianism they gained. Confucianism plays a large role in the education of the yangban class, the oligarchy that rules Korea
- 1251** *Tripitaka Koreana*, the world's first and oldest collection of Buddhist teachings is printed on 80,000 wood blocks.

#### **Chosŏn Dynasty**

- 1392** Chosŏn Dynasty established; Buddhism is suppressed in favor of Neo-Confucian principles, but does not disappear.

*Source: adapted from Bruce Cumings, Korea's Place in the Sun. W.W. Norton: 2005.*

**Using the Timeline, identify three points in time that provide evidence of cultural diffusion between China and Korea, including the date and what occurred.**

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## Document 2

### *Confucianism*

Confucianism is a belief system that guides the behavior of all those within a society. The purpose is to ensure a stable, conflict-free society so that individuals and the State will prosper and thrive. It does this by recognizing the relationships between individuals; the relationships are based on the social hierarchy. Those who are lower on the hierarchy are expected to give obedience and loyalty to those above them. Those who are higher on the hierarchy are expected to give guidance and protection to those below them. These duties apply to relationships between individuals and to the relationship between the State and the people governed by the State. These relationships are identified as the *Five Basic Relationships* and include:

Ruler to Subject  
 Father to Son  
 Husband to Wife  
 Older Brother to Younger Brother  
 Friend to Friend

In addition to the *Five Basic Relationships*, Confucianism recognizes a set of values that followers adopt and practice within their families and broader communities. These values include the following:

Li: rituals, propriety, and etiquette within society  
 Hsiao: love within the family  
 Yi: righteousness or acting in a morally proper way  
 Xin: honesty and trustworthiness among individuals  
 Jen: benevolence, humaneness and kindness towards others  
 Chung: loyalty to the State and loyalty to rulers of the State

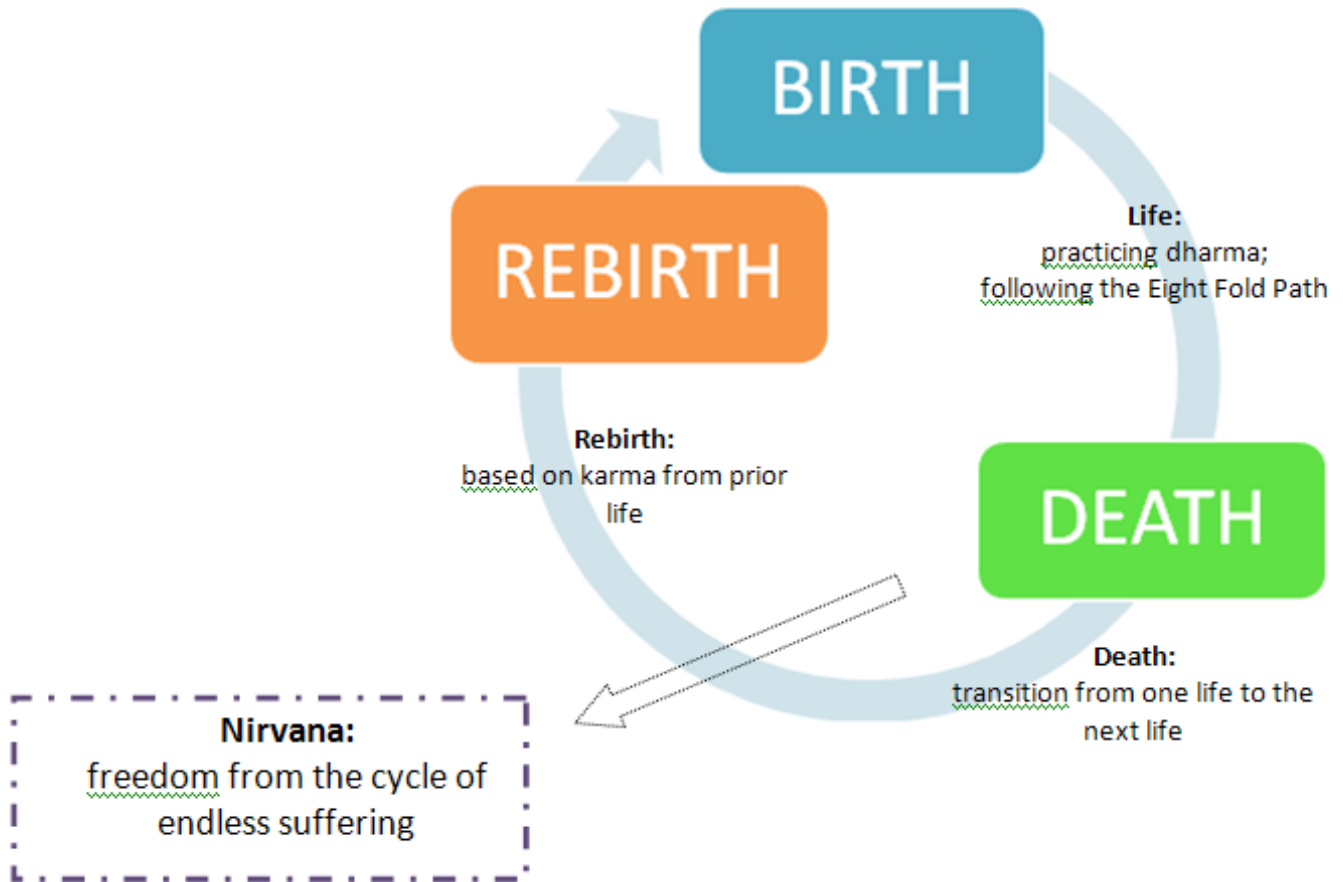
Confucianism is based on the ideas of Confucius who lived in China from 551-479 BCE. Confucius taught his ideas to anyone who was eager to learn. He taught the importance of loyalty and the love of others. His ideas stressed the need to develop a moral and responsible character. This character is developed through strict rules of behavior. Confucius was not concerned about matters of heaven; instead he cared about how people behaved on earth.

Confucianism first gained influence in China during the Han Dynasty. From that time on, Confucianism has provided the guiding principles for Chinese society. Although it is not considered official policy today, the ideas and values of Confucianism are still widely recognized and practiced in modern China. Further, the ideas of Confucianism spread to other parts of East Asia, and to Korea in particular, through cultural exchange and diffusion. Beginning in ancient Korea and continuing today, Confucianism plays an important role in the social and political systems of the Korean peninsula.

*Source: Adapted from [religioustolerance.org](http://religioustolerance.org).*

## Document 3: Buddhism

### Buddhism: Cycle of Reincarnation





## Document 4

### *Jǒng Mong-Ju and the Fall of the Koryŏ Dynasty*

Jǒng Mong-Ju was born in Yǒngchǒng during the late Koryŏ dynasty. He passed three different civil service exams and, in 1367, became an instructor of Neo-Confucianism in the service of King U, as well as one of his most trusted government officials. He served as a diplomatic envoy to China and Japan, working to establish bonds of connection to China, and to limit the violence of the Japanese pirate invasions.

During Jǒng's lifetime, however, a man named Yi Bangwon helped plot a coup against the Koryŏ king, King U, and wanted Jǒng to join in the coup. Yi invited Jǒng to a dinner party and while there, Yi recited a poem—a *sijo*—whose purpose was to convince Jǒng to join him in overthrowing the king. Jǒng, in reply, recited his own *sijo* in which he made his loyalty to the king clear. Jǒng did this, knowing that it meant his certain death. After the dinner, Jǒng was returning to the palace to warn the king of the plot, when he was attacked and murdered by five men loyal to Yi.

Yi succeeded in overthrowing King U and gave his father the throne. Yi's father established the Chosŏn Dynasty, which ruled Korea 600 years—until 1910! Yi Bangwon became the second king of the dynasty, taking the name Taejong.

Even though Jǒng Mong-Ju lost his life, he died a martyr. In maintaining his loyalty to the king, he displayed one of the key virtues of Confucian teaching. For this, he became enshrined as one of the eighteen Korean Confucian Sages, a great honor that is remembered by Koreans today.

*Source: Adapted from Sijo: Korean Poetry Form. Sejong Cultural Society: sejongculturalsociety.org.*

**Who was Jǒng Mong-Ju? During which dynasty did he live? What was his role?**

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**Who was Yi Bangwon? What did he do?**

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**How is Jǒng Mong-Ju remembered by historians and by the Korean people?**

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**Document 5*****Jōng Mong-Ju's Sijo***

This is the sijo (pronounced shi-jo) or poem written by Jōng Mong-Ju to express his loyalty to his king:

*Though I die, and die again; though I die one hundred deaths,  
Long after my bones have turned to dust, whether my soul exists or not,  
My red heart, forever loyal to my Lord, will never fade away.*

-- Jōng Mong-Ju

*Source: Translated by Mark Peterson, Associate Professor of Asian and Near Eastern Languages, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah*

A sijo is a three-line poem where each line is composed of 14-16 syllables in each line (with a total of 44-46). Read Jōng Mong-Ju's *sijo* within the chart below and count each syllable.

Each of the numbers represents a certain number of syllables. You will notice that the syllable count does not work perfectly, but remember: this is a translation from Korean and was not originally written in English!

Line One	3 (Though I die)	4 (and die again)	3 (though I die)	4 (one hundred deaths)
Line Two	4 (Long after my bones)	4 (have turned to dust)	4 (whether my soul)	4 (exists or not)
Line Three	3 (My red heart)	8 (forever loyal to my lord)	3 (will never)	3 (fade away.)

If you read *sijo* carefully, you will notice that in the first line a situation or a problem is stated, and it is developed in line two. The concluding line is usually a twist that resolves the tensions stated and developed in the previous two lines, and is usually a surprise.

- Adapted from *Asian Poetry: The Korean Sijo*

**What line of the sijo provides evidence that Jōng Mong-Ju held Buddhist beliefs? Explain how the line exemplifies Buddhist teaching.**

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**What line of the sijo provides evidence that Jǒng Mong-Ju held Confucian beliefs? Explain how the line exemplifies Confucian teaching.**

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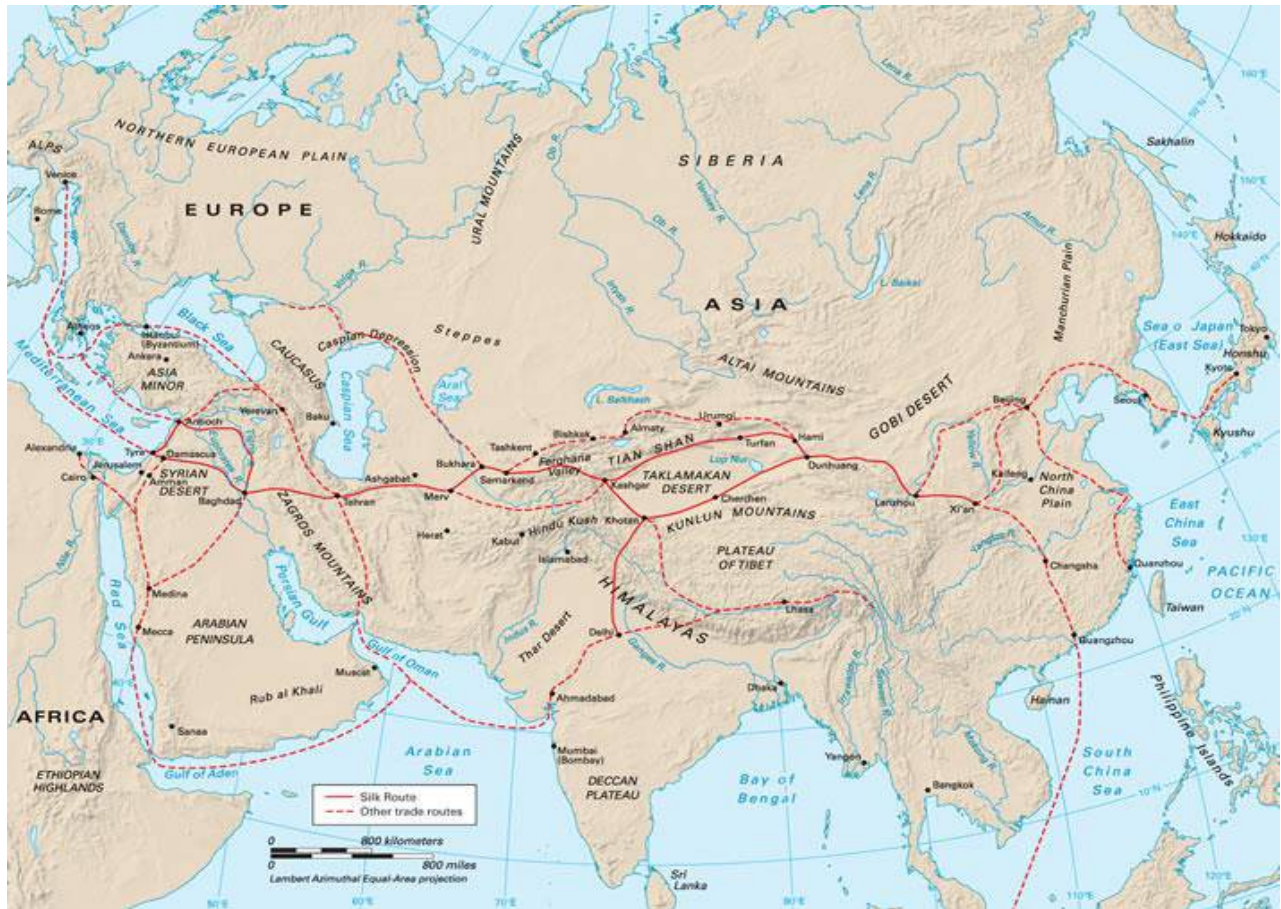
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## Document 6

### Silk Road Trade Route



Source: *The Silk Road Project, Inc. (silkroadproject.org)*

Based on this map, what was the relationship between Korea and the Silk Road? Do you think Korea benefited from the Silk Road? Why or why not?

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## DBQ Teacher Key

1.

**Using the Timeline, identify three points in time that provide evidence of cultural diffusion between China and Korea, including the date and what occurred.**

- CE 57-676** Period of the Three Kingdoms (Paekche, Koguryŏ, and Silla) in Korea, where Chinese cultural influences were felt through constant political and military contact.
- 372** Buddhism adopted the Koguryŏ Kingdom
- 384** Buddhism adopted by the Paekche Kingdom
- 527** Buddhism adopted by the Silla Kingdom
- 648-668** Silla forms an alliance with the T'ang Dynasty of China, conquers Paekche and Koguryŏ.
- 936** Koryŏ defeats the Silla Dynasty; Buddhism established as the state religion
- 956** King Gwangjong institutes Confucian examination systems in Korea
- 918-1392** Korean scholars visit China and return to impart the knowledge of Confucianism they gained. Confucianism plays a large role in the education of the yangban class, the oligarchy that rules Korea

**Who was Jŏng Mong-Ju? During which dynasty did he live? What was his role?**

Jŏng Mong-Ju was a civil servant who lived during the Koryŏ Dynasty. He studied Confucianism to pass the civil service exams and was an instructor of Neo-Confucianism. He was as trusted official to King U and served as his diplomatic envoy to China and Japan.

**Who was Yi Bangwon? What did he do?**

Yi Bangwon was a member of the oligarchy who opposed the rule of King U. He staged a coup d'état to overthrow King U and install his own father as King and begin a new dynasty, the Chosŏn Dynasty. Later, he became the second king of the Chosŏn Dynasty.

**How is Jŏng Mong-Ju remembered by historians and by the Korean people?**

Jŏng Mong-Ju is considered a hero of the Korean people because of his loyalty and martyrdom. He not only remained loyal to the king as Confucian teachings dictate but he also knowingly died as a result of his loyalty. He is considered one of 18 Korean Confucian Sages, a great honor in Korea that is recognized today.

**What line of the sijo provides evidence that Jŏng Mong-Ju held Buddhist beliefs? Explain how the line exemplifies Buddhist teaching.**

The following line provides evidence that Jŏng Mong-Ju held Buddhist beliefs: "Though I die and die again, though I die one hundred deaths." This shows his belief in reincarnation. The second part of the next line, "whether my soul exists or not," however shows the conflict between Buddhism's belief in the afterlife and Confucianism's lack of concern or doubt about the afterlife.

**What line of the sijo provides evidence that Jŏng Mong-Ju held Confucian beliefs? Explain how the line exemplifies Confucian teaching.**

The following line provides evidence of Confucian beliefs: My red heart forever loyal to my lord, will never fade away. This shows the virtue of Chung or loyalty to the ruler and state.

**Based on this map, what was the relationship between Korea and the Silk Road? Do you think Korea benefited from the Silk Road? Why or why not?**

While most sources do not extend the Silk Road to Korea and Japan, it is clear that Korea and Japan were both linked by trade to the Silk Road via China. Korea and Japan thus benefitted from the Silk Road trade as both goods and ideas—especially Buddhism—moved along the trade routes to new civilizations. Despite the depiction of the trade routes to Korea as tangential to the Silk Road itself, archaeologists have unearthed numerous artifacts in Korea that both originated in places beyond China and/or were influenced by the styles of faraway places including Rome, Greece, and Persia.

Did Korea benefit: This is a matter of opinion by the student but hopefully students will argue that Korea did in fact benefit from cultural diffusion due to the enriching of both Korea's culture and enriching of other civilizations by Korean influences.

**2. *To what extent was Korea influenced by Confucian and Buddhist beliefs?*** Cite specific facts from at least three of the documents to answer the question. Be sure to cite the documents as you refer to them in your response.

Responses should probably draw from Documents 1, 4, 5 and 6 and discuss the numerous points of evidence that Korea adopted Confucian and Buddhist beliefs. Document 1 provides several specific dates when Korea formally adopted Confucianism and Buddhism to govern state policies. Documents 4 and 5 describe the use of Confucianism to guide the behavior of an individual but also a government official, showing the influence of the philosophy at the society and government levels. Document 6 can be used to demonstrate the linkages between China and Korea. The astute student will include Japan and may cast his/her discussion in terms of Eastern Civilization, recognizing the larger international community formed by the far eastern civilizations.

**3. *If you were Jōng Mong-Ju, would you have remained loyal to the king, knowing it would result in your death? Why or why not?*** Reflect on what you have learned and write a personal response to the question.

This is a personal response that challenges students to put themselves in another time and place and to view the world through an historical lens. In simple responses, students will merely think only in terms of themselves acting in a current-day situation. More advanced responses will show the students thinking through their own personal lens although acting in ancient times. The most advanced students will try to recognize that their actions would be influenced by the ideological lens of the time and place—i.e., Confucianism—and that their actions must be governed and explained by that viewpoint.