

The historical context

As anyone who witnessed the opening ceremonies of the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing can attest, the Chinese continue to take great pride in their three main belief systems: Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism. These three belief systems continue to exert tremendous influence over life in China. Thus, by examining this unit, students can appreciate the connection between the past and the present in China.

This Closeup unit has its roots in Big Era Four but applies to Big Era Five as well. Both belief systems indigenous to China that are covered in this unit originated during the fourth and fifth centuries BCE. The founders of these belief systems—Laozi (Lao Tzu) and Confucius—lived during the violent and chaotic “Warring States Period” of the eastern Zhou dynasty. This occurred nearly three centuries before China was first united into an empire by Shi Huangdi in 221 BCE. This “Warring States Period” was a time when the line of succession within each state was murky at best, since rulers would often have children with wives and concubines; many of the progeny of these unions would try to claim their rightful place on the throne. Bitter, rejected “wannabe” rulers often joined forces with rival states to seek justice and revenge and attempt to “clear the heir” in their own states. In addition, these Chinese states often united in common cause against a more powerful state (or states) in order to preserve a balance of power between them.

In military terms, this period saw a move away from the aristocrat-led, chariot-based, and chivalrous battles to large-scale armies, cavalry, walled fortifications, and use of the crossbow. These developments caused battles to be larger in scale and intensity than ever before, requiring the skills of well-organized generals. Iron-making technology, developed in the early Zhou period, promoted economic expansion. The economic growth of the late Zhou period is evident in the appearance of cities all over northern China. In the fourth century BCE, rulers of city-states in China began attempting to conquer neighboring states. Siddhartha Gautama, the founder of the third belief system—Buddhism—discussed in this unit also lived around 500 BCE in India.

Chinese societies were in closer contact with Indian societies than they were with other ancient civilizations given the geographic proximity to each other. However, early India differed from ancient China in many ways due, in large part, to its climate: India was farther south, closer to the equator, and warmer year round. India also had closer relationships to other early Indo-European societies, such as Persians and Greeks, than did the early Chinese. Within two centuries before Siddhartha, records indicate that philosophers in India began questioning the meanings of sacrificial rituals and pondering the role of humans in the cosmos. Ancient Indian beliefs envisioned endlessly-repeating cycles of birth and death. Those who lived good lives

would be reborn into a better life, and those who did bad deeds would be reborn as lower beings. This led some to seek a more mystical understanding of the universe—and attempt to perform good deeds only—by practicing asceticism and retreating from society. It is from this environment that the philosophy of Buddhism emerged. The spread of Buddhism both inside and outside of India was greatly supported by the Indian King Ashoka who became a Buddhist after recognizing—and agonizing over—the carnage he inflicted when he defeated his enemies in a bloody battle in 261 BCE. (See Landscape Teaching Unit 4.4, An Age of Greek and Persian Power.)

By 100 CE, the economy of the cities of Inner Eurasia was becoming dependent on east-west trade along the [silk roads](#). During the powerful Han dynasty, the Chinese controlled much of eastern Inner Eurasia, although trade continued after the Han fell. Thus, the message of Buddhism was first introduced into China by foreign merchants. Soon after, missionaries also carried the teachings of Buddhism to China. The spread of Buddhism deepened when the sutras (Buddhist holy writings) were translated from Sanskrit into Chinese by both Inner Eurasian and Chinese monks.

After the fall of the Han dynasty in 220 CE, China disintegrated into the “Period of Division.” The territory was broken into competing states until 589 CE. At one point non-Chinese were able to control parts of northern China. This was due in large part to the invention of the stirrup about 300 CE. This device gave advantage to cavalry in warfare and favored the superior riding ability of northern tribes. During this disunity, Buddhism spread in China and connected Chinese society with societies throughout Asia. At the same time, Daoism emerged as a rival to Buddhism, and Daoists wrote their own sacred texts and instituted monastic rites as a way to become more accepted into higher society and political circles. Finally, in 589 CE, the Sui dynasty defeated the last of the southern dynasties and China was politically reunited. The Sui founder, Wendi, presented himself as a Buddhist king and spread the teachings of Buddhism across China. At the same time, the Sui selected government officials based on their scores on civil service examinations which stressed knowledge of Confucianism. However, the costly (in terms of money and casualties) battles the Sui waged to regain China’s control over Vietnam and Korea—as the Han had done—caused the Sui dynasty to fall after only two generations.

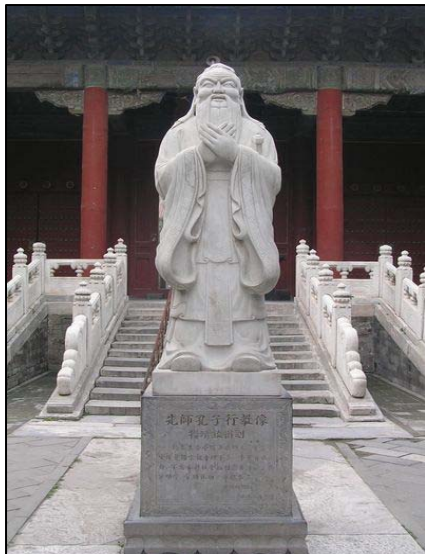
The Tang dynasty, which took over in 618 CE and lasted until 907 CE, continued the civil service examinations. Eventually there were two main examinations: one tested knowledge of the Confucian classics, and the other tested the candidates’ ability to answer political questions and compose poetry. The Tang dynasty rivaled the Han in terms of territorial control, and the Tang elite was perhaps even better educated than the Han elite. For example, the Tang elite continued to prepare for and take the civil service exams as a matter of personal prestige. As we will see in the lessons in this unit, all three belief systems—Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism—flourished under the Tang and Song dynasties (roughly 960-1279 CE).

Lesson 2

Student Handout 2.2—Confucius (Kong Fuzi), 551-479 BCE

Confucius was a sage, that is, a wise man. He was born in 551 BCE, during a period when China was divided into many small states, each with its own lord. This time is known as the “Warring States Period” because the different states were always fighting with each other. There were many attempts to overthrow the lords because they were often cruel to the people they ruled. It was a period of great chaos (disorder) and suffering among the people.

Like other people during this difficult and dangerous time, Confucius looked for ways to improve society and make it more peaceful. He believed that life would be better and safer if there was clear order, or harmony, in society. He also understood that rulers needed to govern more wisely to avoid or reduce bloodshed. Confucius believed that people should not use family connections to obtain government positions as many people did during that time. Instead, he thought that government officials should be well-educated, talented, honest, and fair. Confucius believed that government officials should live lives of virtue (be virtuous) so that the people they ruled would follow their example. Therefore, he developed a philosophy that established clear relationships between people in all aspects of their lives.



**Statue of Confucius at the
Confucius Temple in
Beijing China**
Wikimedia Commons
Photo by Miguel A. Monjas



**Tomb of Confucius in
Qufu, China**
Wikimedia Commons
Photo by Ralf Müller

1. **Parents-Children.** Parents should love and care for their children. Children should respect and obey their parents. The children's respect and devotion for their parents is often called "filial piety."
2. **Ruler-Subjects.** A ruler should care for the people he governs. The people he rules (the subjects) should obey a ruler who takes care of them.
3. **Older brothers-Younger brothers.** Older brothers should care for younger brothers. Younger brothers should respect and obey older brothers.
4. **Husband-Wife.** Married people should live in harmony. A wife should obey her husband.
5. **Friend-Friend.** Friends should trust each other and treat each other well.

Do you notice a pattern? Those in power must take care of those who are weaker. Those who are weaker must respect and obey those who are in power. Those who are equal should treat each other equally. The primary and most important relationship is between parent and child. Children who understand their roles and duties to their parents will then be able to go into the world and understand their positions in society. It will be very difficult, however, for those who do not fulfill their primary duties (to their parents) to lead a successful life.

These relationships are based on traditional Chinese values, such as respect for elders (older people) and ancestor worship, which existed before the time of Confucius. This was an important reason why Chinese people were able to embrace the teachings of Confucius: they were already familiar with many of these ideas. The teachings of Confucius were rooted in things that the Chinese already believed in and practiced.

On the other hand, Confucianism also placed greater importance on learning, or scholarship. According to Confucianism, people can become government officials to help rule the land if they study hard, are just and fair, and can pass difficult exams. Under his philosophy, it is not as important which family you are born into. It is much more important how smart and just you are. Therefore, Confucianism gives everyone the opportunity to become more powerful.

The main writings of Confucius are in the *Analects*, the sayings of Confucius. In addition to his own words, the ideas of Confucianism were developed by many other people who were the disciples of Confucius. These people accepted and spread his teachings. The most famous of these was Mencius. He was born almost 100 years after Confucius died. He tried to convince rulers in China that they should accept the teachings of Confucius.

In Confucianism, memorizing the sayings of Confucius was one of the most important rituals. That way, if someone spoke the first part of a saying of Confucius, the other people in the group (Confucians) would be able to complete it. If they could not, they would not be considered to be part of that group of "well-educated" people or "leaders."

Some of the sayings of Confucius were about the five relationships, but many others were examples of the way people should behave in order to keep harmony in society. These sayings often talked about people who were superior (better than other people) or inferior (worse than other people).

Here are two examples of famous sayings of Confucius:

- “What is a superior person? One who acts before he speaks, and afterwards speaks according to his actions.”
- “Good government results when those who are near are made happy, and those who are far are attracted to it.”

Lesson 2

Student Handout 2.3—Laozi (Lao Tzu), Fourth Century BCE (?)

We do not know if Laozi was a real person or not. The name in Chinese means “Old Philosopher” or “Old Master.” This name may actually have represented several different writers who contributed to the *Daodejing*, or *The Way and Integrity Classic*, which was the earliest set of teachings associated with Daoism. This person or persons lived during a period when China was divided into many small states, each with its own lord. This time is known as the “Warring States Period,” because the different states were always fighting, or warring, with each other and their lords. There were many attempts to overthrow the lords because they were often cruel to the people they ruled. It was a period of great chaos and suffering among the people.

Like other people during this difficult and dangerous time, Laozi looked for ways to improve society and help comfort people. According to legend, he wanted to leave the problems in China in order to live out the end of his life in peace and quiet in Central Asia (west of China). A border guard asked him to write down his teachings before leaving China, and so Laozi composed the *Daodejing*, which lays out the main ideas of what later became known as Daoism.

According to Daoism, people have problems because they do not understand the natural world they live in and how it behaves. Therefore, the basic goal of Daoism is for people to understand the Dao (the way) of nature and behave according to it. Those who follow the Dao achieve mental clarity, power, and “inner peace.”

It is difficult to describe the Dao in words. In fact, when we put things from nature into words, we remove ourselves from the experience of reality, according to Daoism. Therefore, Daoists (people who practice Daoism) say that instead of using words, the best way to experience nature is by observing it and being in tune with it. For example, when we watch waves at the beach, we do not judge waves and say, “This one is right and beautiful” or “That one is wrong and ugly.” Nature is just what it is; it does not make mistakes. There is no “good” or “bad” in nature. These are ideas that people made up to describe how things affect them.

Therefore, it is easier to explain Daoism with the yin yang symbol. Many people (especially in Western countries) tend to separate ideas in nature into opposites like good and evil, black and white, or life and death. Daoists see nature as being whole (the complete outside circle in the yin yang symbol), and everything inside of it as being connected and as part of the whole. The “yin” is represented by the black in this symbol. It also represents water, the moon, and earth, as well as the quiet, soft, and feminine qualities. The “yang” is represented by the white in the symbol. It also represents fire, the sun, and heaven, as well as the dynamic, hard, and masculine qualities. Nature is always moving and flowing, and the yin and yang work together. For example, black and white are only seen in relation to the other, part of each other, and flowing into each other.





The yin yang symbol is seen everywhere in a Daoist monastery near Chongqing, China, even in the soup!

Photo by J. Rothblatt



Statues of gods in a Daoist monastery near Chongqing, China

Photo by J. Rothblatt

The Daoist belief system was accepted in China in part because it reflected earlier philosophies and legends. For example, according to a very famous legend in China, one of the mythical founders of China faced a problem about how to deal with a huge dam that was leaking. Rather than trying to block it, he formed channels to “naturally” drain the water away, thus creating China’s landscape.

Aside from Laozi’s writings in the *Daodejing*, the philosophy of Daoism is based on the ideas of other people who accepted and spread the teachings of Daoism. The most famous of these was Zhuangzi (or Master Zhuang), who was born perhaps 100 years after Laozi died and who wrote *Zhuangzi*.

In Daoism, meditation and tuning into nature are the most important rituals. Daoists also memorize the main writings of Daoism, especially the *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi*. That way, if someone begins speaking the first part of a saying from one of these books, the other people in the group (Daoists) are able to complete it. If they cannot, they are not considered to be part of that group of Daoists.

Examples of two famous Daoist sayings:

- “Who can make the muddy water clear? Let it be still and it will gradually become clear.”
- “That which goes against the Dao will come to an early end.”

Lesson 2

Student Handout 2.4—The Buddha (born Siddhartha Gautama), 563-483 BCE

Siddhartha Gautama was born a prince in Northern India. According to legend, it was predicted at Siddhartha's birth that he would become either a great ruler or a great teacher. His father, the king, wanted Siddhartha to succeed him as ruler. For this reason, his father tried to prevent him from seeing or experiencing anything sad, which might cause him to become religious and teach others. Therefore, Siddhartha enjoyed his early years in the palace in luxury without knowing about things such as old age, sickness, or death. Eventually, the young prince decided to go outside of the palace. There, for the first time, he saw an old person with wrinkled skin who had difficulty walking. Siddhartha understood that he himself would also become old. He also saw a sick person and a dead person. All this made Siddhartha feel much suffering. During another trip, he saw a holy man who appeared to be happy and at peace. Siddhartha learned that this person had given up his home and everything he owned. The holy person was trying to find wisdom and peacefulness by living a pure and simple life.

From then on, Siddhartha searched for a way to end suffering and become happy. He decided to follow the path of a holy person. He gave up everything he owned. He left his wife and young child and a life of luxury in the palace. He traveled around India for years, but he still did not find a way to end suffering. Finally, he decided to sit under a tree and meditate (become quiet and relaxed and clear his mind of thoughts) until he became enlightened (understood the truth about the world and such things as why there is suffering and how to end it). After meditating for several hours, he became enlightened and became known as the "Buddha," or the one who knows the truth.



**Two Golden Statues of
Buddha in a Temple
Shanghai, China**
Photo by J. Rothblatt



**Buddhists burn incense and chant
in a temple
Shanghai, China**
Photo by J. Rothblatt

In order to share the truths he found with others, the Buddha became a teacher. (Remember: this is one of the career paths predicted for him at birth and the one that his father did not want him to take.) There are two main beliefs of Buddhism, that is, the teachings of the Buddha and his followers.

One is the “Four Noble Truths,” which the Buddha discovered when he meditated beneath the tree. These truths are:

- Life is full of suffering from birth to death.
- People suffer because they desire (try to get) things that do not last, for example, money and possessions.
- The way to end suffering is to stop desiring things.
- The way to get rid of desire is to follow the “Eightfold Path.”

According to Buddhism, the “Eightfold Path” means to lead a good life. People who follow this path are freed from suffering and gain happiness. These steps are:

- Right understanding. It is important to be certain that you understand the teachings of the Buddha correctly
- Right thought. Think thoughts that are pure and good.
- Right speech. Speak words that are truthful and not harmful.
- Right action. Treat people well, as you would like to be treated.
- Right work. Do not harm others as you earn a living.
- Right effort. Keep trying to become a better person; stop bad habits.
- Right mindfulness. Be mindful (or aware) of what you are doing and what is going on around you; always think about how you live
- Right meditation. Meditate correctly each day to clear your mind of desires and be able to find peace and truth

When and why did Buddhism arrive in China? Buddhism probably first entered China along the “silk roads,” that is, the system of trade routes that connected China to lands farther west as far as the Mediterranean sea and Europe. Trade on the silk roads goes back thousands of years. By about 100 BCE, Buddhist missionaries began traveling on the routes along with traders. Trade routes opened contact and communication between people and places. In addition to goods, people and ideas spread along the trade routes.

By 68 CE, a Chinese Han emperor asked some advisers to visit India to learn more about this “western religion,” that is, Indian religion. They returned to China with Buddhist monks. New religions and beliefs often become popular during difficult times when people are searching for answers to why there is suffering. When dynasties were ending in China there was much unrest, and the Chinese tended to embrace Buddhism more. For example, at the end of the Han dynasty, Buddhism became more popular.

Lesson 2***Student Handout 2.10—Sayings of the Three Belief Systems of China***

This page lists sayings or quotations from the founders/leaders of each of the three belief systems of China that we studied. Your job is to identify which sayings are from which belief system and complete the worksheet.

1. Have no friends [that are not] not equal to yourself.
2. If you think that you do not have enough, then you will never have enough.
3. Live and let live.
4. The inferior man is disrespectful to great men; he makes fun of wisdom.
5. Suffering can be ended.
6. The fully enlightened one is the highest among all living beings.
7. While his parents are alive, a son may not move far away.
8. The best way to run the world is to leave it alone.
9. A mother cannot shield her son from old age, disease, and death; nor can the son shield his mother from them.
10. Of all people, girls and servants are most difficult to behave.
11. The progress of a superior person is upwards, the progress of an inferior person is downwards.
12. Happiness does not come from having much, but from being attached to little.
13. Your worst enemy cannot harm you as much as your own unguarded thoughts.
14. A journey of a thousand miles starts with the first step.
15. If you are not always trying to be someone, you can be who you are.

Lesson 3

Student Handout 3.2—The Reunification of China and the Spread of Buddhism

Why did Buddhism spread during the era of the Tang dynasty in China?

Confucianism was the “official” belief system in China under the Han dynasty, which ruled China from 206 BCE to 220 CE. When this dynasty fell, however, many people became disillusioned (disappointed) with Confucianism. It did not seem to work to keep order in China. There was much suffering throughout China because the once-unified empire was again broken into smaller pieces, and almost constant fighting occurred during the next 400 years. People naturally began to embrace Buddhism, a new religion that promised an end to suffering.

Political reasons

Several other events caused Buddhism to spread in China. One was the political reunification (making whole again) of China. The person who did this was Emperor Wendi. He started a new dynasty called the Sui (pronounced “sway”) in 581 CE. He became a Buddhist and promoted the spread of Buddhism in China. For example, he sent statues of the Buddha to Buddhist temples throughout China. Those statues had an inscription saying that all people could reach enlightenment. Emperor Wendi was a clever ruler: he kept Confucianism as the “official” belief system to help remind the Chinese of the old, strong, and long-lasting Han empire.

Geographical Reasons

Another cause of the spread of Buddhism in China was that, as the Sui and Tang dynasties expanded China, they seized new lands to the west. Many of the people living there were Buddhists, and they spread their religion as they traveled throughout China. The Sui dynasty, however, did not last long. Despite the wisdom of Wendi, other leaders fought expensive wars to try to gain more land at the same time that they undertook great projects like the 1,200 mile Grand Canal, which connected northern and southern China. The Sui dynasty was overthrown in 618 CE and replaced by the Tang dynasty. The Tang period was a “golden age” for China as it kept the land united and strong for almost 300 years, from 618 to 907 CE.

Chang’an, the capital of the Sui and Tang dynasties, became one of the largest cities on earth. It had a diverse population of more than one million people from many parts of the world. Also, since Chang’an was a key staging center for the silk road caravans, it was a city of trade, culture, and wealth, and a center for the spread of Buddhism far and wide in China.

Economic and Social Reasons

Many Buddhists, even some Chinese emperors, gave money and land to build Buddhist monasteries and temples where monks could live and pray. These temples and monasteries also provided numerous social services in China: they ran schools, took care of the sick, helped the poor, and gave travelers a place to stay. They even played important economic roles in China. For example, they acted as banks to loan people money for business. The Buddhist monasteries ended up owning much land and becoming powerful.

Intellectual and Religious Reasons

As interest in Buddhism grew, especially among the Tang rulers, many of whom were Buddhists, Chinese travelers went to India to bring back holy Buddhist writings and translate them into Chinese. When Buddhist writings became more available to people in China, however, they also caused a split in how this religion was practiced. Two main groups formed that did not follow the style of Buddhism practiced in India. One group (called Zen Buddhism in Japan) focused on self-discipline and meditation. The other group, called Pure Land Buddhism, focused on attaining “Western (Indian-style) Paradise” through chanting words over and over again.

The Spread of Buddhism to Korea and Japan

Buddhism spread through much of East Asia because most governments and people there looked up to China as the “mother culture” and as the most powerful government in the region. The other governments in Asia wanted to adopt the types of cultural practices that made China strong. Buddhism spread to these regions and the rest of Asia especially during the Tang era because China was going through a golden age of power and culture. It was the Chinese forms of Buddhism, notably “Pure Land” and “Zen,” that spread to Korea and Japan, and not the type of Buddhism practiced in India.

Author

Linda Karen Miller taught world history and American government in Kansas and Virginia for thirty-two years before retiring in 2002. Since 2003, she has been an adjunct professor in the Department of Education at the Community College of Southern Nevada. In 1996, she was selected as the Organization of American Historians' Pre-Collegiate Teacher of the Year and the National Council for the Social Studies Outstanding Secondary Teacher of the Year. She has traveled extensively, especially in Asia. She is the author of many instructional materials.

The historical context

Humans have inhabited the Korean peninsula since the [paleolithic era](#). Although [archaeologists](#) have found and excavated some paleolithic sites, those from the neolithic era are more numerous. One of these is Amsa-dong, which lies along the Han-gang River near Seoul. It dates to 6,000-7,000 years ago. The region's inhabitants lived by fishing, hunting, and gathering wild fruits. They also made a type of pottery known as "comb pottery," with a herringbone pattern. It was made out of clay by using the coiling method.

According to a Korean [creation myth](#), recorded by a Buddhist priest in 1289, Hwang-Ung descended from heaven to the region of Mount Paekdu, located along the Yalu river. He transformed Ung-Yo, a she-bear, into a woman. Since she could not find a mate, he married her. They had a son, Dan-Gun, who became a leader of many [clans](#) and founded a nation called Chosun in 2333 BCE.

The Chosun clans began to develop into kingdoms and, by the first century BCE, there were three: Koguryo, close to China; Paekche, in the southwest; and Silla (pronounced "she-la") in the southeast. Koguryo, the first one to become powerful, was also the first to adopt, in 372 CE, Buddhism and Buddhist scriptures in Chinese translations. Academies were established to educate the nobility. But it was a time of constant struggles, and the Three Kingdoms ended when Silla, with the help of Tang China, defeated Paekche.

The Silla unified the peninsula, and in the eighth century CE it flourished in science and art. Agriculture improved and land was distributed equitably to the peasants. When the Silla fell apart in the early tenth century, the Koryo dynasty (918-1392) was established. King Hyeonjin (r. 1099-1031) ordered the carving of woodblocks to print the *Tripitaka*, the Buddhist canon of scriptures, in order to earn Buddha's favor during a war with northern nomads. Between 1236 and 1251, a set of 80,000 woodblocks was carved to print the *Tripitaka*. The woodblocks and thousands of books were lost when the palace was burned during the Mongol invasion in the thirteenth century. Movable bronze type came into use, and many books were eventually replaced.

Confucianism arrived in Korea before Buddhism, but it did not flower until the Choson dynasty, which overthrew the Koryo. The court established a Chinese-style examination system, and scholars from Confucian academies were recruited for government offices.

King Sejong (r. 1418-1450) had scholars devise a Korean alphabet, known as *Hangeul*. It consisted of 28 easy-to-learn letters. Sejong's reign marked another golden age of science and art. A work on agriculture, the *Nongsa chiksol* (Straight Talk on Farming), as well as numerous medical books, were published. The monarchy briefly declined after Sejong's abdication, but King Sejo (r. 1455-1468) strengthened the monarchy, as well as the army.

In 1592, the Japanese invaded Korea when the Choson rulers refused to aid them in attacking China. The war was fought on land as well as on the sea, where Korean metal-armored *kobukson* (turtle ships) seriously weakened the Japanese, who were eventually forced to withdraw.

In the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, western ideas began to filter into Korea through China. One of them was Christianity, which spread quickly and came into conflict with Confucianism. Christianity prospered among the poor, especially after persecutions in 1801, 1839, and 1866.

During the late nineteenth century, Great Britain and France began to request commercial relations with the Choson. In 1866, the United States tried to establish those relations by force. In response, the Koreans attacked and burned the American ship *General Sherman* in the Taedong river. Finally, in 1882, the Choson were forced to sign a treaty of friendship with the United States.

Japan pressed for open ports and by 1876 managed to obtain trade privileges. But soon Japan wanted to control Korea, and in 1895 Japanese Minister Miura Goro assassinated Myongsong Hwanghu, the Korean queen. In 1905, through treaties with the British, Russians, and Americans, the Japanese were able to colonize Korea. Then Japan ousted the Choson king and on August 22, 1910 annexed Korea.

The Japanese began to control every facet of Korean life, including newspapers and education, and made every attempt to destroy the Koreans' national identity. The Koreans resented Japanese oppression, and they organized resistance movements. On March 1, 1919, there was a cry for independence, and demonstrators set out from Pagoda Park in Seoul. Japanese troops killed more than one thousand Koreans, and many more were arrested.

In April 1919, Korean nationalists created a provisional government. One of its leading members was Syngman Rhee, who later became the first president of South Korea. In 1945, at the end of World War II, Japanese occupation came to an end, only to be replaced by occupation by the U.S. and the Soviet Union. These two countries, along with Great Britain and China, became Korea's trustees.

Korea was divided between the American and Soviet forces along the 38th parallel. Three years later, on August 15, 1948, the Republic of Korea was established. On June 25, 1950, North Korea invaded South Korea, and there ensued a three-year war that inflicted enormous casualties

and great devastation upon both sides. The war ended in a stalemate, with both sides agreeing to an armistice in 1953.

To this day Korea remains divided along the 38th parallel. The North has an impoverished, communist-led government, while the South has an economically-thriving democratic government, though one with its own political problems. Troops are aligned along the demilitarized zone (DMZ) between the two states to stop any conflict and help bring about the “morning calm” of the past.



Lesson 3

Early Printing

Content link to
Landscape Teaching Unit 5.3
Consolidation of the trans-hemispheric network, 1000-125- CE

Preparation

Make arrangements for access to Internet sites and photocopy Student Handouts 3.1 and 3.2.

Introduction

The history of printing began in China, where woodblocks were first used in the seventh century to print Buddhist sutras. Subsequently, printing spread to other countries, like Korea and Japan. The world's oldest woodblock print, a scroll known as the *Dharani Sutra* dating to 750 CE, was discovered in Korea at the Seokgatap Pagoda in the Bulguksa Temple in 1966. Japan's oldest woodblock print, the *Hyakuman Dharani*, was printed in 770, and China's *Diamond Sutra*, now in the British Museum, in 868.

The spread of printing paralleled the spread of Buddhism. In Korea, the first set of woodblocks for the printing of the *Tripitaka*, the complete Buddhist canon of scriptures, was carved between 1011 and 1087. The *Tripitaka* was meant to harness the force of Buddhism to protect the nation during a war with the Khitans from the north. All of the woodblocks, as well as numerous books, were lost in a palace fire during the Mongol invasion.

In 1236, a new office for publication was established to produce a second *Tripitaka*. The woodblocks were completed in 1251 as a plea to Buddha to help repel the Mongol invaders. These blocks remain in excellent condition today and are the most complete collection of the Buddhist canon to be found in East Asia. The new woodblocks, preserved in the Haeinsa monastery, are important artifacts of Korean heritage. In 1995, they were placed on UNESCO's World Cultural Heritage list.

In 1987, the Cheongju Early Printing museum was built in Cheongju on the site where the Heungdeok Temple once stood. It was here that in 1377 the world's oldest surviving book was printed with movable metal type. Currently a part of the Bibliothèque Nationale collection in Paris, the book, known as *jikji*, was the work of a priest, Baekwun-hwasang. He wanted to enlighten followers of Zen Buddhism to attain proper perspective and transmit traditions to future generations. It draws extensively on Buddhist scriptures and biographies. The key phrase from that book, *jikji simche*, states that if one looks directly into one's mind, one realizes that every enlightened mind is, in fact, the mind of Buddha.

The Choson dynasty inherited the Koryo dynasty's printing tradition and continued its development. Using brass and iron types, many books were printed, sometimes to help spread

Confucianism, which became the dominant ideology of the Choson dynasty. As types improved, the number of pages that could be printed in a day constantly increased.

In 1443, during the reign of King Sejong, the alphabet known as Hangeul (or Hangul) was invented to replace the Chinese [logographic writing system](#) which, until then, had been used to write Korean. One of the king's objectives was to provide uneducated commoners with an effective means to express their grievances. The new script was phonetic, and it was made up of 28 easy-to-learn letters.

Activities

1. Webquest activity: printing. Have students, individually or as a jigsaw, go to the website for the Print Museum in Korea, at:

<http://www.jikjiworld.net/content/english/jikji/main.jsp>

Distribute copies of Student Handout 3.1 and have students answer the questions.

2. Webquest activity: Hangeul. Have students investigate the development of the Korean alphabet called Hangeul by going to the following website:

http://www.korea.net/korea/kor_loca.asp?code=G0702

Distribute copies of Student Handout 3.2 and have students answer the questions.

Lesson 4

The Yangban

Content link to
Landscape Teaching Unit 6.3
Rulers with guns: The rise of powerful states, 1400-1700

Preparation

Photocopy Student Handouts 4.1-4.3.

Introduction

In Korea, during the Silla period, possession of a particular “bone rank” qualified a person for a position in the bureaucratic hierarchy. This system disappeared during the Koryo dynasty, when the Chinese system of civil service examination, based on merit and talent, was instituted. Numerous Confucian schools were established in order to produce well-educated candidates. Those who passed the literary exam on Confucian classics, history, and literary arts became civil officials.

In the Koryo social system, people were classified into four classes:

- the *yangban* (nobility)
- the *chung'in* (middle class)
- the *sangmin* or *snagin* (commoners)
- the *oh'onmin* (low-born)

The social status of individuals was hereditary. There was little upward social mobility, and intermarriage between the *yangban* and commoners, for example, was forbidden. The *yangban* nobility included high-ranking civil and military officials and their families. All members of the *yangban* class with government appointments received land grants according to their ranks.

During the Choson dynasty, in Confucian Korea, the *yangban* became one of the most enduring social institutions, shaping society, politics, and culture. This class influenced the value system and lifestyle of Koreans down to the present day. They can be equated with the modern educated middle class.

Unlike the monarchs of other countries, Korea's did not have absolute power. During the Koryo and the Choson dynasties, the emperor had to work with the officials. The *yangban* can be compared to the gentry in China and to the *samurai* in Tokugawa Japan. While the *samurai* were expected to live in castle towns, however, the Choson *yangban* did not have to live in urban administrative centers. They differed from the Chinese gentry in that they were not required to pass government examinations to maintain their privileged class.

Korean *yangban* society was patriarchal. Although women were supposed to be equal, they were also considered separate. The public world belonged to the man (*yang*) while the private belonged to the woman (*yin*). Women were not allowed to participate in social activities and were denied the opportunity to go to school or learn the classics. Remarriage of widows was forbidden.

Agriculture was the economic foundation of the nation and the basis of the *yangban* class. When land became scarce around the capital in the seventeenth century, a growing number of *yangban* officials left for the countryside to become landlords. The *yangban* began forming Confucian cultural enclaves in village communities. Their emphasis on kinship and family ties contributed to social stability and continuity of local communities in the late Choson dynasty.

The influence of the *yangban* on modern Korea can be seen on the national flag adopted by South Korea in 1950. In addition to four *kwae* (trigrams), it pictures a *yin* and *yang* symbol. This dualism, that was valued by the *yangban*, is the symbol of Korean identity today.

Activities

1. Have students break into three groups. Distribute copies of Student Handouts 4.1-4.3 and assign a cameo study of a *yangban* to each group.

2. After students have read their cameo, have them discuss the following as a class:

Who were the *yangban* and what was their legacy in modern Korea?

What are the similarities between the three *yangban* families?

3. As an extra activity, have students create their own *yangban* cameo.

4. Have more advanced students compare the *yangban* in Korea with the *samurai* in Japan and the gentry in China.



The academy for Confucian studies at Tosan Sowon in South Korea. It dates to the sixteenth century.

Photo by R. Dunn