

Spread of Buddhism in East Asia

Directions: Examine and annotate the documents and answer the questions.

Buddhism Begins to Spread

... The Buddha is reported to have exhorted [urged] his monks to “go and travel around for the welfare of the multitudes, for the happiness of the multitudes, out of sympathy for the world, for the benefit, welfare, and happiness of gods and humans. No two should go in the same direction.” Although this last admonition [caution] seems not to have been heeded [obeyed], it is true that Buddhist “missions” were not large and well-organized movements, and instead often took the form of itinerant monks (or groups of monks) traveling by land and sea in the company of traders and royal emissaries. According to traditional accounts, the first foreign mission was to the island of Sri Lanka, and was led by the son of [the Mauryan Emperor] Ashoka. . . .

Source: Donald S. Lopez, Jr., “Buddhism in Practice,” *Asian Religions in Practice*, Princeton University Press, 1999

1. According to this excerpt from “Buddhism in Practice,” how did Buddhism spread from its place of origin in ancient India to other parts of Asia?

An Age of Buddhism in China

Buddhism first came to China from India during Han times. Although few Chinese adopted the religion at first, during the Period of Disunion many Chinese turned to Buddhism. Because Buddhism taught that people could escape suffering and achieve peace, it appealed to people living in the midst of the turmoil of that period.

By the Tang dynasty, Buddhism was well established in China. Many of the Tang rulers were Buddhists and supported the religion. Buddhist temples appeared across the land, and Chinese missionaries spread Buddhism to other Asian lands. Because of Buddhism’s importance, the period from about 400 to 845 in China is known as the Age of Buddhism.

The Age of Buddhism came to an end when the religion lost official favor in the mid-800s. A Tang emperor, seeing the growing power of the Buddhist religious communities as a threat, launched a campaign against Buddhism. His officials burned Buddhist texts and destroyed Buddhist temples. Although these actions weakened Buddhism in China, the religion survived. However, Buddhism began to change as the Chinese blended it with other beliefs, such as Confucianism and Daoism.

Source: Susan Ramirez, et al. “Chinese Empires,” *World History: Human Legacy*, Holt

2. What conditions in China led people to convert to Buddhism? Explain.

3. Why was Buddhism suppressed during the late Tang Dynasty?



Connecting Korea

... With the rise of Buddhism, Korea's contacts with the outside world grew, and scholarship, arts, science and technology which were imported to Korea from China, India and regions beyond brought about the enrichment of Korean culture. As a result, one of the oldest astronomical charts in the world was produced, the oldest astronomical observatory called Ch'ömsöngdae was built, tumuli [burial mounds] architecture represented by the Ssangyöng tomb developed, and the system of doctor of medicine was established in Korea. During the Three Kingdoms period, Korea's cultural progress in the fields of astronomy, mathematics, medicine, architecture and metallurgy reached the level of other advanced civilization of the world. . . .

Source: Andrew C. Nahm, *A Panorama of 5000 Years: Korean History*, Hollym

4. According to Andrew C. Nahm, what is one aspect of Korean culture that was influenced by the spread of Buddhism?

Buddhism and Chinese Influence in Japan

... The high period of Chinese influence in Japan was also marked by the acceptance of Buddhism both as a dominant religion and as a powerful establishment. The adoption of a new universal religion must be considered a major turning point in the evolution of any people's cultural history, and the arrival of Buddhism to Japan, like the spread of Christianity to the British Isles, was such a turning point. Some historians, in fact, have written of the early history of Japan as being divided into two distinct parts: Japan before and after the introduction of Buddhism. The impact of Buddhism on Japan was certainly more profound and lasting than it was on China itself, and Japan still stands as one of the major strongholds of the Buddhist religion in the world today...

Buddhism in Japan came to play three major roles. First as a religion it brought to Japan a new system of beliefs and pious attitudes. Secondly as a religious establishment which spread to Japan from the continent it was a major carrier of Chinese civilization to Japan. Thirdly, having established itself as a religious organization with social influence and economic power on Japanese soil, it became a major force in the nation's political affairs...

Source: John Whitney Hall, *Japan: From Prehistory to Modern Times*, Delacorte Press

5. According to John Whitney Hall, what were two roles Buddhism played in Japan?

