

# **DOCUMENT BASED QUESTION (DBQ): THE RISE OF SILLA**

**GRADES:** 9-12

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**SUBJECT:** World History, AP World History

**TIME REQUIRED:** Two to three class periods

## **OBJECTIVES:**

1. Understand the Three Kingdoms period in Korean history and the Rise of Silla
2. Demonstrate this understanding by responding to a DBQ (Document Based Question) with an essay.

## **MATERIALS REQUIRED:**

- Documents 1-5 (attached)
- Lee, Ki-baik. Edward W. Wagner & Edward J. Shultz (translators). *A New History of Korea*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1984.

## **BACKGROUND:**

The Three Han Kingdoms in the southern part of Korea gradually developed into states. Paekche and Silla were prominent in the south, Koguryō in the north. By the first century CE, Koguryō was firmly established as a state power. In 342, however, Koguryō's capital fell to the Chinese Yen. Paekche amassed power while Koguryō was fighting against the Chinese, and came into conflict with Koguryō in the late fourth century. Then came the growth of Silla with a more fully organized state power.

Koguryō was the first kingdom to adopt Buddhism as the royal creed in 372; Paekche, the second in 384; and Silla, the last in 528. Koguryō established an academy to educate the nobility and compiled a state history consisting of 100 volumes before the introduction of Buddhism. Paekche also compiled its history in the early fourth century.

All three kingdoms developed highly sophisticated state organizations on the Korean Peninsula, adopting Buddhism and a Confucian hierarchical structure with the king at the top. State codes were established as a legal system to rule the people. The three kingdoms competed with each other to strengthen Buddhist-Confucian state power and expand their territory.

Silla developed the *Hwarang*, an elite youth group. *Hwarang* members were trained as a group in the arts of war, literature and civics. The objective of this rigorous education was to instill in the students 1) loyalty to the monarch; 2) filial piety to parents; 3) amicability among friends; 4) bravery in war; and 5) aversion to unnecessary killing. These objectives were taught by the famous monk Won-kwang, who consolidated Buddhist-Confucian virtues in the education of Silla youth. The *Hwarang* contributed to the strength of the Silla kingdom.

With this youth corps, Silla was able to amass state power in the cultural sphere as well. With the aid of a Paekche architect, it erected a huge temple, Hwangyongsa (Temple of the Illustrious

Dragon), and a towering pagoda famous even in China. The 70-meter-high pagoda of Hwangyongsa stood from 645 until the Mongol invasion of the thirteenth century. Silla was open to cultural influences from Koguryŏ and Paekche, and also dispatched monks to China to learn about Chinese culture, especially Buddhist doctrine, architecture and classics.

While Silla was building friendly relations with Tang China, Koguryŏ was in fierce conflict with them. Silla persuaded Tang China to come to its aid in the conquest of Paekche and Koguryŏ. With the political and military backing of Tang China, Silla was finally able to defeat the other two kingdoms, but was unable to control the whole territory of Koguryŏ which extended to Manchuria. Tang's intention toward Silla was made clear in the aftermath of the unification of Silla. Tang intended to conquer Silla and occupy the entire Korean peninsula. In 671 Silla started its own operations against Chinese rule and fighting began. China finally gave in to Silla's claim of territory south of the Taedongkang River. Silla became a unified state covering most of the Korean Peninsula's territory and people.

Koreans also influenced the outside world during this period. One Koguryŏ warrior, Ko Sa-gye, who was captured by a Tang general, joined the Tang army. His son Ko Sŏn-ji had a successful military career in Tang and conquered Tashkent in the mid-eighth century. In 727, the Silla monk Hyech'o made pilgrimages to important Buddhist sites in India. The account of his journey serves as an important historical record about eighth century India.

Silla (57 BCE–935 CE) reached the peak of its power and prosperity in the middle of the eighth century. Silla's leadership attempted to establish an ideal Buddhist society and constructed the Sŏkkuram Grotto shrine and Pulguksa temple. Extensive printing of Buddhist scripture was undertaken with woodblocks. The oldest imprint of the Dharani sutra, probably printed between 706 and 751, was brought to light during the recent restoration of a three-story pagoda at Pulguksa temple.

Silla treated the conquered nobility of Koguryŏ and Paekche with generosity. Scholars specializing in diplomatic correspondence, medicine, mathematics, and astronomy were invited to bring professional personnel into Silla government service. The distribution of Jŏngjŏn (equity land system) was put into practice in 722 for the peasants, and the people in the country then became eligible to cultivate allotted lands. In addition, reservoirs were erected for rice field irrigation. In return for their land, peasants had to grow rice, millet, barley and wheat. A certain percentage of these crops were handed over to the government, as taxes. In addition, peasants were bound to plant mulberry trees for silkworms, and walnut and pine nut trees as another tax to the government and nobility. Overall, Silla's people were prosperous.

The eighth century was a time of peace for Silla and the desire for learning grew. Idu, a new transcription system of Korean words that used Chinese characters, was invented and used by Silla scholars. The growing need for scholarly work necessitated the recruitment of scholars from beyond the traditional scholarly class, so a quasi-civil service examination system was instituted in 788 to meet the need.

By the ninth century Buddhism began to lose its sway over the public as the nobility indulged in lazy and luxurious lifestyles. In response, a new Buddhist sect known as Sŏn (generally known

in the West by its Japanese name, Zen) was formed in remote mountain areas. In the cities, civic life also became more difficult as conflict among the nobles and attempts to usurp the throne increased.

Silla in the ninth century was shaken by rebellions, in the capital as well as the countryside. Jang Bo-go, a successful merchant who transported goods to and from Chinese and Japanese ports was one of many local leaders to rebel against royal authority.

The government tried to remedy the volatile situation by reigning in the nobility's decadent lifestyle in 806.

One of many prominent scholars of the period, Choi Chi-wŏn proposed social changes to strengthen the throne, re-vitalize Buddhism and restore order. However, his suggestions were not taken seriously. As a result, he retreated to Haeinsa temple to live as a hermit to pray for the country in danger. At this point, many scholars and talented persons from the middle and upper classes now wanted a change from Silla administration.

Eventually the kingdom was torn to pieces by various rebel leaders, and finally Wang Gŏn accepted the abdication of King Kyŏngsun of Silla in 935. The following year he conquered Latter Paekche and unified the Korean Peninsula. He was enthroned as the founder of the Koryŏ kingdom (918–1392).

#### **PROCEDURE:**

1. Students should read, or teacher may lecture, from Chapters 1-3 (pp. 36-109) of Lee's *A New History of Korea*.
2. Discuss how Silla united the Three Kingdoms. Using the documents presented below, discuss how Silla came to dominate the Korean Peninsula through its foreign policy, political structures, religion its openness to borrowing foreign (Chinese, Indian) cultural elements.

**EVALUATION:** Using a system similar to the College Board AP rubric, students' responses should be assessed using a nine-point scale based on how they:

- analyzed each document
- provided outside information besides what was contained in the document
- discussed Silla's rise based on its foreign policy, political structures, culture and its integration of Indian and Chinese cultural elements.
- suggested additional documents that might have been useful in addressing the question.

**ENRICHMENT:** Ask students to make a comparison between Silla and other states that have risen and fallen, such as Rome.

#### **REFERENCES:**

Adams, Edward B. *Korea's Golden Age: Cultural Spirit of Silla in Kyongju* (revised edition). Seoul: Seoul International Publishing House, 1991.

- Banaschak, Peter. *Worthy Ancestors and Succession to the Throne: On the Office Ranks of the King's Ancestors in Early Silla Society*. Munster: LIT-Verlag, 1997.
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- Best, Jonathan W. "Tales of Three Paekche Monks Who Traveled Afar in Search of The Law." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 51:1 (June 1991): 139-198.
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- Lee, Ki-baik. Edward W. Wagner & Edward J. Shultz (translators). *A New History of Korea*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1984. (chapters 3, 4, 5; pp.36-109).
- Lee, Ki-baik. "Confucian Political Ideology in the Silla Unification and Early Koryo Periods." *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 42 (December 1975): 1-23.
- Lee, Ki-dong. "Bureaucracy and Kolp'um System in the Middle Age of Silla." *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 52 (December 1980): 31-58.
- Pan, Yihong. "Tang and Korea: Expansion and Withdrawal." in *Son of Heaven and Heavenly Qaghan: Sui-Tang China and Its Neighbors*. Bellingham, WA: Western Washington University, 1997.
- Pankaj, Narendra M. "The Buddhist Transformation of Silla Kingship: Buddha as a King and King as a Buddha." *Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 70 (1995): 15-35.

## DOCUMENT 1: PULGUKSA

The first temple at the Pulguksa site was built when King Pōphŭng (r. 514-540), the first Silla ruler to embrace Buddhism, erected a small temple in which his queen could pray for the prosperity and peace of the kingdom. Pulguksa temple's present structure dates from 751 when Kim Taesōng began building the large "Temple of the Buddha Land." Originally consisting of more than 80 buildings (only eight survive today), it was the center of Buddhism in Silla and served primarily as a place to pray for the Buddha's protection against invaders.



Pulguksa's main stairway

## DOCUMENT 2: SÖKKURAM

Sökkuram grotto is located high up on the mountain behind Pulguksa temple. It was designed around a statue of Buddha and is one of Asia's finest Buddhist grottos. Many of Korea's early Buddhist monks risked their lives to make pilgrimages to faraway India and China to learn firsthand about their religion and its traditions. When they returned they brought with them ideas of such grottos which allowed the Silla architects and craftsmen to employ their advanced scientific principles, precise mathematical and architectural concepts, and great technical skill to produce this man-made grotto. Unlike its Chinese and Indian models, Sökkuram was not built by tunneling into the granite bedrock, but was artificially created using carved granite slabs.



### DOCUMENT 3: MAP OF THE THREE KINGDOMS

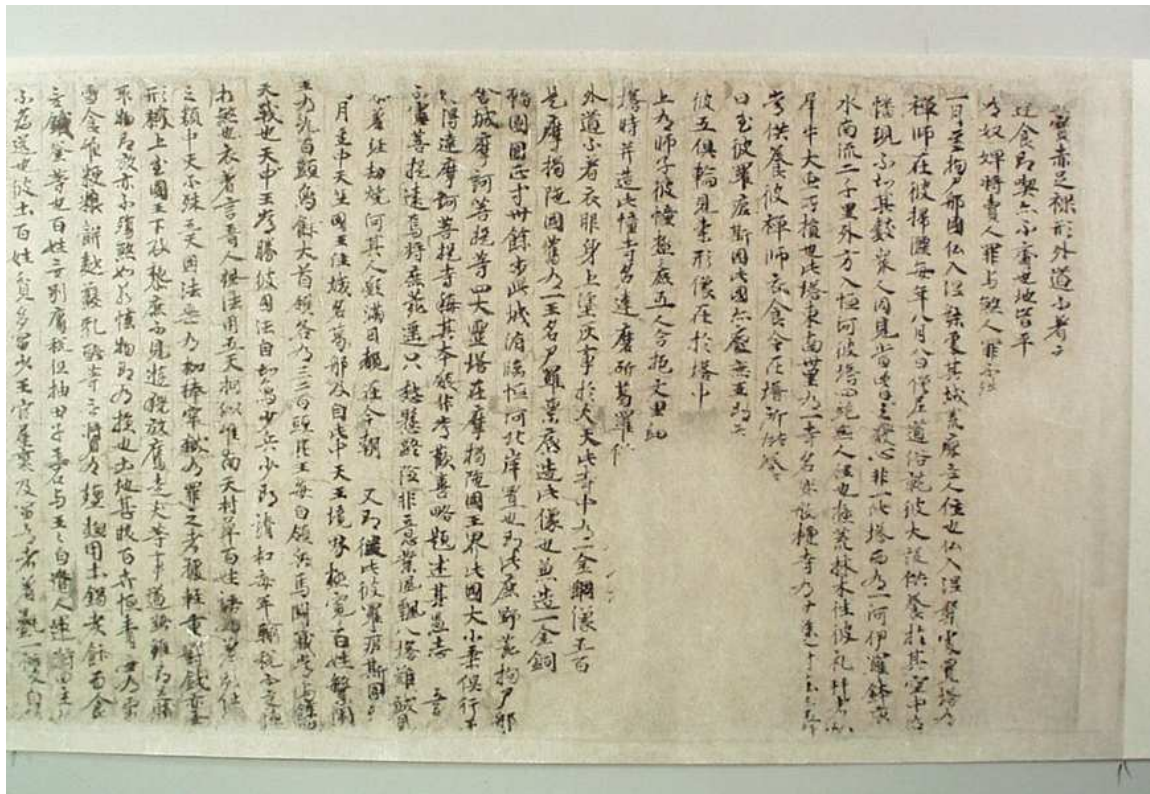


**Map of the Korean peninsula at the time of the Three Kingdoms.**



## DOCUMENT 4: WANGOCH'ŎNCH'UKKUKJŎN

Hyech'o, a Buddhist monk from the Silla Kingdom, traveled to India and wrote *Wangoch'ŏnch'ukkukjŏn* (*Accounts of Visits to the Five Lands of India*) in 727 CE. His memoir describes the culture, religion and customs of India.



*Wangoch'ŏnch'ukkukjŏn*



## DOCUMENT 5: CONFUCIAN ANALECTS

The introduction of Confucianism in the first century CE transformed Korean culture. Korean society adopted many customs, rituals, rites of passage and beliefs from Confucianism: veneration of ancestors, filial piety, social roles and system of societal commitments. The Confucian classics were brought to Korea along with other Chinese texts before the common era. By 4 CE for instance, Koguryŏ had a center of Confucian scholarship, and other areas had Confucian schools known as *kyŏngdang*. During the Silla Unification, official delegations of scholars were frequently sent to China. They brought back volumes of Confucian texts. They also brought back to Korea the administrative methods that they had observed in Chinese Confucian institutions. From the very first, Korea adopted the strictest observance of Confucian values, so much so that even the Chinese regarded Koreans as being the most virtuous of people. China was to refer to Korea as "the country of Eastern decorum"—a reference to the punctiliousness with which the Koreans observed all phases of doctrinal ritual. Two Confucian maxims especially important to Silla scholars were:

The Master said, "To rule a country of a thousand chariots, there must be reverent attention to business, and sincerity; economy in expenditure, and love for men; and the employment of the people at the proper seasons."

The Master said, "A youth, when at home, should be filial, and, abroad, respectful to his elders. He should be earnest and truthful. He should overflow in love to all, and cultivate the friendship of the good. When he has time and opportunity, after the performance of these things, he should employ them in polite studies."

### *Confucian Analects*

English translation by James Legge taken from  
<http://www.sacred-texts.com/cfu/cfu.htm>

