

BUDDHISM AND TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE

GRADES: 9-12

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SUBJECT: Religion, Architecture

TIME REQUIRED: Two to four class periods

OBJECTIVES:

1. Reinforce basic concepts of Buddhism.
2. Introduce aspects of Buddhist architecture.
3. Prepare students for comparative studies.

MATERIALS REQUIRED:

- Handout: Arrangement of a Typical Temple (attached)
- Handout: The Four Noble Truths/Eight-fold Path (attached)
- Internet sites:

www.koreasociety.org

Useful introduction to Korea, with valuable guide to links.

<http://www.buddhapia.com/buddhapi/eng/temple/korexp/html/index.html>

Numerous images and reliable background information on Buddhism and temples.

sponsored by the Korean National Tourism Organization and the Buddhist Lotus Lantern Society. A good place to start.

www.ocp.go.kr/english/index.html

Numerous high-quality cyber-tours offered by the Korean Office of Cultural Properties, a government agency.

www.google.com

A search engine useful for locating new websites. Enter combinations of “Haeinsa,” “Pulguksa (or Bulguksa),” “Korea” “temple,” “Buddhism.” Be aware that there are variations in the spelling of temple names.

BACKGROUND:

The architecture of religious sites often provides a clearer statement on the tenets of a religion than its scriptures or commentaries. For students studying Korea or Buddhist images, temples are an effective way of visualizing religious beliefs. By looking at elements of two famous Korean temples students will better understand the nature of Korean Buddhism, the contributions made by Koreans to the religion, and to Korean architecture in general.

Two of the most famous Korean temples are Haein-sa and Pulguk-sa (*sa* means “temple”). While each has its distinctive features, they share common characteristics that deserve attention. First, geomancy (Chinese: *fengshui*, Korean: *p’ungsu*) determined the site of each temple and its layout. They are, for example, situated in the mountains and along streams. For Koreans (and most people) mountains are sources of great power symbolizing eternity. Flowing water is not

only essential to life; it also symbolizes the endless changes in the universe and in our own lives. At Haein Temple, the pervasive *sound* of cascading streams manifests these basic Buddhist beliefs and it provides a natural “white noise” that facilitates meditation.

Fengshui contributes directly to the success or failure of the monastery. It is of fundamental importance to live harmoniously with nature and that begins with the style and arrangement of buildings on a specific site. The buildings, walls, and other structures of the monasteries are arranged harmoniously with its natural surroundings.

One enters temples through a gate, which is usually surmounted by a proverb. At Pulguk Temple, one passes through three gates symbolizing one’s religious development toward a greater understanding of the Buddha’s message. Entrants soon cross small bridges, too. These also symbolize one’s passage from a lower to a greater understanding of Buddhist principles, a crucial need if one is to escape from the suffering of the material world. Bridges at these temples are their own symbol and need no elaborate decoration.

Having symbolically entered a higher state, one now enters upon a broad, open courtyard. There are at least three essential elements present: a pagoda (originally called a stupa), bell pavilion, and the main temple. The pagoda is a tall stone tower with a series of eaves projecting from a central obelisk. The eaves symbolize the levels of existence and cosmic consciousness of life. The bell pavilion is a raised platform covered with a hipped, tiled roof. Here four different instruments are sounded to announce Buddha *dharma* (the moral order of the universe reflected in the teachings of the Buddha). A massive bell and gigantic drum announce the dharma to all, a flat metal *unp’an* delivers the message to the beings of the air, and the piscatorial wooden *mogo* announces the message to beings in water.

Dominating this area is the Main Temple, which houses images of the Buddha. At Haein-sa and Pulguk-sa, there are numerous manifestations of the Buddha reflecting different aspects of Korean Buddhism: Sakyamuni is the historical Buddha, Maitreya is the Buddha who will come in the future, Vairocana Buddha represents the cosmic universe of matter and spirit or reality itself, and Amitabha Buddha is the Buddha of the paradise in the Western region of the universe.

Temples have many other images and symbols, such as lotus flowers (representing the growth of religious consciousness), scenes from the life of the Buddha, or images of bodhisattvas (persons on the path to nirvana but who choose to remain on earth to assist others). Despite these variations, the temple follows Chinese religious architecture with tiled, hipped roofs, bracket roof supports, brilliant combinations of green, red, and orange paint, and lotus tiles on the raised floor.

There are usually other buildings within the walls of the temple grounds since monks must live there. Simple spaces for administration, cooking, sleeping, and instruction are located on the perimeter and do not interfere with the symbolic progress from entry to the temple. Most temples also have a library. At Haein-sa, however, the Changgyongp’an-jon sits behind and above the main temple, symbolically suggesting the precedence of scripture. These two buildings store more than 81,000 hand-carved woodblocks containing essential Buddhist texts. The woodblocks constitute the oldest collection of Buddhist texts in the world and were carved in the 13th century

(they replaced an 11th century edition that had been destroyed by Mongol invaders). As a practical matter, the hall is ingeniously placed to utilize natural air currents to preserve the woodblocks from swelling from humidity or cracking under drier conditions. The simple method of humidity control underscores the fundamental principles of harmony with nature typical of Korean temple architecture.

PROCEDURE:

The materials available can be used to discuss Korean Buddhism or architecture, as well as to compare religions. All students in Grades 9-12 should read and discuss the Four Noble Truths before considering the images. Most students in those grades should be able to read the Eight-Fold Path as well. Once they have an understanding of the concepts they will profit from examining the images. The four suggested activities are designed with different student populations in mind, and range from relatively simple activities to more sophisticated ones

1. Distribute the handout *Arrangement of a Typical Temple* and accompanying images. Ask students to identify the purpose of each of the identified buildings. Once that has been completed, lead a discussion on how societies have arranged religious spaces.
 - How does the arrangement of a typical temple reflect the values of Buddhism? Make direct connections with the Four Noble Truths.
 - Why would anyone want to retire to a monastery?
 - What does this arrangement tell us about how engaged Buddhist monks are in the world?
 - After the discussion, ask each student to write 2-4 paragraphs (using their notes) on how the Buddhist temples reflect the ideas of the Four Noble Truths and Eight-Fold Path.
2. If there is adequate access to Internet resources, create teams of students. Ask the teams to develop virtual tours of particular Korean temples or to create a composite of a typical temple. Using presentation software such as PowerPoint, each student will take turns explaining the features of the temples and how they reflect religious values. There is enough material on-line that students could be assigned to create a virtual tour of a temple.
3. Ask students to compare the arrangement of Buddhist temples with their own houses of worship.
 - Does their church, synagogue, mosque, or coven “arrange the furniture” in a way that leads to greater religious faith?
 - Classical Korean temple architecture, and classical Korean architecture in general, attempts to merge buildings into natural surroundings. Do western houses of worship do this? What does that tell us about the relationship between humanity and nature?
 - Ask them to sketch out the floor plan and grounds and then compare the architecture and beliefs of the religions. Teachers might take the opportunity to introduce the classic cruciform outline of a Gothic cathedral as a way of stimulating student thought.
4. The site of the present capital of Korea was picked because of its auspicious combination of mountains and flowing water. Assign groups of students to pick a site for the new capital city of their state. Using the principles of geomancy, where should it be located?

5. A related topic is the widespread practice of monasticism. The establishment of the Christian Order of St. Benedict is roughly contemporary with the appearance of Buddhist monasteries in Korea.
- Ask students why monasticism is so common. Why do monks retire from the world?
 - What do Christian and Buddhist monks seek to achieve by joining a monastery?
 - Does it help or hurt a religion or its society to have individuals “drop out” to join a monastery?
 - What do Christian and Buddhist monks have in common?
 - Are monasteries important to a nation’s economy?

EVALUATION:

All students should be able to define the basic principles of the Four Noble Truths and the basic elements of Korean temples. They should also be able to demonstrate that they can manipulate their knowledge to clearly explain principles to their peers or to achieve a deeper understanding of Korean culture by comparing it with similar Western practices.

ENRICHMENT:

- Invite a Korean Buddhist to discuss his or her beliefs with the class.
- Read to students the very peculiar legend of how Buddhism spread throughout Korea. “Popkong Declares Buddhism the National Faith” in Peter Lee and Theodore de Bary, *Sources of Korean Tradition* (1997).
- Read excerpts of the *Rule of St. Benedict*.
- Visit a monastery of any sort.

Arrangement of a Typical Temple
<http://www.buddhapi.com/buddhapi/eng/temple/korexp/html/bu28.html>



Main Temple



Bell Tower



Pagoda



Guardian Gate



One-Pillar Gate (Entry)

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS / THE EIGHT-FOLD PATH

Buddhism

Portions of this page were adapted from Five-Minute Buddhism by Brian White (1993). Santiphap Chaiyana and Mike Butler's *An Introduction to Buddhism* (available from Buddhanet). <http://buddhism.about.com/cs/buddhism101/>

The Four Noble Truths

1. The Truth of Suffering: Existence is suffering. That is, life includes pain, aging, disease and death. We also endure psychological suffering like loneliness frustration, fear, embarrassment, disappointment and anger. To Buddhists, this is an irrefutable fact of life. It is realistic rather than pessimistic because pessimism is expecting things to be bad. Instead, Buddhism explains how suffering can be avoided and how we can be truly happy.
2. The Truth of Suffering's Cause: Suffering is caused by desire. The second truth is that suffering is caused by craving and aversion. We will suffer if we wish other people to conform to our expectations, if we want others to be popular, or if we do not get something we want. On the other hand, getting what you want does not guarantee happiness. Rather than constantly struggling to get what you want, Buddhists advocate modifying your desires. Wanting deprives us of contentment and happiness. A lifetime of wanting and craving (especially the craving to continue to exist) creates a powerful energy that causes the individual to be reborn into another life of suffering and desire.
3. The Truth of Stopping Suffering: Stop the cause of suffering (desire), and the suffering will cease to arise. The third truth is that suffering can be overcome and happiness can be attained: true happiness is possible. If we give up all desires and learn to live *now* without dwelling in the past or the imagined future, then we can become happy and free to help others. This is *Nirvana* (enlightenment).
4. Freedom from suffering is found by following the Eightfold Path. The Truth of the Way: The Eightfold Path. The path to nirvana, as taught by the Buddha, is known as the Eightfold Path.

Right Understanding

Wrong understanding occurs when one imposes one's expectations onto things; expectations about how one hopes things will be, or about how one is afraid things might be.

Right Understanding occurs when one sees things simply, as they are. It is an open and accommodating attitude. One abandons hope and fear and takes joy in a simple straightforward approach to life.

Right Thought

The second point of the path proceeds from right view. If one is able to abandon one's expectations, hopes and fears, one no longer needs to be manipulative. One doesn't need to try to force situations into preconceived notions of how they should be. One works with what is. Our thoughts are pure.

Right Speech

The third aspect of the path is Right Speech. Once one's intentions are pure, one no longer needs to be embarrassed about one's speech. Since one isn't trying to manipulate people, one doesn't have to hesitate about what one says, nor does one need to bluff one's way through a

conversation with phony confidence. One says what needs to be said, very simply in a genuine way.

Right Action

The fourth point on the path, Right Action, involves a kind of renunciation. One needs to give up the tendency to complicate issues. One practices simplicity. One has a simple straightforward relationship with other people. One gives up all the unnecessary and frivolous complications that might cloud any relationship.

Right Livelihood

Right Livelihood is the fifth step on the path. It is only natural and right that we should earn our living. There are, however, jobs that exploit or damage others, and which may not be on the path of Right Livelihood. Often, many of us don't particularly enjoy our jobs. We should form a simple relationship with it, and one needs to perform it properly, with attention to detail.

Right Effort

The sixth aspect of the path is Right Effort. Wrong effort is struggle. One often approaches a spiritual discipline as though one needs to conquer one's "evil side" and promote our "good side." One is locked in combat with one's self and tries to obliterate the tiniest negative tendency. Right Effort doesn't involve struggle at all. When one sees things as they are, one can work with them, gently, and without any aggression.

Right Mindfulness

Right Mindfulness, the seventh step, involves precision and clarity. One is mindful of the tiniest details of our experience. One is mindful of the way one speaks, performs one's job, one's posture, and attitudes toward our friends and family, in every detail.

Right Concentration

Right Concentration is the eighth point of the path. Usually one is absorbed in absentmindedness. One's mind is completely captivated by all sorts of entertainment and speculation. Right Concentration means that one is completely absorbed in Now-ness, in things as they are. This can only happen if one has some sort of discipline, such as sitting meditation. We might even say that without the discipline of sitting meditation, we couldn't walk the Eightfold Path at all. Sitting meditation cuts through our absent mindedness. It provides a space or gap in our preoccupation with us.

The Goal

Nirvana simply means cessation. It is the cessation of suffering.