

## Silla Korea and the Silk Road *Golden Age, Golden Threads*

YONG JIN CHOI: PROJECT DIRECTOR

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Reviewed by Alan Whitehead

*Silla Korea and the Silk Road, Golden Age, Golden Threads*, a curriculum guide designed for world history, geography, and Asian studies high school courses, lucidly demonstrates the normally neglected role of Korea in the history of the Silk Road. The Korea Society has a well-deserved reputation for the very high quality of everything it sponsors and publishes. This guide is no exception. The work focuses on, but is not limited to, the Unified Silla Kingdom period (668–935 CE) usually referred to as Korea's Golden Age.

Content and activities in the guide make clear that Silla Korea's trade in products and ideas both shaped Korean culture and influenced other parts of Asia as well. Korean livestock, silk, wool, medicine, ginseng, and superbly crafted gold and silver ornaments and utensils reached China and Central Asia. Products ranging from calendars, clocks, and paper—to Central Asian and Mediterranean art objects—reached Silla from the Silk Road and related maritime trade. Architectural and artistic styles from foreign cultures, most notably Buddhist inspired works, also reached Silla through the Silk Road, and then were transmitted to Japan.

A complete copy of the guide, 194 glossy pages full of excellent photographs, handouts, drawings, maps and text, in pdf format, is also included on a CD which accompanies the guide. A pdf version of the guide is also available online on the Korea Society Web site at <http://www.koreasociety.org>.

This work consists of seven major parts. In Part One, "Was Silla Part of the Silk Road?" a convincing historical case is made that Koreans participated in trading a variety of products and ideas via the Silk Road. Part Two, "Did the Silk Road Create Silla's Golden Age?" provides an overview of six major elements of the Golden Age that reflect Silk Road influences. The third major topic consists of biographical sketches of twelve individuals whose lives and achievements represent the Silk Road legacy of Silla Korea.

The remaining four sections of the book include Part Four, a concluding exercise where students debate the question, "Does international trade hurt or help a culture?" Ten statements supporting each side of the question are furnished and three suggestions are given as to how a class might address the question. This thought provoking exercise guides students through a systematic examination of both the intended and unintended consequences of international economic interactions using Silla as a historical case study.

Part Five is a collection of five articles for advanced readers. This section includes important related events in northern and western China. While Part 5 is intended to be an entire unit, each of the articles within the unit could be addressed separately. (Early Japan's Korean connection is particularly interesting.) Also in Part Five, discussion of

### Buddhist Statue Exported to Japan



- Left: The Maitreya (Buddha-of-the-Future), Koryu-ji, Japan. Records indicate that it was exported from Korea in the 7<sup>th</sup> century.
- This Maitreya is slightly larger than its "almost twin" at the National Museum in Seoul and is definitely Silla in style.

Slide number 42 of the online PDF version at [http://www.koreasociety.org/k-12\\_resources/](http://www.koreasociety.org/k-12_resources/).

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the annotated timeline for important events in northern and western China may be used as an excellent enrichment activity.

Part Six "Teaching the History and Significance of the Silk Road in the Post Classical Era," by high school teacher Ane Lintvedt, addresses trade in goods as well as the spread of Buddhism and Confucianism, while making the case that it is easy and important to include Korea in the history of the Silk Road in world history.

The seventh part of the guide consists of the alignment of the included material with national history standards and standards for the states of California, Michigan, and New York. An easy to use pronunciation guide for the Korean, Chinese, Japanese, and Sanskrit words found in the text and a bibliography conclude the book.

In total there are twenty-six classroom exercises in the guide. Examples of lessons include, "Silk as a Medium of Exchange," "What can archeology reveal about trade goods?", and "How does an era become known as a Golden Age?" Well thought-out handouts accompany each lesson and go far beyond the pedestrian "fill in the blank" exercises so common in high school. Many include advanced readings or visuals. Several of the lessons have well constructed "Points to Consider" questions. These are excellent higher level thinking skill questions that are thought/discussion provoking and help students draw global connections.

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ALAN WHITEHEAD teaches Honors and Advanced Placement World History at White Station High School in Memphis, Tennessee. He has traveled and studied in Japan (US Japan Foundation), Korea (Korea Society), and China (Asia Society).