Overview of Korean History

Traditional Korean sources present two contrasting accounts of the origins of civilization on the peninsula.[1] One credits the achievement to an indigenous demigod, Tan'gun, whose birth more than 4,000 years ago is attributed to the union of a sky deity and a bear-woman (for a synopsis of this legend, see Lesson Plan 3: Illustrated Manuscript, p. 126). The second account credits a Chinese noble and court minister, Jizi (Kr. Kija), who is believed to have emigrated to Korea with a large group of followers at the start of the Chinese Zhou dynasty (ca. 1046–256 B.C.). The contrast between these two traditions reveals a tension that long conditioned premodern Korean perceptions of their own culture. On the one hand, there was proud awareness of cultural distinctiveness and, on the other hand, recognition of the extensive influence of Chinese civilization.

Paleolithic and Neolithic (ca. 7000–ca. 10th century B.C.) **periods** Modern archaeology has shed much light on the origins and civilization of the Korean people. Humans have inhabited the Korean peninsula from as early as the Pleistocene epoch, about 500,000 B.C. Although few Paleolithic sites have been unearthed, archaeological evidence suggests that the inhabitants made stone and bone tools, relied on hunting, fishing, and gathering of fruit, and moved frequently.[2]

While Neolithic inhabitants of the Korean peninsula relied primarily on game, fish, and foraged vegetation, the first efforts at farming probably began during this time. These people lived in small settlements of semi-subterranean, circular dwellings near rivers or coastal areas, and fashioned tools of stone and bone.

Pottery is one of the defining features of all Neolithic cultures. Korea's Neolithic period is generally associated with the production of *chŭlmun* (comb-pattern) and *mumun* (undecorated) pottery. The earliest known Neolithic pottery in Korea has been dated to about 7000 B.C. The variety of shapes and decorative techniques of excavated wares reflects the diversity of material cultures during this period and points to contacts between populations living in different areas of the peninsula as well as with those on the continental mainland and the islands that constitute modern Japan.

Bronze Age (ca. 10th–ca. 3rd century B.C.)
Migration into the Korean peninsula from regions in Manchuria and Siberia to the north intensified in the Bronze Age. Additional waves of immigrant farmers moving onto the peninsula from China during the late Shang (ca. 1600–1050 B.C.) and Zhou dynasties most likely resulted in the introduction of bronze technology and rice cultivation. Continuing earlier practices, they also cultivated other grains and foodstuffs, such as millet, barley, and vegetables. Bones of domesticated pigs found at sites dating to the Bronze Age are evidence of a growing reliance on animal husbandry. Although clusters of homes built partially underground were still the norm, Bronze Age settlements often included a larger number of families and were located on hillsides and inland. Stone tools and weapons, pottery vessels, weaving implements, and fishing equipment are among the artifacts of daily life most often found at domestic sites dating to this period.

Advances in metallurgy and agriculture encouraged the development of a more complex social hierarchy. Beginning in about 1000 B.C., the existence of an elite social stratum is indicated by increasingly elaborate burial practices. Dolmen tombs, most often formed of upright stones supporting a horizontal slab, are more numerous in Korea, where approximately 200,000 have been found, than in any other country in East Asia (see fig. 3, p. 52). Other forms of burial include cists (burial chambers lined with stone) and earthenware jar coffins (large pottery containers in which the deceased were interred). Furnishings found in these tombs indicate that the men, women, and children who occupied them enjoyed wealth and an elevated status, and were presumably members of the ruling class. Ritualistic bronze implements, including mirrors and rattles, suggest that some of the deceased were shamans or priests.

Iron Age (beginning ca. 300 B.C.)
It is not yet clear when iron technology first appeared in Korea, but it seems to have been widespread by about 300 B.C. Presumably iron was imported from China, where it appears to have been cast since at least the sixth century B.C. Excavations of Chinese coins and mirrors at Korean sites, as well as observations of Korean political conditions and social practices in Chinese historical records of the time, confirm direct links between the peninsula and northeastern China. Locally mined and smelted iron in Korea was used in part to fashion utilitarian tools for farming and carpentry.

Three Kingdoms period (57 B.C.–668 A.D.)
From the early Iron Age until the emergence of confederated kingdoms in the first to third centuries A.D., the Korean peninsula underwent further important changes. The most developed Korean state at the time, which was probably a tribal alliance, was Old Chosŏn, situated northeast of present-day Manchuria. Archaeological evidence suggests that this polity emerged around the fourth century B.C. One of the last rulers of this state, Wiman, seized power in the second century B.C.

Less than a century after Wiman's rise to power, Korea was for the first time subjected to Chinese aggression and direct political control. After the Han dynasty (206 B.C.–220 A.D.) conquered Wiman Chosŏn in 108 B.C., Chinese officials established four military commanderies in the northern part of the peninsula, the largest of which was Nangnang (Chn. Lelang), near modern P'yŏng'yang, which was to remain a Chinese colonial bastion for over four hundred years. The other three commanderies were abolished within thirty years of their establishment owing to the resistance of the local Korean population. In addition to administering the commandery, Han officials stationed at Lelang had responsibility for overseeing most of China's diplomatic and commercial contacts with the peoples of northeastern Asia. Over time, these contacts had manifold cultural and political effects upon native populations as far north as the Sungari River in upper Manchuria and as far south as the Japanese archipelago. The Chinese colonial officials were also responsible for recording the earliest extant data about the peoples of these far-flung lands.

In the first century B.C., powerful tribal clans on the Korean peninsula began to consolidate their authority over contending neighboring clans. While the Koguryŏ kingdom (37 B.C.–668 A.D.) secured control in the north, three new tribal federations, known as the Mahan, the Chinhan, and the Pyŏnhan, were established in the area south of the Han River, roughly along the lines dictated by the primary mountain ranges. By the middle of the fourth century A.D., the first two of these independent polities had evolved into centralized aristocratic states, the Paekche kingdom (18 B.C.–660 A.D.) in the southwest and the Silla kingdom (57 B.C.–668 A.D.) in the southeast (see **Map 2**, p. 23). The third evolved into a federation of semi-independent principalities known as the Kaya Federation (42–562 A.D.), which occupied land in the south central area of the Naktong River basin between Paekche and Silla. During the next 350 years, Koguryŏ, Silla, and Paekche vied

for territory and supremacy through political maneuvers and violent clashes. These hostilities did not, however, preclude cultural interchange, and there are many examples of shared customs.

Koguryŏ, the largest of the three kingdoms, had succeeded in driving out the Chinese by overtaking Lelang in 313 B.C., and expanded its territory northeast into Manchuria. At the height of its power in the fifth century, Koguryŏ controlled over two-thirds of the Korean peninsula. There were frequent border clashes between Koguryŏ and China. Indeed, only Koguryŏ's tenacious resistance against the expansionist campaigns of the Sui (581–618) and Tang (618–907) dynasties prevented Chinese conquest of Korea. However, not all encounters with the Chinese were militant: the three Korean kingdoms actively traded with the mainland and sought to strengthen their own political positions by cultivating alliances with Chinese rulers. As a byproduct of these contacts, Koreans willingly embraced elements of Chinese statecraft and Confucianism, which, with its emphasis on loyalty to the sovereign and deference to elders and superiors, was adopted to bolster royal authority. Chinese writing, which had been introduced to Korea at about the same time as iron technology, was adapted to the Korean language. Koguryŏ exported gold, silver, pearls, furs, ginseng, and textiles, among other items, to China, and imported weapons, silk, books, and paper.

Buddhism also came to Korea from China, transmitted by Chinese monks to Koguryŏ, in 372, and then to Paekche, in 384. Silla, whose relative geographical isolation in the southwestern part of the peninsula generally slowed the penetration of Chinese culture, did not officially recognize Buddhism until 528. Like Confucianism, Buddhism was used by the royal houses as a means of consolidating their power and unifying their subjects. Buddhist deities were construed as protectors of the state, and the Buddhist clergy closely allied themselves with state institutions, sometimes serving as political advisors. The influence of Buddhism on the artistic developments of this time is evident in the surviving architecture and sculpture. Korea played a crucial role in the subsequent transmission of Buddhism and its accompanying architecture and art to Japan. In 538, the reigning monarch of the kingdom of Paekche sent the official diplomatic mission that introduced the religion to the Japanese court.

Unified Silla dynasty (668–935)

Through a series of military and political moves, Silla achieved dominance over most of the Korean peninsula by the end of the seventh century. Its campaign of unification began with the defeat of the Kaya Federation in 562, after which an alliance with the Chinese Tang court helped Silla to conquer the kingdoms of Paekche in 660 and Koguryŏ in 668. By 676, Silla succeeded in forcing the Chinese troops to withdraw into Manchuria, and for the first time in history the peninsula came under the sway of a single Korean government. In the succeeding Unified Silla dynasty, Korean culture flourished, creating a political and cultural legacy that was handed down to subsequent rulers of the country. Meanwhile, remnants of the Koguryŏ ruling family moved north into Manchuria and in 698 established the state of Parhae, whose territory included the northernmost part of the Korean peninsula. Parhae survived until 926, when it came under the control of northern nomadic tribes. Although the kingdom of Parhae is an important part of the history of Korea, its impact on the country's later cultural history is considered minor in comparison with that of Unified Silla.

Consolidation of the three kingdoms under a single absolute ruler led to an increase in the wealth of the aristocracy, whose status was secured by a rigid hereditary class system. Kyŏngju, the capital of Unified Silla, was a prosperous and wealthy metropolis with magnificent palaces, imposing temples, and richly furnished tombs. The new government supported Buddhism as the state religion. The religion's influence on the arts intensified during this period as the number of Buddhist adherents increased and the religion began to permeate all layers of society. In fact, some of the most refined and sophisticated Buddhist art and architecture in East Asia was produced in Korea during this time.

The Unified Silla court maintained close relations with Tang China through trade and diplomatic and scholarly exchanges. The constant flow of Korean travelers to China, and the occasional intrepid pilgrim to India, contributed to a growing receptivity to foreign ideas. For example, Confucian philosophy, administrative systems, and education flourished under the rulers of Unified Silla, who established a state university (*kukhak*) and implemented an examination system to select candidates for official posts from members of the aristocracy. Throughout this period, Korea continued to play a crucial role in the transmission of technology and ideas to Japan.

Koryŏ dynasty (918–1392)

Beset by power struggles between the court and the aristocracy, Unified Silla declined in the late eighth century. The rise of local military garrisons and landed gentry in the countryside, along with increasing unrest among the peasants, led to a steady deterioration of the social fabric. Rebel movements gradually encroached upon government authority and inspired two provincial leaders to establish competing regional states, Later Paekche in the southwest and Later Koguryŏ in the north, in 892 and 901, respectively. Together with the declining Unified Silla, the two states formed what is known as the Later Three Kingdoms period. In 918, Wang Kŏn (877–943), a high-ranking military official, seized control of Later Koguryŏ and established the Kingdom of Koryŏ with the capital at Song'ak (modern Kaesŏng). In 936, having subjugated Later Paekche, Wong Kŏn reunited the country under the new Koryŏ dynasty. (The name of this dynasty is the source of the English name "Korea.")

As in the Unified Silla period, Buddhism, especially the meditative Sŏn (Chn. Chan; Jpn. Zen) sect, was the dominant religion during the Koryŏ period and continued to flourish under the munificent patronage of the court and aristocracy. Temples increased in number and amassed ever more land, wealth, and political influence during the course of the dynasty. The spread of Confucianism during the Unified Silla period also continued unabated under the new government. A civil service examination system, established in 958 and based on the Chinese model, required a thorough knowledge of the Confucian classics and functioned to identify men capable of serving as government officials.

The vogue for Chinese culture permeated every aspect of Koryŏ court life, even though relations with the mainland were not always friendly. In the northern part of the peninsula, Koryŏ engaged in border struggles with northern China's conquerors, the Khitan and Jurchen tribes of skillful mounted warriors.[3] Koryŏ suffered three invasions by the Khitan between 993 and 1018. Although these incursions were eventually unsuccessful, the Koreans were inspired to build a thousand-*li* Long Wall (a *li* equals approximately one-third of a mile) to the south of the Amnok River. Koryŏ avoided invasion by the Jin only by becoming a vassal of the powerful state, at the same time still delicately maintaining relations with the Chinese court, now relocated in the south.

A little more than a century later, devastating assaults by Mongol forces overthrew first the Jin dynasty in 1234 and then the Southern

Song in 1279. The Mongol rulers thereupon established themselves as the emperors of China and designated their new regime the Yuan dynasty (1272–1368). Korea, too, was ravaged by Mongol armies, suffering six invasions between 1231 and 1257. In 1231 the Koryŏ court fled the capital and took refuge on Kanghwa Island, less than two kilometers offshore in the Yellow Sea. Eventually, by 1270, a peace was negotiated with the Mongol invaders, and the Koryŏ court entered an era of very close relations — including royal intermarriage — with the Mongol Yuan emperors.

By the mid-fourteenth century, the Yuan dynasty had begun to deteriorate, gradually losing control in China as well as in its vassal state of Korea. In 1368, the Chinese rebel leader Zhu Yuanzhang (Hongwu emperor, r. 1368–98) successfully ousted the Yuan and established the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). In Korea, King Kongmin (r. 1351–74), the last authoritative ruler of the Koryŏ dynasty, adopted a pro-Ming policy and took action to suppress the powerful families who had benefited from cooperation with the Mongols. Although his reforms were broadly popular, they were not entirely effective. Kongmin was ultimately assassinated and succeeded by a series of puppet kings.

Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910)

In 1388, a weakened and divided Koryŏ court sent a military expedition to invade Manchuria, in response to a declaration by the Chinese Ming government of its intention to claim Koryŏ's northeastern territory. One of the expedition commanders, Yi Sŏng-gye (1335–1408), renowned for expelling Japanese pirates who had terrorized Korea's coastline, favored a pro-Ming policy and opposed the idea of the expedition. Leading his troops back to the capital, he seized control of the government. Yi Sŏng-gye then instituted sweeping land reforms that in effect destroyed the power of the aristocratic families who had been the target of the earlier unsuccessful reforms of King Kongmin. With the support of the *yangban*, the educated elite who dominated both the civil and the military branches of government, he also set out to undermine the authority and privilege of the Buddhist clergy, who were seen as inextricably bound to the corrupt and decadent Koryŏ court. In 1392, having consolidated his power and eliminated his rivals, Yi founded a new dynasty, which he named Chosŏn, after the ancient Korean kingdom that had flourished in the fourth century B.C.

The royal house of Yi ruled Korea until the end of dynastic control in the early twentieth century. This new dynasty, with its capital at

Hanyang (modern Seoul), strove to distance itself from the former Koryŏ court. The practice of Buddhism was discouraged, and Neo-Confucianism was embraced by the court and aristocracy as the official state ideology and dominant social system. With Chosŏn government support, Neo-Confucianism's influence came to permeate elite Korean society and culture. Through observance of textually prescribed ceremonies and rites, all social interactions—from the public arena to the intimate circle of the family—were affected by Confucianism's ideals and hierarchical values.

The fortunes of the *yangban* improved markedly during the early years of Chosŏn rule, as they assumed the duties formerly fulfilled by the upper ranks of the aristocracy and landowning families of the Koryŏ. In theory, the *yangban* owed their position to their performance in the civil service examinations that had been formally established by the Koryŏ court and were ostensibly open to all educated free males. In fact, by restricting access to education and the examination system, the *yangban* maintained control over the bureaucracy.

The reign of King Sejong (r. 1418–50) was the cultural high point of the early Chosŏn dynasty. One of Sejong's most noteworthy accomplishments was the introduction in 1446 of an indigenous writing system, known today as *han'gŭl*. This phonetic writing system was devised for those—primarily women and non-*yangban* men—who had no opportunity to learn classical Chinese, an arduous system to master and one that ill matched the Korean language.

For much of the mid-Chosŏn period, Korea was in political and intellectual turmoil. The country was ravaged by two devastating military campaigns, in 1592 and 1597, waged by the Japanese warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–1598). In 1636, Manchu armies, taking advantage of the weakened and disorganized Ming court in China, also launched an invasion of Korea, but with less damaging results than the war with Japan. The indecision and ineffectiveness of Ming troops during the Japanese invasions, and the rise of the Manchus as a new regional power, intensified the debate at the Chosŏn court about the role of Chinese culture in Korea. Some officials supported continued political and cultural loyalty to the Ming, whereas others advised that the country abandon what was perceived as a slavish imitation of Chinese culture and concentrate instead on the development of indigenous institutions and traditions. Following the defeat in 1644 of the Ming dynasty and the subsequent establishment of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) by the Manchus, the debate grew even more heated. Pro-Chinese

factions argued for the support of Ming loyalist movements, while anti-Chinese cliques pointed to the fall of the Ming as a vindication of their position. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, promoters of an independent Korean culture prevailed at court and instigated the enactment of political, economic, and social policies that encouraged distinctive native traditions in the fine arts, literature, and the decorative arts.

The positive political and economic developments of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries notwithstanding, many causes of governmental instability and social unrest remained unaddressed within Korea. The enervating effects of these problems were aggravated in the nineteenth century, first by the protracted domination of the central government by avaricious royal in-law families, and second by the disruptive pressures exerted on the government by foreign imperialist powers. Motivated by regional strategic concerns, China, Russia, and Japan brazenly sought concessions and influence on the peninsula. The major European powers and the United States also pursued advantageous concessions, sometimes arguing that such arrangements also benefited the Koreans. The Chosŏn government proved to be too weak and ill prepared to resist the rising tide of foreign domination. After its victory in 1905 in the Russo-Japanese War, Japan formally annexed the peninsula in 1910, beginning a period of colonial rule that lasted until 1945.

Korea and the West

Reports made by Arab traders in the ninth century provide the first known accounts about Korea circulated west of India.[4] The traveler Ibn Khordhbeh, who served the Abbassid Caliph Ahmed al-Mutamid alallah (r. 870–92) of Syria, mentioned the high mountains, abundant gold, and presence of such uncommon materials as ginseng, lacquer, porcelain, and cinnamon in his descriptions of Korea. The thirteenth-century merchant Marco Polo, who claimed to have journeyed from Italy to China, briefly noted the existence of Korea in his travel memoirs, referring to it as the land east of China that had been annexed by Khubilai Khan (r. 1260–94).

More extensive (although still vague) reports about Korea were sent by Jesuit missionaries working in China and Japan in the seventeenth century. These priests also made the first attempts to introduce Christianity into Korea, although these efforts proved futile. During the next two centuries, a few European priests tried to establish an

official presence in Korea but were martyred as part of the Chosŏn government's strict determination to suppress the spread of Christianity in the peninsula. The most complete written account circulated in Europe in this era was the seaman Hendrik Hamel's record of his thirteen years spent in captivity in Korea after his ship was stranded off Cheju Island, off the southwest coast of the peninsula. Hamel offered one of the first eyewitness accounts of the country made by a European and, in particular, noted the Korean enthusiasm for education and literacy and the differences between the homes of the nobles and commoners.

Under duress, Korea signed the Treaty of Kanghwa with Japan in 1876. This agreement succeeded in opening Korea to the outside world and was followed by other unequal treaties with the United States, Britain, Germany, Italy, Russia, France, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Korean-French Treaty of 1886 allowed the propagation of Christianity in Korea, thereby initiating a flood of Roman Catholic and Protestant missionaries from the West into the peninsula.

Notes

1. For a more detailed discussion of Korean history, see Jonathan W. Best, "Profile of the Korean Past," in *Arts of Korea*, pp. 14–38. On the subject of Korean state-formation theories, see Hyung Il Pai, *Constructing "Korean" Origins: A Critical Review of Archaeology, Historiography, and Racial Myth in Korean State-Formation Theories* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center and Harvard University Press, 2000).

2. It should be noted that many scholars consider the terms "Paleolithic" and "Neolithic" inaccurate descriptions of Korea's earliest developmental stages. Some prefer to identify various periods by the dominant pottery type of the time, while others emphasize the stage of economic or social development.

3. The Khitan were semi-nomadic people from the Mongolian steppes. After consolidating control over the other tribes in the territory north of China, they established the Liao dynasty (916–1125) and occupied part of northern China. The Jurchen, another semi-nomadic people from Manchuria, who founded the Jin dynasty (1115–1234), defeated the Khitan Liao and in 1126 attacked Kaifeng, the capital of the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127), bringing the Northern Song to an end.

4. Beginning in the Three Kingdoms period, Indian and Central Asian monks were known to have traveled to Korea to promote Buddhism, while Koreans traveled westward to study the religion at its source.

Korean Religions and Systems of Thought

In the course of its long history, Korea has developed and assimilated a number of diverse religious and philosophical traditions. Although their influence on Korean society has varied over time, these traditions, once established, became a fixed part of Korean life. Not only have these traditions coexisted but they have also influenced each other, exchanging and sharing ideas, practices, and sacred figures. This tendency to accommodate diverse religions and systems of thought is found throughout East Asian cultures.

Shamanism is Korea's earliest belief system and forms an enduring part of its cultural foundation, affecting the other religions that followed. Knowledge of Chinese Confucianism and Daoism reached Korea between 108 B.C. and 313 A.D., when China's rulers maintained military commanderies in the northern part of the peninsula. However, neither exerted a strong impact on Korean society for several centuries. Buddhism was imported from China into the peninsula in the fourth century and dominated religious, cultural, and artistic life from the latter part of the Three Kingdoms period (57 B.C.–668 A.D.) through the Unified Silla (668–935) and Koryŏ (918–1392) dynasties. During the subsequent Chosŏn period (1392–1910), Confucianism, which had been used to a limited extent by the Unified Silla and Koryŏ monarchies for its political, social, and educational benefits, gained primacy and became the dominant social system. Koreans learned of Christianity in the seventeenth century, primarily from European Jesuits and Chinese converts in China. Despite the Chosŏn court's strenuous efforts to eradicate Christianity in Korea, the country today has the largest Christian following in East Asia (although Buddhism remains the dominant religion).

Shamanism

Shamanism (*musok*), according to a narrow definition, originated in the Ural-Altaic regions northwest of Korea. This collection of customs and practices, brought to the peninsula in ancient times by migrants from the north, centers on the powers of a priest to act as

an intermediary between the human and spirit realms. In Korea, a supreme deity, Hanunim, presides over a world in which the sun, moon, stars, earth, mountains, trees, and various parts of the household are imbued with a divine spirit, often manifested in the form of folk deities. Since at least the Koryŏ period, most shamans have been women, usually from the lower classes. Shamanism's relationship with Korea's rulers and the state has vacillated over the centuries. Ancient tribal chieftains are thought to have been shamans, and during the early Three Kingdoms period, shamans exerted considerable influence in political and military affairs. In later times, especially during the Chosŏn period, Confucian bureaucrats often attempted to suppress shamanistic practices. Throughout Korean history, however, members of all levels of society have from time to time sought the assistance of shamans to cure illness, appease the dead, learn about the future, and secure good fortune, among other concerns.

Kut. This ritual performance, the most important ceremony in shamanism, marks the occasion when a spirit is invited to take possession of a shaman in order to communicate with the supplicant. A *kut* may be conducted to dispel evil spirits, summon rain, give thanks for a bountiful harvest, cure illness, or ensure good fortune. During a *kut*, Korean shamans typically dress in costumes and dance to music and drumming, display pictures of folk gods, and make offerings of food, money, or paper reproductions of valuable objects.

Mudang. This term refers to Korean female shamans, who are more numerous than male shamans. Their primary work is to communicate the wishes of a spirit or deity (benevolent or evil) who takes possession of them during a ritual trance. It is thought that these women, who are usually the daughters or adopted daughters of other *mudang*, assume their profession in response to a call from the spirits. If this summons is ignored, sickness, especially in the form of dreams or hallucinations, is said to afflict the individual. A woman becomes a *mudang* in an initiation ritual during which she learns the identity of her personal deity and receives the cult objects that she will use. *Mudang* are not part of an organized clergy and do not use an established liturgy.

Shamanism and Art

The objects and ornaments used in ceremonies and for communication with the spirits are the most direct expression of shamanism in art. Ritual implements such as bronze rattles, and decorative accessories such as gold crowns and belts with antler-shaped appendages and curved jade pendants (*kogok*), found in tombs of the Bronze Age (ca. 10th–ca. 3rd century B.C.) to the Silla period (57 B.C.–668 A.D.), suggest that in ancient times the role of shaman was performed by members of the ruling class. In later periods, paintings and sculptures of folk deities were produced for use during *kut* and related rituals. The concept of representing sacred beings in anthropomorphic form was first inspired by Buddhism.

The ideas, practices, and imagery associated with shamanism have strongly influenced Korean native myths, literature, and the visual arts, especially folk art. Symbolic images of animals, plants, and deities derived from shamanism can be found in a variety of sacred and secular objects. For example, images of Sansin, folk god of the mountain spirits, are used in shamanistic rituals and are also placed in shrines dedicated to him in Korean Buddhist temples. Sansin is often shown accompanied by a tiger, a symbol of power and courage and one of the most popular images in Korean decorative painting and Chosŏn ceramics.

Although the connection is less obvious, the directness and familiarity that characterize much of Korean art are reminiscent of the energy and vitality of the *kut*, which serves to connect humans with the realms of nature and the spirits.

Buddhism

Buddhism (*pulgyo*), founded by the Indian prince Siddhartha Gautama (d. ca. 400 B.C.; traditional dates ca. 556–483 B.C.), revered today as the Buddha or Buddha Shakyamuni, is one of the great world religions. The basic tenets of Buddhism are that life is impermanent, illusory, and filled with suffering, which is caused by desire and ignorance and gives rise to a continuous cycle of death and rebirth. The cessation of suffering (Skt. nirvana) is achieved when desire and ignorance are extinguished, which is possible through a life of moderation, moral conduct, and meditative practice.

The early form of Buddhism, known as Theravada (also called Hinayana), focuses on personal salvation, possible only for those who join a monastic order. The later form of Buddhism, Mahayana (the Great or Universal Vehicle), offers salvation for all sentient beings. In

their pursuit of this goal, followers of Mahayana seek the assistance of saviors and guides known as bodhisattvas. Mahayana was the branch of Buddhism most widely disseminated across northeast Asia. The Esoteric sects, which evolved somewhat later and offered immediate salvation through elaborate rituals and powerful deities, were especially appealing to the ruling classes of China, Korea, and Japan.

Buddhism was transmitted throughout Asia along sea and land routes by traders, monks, and travelers. The religion spread eastward across Central Asia, reaching China in about the first century A.D. It was transmitted to Korea in the fourth century by Buddhist monks sent from China, and subsequently became the official religion of the kingdoms of Koguryŏ (37 B.C.–668 A.D.), Paekche (18 B.C.–660 A.D.), and eventually Silla. It was through Korea that Buddhism was formally introduced to Japan in the sixth century, initially by official envoys from the Paekche court.

Buddhism in Korea found greatest favor among the court and aristocracy, who looked to the religion to assist in the development and protection of their emerging centralized states. The rulers attempted to legitimize their authority and garner support by likening themselves and their kingdoms to the enlightened buddhas and paradise realms described in Buddhist scriptures. The close relationship between early Korean Buddhism and the welfare of the state is echoed in the Five Precepts for Lay People, an influential code of conduct formulated by the famous monk Wŏn'gwang (d. ca. 630) especially for young male aristocrats: Serve the king with loyalty; Serve one's parents with devotion; Treat one's friends with trust; Do not avoid combat; and Do not kill indiscriminately. These rules also reveal a strong Confucian influence, and thus exemplify the Korean tendency to merge aspects of different belief systems.

Many schools of Buddhism were imported during the Unified Silla and Koryŏ periods. During the latter dynasty, these sects were divided into two broad groups: the textual sect, Kyo, which stressed mastery of the scriptures, and the contemplative sect, Sŏn (Chn. Chan; Jpn. Zen), which emphasized meditation and a more individual approach to spiritual understanding. The principal schools in the Kyo tradition were the philosophical Avatamsaka (Hwaŏm) school and the devotional Pure Land sect, which focused on the worship of Amitabha (Amit'a), the Buddha of the Western Paradise. From the twelfth century on, however, Sŏn was the primary form of Buddhism practiced in Korea.[1]

The Unified Silla and Koryŏ royal courts and aristocracy actively patronized Buddhism, donating large amounts of money and land to support the construction of Buddhist temples and monasteries and the production of exquisite works of art. By the end of the Koryŏ period, however, the wealth and political power amassed by the Buddhist establishment, the reported corruption of the clergy, and the expense of publicly funded Buddhist rituals generated increasing criticism. While several Chosŏn monarchs and female members of the royal family remained devout Buddhists, the establishment of the Chosŏn dynasty, which suppressed Buddhism and embraced Neo-Confucianism as the new state ideology, marked the end of Buddhism's golden period in Korean history.[2]

In the following section, the names of Buddhist deities are given in Sanskrit, the ancient Indic language that is the sacred and classical language of Hinduism and Buddhism. The Korean equivalent is given in parentheses.

Amitabha (Amit'a). The principle deity of Mahayana Pure Land Buddhism, the Buddha Amitabha, whose name means "Infinite Light," presides over the Western Paradise, one of many Buddhist "pure lands" where one may blissfully reside until nirvana is achieved. Motivated by compassion and wisdom, Amitabha leads devotees after their death to his realm, regardless of their past deeds, if they call out his name with sincerity. Amitabha is often shown as a meditating buddha, as the central figure of the Western Paradise, or descending from above to lead souls to his paradise (see **image 15**).

Image 15

Avalokiteshvara (Kwanŭm). This bodhisattva is one of the most important and popular figures in Mahayana Buddhism. Revered for his great compassion and wisdom, Avalokiteshvara is the manifestation of the power of Amitabha, the Buddha of the Western Paradise. Avalokiteshvara's association with Amitabha is often indicated by a small, seated representation of the buddha in the crown of his headdress. Although he has a variety of attributes, he is most commonly shown holding a flask of holy water, a willow branch, or a lotus blossom. Avalokiteshvara can assume many guises, both male and female, human and suprahuman, depending on the intended function and setting of the image (see **image 16**).

Image 16

Avatamsaka (Hwaŏm). After three decades of study in China, the eminent Silla monk Ŭisang (625–701) returned to Korea and established the Avatamsaka school, the principle school of Mahayana Buddhism. Known in Korea as Hwaŏm, it became the dominant philosophical Buddhist sect and appealed in particular to intellectuals among the Unified Silla and Koryŏ aristocracy. Followers of this powerful school stressed that all things were part of a single, higher whole, comparable to the waves that make up the sea. During its period of florescence, the Hwaŏm school inspired not only a rich body of intellectual and theological interpretations but also numerous visual representations of the scriptures.

Bodhisattva (*posal*). A bodhisattva is an enlightened being who, despite having accumulated sufficient wisdom and merit to achieve nirvana, renounces complete freedom from the world of suffering until all sentient beings can be saved. Motivated by compassion, bodhisattvas actively assist those in need and therefore are common objects of devotion and supplication. Their engagement with this world is often expressed in their depiction as bejeweled and richly ornamented figures.

Buddha (*pul* or *puch'ŏ*). A buddha, or "enlightened one," is a being who, having realized the truths espoused in Buddhism, has freed himself from the attachments and desires that bind one to the painful cycle of death and rebirth. Having achieved full liberation (nirvana) from the cycle of reincarnation, a buddha is no longer influenced by sensations, emotions, and events. While the name "Buddha" customarily refers to the founder of the religion, the historical Buddha Shakyamuni, there are numerous buddhas. They are often depicted as monks dressed in simple robes and bearing the physical markings (Skt. *lakshana*) of enlightenment (see fig. 1, p. 43), but in certain manifestations they are shown as richly ornamented regal figures (see **images 5, 15, 17**).

Images 5, 15, 17

Esoteric Buddhism. This version of Buddhist practice, which is also known as Tantric Buddhism or Vajrayana, represents the last major phase of the religion in India. Developed between the fourth and sixth centuries, Esoteric Buddhism was transmitted to East and Southeast Asia, and reached its greatest level of influence in Tibet. Generally taught to initiates by a highly revered teacher, Esoteric Buddhist practices include rites that use magic, incantations, and ritualized actions to achieve enlightenment in one's lifetime. This form of Buddhism also

incorporates a diverse pantheon of male and female deities that can assume many different manifestations and forms.

Kshitigarbha (Chijang). Kshitigarbha (literally, "womb of the earth") is a bodhisattva who is dedicated to the rescue of beings in hell. Depictions of this deity typically show him dressed as a monk, carrying a six-ringed staff in one hand and a wish-granting jewel in the other (see **image 18**).

Image 18

Mahayana. Mahayana, or the Great Vehicle, so named because it is meant to deliver all beings from the cycle of suffering to salvation, developed out of the older Theravada, or Hinayana, tradition around the first century A.D. Mahayana offers the assistance of compassionate buddhas and bodhisattvas, who are able to alleviate the suffering of supplicants and assist them in their quest for enlightenment. This branch of Buddhism, which gained prominence in East Asia, teaches that all sentient beings possess the potential for enlightenment and attainment of buddhahood.

Maitreya (Mirŭk). Maitreya (meaning "benevolence") is the all-compassionate buddha, who, after the conclusion of the current period dominated by the historical Buddha Shakyamuni, will come to earth as the last earthly buddha. Until the time of his appearance as a buddha, Maitreya resides in the Tushita Heaven as a bodhisattva. He is therefore depicted as either an unornamented buddha or a bejeweled bodhisattva. He occasionally wears a miniature stupa in his headdress, and may hold a vase or a wheel representing Buddhist teaching. A cult dedicated to Maitreya was popular during the Three Kingdoms, especially among the young male aristocrats known as *hwarang* (flower youth) who honored the five injunctions laid down by the monk Wŏn'gwang, and in the Unified Silla period.

Meditation. This term encompasses a variety of techniques and types of religious practices derived from ancient yogic teachings that are designed to calm and concentrate the mind, making possible the ultimate goal of developing the practitioner's consciousness to the point of inner enlightenment.

Nirvana. Considered by Buddhists to be beyond description and definition, nirvana is the ultimate goal of Buddhist practice. It refers to the

state of bliss attained when one is no longer deluded by ignorance, influenced by attachments and desires generated by the ego, or subject to the cycle of rebirth, the nature of which is conditioned by the deeds (Skt. karma) of former lives. In Mahayana Buddhism, nirvana also includes the awareness of one's unity with the absolute.

Pure Land school. This school of Buddhism, which had reached Korea by the seventh century, emphasizes faith in Amitabha, expressed primarily through recitation of his name and the desire to be reborn into his Western Paradise. Because it offers a simple and direct route to salvation, Pure Land Buddhism became very popular among the common people in Korea.

Shakyamuni (Sŏkkamoni or Sŏka-bul). The name "Shakyamuni," meaning "Sage of the Shakya clan," refers to Prince Siddhartha (d. ca. 400 B.C.; traditional dates ca. 556–483 B.C.) of the royal Gautama family, the founder of Buddhism. Born in northeastern India, as a young adult Shakyamuni became distressed over the human condition of suffering and death. He abandoned worldly life to seek the cause of pain and discover a means of attaining release. After achieving enlightenment, Shakyamuni spent the remaining decades of his life traveling and teaching his doctrine of meditation and moderate living. He is most often shown as a monk with physical marks that signify his enlightened status, such as a cranial protuberance, tuft of hair in the middle of his forehead, and elongated earlobes (see **image 5** and fig. 1).

Image 5

Sŏn (Chn. Chan; Jpn. Zen). Sŏn is the Korean version of the Chan school of Mahayana Buddhism, which developed in China between the sixth and seventh centuries. The origins of this school are traced to the legendary Indian monk Bodhidharma, who is said to have traveled to China in the early sixth century and guided his followers in their search for a direct, intuitive approach to enlightenment through meditation. A form of Chan Buddhism was transmitted to Korea perhaps as early as the seventh century, reportedly by a Korean monk who journeyed to China and studied with the fourth patriarch Daoxin (580–651). Sŏn developed in nine independent mountain centers (*kusan sonmun*) and, after the twelfth century, became the dominant form of Buddhist practice in Korea.

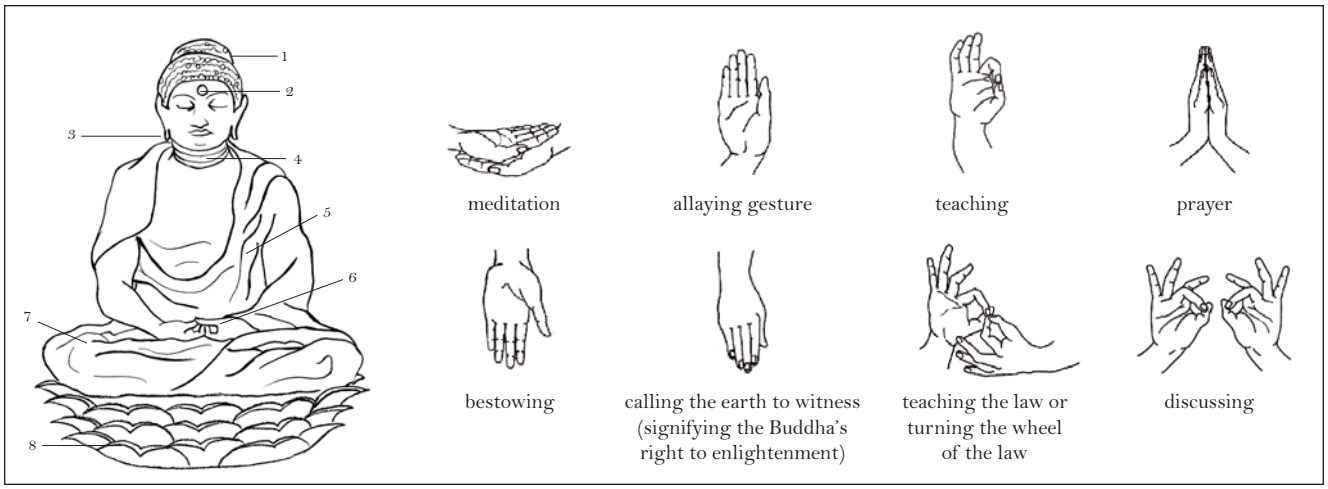

Figure 1. Buddhist corporeal iconography and symbolic hand gestures, or *mudras*

1. skull protuberance – wisdom
2. tuft of hair or gem – enlightenment
3. extended earlobes – princely wealth, rejection of materialism
4. three neck folds – auspiciousness
5. monk's robes – ascetic life of the Buddha
6. *mudra* – symbolic hand gesture (here indicating meditation)
7. seated in lotus position
8. lotus platform – purity

Buddhism and Art

Buddhism, which had deeply permeated Korean elite culture long before the political unification of the country in the seventh century and served as the national religion until the end of the fourteenth century, had an enormous impact on the arts of Korea. The majority of Korea's most important surviving art treasures were inspired by the practice of this religion. According to Buddhist teachings, devotees attain religious merit through the commissioning and production of images and texts. This belief motivated the creation of enormous numbers of votive figures, ritual implements, paintings, and illuminated manuscripts of Buddhist scriptures. Many of these objects were made for the numerous temples built by the Three Kingdoms and Unified Silla kings as well as the Koryŏ monarchs and nobles. Because members of the upper classes were for centuries the primary proponents of Buddhism in Korea, huge sums were lavished on the production of exquisite devotional objects.

Religious texts, or sutras, provide the foundation of Buddhist belief. Sutras were copied and often illustrated by hand or produced in multiple copies with the technique of woodblock printing. Highly skilled calligraphers and painters were employed by the royal court and aristocracy to produce these sacred works using the finest materials.

The representation of deities and spiritually perfected people is a fundamental artistic expression of Buddhist thought. The enlightened status of these figures is visually conveyed in part through their appearance as idealized beings. Specific attributes and distinguishing marks — such as a protuberance on top of the head and a tuft of hair in the middle of the forehead (generally represented by a dot between

the eyebrows)—as well as hand gestures (Skt. *mudra*) communicate information to the viewer about the identity of the figure or convey a message (see fig. 1). Buddhist deities are frequently depicted with a halo or nimbus surrounding their heads and/or an aureole, or mandorla, around their entire bodies. As in the West, these representations of emanating light indicate the figure's spiritual radiance. The magical abilities and power of deities in the Esoteric Buddhist pantheon are often represented by such suprahuman characteristics as multiple arms and heads. The setting in which a figure is depicted can also reveal clues to the deity's identity. For example, the Buddha Amitabha is often shown presiding over his Western Paradise flanked by the bodhisattvas Avalokiteshvara and Mahasthamaprapta (see **image 15**).

Image 15

Ideas about physical perfection and beauty are closely connected with the culture in which they prevail. Modern viewers, therefore, must keep in mind that their own concepts of physical beauty may differ from beliefs held by people in other places and times. Specifically, the soft, rounded physiques and gentle expressions of Buddhist images, especially bodhisattvas, often look feminine to modern Western viewers. The makers of these images were responding to a number of impulses, including their own ideas about physical perfection and a desire to depict deities that transcend the limitations of age, gender, and human physical features.

Confucianism

Confucianism (*yugyo*) is the philosophical, social, and political doctrine developed in China based on the teachings of Confucius (ca. 551–479 B.C.) and his principal followers. This ideology was developed in response to the need for a new system that could provide the social cohesion and moral imperatives demanded by the shift during the Zhou dynasty (ca. 1046–256 B.C.) from a society dictated by the belief in the power of ancestral spirits to one in which man assumed the central position. Through the writings attributed to Confucius and his followers, Confucianism offered a code of proper social conduct motivated by virtue and tempered by humanism. During his lifetime, Confucius had little success in convincing rulers to adopt his system, and his precepts did not become guiding principles in China until the Han period (206 B.C.–220 A.D.).

Confucius exhorted rulers to govern by example. He believed that if a king behaved properly and observed the necessary rituals, society

would be stable and harmonious. Rituals held a central position in Confucian ethics because their performance was thought to encourage the best aspects of human nature and to correct character flaws. Confucianism emphasizes five fundamental relationships, which if properly maintained will result in a harmonious, virtuous society: ruler and minister, father and son (filial piety), husband and wife, elder brother and younger brother, and friend and friend. Filial piety, for example, requires that a son defer to and care for his parents while they are alive and after their deaths honor them with a suitable funeral, a properly observed mourning period, and timely acts of veneration through the presentation of offerings. Because Confucius also advocated the appointment of learned and capable administrators to government posts rather than dependence on a hereditary system, Confucianism became closely associated with education and an examination system whereby the government could identify talented men.

Confucius expressed little interest in metaphysical matters, and limited his comments on the spiritual realm to general references to an impersonal Heaven. Although shrines dedicated to Confucius and worthy dignitaries and heroes were established in later times, Confucianism is not, strictly speaking, a religion. It never developed a formal clergy, and the most important rituals associated with its practice are ancestral rites.

Introduced into Korea with the establishment of the Chinese Han military commanderies in the northern part of the peninsula at the end of the second century B.C., Confucianism was utilized by the rulers of the Three Kingdoms, Unified Silla, and Koryŏ to enhance their political authority. They embraced the Confucian virtues of loyalty, social harmony, and class stratification, established academies in which Confucian classics were taught to the sons of the aristocracy, instituted civil service examinations for members of the upper classes, and adopted Chinese-style rites.

In the final decades of the Koryŏ dynasty, bureaucrats steeped in Confucian learning increasingly opposed the political and economic power of the Buddhist clergy, whom they considered to be a corrupt and enervating influence. With the establishment of the Chosŏn dynasty, Confucianism emerged as the dominant ideology in Korean society, with a strict emphasis on the proper observance of ancestral rites and interpersonal relationships. This expansion of Confucianism's reach coincided with the growing influence in Korea of Neo-Confucianism, called *sŏngri-hak* (philosophy of mind and principle) or

chuja-hak (philosophy of Master Zhu, or Zhu Xi [1130–1200], the great Neo-Confucian scholar of the Chinese Song dynasty). Incorporating concepts from Daoism and Buddhism, Neo-Confucianism shifted attention to the cultivation of the self through the study of metaphysical and cosmological ideas.

After the devastating Japanese invasions of the peninsula in the late sixteenth century, followed a few decades later by the fall of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) in China, which had been viewed as Korea's role model, many Korean intellectuals recognized a need for reform. The faction known as Sirhak-p'a (School of Practical Learning) became a formidable intellectual force in the late seventeenth century. The Sirhak scholars, who advocated political, economic, social, and educational reforms, took practical affairs as their point of departure, emphasizing not only the traditional humanistic disciplines but also the study of science, natural science, and technology. Their interest in promoting a new understanding of the country's history and culture led to a surge of publications on various aspects of Korean history, literature, language, and geography.

Neo-Confucianism. Based on the writings of the twelfth-century Chinese scholar Zhu Xi, Neo-Confucianism represented a major intellectual breakthrough in Chinese philosophy. It grew out of a revival of the ancient moral philosophy of Confucianism combined with metaphysical concepts borrowed from Daoism and Buddhism. Neo-Confucian philosophers developed a metaphysical system of heavenly principles, which embraced both a transcendent reality and the cultivation of the self.

Yangban. Members of the educated elite, the *yangban* dominated society in the Chosŏn period. They were typically educated in the Confucian classics, which prepared them for the official civil and military service examinations and positions in the government bureaucracy. While not all *yangban* were wealthy, their status as officials and landholders allowed many to become affluent. Although, theoretically, all educated men were eligible to take the exams necessary for entry into the ranks of the bureaucracy, in practice, membership in the *yangban* class was largely restricted to established upper-class families: access to education was restricted, land and property were inherited by the eldest son, and endogamous marriages were preferred. Beginning in the seventeenth century, attitudinal changes caused an expansion in

yangban ranks, weakening class exclusivity. Eventually, the term became a polite reference for any gentleman.

Zhu Xi (1130–1200). Zhu Xi was one of China's most influential philosophers and the founder of the Neo-Confucian orthodox School of Principle, which taught that the mind is disciplined and morality is learned through "the investigation of things"—an objective study of the many aspects of the material world.

Confucianism and Art

Confucius is said to have advised gentlemen to cultivate their moral character in part through the appreciation of music and the study of literature and history. Confucianism exerted its strongest impact on the fine arts through the aesthetics it espoused. Restraint, modesty, and naturalness were encouraged in the form of muted colors, subtle decoration, and a preference for organic materials. White-bodied porcelains, scholars' utensils made of bamboo, wood, or stone, and simple white silk robes epitomized Confucian sensibilities.

Confucian veneration of ancestors and teachers prompted the rise of private Confucian academies (*sŏwŏn*) and the production of portraits of ancestors as well as those of renowned Confucian masters. Domestic rites, the most important of which were coming-of-age ceremonies, weddings, funerals, and veneration of the ancestors, constituted the most essential aspects of private Confucian practice during the Chosŏn period. Ancestral rites were typically carried out by men of the upper class in family shrines, which were usually located within the domestic compound of the eldest male. Offerings of wine, food, and tea were presented to the ancestors, represented by inscribed name plaques placed on an altar. While food was usually presented on wood or metal plates and bowls, wine was offered in small cups made of white porcelain or metal (see **image 22**). After the service, the relatives of the deceased would consume the food and drink in a family meal.

Image 22

Confucian scholars were usually active practitioners and patrons of calligraphy and literati painting. Ideally, these arts were enjoyed as a means of personal expression, either alone or among like-minded friends. Ink paintings of bamboo, orchids, and landscapes rendered with little or no color and employing calligraphic brushwork are typical examples of literati art (see **image 28** and **Artists and Materials** , pp. 70–72).

Image 28

Daoism

Daoism (sometimes romanized as Taoism) is native to China, and encompasses various ancient practices and schools of thought ignored or rejected by Confucianism. The older form of Daoism, philosophical Daoism (*toga*), consists of concepts credited to Laozi (5th century B.C.) and Zhuangzi (ca. 369–ca. 286 B.C.), who advocated a passive acquiescence to the Dao (The Way of the Universe) and a close relationship with nature. Around the second century A.D., Daoism absorbed components of shamanism, alchemy, medicine, and various primitive cults and developed into religious Daoism (*togyo*).

Chinese inhabitants of the Han military commanderies in northern Korea are presumed to have introduced Daoist texts and beliefs into the peninsula as part of the transmission of Chinese culture. Members of the Koguryŏ aristocracy, for example, are known to have requested information about Daoist practices from China. Although many Daoist ideas were absorbed into Korean society, Daoism never became established in an organized form but was an important feature of the cultural background.

Because of the many similarities between religious Daoism and shamanism, practices not associated with Buddhism or Confucianism—such as the use of charms and certain symbols—are sometimes incorrectly identified as being Daoist. Moreover, some concepts, such as the two alternating principles of the universe, *yin* and *yang* (*ŭm* and *yang*), and geomancy, are commonly attributed to Daoism, although they actually predate it. In general, conceptions of the immortals and their realms and the pursuit of immortality through alchemical means are the most authentic expressions of religious Daoism.

Dao. The Dao (or The Way of the Universe) is a fundamental term in Chinese philosophy for the unchangeable, transcendent source of all existence. This principle, which is vast and indescribable, encompassing action and nonaction, void and matter, knowledge and ignorance, remains constant as all else changes.

Laozi (5th century B.C.). The semilegendary founder of Daoism and author of the classic *Daodejing*, Laozi is said to have been a government official until he grew dissatisfied with political conditions in China and left the country to travel westward. He is thought to have been an acquaintance of Confucius, and his followers claim that he taught the Buddha Shakyamuni.

Zhuangzi (ca. 369–ca. 286 B.C.). Zhuangzi was one of the most important early developers of Daoist philosophy. He is credited with a book of poems, parables, and fantasies describing the importance of passivity and the maintenance of a close connection with nature, as well as criticizing government service.

Daoism and Art

As mentioned above, it is often difficult to separate Daoist ideas from those of shamanism. While figures such as the God of Longevity—known as Shoulao in Chinese and frequently pictured as a wizened old man carrying a large peach—have Daoist origins, over time they have been conflated with Korean folk deities associated with shamanism. In this case, Shoulao has been combined with the popular deities Namguksong (the Southern Star spirit) and Ch'ilsong (Seven Stars). Similarly, symbols of longevity, including the pine tree, crane, and fungus of immortality, are found in both Daoist and shamanist contexts.

Philosophical Daoism emphasizes the maintenance of a strong connection with the natural world, which is seen as necessary to the proper development of human character. In part resulting from Daoism's influence, nature holds a critical position in East Asian culture and thought. This attitude bolstered the development of landscape painting, which by definition in East Asia consists of mountains and water—elements made up of opposite physical characteristics (see **Key Themes, Nature**, p. 16). Up until modern times, whenever humans are included in landscape compositions, they typically reflect the Daoist ideal of man in harmony with nature.

Christianity

Korean art from the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries and objects associated with Christianity are not represented in the Metropolitan Museum's collection, thus the religion is only briefly discussed here.

In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, European missionaries attempted but failed to establish a foothold in Korea as part of their proselytizing efforts in other parts of Asia. After encountering Jesuit priests in Beijing in the second half of the seventeenth century, Korean emissaries were the first to introduce Christian texts and ideas to Korea successfully. Initially, Roman Catholicism's most receptive audience were upper-class intellectuals, especially those of

the Sirhak (Practical Learning) movement, which advocated using Western scientific knowledge to reform Korean commerce and agriculture. These men met secretly and their numbers, which came to include many commoners, swelled to approximately 10,000 in the early years of the nineteenth century. They sent requests to the Europeans to send priests, many of whom were eventually martyred. During the nineteenth century, the Korean government, fearing Western incursions, the prevalence of political opposition among Christian ranks, and Catholicism's ban on ancestor worship, enacted a number of brutal persecutions that killed tens of thousands of people and drove the Christian church underground until the 1870s.

Protestantism was established in Korea in the last decades of the nineteenth century. In addition to their evangelical efforts, Protestant missionaries, the majority of whom came from the United States, Canada, and Australia, instituted important changes in the areas of education and modern medicine. The use of *han'gŭl*, the native syllabary system, in religious books was instrumental in increasing the literacy rate among the population, especially among women. Missionaries founded several important hospitals and educational institutions, including Yonsei University and Ewha Woman's University in Seoul.

Notes

1. For further information on the development of various schools of Buddhism in Korea, see Pak Youngsook, "The Korean Art Collection in The Metropolitan Museum of Art," in *Arts of Korea*, pp. 424–26. A more detailed account is provided by Lewis R. Lancaster and Yu Chai-shin in *Introduction of Buddhism to Korea: New Cultural Patterns*, vol. 3, and *Assimilation of Buddhism in Korea: Religious Maturity and Innovation in the Silla Dynasty*, vol. 4, Studies in Korean Religions and Culture (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1989 and 1991).

2. Jonathan W. Best, "Imagery, Iconography and Belief in Early Korean Buddhism," *Korean Culture* (Fall 1992), pp. 23–33, is a useful overview of Korean Buddhist history, and includes a description of important deities in the Korean Buddhist pantheon and their iconography.