

## ***Research Projects on the Silla Dynasty (57 B.C.E-935 C.E.)***

The Lesson: Korean Ingenuity

Grades: Middle and High School

Subjects: Ancient History, World History, Asian Studies and Art History

Time: One or more class periods

Objectives:

The lesson will provide an opportunity for students to complete short research projects to learn about the creativity of the early Koreans and their remarkable accomplishments. Students will work independently or in pairs to determine how one of the following selections reflects Korean ingenuity and understanding of Korean history and culture.

Information for student research and class presentations will be found on the Korean Spirit and Culture Promotion Project (KSCPP) website (<http://www.kscpp.net>); *Fifty Wonders of Korea, Volume 1: Culture and Art*; *Fifty Wonders of Korea, Volume 2: Science and Technology*; and the official internet site for the government of Republic of Korea (<http://www.korea.net>). KSCPP will mail books free of charge to teachers who request books for classroom use. Information that responds to the following cultural treasures will also be found on *Silla Korea and the Silk Road, Golden Age, Golden Threads* on The Korea Society's website (<http://www.koreasociety.org>) and numerous helpful websites.



1. Golden crown from Hwangnam Tumulus, Gyeongju, 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, National Museum of Korea. The pure gold crowns of Silla are the foremost example

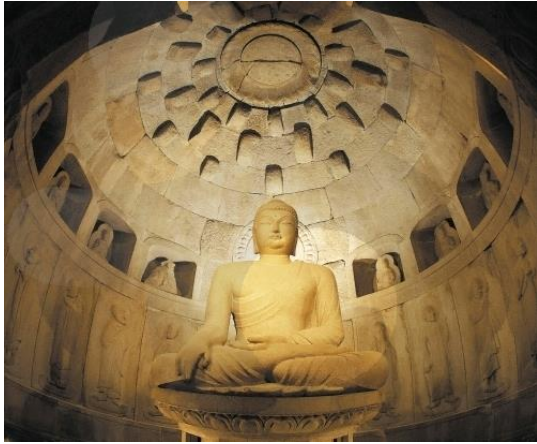
of the advanced technology and craftsmanship possessed by Silla artisans. The crowns belonged to the royalty and members of the royal family who had a significant role in Silla's ancient capital city.



2. Bulguksa, near Gyeongju, 8<sup>th</sup> century CE. The temple is considered to be the most magnificent example of Silla architecture and the most renowned Buddhist temple in Korea. It is located in the mountains near Gyeongju, the ancient Silla capital. The harmonious beauty of the temple reveals the highly developed architectural taste and skills of the ancient Silla people.



3. The Dharani Sutra, near Gyeongju, early 8<sup>th</sup> century C.E., National Museum of Korea. In 1966, the Dharani Sutra was discovered within the Shakyamuni Pagoda of Bulguksa Temple near Gyeongju. Since it is believed that the pagoda was completed in 751 C.E., the print is therefore at least as old as the shrine in which it was stored. The discovery of the Dharani Sutra caused much controversy among academics, but it is now considered to be the oldest woodblock print in the world.



4. Main Hall of Sokkuram Grotto, Gyeongju, 8<sup>th</sup> century CE. Many consider the Sokkurum Grotto to be the finest achievement of the people of Silla. The Sokkurum Grotto embodies ideal harmony of science, art, and religion in a single entity. The Buddha was created with perfect dimensions and the highest artistic skills. It is considered one of the most beautiful Buddhist statues in East Asia.



5. Sacred Bell of King Seongdeok, Gyeongju, 8<sup>th</sup> century CE. The bell is the largest bell of its kind in Korea today. The casting techniques of the Silla people who created this enormous and beautiful bell 1,200 years ago are still not fully understood. A bell patterned after the sacred bell of King Seongdeok was presented to the United States in 1976 in recognition of the friendship between South Korea and the United States and is located in San Pedro, California.



6. Gold Earrings, Gyeongju, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, early 6<sup>th</sup> century CE. The gold ornaments found in the Silla royal tombs projected Silla as the “Country of Gold Splendor” as it became known in ancient records. The earrings demonstrate the intricate craftsmanship of Silla artisans in producing jewelry and creating works of art that transcend time.



7. Cheomseongdae Observatory, Gyeongju, 7<sup>th</sup> century CE. The Cheomseongdae Observatory is the world’s oldest existing observatory and reflects the belief that the events in the sky were like a mirror and guide for earthly affairs. It was built on the royal palace grounds during the Silla dynasty and the reign of Queen Seondok. The building reveals the Silla people’s awareness of the science of astronomy.



8. Sarira Reliquary of the Gamunsa Temple, National Museum of Korea, 7<sup>th</sup> century CE. This reliquary is unparalleled in beauty and craftsmanship. In Buddhism the sarira are marble-like relics that remain after an enlightened being has been cremated. A sarira reliquary is a work of art that is made to hold those relics. Since sarira are considered sacred, the greatest artistic skill and most advanced techniques were used in its construction. In 2002, researchers tried to replicate the reliquary's wind chime with modern heating equipment, but could not achieve what 7<sup>th</sup> century artisans could accomplish.



9. Pagoda at Bunhwang Temple, Gyeongju, 634 CE. The stone pagoda of the Bunhwang Temple was built during the reign of Queen Seondok and is the only surviving pagoda from the pre-unified Silla period. Originally the pagoda had nine stories, but only three remain.



10. Heavenly Horse Painting from Cheonma Tumulus, Gyeongju, 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century CE. In 1973 when excavations were being conducted, workers found this painting of a beautiful flying white horse about fifteen inches long in an ancient Silla tomb. It is believed that the painting reflects the shamanistic belief that the ruler's spirit is being carried to heaven on horseback. In ancient Silla the horse's ashes were placed next to its owner, but fortunately the saddle flap painting survived.

*The Korea Society's book, Silla Korea and the Silk Road, Golden Age, Golden Threads*, includes interesting biographies of famous people during the Silla dynasty. Students could perform research on individuals, such as the following: Queen Seondok, Kim Yusin (Silla's greatest general), Wonhyo (Silla's most famous Buddhist monk), and Jang Bogo (successful maritime trader, "Emperor of the Yellow Sea," and head of Cheonghae Garrison).

A helpful pronunciation guide appears at the end of the book.