

Asian Art and Architecture

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

China and Japan historically have had a close relationship, and the influence of Buddhism on both of these cultures has had much impact on Asian art. It is important to understand the basic tenets of Buddhism and two types of Buddhism, Zen and Pure Land, when exploring artwork from this region and period in time. This lesson will cover:



BIG IDEA

Buddhism was very influential on the art and architecture of China and Japan.

1. Location: Asian Art

The focus for this lesson is the geographical region of China. The historic Silk Road, which is located in this region, is largely responsible for the cultural exchanges between Western and Eastern civilizations, as well as within Asia itself.

2. China and Japan

China and Japan may not have always been best friends necessarily, but these two Asian countries have a close relationship historically. China had significant influence on the cultural, linguistic, religious, political, and artistic development within Japan.

Both cultures were very influenced by the rise of Buddhism. This was largely due to the Silk Road. Buddhism found its strongest integration within the cultures of China and Japan, despite developing in India. Influenced by devotional cults and Bhakti, a movement characterized by the deeply reciprocal love between a devotee and a personal god, India began seeing significant growth in Hinduism between the 4th and 11th centuries.

3. Buddhism

Although distinct religions, Buddhism and **Hinduism** are closely related, and share many essential characteristics. This overlap in religions includes the veneration of images. The veneration of images was perceived as idolatrous by other religions, such as Islam. Because of this conflict, the results were the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas, which are colossal statues of Buddha carved within massive rock walls. Their destruction occurred in Afghanistan in 2001 by the Taliban, despite the best efforts globally to preserve

them.

The idea of a devotional cult is at the heart of **Pure Land Buddhism**, a type of Buddhism that emphasizes devotion to a form of Buddha-- the Buddha of Infinite Light. The belief was that in order to be reborn within the Pure Land, or Pure Realm, one must be sincerely devoted to the Buddha of Infinite Light. **Zen Buddhism**, on the other hand, was a more introspective take on Buddhism with an emphasis on personal enlightenment through the study of Buddhist teachings and the use of meditation.

Both types had, and still have, a large following within Asia. But regardless of the type of Buddhism, the basic tenets remain essentially the same. Buddhists believe in the four noble truths. These four truths include:

- Truth of suffering
- Truth of the cause of suffering
- Truth of the end of suffering
- Truth of the path that leads to the end of suffering

Karma is another basic tenet of Buddhism, and refers to actions and consequences, or cause and effect. The third basic tenet is the concept of reincarnation, which is a cycle of spiritual rebirth in order to achieve enlightenment.



TERMS TO KNOW

Hinduism

A system of religious practice in India that emphasizes the idea of dharma, or duty, and corresponding daily rituals and practices.

Pure Land

The heavenly realm of a Buddha.

Zen

A school and teaching of Chinese Buddhism that emphasizes enlightenment and individual understanding of Buddhist teachings through formal studies and observances.



SUMMARY

Buddhism was very influential on the art and architecture of China and Japan. You learned about the **location of Asian art** in this lesson. **China and Japan** have a significant and historical relationship, and they are both influenced by the religion of **Buddhism** in various ways. Remember, though, that the veneration of images was perceived as idolatrous by other religions, such as Islam. This resulted in the destruction of some Asian artwork such as the Bamiyan Buddhas, colossal statues of Buddha carved within massive rock walls.

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