

# Unit 3

South, East, and Southeast Asia

## Buddhist Art and Architecture



# The Great Stupa (Sanchi, India) completed first century CE

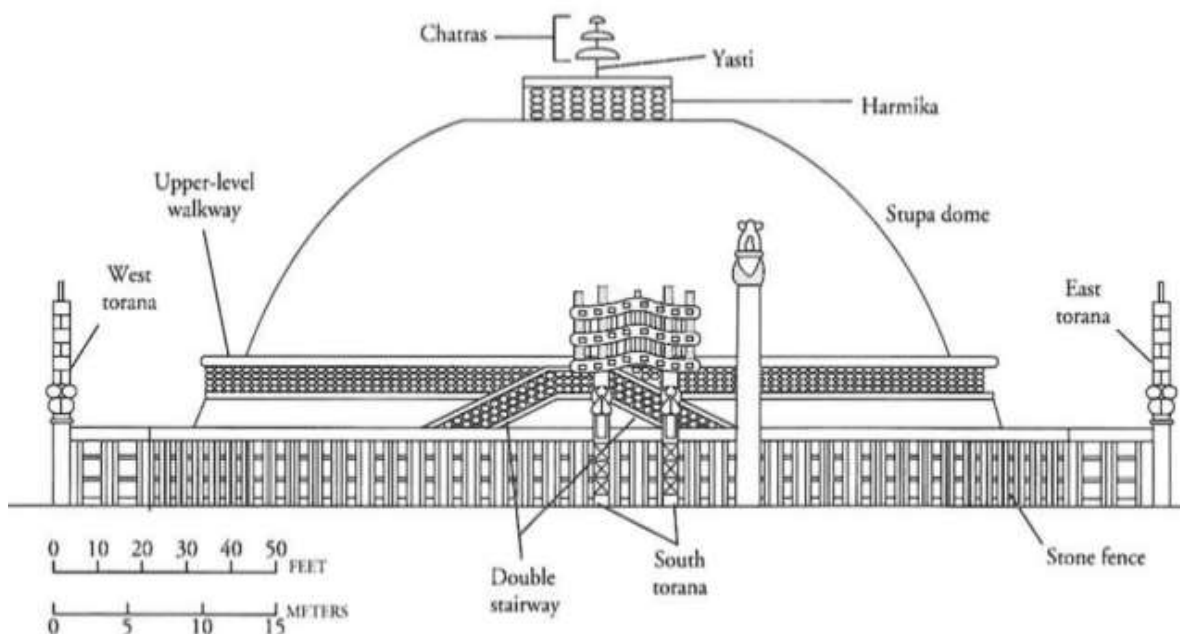
Buddhists visit stupas to perform rituals that help them to achieve one of the most important goals of Buddhism: to understand the Buddha's teachings, known as the Four Noble Truths (also known as the dharma and the law) so when they die they cease to be caught up in *samsara*, the endless cycle of birth and death.

## The Four Noble Truths:

1. life is suffering (suffering=rebirth)
2. the cause of suffering is desire
3. the cause of desire must be overcome
4. when desire is overcome, there is no more suffering (suffering=rebirth)

Once individuals come to fully understand The Four Noble Truths, they are able to achieve Enlightenment, or the complete knowledge of the dharma. In fact, Buddha means "the Enlightened One" and it is the knowledge that the Buddha gained on his way to achieving Enlightenment that Buddhist practitioners seek on their own journey toward Enlightenment.

## Sanchi Stupa



According to Buddhist texts, when the Buddha died (the Mahaparinirvana), he was cremated, and his ashes were divided and enshrined in eight stupas, or burial mounds. Stupas thus came to stand for the Mahaparinirvana, the last of the four great miracles of Shakyamuni's life. The hemispherical form of the stupa, however, predates Buddhism and, like the monumental pillars, has cosmological significance.

Originally, remains or other relics were placed in a hole in the ground, into which a pillar was set, and



then earth was mounded around the pillar to prevent plundering.

With the development of Buddhism under emperor Ashoka, these mounds evolved into monumental stupas. Carved onto different parts of the Great Stupa, more than six hundred brief inscriptions show that the donations of hundreds of individuals made the monument's construction possible. The vast

majority of them common laypeople, monks, and nuns, they hoped to accrue merit for future rebirths with their gifts.

The stupa was designed as a **mandala**, or cosmic diagram. The stupa's dome symbolizes the dome of heaven. It supports a square platform, enclosing by a railing, through which a central axis-pillar projects. Attached to the pillar are three umbrella-shaped chattras, royal symbols that honor the Buddha. The configuration of the enclosure recalls pre-Buddhist nature worship and the ancient South Asian practice of enclosing a sacred tree with a wooden fence. On top of the dome, another stone railing, square in shape, defines the abode of the gods atop the cosmic mountain. It encloses the top of a mast bearing three stone disks, or 'umbrellas,' of decreasing size. These disks have been interpreted in various ways. They may refer to the Buddhist concept of the three realms of existence- desire, form, and formlessness. The mast itself is an **axis mundi**, connecting the cosmic waters below the earth with the celestial realm above it and anchoring everything in its proper place.



A major stupa is surrounded by a railing that creates a sacred path for ritual circumambulation at ground level. This railing is punctuated by gateways called **toranas**, aligned with the cardinal points. The toranas rise to a height of 35 feet. Their square posts are carved with symbols and scenes drawn mostly from the Buddha's life and his past lives. The "capitals" of the toranas consist of four back-to-back elephants on the north and east gates, dwarfs on the south gate, and lions on the west gate. The capitals in turn support a three-tiered superstructure whose posts and crossbars are elaborately carved with still more symbols and scenes and studded with freestanding sculpture depicting such subjects as yakshis and yakshas, riders on real and mythical animals, and the Buddhist wheel. As in all known early Buddhist art, the Buddha himself is not shown in human form. Instead, he is represented by symbols such as his footprints, an empty 'enlightenment' seat, or a stupa.



Forming a bracket between each capital and the lowest crossbar is a sculpture of a yakshi. These yakshis are some of the finest female figures in Indian art, and they make an instructive comparison with the yakshi of the Maurya period. The earlier figure was distinguished by a formal, somewhat rigid pose, an emphasis on realistic details, and a clear distinction between clothed and nude parts of the body. In contrast, the yakshi leans daringly into space with casual abandon. The swelling forms of her body with their arching curves seem to bring this deity's

procreative and bountiful essence to life. As anthropomorphic symbol of the waters, she is the source of life. Here she personifies the sap of the tree, which flowers at her touch. Buddhism (like Hinduism) regarded sexuality and spirituality as variant forms of a single, fundamental cosmic force. Here, the woman-and tree motif carried an added dimension of meaning due to a widely prevalent ancient belief

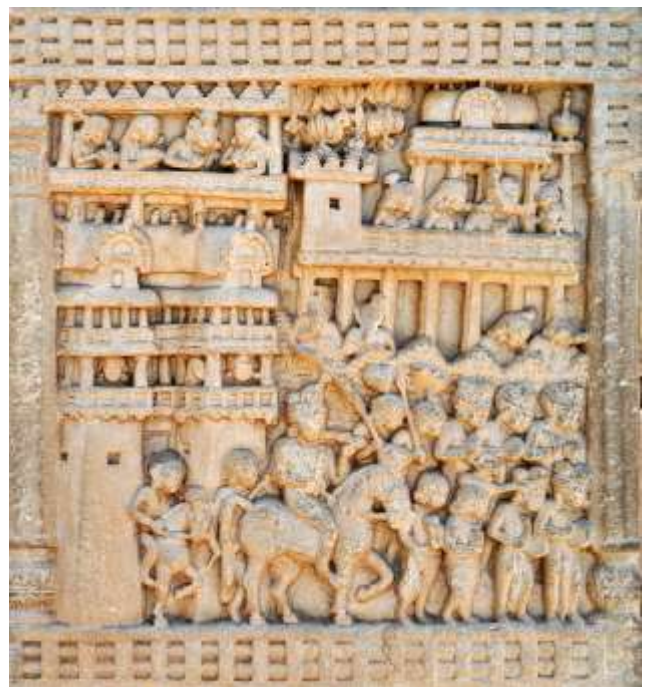


that by her very touch, woman could cause a tree to blossom or bear fruit.

The ritual of circumambulation was performed by entering the precinct through the east gate and walking clockwise. This direction related the devotee's movements with the passage of the sun (east, south, and west) and put him in harmony with the cosmos. In fact, personal involvement with the stupa was a bodily engagement within a gigantic three-dimensional mandala, or sacred diagram of the cosmos, which slowly and systematically transports the faithful from the mundane world into the spiritual one. While the spiritual journey of the early Christian pilgrim was linear (from narthex to apse), marking

the movement from sin to salvation, the Buddhist journey was circular, symbolizing the cycle of regeneration and the quest for nirvana. The stupa, central to Buddhist ritual, was exported with the faith beyond India to evolve into different forms in new lands- the pointed pagoda of Burma, the stacked chorten of Tibet, the tiered tower pagoda of China, and the mammoth 'world mountain' of Borobudur in Central Java, the greatest of all Buddhist stupas.

An outstanding feature of the narratives of the Great Stupa is its expression of joyful participation in all of life's activities. Sculptors did not present viewers with sermons in stone but with the vibrant everyday world of the first century BC to which they could relate with ease, and which would give a sense of immediacy to their viewing of otherwise distant events. We see processions watched by people on balconies, joyous scenes of



music and dance, villages where women pound grain and fetch water, and forests where elephants bathe in lotus ponds while monkeys and geese frolic on the banks. In the midst of all these apparently everyday surroundings, the Buddha is present. Processions and dances are in honor of his relic; the village is where he performed one of his miracles; the forest is the setting for a tale of his previous life. In unfolding the story of the Buddha, or the truths of Buddhism, artists invariably framed them in the world of the familiar.



One architrave that presents the story of the Buddha's enlightenment employs a central focus to create an effect very different from the continuous narrative of the Great Departure. At its midpoint is the Buddha, whose presence is indicated by a shrine surrounding the seat beneath the bodhi tree where he attained enlightenment; the distinct heart-like shape of the papal leaves makes it instantly recognizable. Artists found nothing incongruous in including the shrine that was in place by the first century BC, but certainly not there when the events occurred; this was one way of giving relevance and immediacy to the enlightenment.

To the right and left of the symbols that indicate the Buddha's presence are the events immediately preceding and succeeding the enlightenment. The demon armies of Mara, the evil one in Buddhism, assailed Siddhartha with every conceivable weapon; finding themselves unable to distract him



from his meditation, they fled in fear and trepidation. The right half of the architrave portrays Mara's demons fleeing in disarray, trampling one another in their haste; their rotund bodies and flaccid, thick-lipped faces are most expressive in the exaggerated grotesqueness.

Their panic-stricken departure continues on the extension of the architrave. The left half presents the arrival of the gods who, by contrast, are a serene and orderly group offering salutations to the Buddha; their arrival too is continued on the architrave's extension. Gazing at the striking difference between the halves of the architrave, one cannot help but wonder whether they were carved by different sculptors, one being far more creative and fanciful in his treatment than the other. On the other hand, a single artist may have intended to contrast the chaotic world of evil with the ordered world of good.



## Bamiyan Buddhas, c. 6th-7th c C.E., stone, stucco, paint, Bamiyan, Afghanistan, destroyed 2001



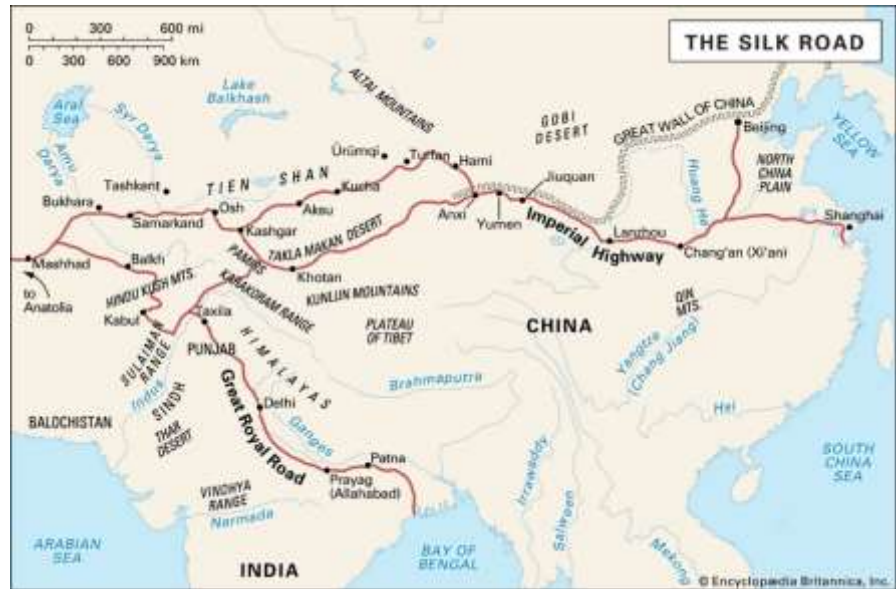
Prior to their recent destruction, the 6th-7th century, rock-cut Buddha sculptures in the Bamiyan Valley of central Afghanistan were considered the largest in the world. Known collectively as the Bamiyan Buddhas, the two monumental sculptures have amazed both Buddhist and non-Buddhist visitors for more than a thousand years. Like many of the world's great ancient monuments, little is known about who commissioned the Bamiyan Buddhas or the sculptors who carved them. However, their very existence points to the importance of the Buddhist faith and the Bamiyan Valley during this period.

Buddhism along the Silk Route Bamiyan is located between the Indian subcontinent (to the southeast) and Central Asia (to the north), which made it an important location close to one of the most



important branches of the Silk Route. The Silk Route was an ancient series of linked trade routes that connected the East to the West and carried both material wealth and ideas. Bamiyan's central location along the Silk Route, along with its fertile plains amid harsh terrain, made it an ideal location for merchants and missionaries to stop during their travels. Many of the missionaries and merchants in this area during the middle of the first millennium were practitioners of the Buddhist faith. Buddhism had long been an important religion in the region, having been introduced during the early Kushan period.

Buddhism spread, in part, because it was not location specific. Believers did not need to worship at a particular temple or at a particular site as part of their practice. Worship could take place anywhere and at anytime. This freedom resulted in the emergence of Buddhist cave architecture throughout Asia. Indeed, if one visits Bamiyan



today, one will see nearly 1000 Buddhist caves carved along 1300 meters of cliff face. It is against this backdrop of carved caves that the two monumental Buddha images were carved.

Prior to their destruction in 2001, two monumental Buddha sculptures could be seen carved into the cliff facing the Bamiyan Valley. The larger of the two figures, located on the western end, measured



175 feet in height. The art historian Susan Huntington has argued that it represented the Buddha Vairochana. The smaller of the two monumental statues, located to the east, depicted the Buddha Shakyamuni. This figure was also enormous and measured 120 feet in height.

Both images were carved into niches of the cliff side in high relief. The area near

the heads of both Buddha figures and the area around the larger Buddha's feet were carved in the round, allowing worshippers to circumambulate. Circumambulation, which is the act of walking around an object such as a stupa (a reliquary mound) or an image of the Buddha, is a common practice in Buddhist worship.

The two large Buddha images reflected the international environment of the Bamiyan Valley and were influenced by the art and cultures of India, Central Asia and even ancient Greek culture. For example, both Buddhas wore flowing robes and have been described as having wavy curls of hair. This hairstyle and the flowing drapery are elements rooted in early Gandharan Buddhist imagery that combined Hellenistic Greek traditions of representation with Indian subject matter.

Much of what we know about the monumental Buddha sculptures comes from the Chinese monk Xuanzang (Hsuan-Tsang) who traveled to Bamiyan in 643 and documented his travels in the text *The Great Tang Records of the Western Regions* (*Da Tang Xiyu Ji*). As the earliest text describing the Buddha images, Xuanzang's writings provide us with remarkable descriptions of the sculptures and the vibrant communities that inhabited the region. He wrote:

“When merchants coming and going happen to witness visions of heavenly deities, whether as good omens or as predictions of disaster, they worship the deities to pray for blessedness. There are several tens of monasteries with several thousand monks, who follow the Hinayana teachings of the Lokottaravada school. To the northeast of the city, there is at a corner of the mountains a rock statue of the Buddha standing, one hundred forty or fifty feet in height, a dazzling golden color and adorned with brilliant gems. To the east there is a monastery built by a previous king of the country. To the east of the monastery there is a copper statue of the Buddha standing, more than one hundred feet tall. It was cast in separate pieces and then welded together into shape.”

Xuanzang's descriptions of the Buddhas provide us great insight into not only what they might have looked like in the 7th century but also how they were engaged with the community around them. Perhaps most surprising to our modern experience with Buddha imagery is that the monumental rock-cut sculptures are described by Xuanzang as being adorned with metal, color, and gems—not stripped down as we often see them in museums and galleries.

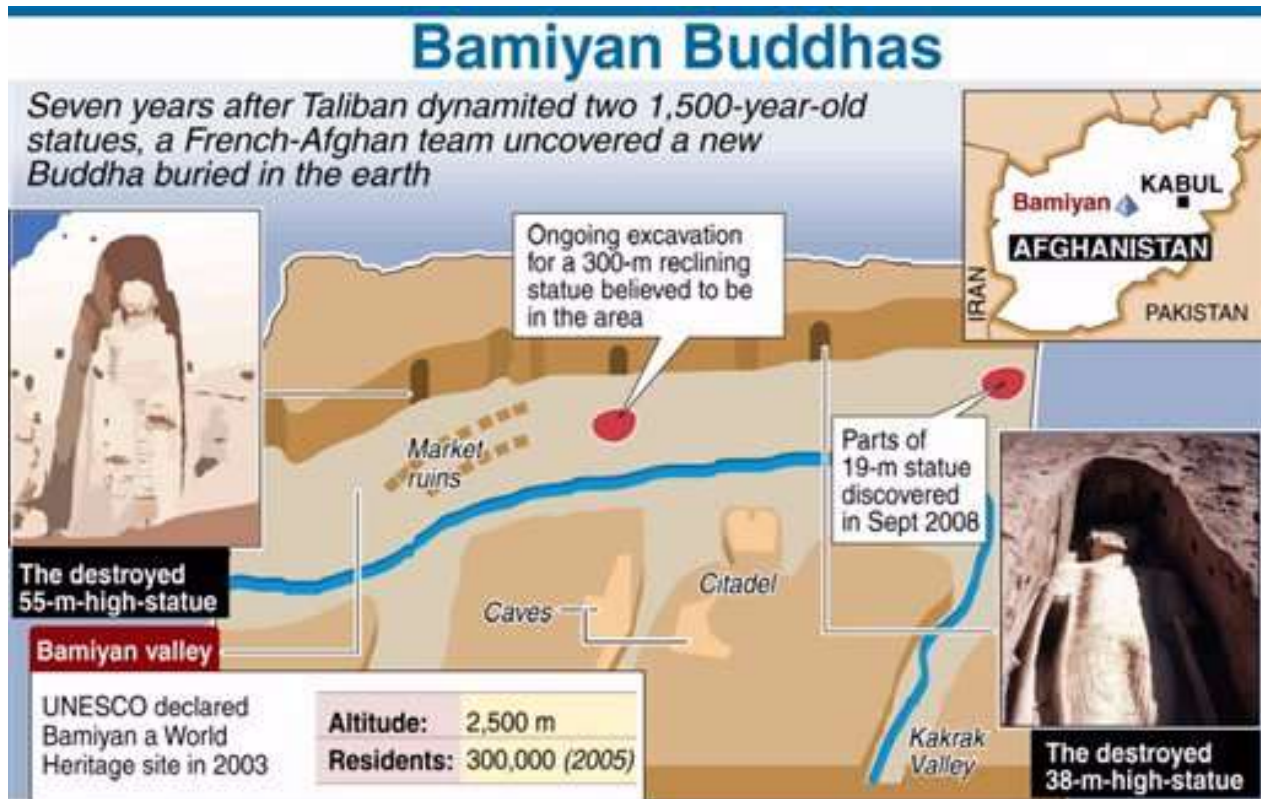
Scholars agree that both images were covered in pigments of various hues so that they appeared to be made of metal and other materials, but that they were not cast entirely of “copper” as Xuanzang suggests of the smaller Buddha image. However, scholars such as Deborah Klimburg-Salter have argued that both of the monumental Buddhas' faces were constructed of masks made of wood clad by a thin layer of brass, which were inserted onto ledges that appeared above the lower lips of both images.

While there is debate over the material and treatment of the Buddha's faces, we know that pigments were applied to the stucco that covered the stone surfaces of the sculptures. Stucco helped to even out the textured rock surface. One can imagine what a powerful impression these monumental Buddhas would have made on passersby and worshippers.

## Destruction

Mullah Omar ordered Taliban forces to demolish the Bamiyan Buddhas in 2001. The destruction was complete. Only outlines of the figures and a few details remain. The direction to destroy the Buddha images was motivated, in part, by the Taliban's extreme iconoclastic campaign as well as their disdain for western interest and funding that had gone to protecting the images while there was an intense and growing need for humanitarian aid in the region. The Taliban's claim that destroying the Buddha sculptures was an Islamic act is belied by the fact that Bamiyan had become predominantly Muslim by the 10th century and that the sculptures had up until 2001 remained a largely intact.

The destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas was a huge loss for our understanding of human history. However, even in darkness light has a way of emerging. Since their destruction several new discoveries have been made near the sites of the Bamiyan Buddhas including the discovery of fragments of a 62-foot long reclining Buddha.



# Longmen Grottoes

The grottoes and niches of Longmen contain the largest and most impressive collection of Chinese art of the late Northern Wei and Tang Dynasties (316-907). These works, entirely devoted to the Buddhist religion, represent the high point of Chinese stone carving.

The Longmen Grottoes, located on both sides of the Yi River to the south of the ancient capital of Luoyang, Henan province, comprise more than 2,300 caves and niches carved into the steep limestone cliffs over a 1km long stretch. These contain almost 110,000 Buddhist stone statues, more than 60 stupas and 2,800 inscriptions carved on steles. Luoyang was the capital during the late Northern Wei Dynasty and early Tang Dynasty, and the most intensive period of carving dates from the end of the 5th century to the mid-8th century.

## Imperial Patronage

Worship and power struggles, enlightenment and suicide—the 2300 caves and niches filled with Buddhist art at Longmen in China has witnessed it all. The steep limestone cliffs extend for almost a mile and contain approximately 110,000 Buddhist stone statues, 60 stupas (hemispherical structures containing Buddhist relics) and 2,800 inscriptions carved on steles (vertical stone markers).



Buddhism, born in India, was transmitted to China intermittently and haphazardly. Starting as early as the 1st century C.E., Buddhism brought to China new images, texts, ideas about life and death, and new opportunities to assert authority. The Longmen cave-temple complex is an excellent site for understanding how rulers wielded this foreign religion to affirm assimilation and superiority.

## Northern Wei Dynasty

Most of the carvings at the Longmen site date between the end of the 5th century and the middle of the 8th century—the periods of the Northern Wei (486–534 C.E.) through early Tang dynasties (618–907 C.E.). The Northern Wei was the most enduring and powerful of the northern Chinese dynasties that ruled before the reunification of China under the Sui and Tang dynasties.

The Wei dynasty was founded by Tuoba tribesmen (nomads from the frontiers of northern China) who were considered to be barbaric foreigners by the Han Chinese. Northern Wei Emperor Xiao Wen decided to move the capital south to Luoyang in 494 C.E., a region considered the cradle of Chinese civilization. Many of the Tuoba elite opposed the move and disapproved of Xiao Wen's eager adoption of Chinese culture. Even his own son disapproved and was forced to end his own life. At first, Emperor Xiao Wen and rich citizens focused on building the city's administrative and court quarters—only later did they shift their energies and wealth into the construction of monasteries and temples. With all the efforts expended on the city, the court barely managed to complete one cave temple at Longmen—the Central Binyang Cave.

### **Central Binyang Cave**

The Central Binyang Cave was one of three caves started in 508 C.E. It was commissioned by Emperor Xuan Wu in memory of his father. The other two caves, known as Northern and Southern Binyang, were never completed.

Imagine being surrounded by a myriad of carvings painted in brilliant blue, red, ochre and gold (most of the paint is now gone). Across from the entry is the most significant devotional grouping—a pentad. The central Buddha, seated on a lion throne, is generally identified as Shakyamuni (the historical Buddha), although some scholars identify him as Maitreya (the Buddha of the future) based on the "giving" mudra—a hand gesture associated with Maitreya. He is assisted by two bodhisattvas and two disciples—Ananda and Kasyapa (bodhisattvas are enlightened beings who have put off entering paradise in order to help others attain enlightenment).

The Buddha's monastic robe is rendered to appear as though tucked under him. Ripples of folds cascade over the front of his throne.

These linear and abstract motifs are typical of the mature Northern Wei style. The flattened, elongated bodies of the Longmen bodhisattvas are hidden under elaborately pleated and flaring skirts. The bodhisattvas wear draping scarves, jewelry and crowns with floral designs. Their gentle, smiling faces are rectangular and elongated.



Low relief carving covers the lateral walls, ceiling, and floor. Finely chiseled haloes back the images. The halo of the main Buddha extends up to merge with a lotus carving in the middle of the ceiling, where celestial deities appear to flutter down from the heavens with their scarves trailing. In contrast to the Northern Wei style seen on the pentad, the sinuous and dynamic surface decoration displays Chinese style. The Northern Wei craftsmen were able to marry two different aesthetics in one



cave temple.

Two relief carvings of imperial processions once flanked the doorway of the cave entrance. These reliefs most likely commemorate historic events. According to records, the Empress

Dowager visited the caves in 517 C.E., while the Emperor was present for consecration of the Central Binyang in 523 C.E.

These reliefs are the most tangible evidence that the Northern Wei craftsmen masterfully adopted the Chinese aesthetic. The style of the reliefs may be inspired by secular painting, since the figures all appear very gracious and solemn. They are clad in Chinese court robes and look genuinely Chinese.



### **Tang Dynasty**

The Tang dynasty (618–907 C.E.) is considered the age of "international Buddhism." Many Chinese, Indian, Central Asian and East Asian monks traveled throughout Asia. The centers of Buddhism in China were invigorated by these travels, and important developments in Buddhist thought and practice originated in China at this time. Fengxian Temple This imposing group of nine monumental images carved into the hard, gray limestone of Fengxian Temple at Longmen is a spectacular display of innovative style and iconography. Sponsored

by the Emperor Gaozong and his wife, the future Empress Wu, the high relief sculptures are widely spaced in a semi-circle.

The central Vairocana Buddha (more than 55 feet high including its pedestal) is flanked on either side by a bodhisattva, a heavenly king, and a thunderbolt holder. Vairocana represents the primordial Buddha who generates and presides over all the Buddhas of the infinite universes that form Buddhist



cosmology. This idea—of the power of one supreme deity over all the others—resonated in the vast Tang Empire which was dominated by the Emperor at its summit and supported by his subordinate officials. These monumental sculptures intentionally mirrored the political situation. The dignity and imposing presence of Buddha and the sumptuous appearance of his attendant bodhisattvas is significant in this context.

The Buddha, monks and bodhisattvas display new softer and rounder modeling and serene facial expressions. In contrast, the heavenly guardians and the vajrapani are more engaging and animated. Notice the realistic musculature of the heavenly guardians and the forceful poses of the vajrapani.

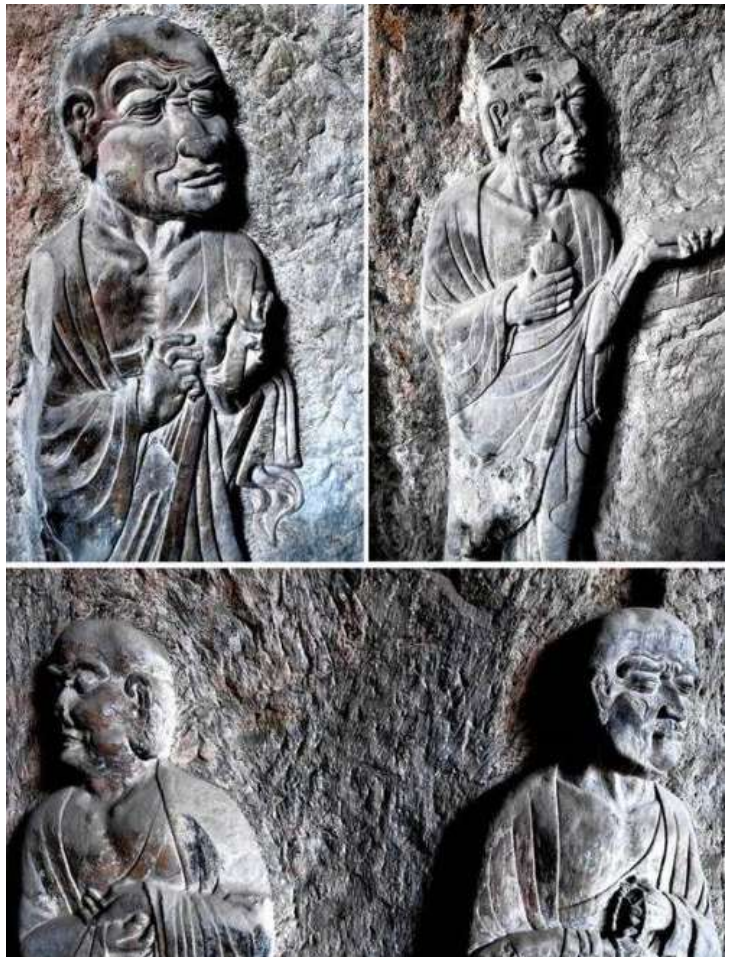


## Kanjing Temple

Tang dynasty realism—whether fleshy or wizened, dignified or light-hearted—is displayed in the Kanjing cave Temple at Longmen. Here we see accurate portrayals of individuals. This temple was created from about 690-704 C.E. under the patronage of Empress Wu.



In the images of arhats (worthy monks who have advanced very far in their quest of Enlightenment), who line the walls, the carver sought to create intense realism. Although they are still mortal, arhats are capable of extraordinary deeds both physical and spiritual (they can move at free will through space, can understand the thoughts in people's minds, and hear the voices of faraway speakers). Twenty-nine monks form a procession around the cave perimeter, linking the subject matter to the rising interest in Chan Buddhism (the Meditation School) fostered at court by the empress herself. These portraits record the lineage of the great patriarchs who transmitted the Buddhist doctrine.





## **Todaiji, Nara, Japan, Nara period, 743, rebuilt c. 1700**

In 720 CE the Japanese capital moved to Nara and the new imperial city, with its grid pattern of wide streets, temples, and palaces, and was laid out along the lines of the Chinese capital of Chang-an (Xi'an). During the Nara period (710-794 CE), Buddhism would become a national religion, and the Japanese aristocracy would increasingly adopt the cultural values of China. During this era Nara was filled with Chinese and Korean monks, scholars, and artists whose teaching, craftsmanship, and styles of dress were taken up by the Nara elite. The institutionalization of Buddhism was a major component in this process of acculturation. As in Korea, Buddhism was adopted in the interest of protecting the welfare state. Hence, a smallpox epidemic in 738 CE prompted the emperor Shomu (701-756) – who later abdicated to become a Buddhist monk – to order the construction of the immense Todaiji temple complex.



Todaiji served as both a state-supported central monastic training center and as the setting for public religious ceremonies. The most spectacular of these took place in 752 and celebrated the consecration of the main Buddhist statue of the temple in a traditional ‘eye-opening’ ceremony, in its newly constructed Great Buddha Hall. The statue, a giant gilt-bronze image of the **Vairochana Buddha (AKA Daibutsu or large Buddha statue)**, was inspired by the Chinese tradition of erecting monumental stone Buddhist statues in cave-temples. The ceremony, which took place in the vast courtyard in front of the Great Buddha Hall, was presided over by an illustrious Indian monk and included sutra chanting by over 10,000 Japanese Buddhist monks and sacred performances by 4,000 court musicians and dancers.

Vast numbers of Japanese courtiers and emissaries from the Asian continent comprised the audience. Numerous ritual objects used in the ceremony came from exotic Asian and Near Eastern lands. The resulting cosmopolitan atmosphere reflected the position Nara then held as the eastern terminus of the Central Asian Silk Road. Some of the objects housed were made in Japan while others came from as far away as China, India, Iran, Greece, Rome, and Egypt. They reflect the vast international trade network that existed at this early date.

Today's gargantuan Vairocana Buddha not only absorbed the energies of thousands of craftsmen but also used up all the copper in Japan, almost bankrupting the state it was designed to protect.



The copper was gilded when gold was discovered in Japan as the statue was being completed. The all-pervasive power of the Vairocana Buddha was given extra national significance when the emperor proclaimed that his ancestor, the great Shinto sun deity Amaterasu, had revealed to him that she and the Buddha were one. On

imperial orders, temples and monasteries were built throughout Japan which would be controlled by Todayji and where sutras (verses) would be copied and further disseminated. So, while Buddhism was at first the preserve of a Nara elite, the centralization of Buddhist power in the capital gradually resulted in its spread.

The Great Buddha Hall (Daibutsuden) is distinguished today as the largest wooden structure in the world. Yet the present Great Buddha Hall, dating to a reconstruction of 1707, is 30 percent smaller than the original, which towered nearly 90 feet in height. Since it was first erected in 752 CE, natural disasters and intentional destruction by foes of the imperial family have necessitated its reconstruction four times. It was first destroyed during civil wars in the twelfth century and rebuilt in 1203, then destroyed in yet another civil war in 1567. Reconstruction did not next occur until the late seventeenth century. By the late nineteenth century its condition had deteriorated so profoundly that restoration finally undertaken between 1906 and 1913 entailed completely dismantling it and putting it back together, this

time utilizing steel (imported from England) and concrete to provide invisible support to the roof, which had nearly collapsed. Architects adopted this nontraditional solution mainly because no trees of sufficiently large dimensions could be found, and no traditional carpenters then living possessed knowledge of ancient construction techniques. Like the building, the Great Buddha (Daibutsu) statue has not survived intact. Its head was completely destroyed in the late sixteenth century and replaced as part of the hall's reconstruction in the late seventeenth century, when its torso and lotus petal throne also required extensive restoration. The present statue, though impressive in scale, appears stiff and rigid. It's more lyrical and original appearance may have approximated engraved images of seated Buddhist deities found on a massive cast-bronze lotus petal from the original statue that has survived in fragmentary form.

After the transfer of the administrative center of government from Kyoto to Kamakura, the rule of the few immensely rich, highly cultivated and pleasure-loving families gave way to a more broadly based feudal regime of Daimyo (Japanese nobility) among whom vigorous, virile simplicity was the order of the day. No artist expressed this more forcibly than the leading sculptor Unkei whose most famous work is the pair of colossal wooden statues of Buddhist guardian figures in the gateway to the Todaiji at Nara, built in 1199 as part of the reconstruction of the monastery after the civil war and following the revival of Buddhism at Nara promoted by the Shogun. With fiercely glaring eyes, tensed muscles and swirling draperies, these guardians are gigantically demonic to the tips of their extended fingers. Despite their huge scale- and also the number of different sculptors or carvers who worked on them under Unkei's direction- they have an almost unique intensity of vigor, as of some explosive volcanic force.



## **Borobudur Temple. Central Java, Indonesia. Sailendra Dynasty. c. 750–842 C.E. Volcanic-stone masonry.**

Borobudur, the largest Buddhist temple in the world, is found in the heart of the island of Java. Built during the Sailendra dynasty, probably between 760 and 810 AD, it is situated in a



plain surrounded by mountains and volcanoes, not far from the shores of the Indian Ocean. The temple is an important document about the kingdoms of Central Java on which there are almost no written documents or other materials to help us reconstruct this historic period.

The stupa, built over a crest of a small hill, is about 408 feet on each side, 105 feet tall, and is decorated with over ten miles of relief sculptures in open-air galleries. The stairways that bisect all four sides of the structure are oriented to the cardinal directions. Borobudur represents **Mount Meru**, the centerpiece of the Buddhist and Hindu universes, and the name of this monument may mean ‘mountain of the Buddhas.’

The base and first five levels, which are rectangular, represent the terrestrial world. Reliefs on the ground level of the stupa illustrate the plight of mankind moving through endless cycles of birth, death, and reincarnation. The walls of the next four tiers show scenes from the life of the Buddha taken from the **jatakas** and the sutras (scriptural accounts of the Buddha). The three round, uppermost levels of the structure



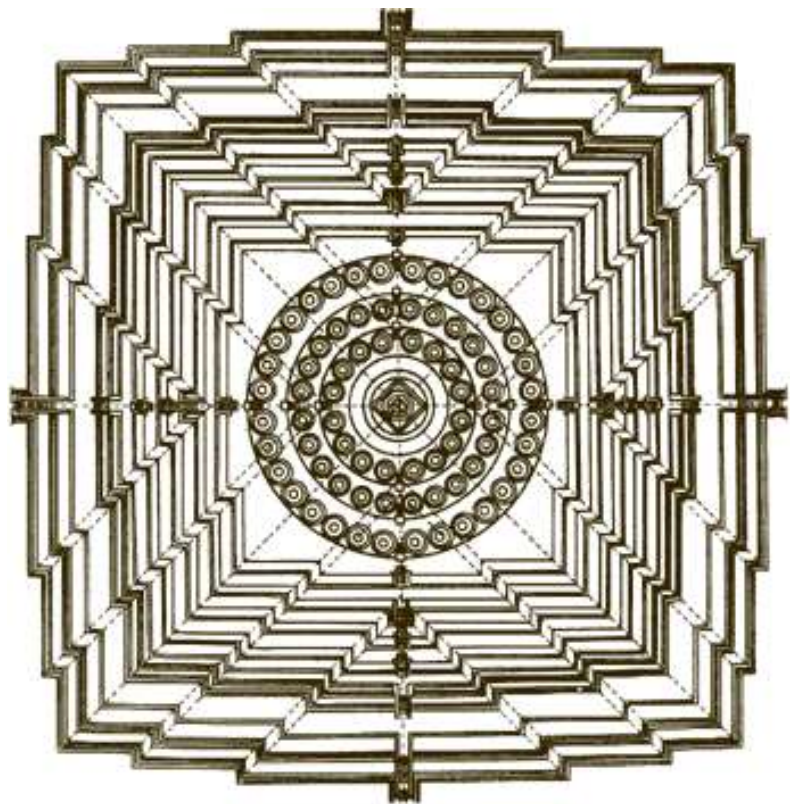
represent the celestial realm and support seventy-two stupas. Each of them originally contained a statue of the preaching Buddha seated in a yoga position, and they surround the largest, uppermost stupa.

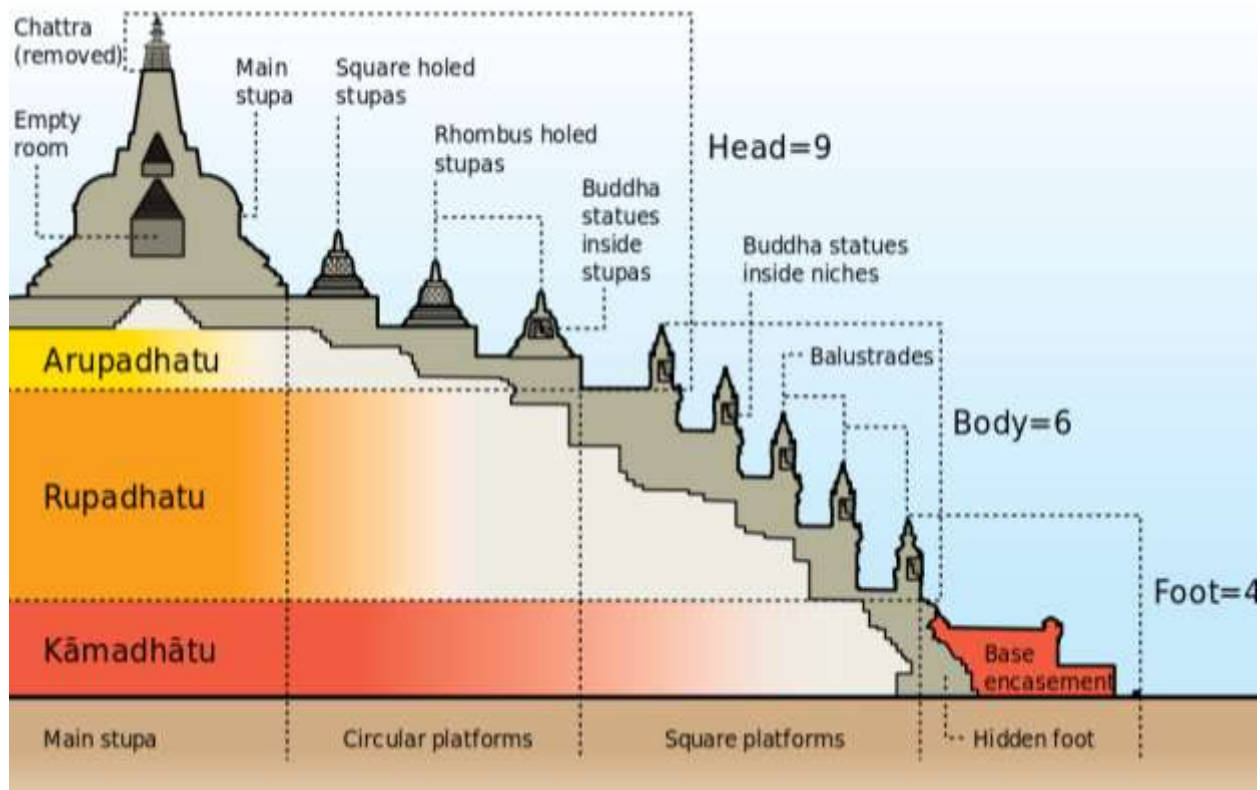
Borobudur is the ultimate diagram of the Buddhist cosmos and existence. Moving around it and ascending to the summit, pilgrims can relive their own previous lives and those of the Buddha, and see things to come in the future. They ascend from the human Sphere of Desire to the Sphere of Form, and finally arrive at the uppermost stupas, the Sphere of Formlessness, which symbolizes the Buddha's ultimate achievement in nirvana. Combined, the symbolism of the architecture and the reliefs to be viewed while encircling it outline a microcosm of all earthly and heavenly existence in a consummate statement of the Mahayana Buddhist philosophy. In the physical act of following the galleries clockwise around the monument, ascending upward from reliefs representing the world of desire,

past the stories of the Buddha who escaped from karma to images of such bodhisattvas as Maitreya, the Buddha of the Future, the devotees follow in the Buddha's footsteps. Unlike the stupa at Sanchi, which provide a single step toward release from karma, Mahayana Buddhism and Borobudur present the ascent as many-leveled, but as capable of being achieved in one lifetime.

Borobudur temple is built to represent many layers of Buddhist theory. From a bird's eye view, the temple is in the shape of a traditional Buddhist mandala. A mandala is central to a great deal of

Buddhist and Hindu art, the basic form of most Hindu and Buddhist mandalas is a square with four entry points, and a circular center point. Working from the exterior to the interior, three zones of consciousness are represented, with the central sphere representing unconsciousness or Nirvana.





## Zone 1 Kamadhātu

The phenomenal world, the world inhabited by common people. This base level of Borobudur has been covered by a supporting foundation, so is hidden from view. During an investigation by JW Yzerman in 1885 the original foot was discovered. Borobudur's hidden Kamadhātu level consists of 160 reliefs depicting scenes of Karmawibhanga Sutra, the law of cause and effect. Illustrating the human behavior of desire, the reliefs depict robbing, killing, rape, torture and defamation.

Evidence suggests that the additional base was added during the original construction of the temple. The reason for adding the base is not 100% certain, but likely to be either for stability of the structure, to prevent the base from moving, or for religious reasons - to cover up the more salacious content. The added base is 3.6m in height and 6.5m wide. A corner of the covering base has been permanently removed to allow visitors to see the hidden foot, and some of the reliefs.

## **Zone 2 Rapadhatu**



The transitional sphere, in which humans are released from worldly matters. The four square levels of Rapadhatu contain galleries of carved stone reliefs, as well as a chain of niches containing statues of Buddha. In total there are 328 Buddhas on these balustraded levels which also have a great deal of ornate reliefs.

## **Zone 3 Arupadhatu**

The highest sphere, the home of the gods. The three circular terraces leading to a central dome or stupa represent the rising above the world, and these terraces are a great deal less ornate, the purity of form is paramount.



The terraces contain circles of perforated stupas, an inverted bell shape, containing sculptures of Buddha, who face outward from the temple. There are 72 of these stupas in total. The impressive central stupa is currently not as high as the original version, which rose 42m above ground level, the base is 9.9m in diameter. Unlike the stupas surrounding it, the central stupa is empty and conflicting reports suggest that the central void contained relics, and other reports suggest it has always been empty.





## **Ryoan-ji, Stone and gravel garden at the temple of Ryoan-ji (Kyoto) c. 1480**

Toward the end of the twelfth century the political and cultural dominance of the emperor and his court gave way to rule by warriors, or samurai, under the leadership of the shogun, the general-in-chief. In 1392 the Ashikaga family gained control of the shogunate and moved their headquarters to the Muromachi district in Kyoto. They reunited northern and southern Japan and retained their grasp on the office for more than 150 years. The Muromachi Period after the reunion (1392-1568) is also known as the Ashikaga era. The Muromachi period is especially marked by the ascendance of Zen Buddhism, whose austere ideals particularly appealed to the highly disciplined samurai. Zen, patronized by the samurai, became the dominant cultural force in Japan.

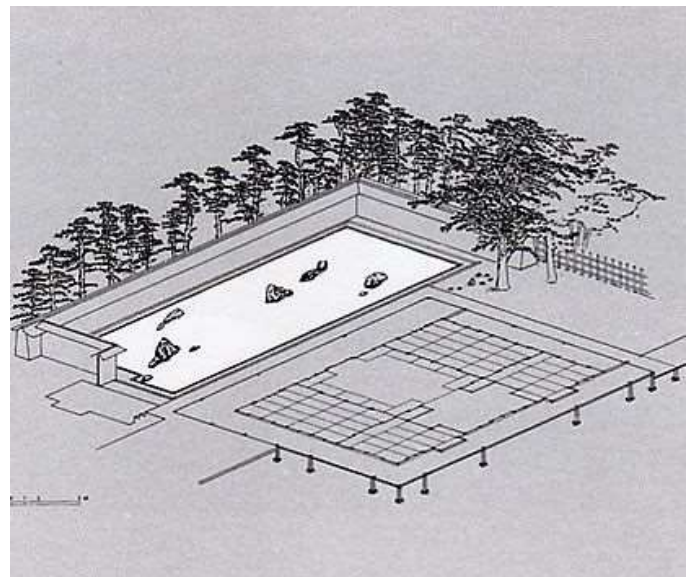
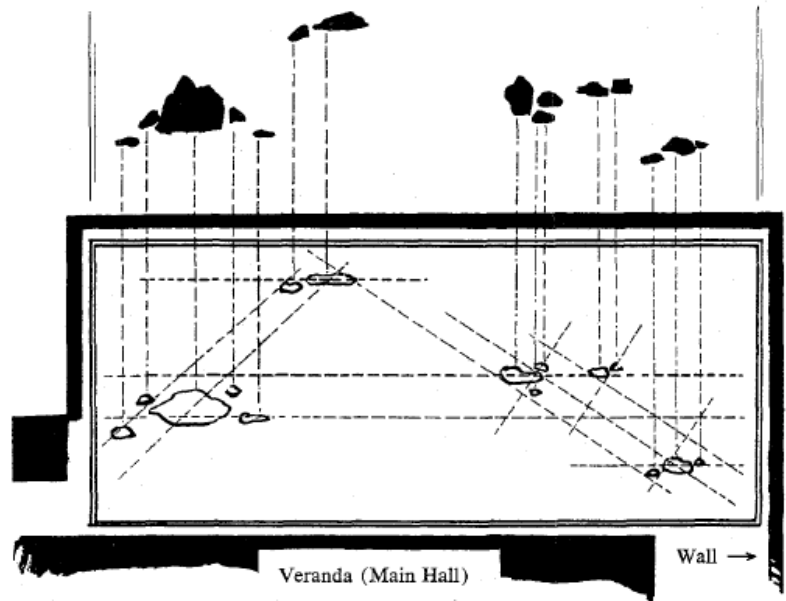
One of the most renowned Zen creations in Japan is the 'dry garden' at the temple of Ryoan-ji in Kyoto. Dry gardens began to be built in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Japan. It is a simple rock garden, consisting of nothing but white gravel/sand and 15 rocks, laid out just after the Onin Wars in the late 15th century. Put simply, this rock garden is acknowledged to be one of the absolute masterpieces of Japanese culture. That is a description, but to understand its effect, and its purity, you have to go there. The design generates tension, drawing the viewer to contemplate the mystery of Zen. It can't be photographed in entirety, the dimensions could drive



any photographer to distraction, but that's the beauty of it. All you can do is just put the camera away, sit down and contemplate it. Especially when you realize that no matter where you sit, you will only see 14 of the rocks at any one time.

By the sixteenth century, Chinese landscape painting influenced the gardens' composition, and miniature clipped plants and beautiful stones were arranged to resemble famous paintings. Especially fine and unusual stones were coveted and even carried off as war booty, such was the cultural value of these seemingly mundane objects.

There is a record of a famous cherry tree at this spot, so the completely stark nature of the garden may have come about some time after its original founding in the late fifteenth century. Nevertheless, today the garden is celebrated for its serene sense of space and emptiness. A flat rectangle of raked gravel, about 29 by 70 feet, surrounds 15 stones of different sizes in islands of moss. The stones are set in asymmetrical groups of two, three, and five. Low, plaster-covered walls establish the garden's boundaries, but beyond the perimeter wall maple, pine, and cherry trees add color and texture to the scene. Called 'borrowed scenery,' these elements are a considered part of the design even though they grow outside the garden. Temple terraces border the garden on the north and east sides, while clay-and-tile walls define the south and west.



Only a part of the larger grounds of Ryoan-ji, the garden has provoked so much interest and curiosity that there have been numerous attempts to ‘explain’ it. Some people see the rocks as land and the gravel as sea. Others imagine animal forms in certain of the rock groupings. Over the centuries visitors have discerned images as diverse as a tigress escorting her cubs across water and the Chinese character for "heart" or "mind." In 2002, a research team at Kyoto University claimed to have cracked the Zen code. Relying on computer models, they found that the garden's rocks—when viewed from the proper angle— subconsciously evoke the tranquil outline of a branching tree. Since the anonymous designer left no explanation, the garden's exact meaning remains a mystery, which no doubt contributes to its enduring allure. Most visitors to the garden will agree that it seems to have a mysterious and almost hypnotic effect upon those who first sit upon the abbot's veranda and contemplate what might be called the complex simplicity of its design. One need not interpret the work in order to experience the remarkable serenity it seems to generate.

However, perhaps it is best to see the rocks and gravel as...rocks and gravel. The asymmetrical balance in the placement of the rocks and the austere beauty of the raked gravel have led many people to meditation. The American composer John Cage once exclaimed that every stone at Ryoan-ji was in just the right place. He then said, ‘and every other place would also be just right.’ His remark is thoroughly Zen in spirit.

There are many ways to experience Ryoan-ji. For example, we can imagine the rocks as having different visual ‘pulls’ that relate them to one another. Yet there is also enough space between them to give each one a sense of self-sufficiency and permanence. The design, as



we see it today, probably dates from the mid-seventeenth century, at which point such stone and gravel gardens had become highly intellectualized, abstract reflections of nature.

Zen monks led austere lives in their quest for the attainment of enlightenment. In addition to daily meditation, they engaged in manual labor to provide for themselves and maintain their temple properties. Many Zen temples constructed dry landscape courtyard gardens, not for strolling but for contemplative viewing. Cleaning and maintaining these gardens- pulling weeds, tweaking unruly shoots, and raking the gravel – was a kind of active meditation. It helped to keep their minds grounded. The dry landscape gardens of Japan, karesansui (‘dried-up mountains and water’), exist in perfect harmony with Zen Buddhism.

Zen Buddhism provided a strenuous, practical discipline to fortify the individual’s struggle for self-knowledge and against self-ness. Frugal simplicity of life and indifference to both sensual pleasure and physical pain were extolled. Book learning, rational argument and philosophy were dismissed as valueless. Zen masters taught by baffling the disciple’s mind with paradoxes of inconsequential discourse –the koans or problems- until it broke through to direct vision of ‘things as they are,’ the ultimate reality.

The garden does not ask to be understood, nor does it symbolize anything: that would defeat its true purpose, which is that of helping the mind reach the state of ‘no-mind’ or ‘no-thought,’ the gateway to an intuitive grasp of higher truth. But these are special gardens for a special purpose and for the less pious, with human failings, the sight of water and greenery and the feel of the earth underfoot provide a softer route to the appreciation of Zen.

