

How Buddhism came to China

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Buddha statues stand in Zhou Park, China. Buddhism has shaped Chinese culture for centuries. Photo from Pixabay.

A religion is a group of beliefs and teachings. Buddhism is one of the world's great religions. It is based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama. He was known as the Buddha, or “the Enlightened One.” He lived in India around 2,500 years ago. Today, India is a large country in South Asia.

For 200 years, Buddhism only existed in India. It took some time for people to follow Buddhism in China. First it came through Central Asia. Later, it spread through Southeast Asia. About 1,900 years ago, India and China began trading. This brought Indian people and ideas into China.

Many years later, Buddhist teachings were written in Chinese. This way, people in China could read them too. Buddhism became the most important religion in China for a long time.

The early centuries

While Buddhism was spreading, China was ruled by the Han family. The country became very rich and strong.

At first, Buddhism took a Chinese form. It became very close to Taoism. Taoism is another Chinese religion. It was founded by a man named Laozi. Many Chinese believed Laozi was reborn in India as the Buddha.

After the Han period, Chinese Buddhism became less Taoist. It drew closer to Indian Buddhism. Many Indian texts were written in Chinese. New Buddhist temples were built.

Developments during the Tang dynasty

The Tang were a family who ruled China after the Han. This was a happy age for Buddhism in China. During this period, many Chinese scholars traveled to India. They brought back Buddhist texts. New temples were built everywhere. New Chinese forms of Buddhism were taught.

Buddhism was never completely accepted, though. Some disliked it because it came from outside of China.

At one point, the ruler of China turned against Buddhism. His name was Wuzong. He tried to get rid of Buddhism completely. Thousands of Buddhist temples were destroyed.

Buddhism after the Tang

After Wuzong, Buddhism in China was never as strong as before. It still remained important, though.

There were different kinds of Chinese Buddhism. The most popular ones were Chan and Pure Land.

Chan Buddhism is also known as Zen. Chan Buddhists became famous about 1,000 years ago. At that time, China was ruled by the Song family. Chan Buddhists were known for their paintings. Their art showed Buddhist ideas. Pure Land Buddhism was more popular with ordinary people.

In 1949, China's government changed. The new government did not like religion. It thought that religion never teaches the truth about the world. Buddhism was no longer allowed. Many temples were destroyed.

After 1976, the Chinese government changed its mind. It allowed people to follow the religion they wanted. Buddhism soon started to come back again.

Quiz

- 1 Read the paragraph from the introduction [paragraphs 1-3].

A religion is a group of beliefs and teachings. Buddhism is one of the world's great religions. It is based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama. He was known as the Buddha, or "the Enlightened One." He lived in India around 2,500 years ago. Today, India is a large country in South Asia.

Which sentence from this paragraph explains what the word Buddha means?

- (A) Buddhism is one of the world's great religions.
 - (B) It is based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama.
 - (C) He was known as the Buddha, or "the Enlightened One."
 - (D) He lived in India around 2,500 years ago.
- 2 Read the section "Buddhism after the Tang."
- Select the paragraph that explains differences between the popular types of Buddhism.
- 3 What event happened first in the article?
- (A) New forms of Chinese Buddhism were taught to people.
 - (B) Buddhist temples in China were destroyed.
 - (C) Buddhism texts were written in Chinese.
 - (D) Buddhist art became well known.
- 4 Why was it important that Chinese scholars went to India?
- (A) It helped them make Buddhism stronger when they returned to China.
 - (B) It helped them learn how to read important Buddhist texts.
 - (C) It helped them learn how to practice Chan Buddhism.
 - (D) It helped them draw closer to Indian Buddhism.