

# BONGUENSA



Photos by Charles Junkerman

***Bongeunsa Temple*** was founded in 794 about a kilometer from its present location on the slope of Sudo mountain in Samsung-dong at the southern edge of metropolitan Seoul.

Buddhism was introduced into Korea in the 4th century, 'blended' with the indigenous Shamanism and nature worship, evolved with Chinese and Indian influences, and flourished until the establishment of the *Chosun* Dynasty in 1392. During the five century *Chosun* hegemony over the Korean peninsula, Confucianism became the sole state religion and Buddhism was suppressed but continued to evolve.

Bongeunsa was reconstructed in 1498. From 1551 through 1936 (when it was largely destroyed by fire) it was the main temple of the Korean *Seon* (Zen) sect of Buddhism. The temple suffered more destruction during the Korean War.

The Korean Peninsula was Japan's land bridge to continental Asia and Korean culture has had a deep and lasting influence on Japanese culture. This is most remarkable in the fields of architecture, ceramics, painting, statuary. . .and stonework.

Buddhism was transformed as it traveled from India through China to Korea and then to the Japanese archipelago (later Japanese Buddhists established direct connections with China).

*"The oldest Japanese Buddhist temple, Asuka-dera, constructed by craftsmen from the ancient Korean kingdom of Baekje in 588, was modeled upon the layout and architecture of Baekje."* \*

Thus it should not surprise us that the stonework in these photos expresses the character and skill that we have come to associate with Japanese stonework. Whole villages of stonemasons (and other artisans, notably potters) settled in (or were relocated to) Japan—the *Anoh-shu* people, for instance, brought their stone-working skills from Korea, settled near Kyoto, and their descendants were involved in the building of Azuchi-jo\*\* (*jo*-castle) which was to serve as the prototype for castles subsequently built during Japan's medieval period. □

T L

\*Kakichi Suzuki. *Early Buddhist Architecture in Japan*. Kodansha International (1980)

\*\* (see Stonexus #XI, pp 52-55)



