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East Asian Architecture and Urbanization Lesson, December 2020

Title of Lesson Plan: The Practical, the Spiritual, and the Environmental: East Asian Architecture for survival, for transcendence, and for the future

Grade Level: 7th or 9th grade World History

Length of Project: 3 separate days (could be done together or separately)

Essential questions?

- What geographic and climatic issues impact how people design their dwellings?
- How do cultures use the materials around them to create their built environment?
- How does religion and spirituality influence our built communities
- What modern issues force societies in South East Asia to transform their built communities?
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Lesson Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Defend their own position on the issue in question by writing a claim and then supporting that claim with evidence and analysis.
- Students will consider the importance of “humanizing” those who otherwise seem distant and different from us.
- Students will recognize the power of taking a “small step” when faced with a problem that seems too large to tackle.

Students will also apply skills from the Global Competence Matrix and will:

- Investigate the world beyond their immediate environment by identifying an issue, generating a question, and explaining its significance locally, regionally, and globally.
- Recognize their own and others’ perspectives by understanding the influences that impact those perspectives.
- Communicate their ideas effectively with diverse audiences by realizing how their ideas and delivery can be perceived.
- Translate their ideas and findings into appropriate actions to improve conditions and to create opportunities for personal and collaborative action.

Materials:

- PowerPoint to an introductory mini-lecture introduction
- Articles for introduction to the issue (addressed in Text section)
- Videos of the yurts, zen gardens, and green living:
- Access to Jstor, Proquest, Gale, and other on-line and hard copy research materials for the paper
- Materials to design their own Zen garden

Procedures:

Lesson 1 (DAY 1):

Part I: The Practical: Built dwellings of the Nomadic Mongolians (The Mongolian Ger)

- Introduction to Mongolia geographically and culturally

The Eastern Mongolian Steppes are home to the largest remaining intact temperate grasslands of the Earth. The ecosystem of Eastern Mongolian Steppes is characterized by treeless flat steppes, gently rolling hills, wetlands, and interlinkages with the Khayangan Mountain Range all the way to the border with the People's Republic of China. The proposed serial property has five components with a total surface area of some 2 million ha, outstanding components representing the vast ecosystem.

- Have students watch [BBC: The Nomadic Life in Mongolia](#) and answer the following questions as a warm-up activity. This could be done on Padlet or Jamboard.
 - Looking at the map below, what do you notice about the location of Mongolia in Asia?



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- From the video, how does the narrator explain nomadism?
- What are the difficulties these Kazakh nomads face every year?

Part II: Gers and Nature

- Watch video on [The Mongolian Ger](#) and answer the following questions:
 - Why do they build the Gers in a round shape? What benefits can you see from this structure?
 - Where else have you seen the use of a round structure in our earlier units?

- How do the modern Mongolians use the natural environment to build their homes?
- Where do you see modern conveniences coming into the home?
- What types of traditions do the Mongolians have behaviorally in the home that your family might share? Give two examples.
- Tie the building of the Ger to the importance of the Mongolian nomadic lifestyle. How do you see this building structure meet the demands of a nomadic lifestyle?
- From your history memory, connect this building style to another nomadic culture. Explain the similarities and differences in building styles, materials, and traditions.

Part III: Nomads and the Digital Future

- Have students read the following article: [What Mongolian Nomads Teach Us About the Digital Future](#)
 - “They get a signal from the air, energy from the sun, and a motorcycle from China. And they can still pack up and move everything in an hour.” Evaluate this idea in context to how you live. What would you be willing to give up to move on?
 - What does the author say about a “nomadix” future?

Lesson 2: Day 2

Part I: The Spiritual: Zen Gardens in Japan

- Introduction to Buddhism and the Spiritual in Japan (read article [The Philosophy of Zen Buddhism](#))
- Have students watch video on [Zen Buddhism in Japan](#) and answer the following questions:
 - What does Zen Buddhism emphasize?
 - What is a Koan? And why is it important for the monks to focus on them?
 - What is the purpose of the “monk strike”?
 - How is Zen Buddhism different from Shintoism?
- Study the map of Japan: How does its location influence its ability to isolate and connect with the rest of Asia?



Part II: The Importance of Nature in Buddhism

- Our goal is to connect Buddhism to the natural environment and the creation of Zen Gardens. Have your students read [The Importance of Nature in Buddhism](#) and talk about how about the importance of nature in Buddhism.
- How does our understanding of the natural world relate to the views of Buddhist philosophy?

Part III: The Zen Garden, Transcendent Architecture

- Read the article, [The Zen Garden](#)
- Our goal for the final part of the lesson is to create a small Zen garden.
- Teachers can watch this video [How to build a Zen garden on a budget](#)
- Materials: small frame, beach sand, candle?, polished stones, zen rake or fork, small Buddhas
- After students have made their Zen Gardens, ask them what they chose and why.
- Finally, have students do a short paragraph writing on the relationship between Buddhism and nature and the goals of the creation of Zen Gardens.

Lesson 3: Day #3:

Part I: The City in the Climate Change Future

Introduction to the problem of climate change and the built environment.

- The problems: watch video [Sea Level Rise and coastlines](#) and answer the following questions:
 - What is causing the rising sea levels?
 - In Los Angeles, how might this impact where you live?
 - What are scientists doing to solve this problem?
- Have students look at the following website to [Problems Climate Change is Causing \(NASA\)](#) and have them investigate one of the issues on the site and report the major problems. Have them connect this information to where they live. What might change in their natural environment because of this issue?

Part II: The Solutions in the World and East Asia, What architects and city planners are doing right now

- Watch video: [7 principles for building better cities | Peter Calthorpe](#)
 - What are the problems that are causing climate change?
 - What is the villain of sprawl?
 - How do we keep people from being isolated in cities in the future?
 - How can we create “streetcar suburbs”?
 - What are the different interest groups that are fighting for land use in a city?
- Watch video: [Should Cities be built with wood in the future?](#)
 - What are the benefits of building with wood? What are the disadvantages?
 - Connect the use of wood with another community that almost exclusively built with wood in the past?
 - What is wrong with using steel and cement in buildings?
 - How can we tie the ideas from this video back to our study of Zen Buddhism, Zen Gardens, and the Nomads of Mongolia? Write a paragraph to explain the importance of nature in these three models.

Part III: Designs for the Cities of the Future

- The last part of this lesson will ask your students to “think big, think creative” about their house, neighborhood, or world in the future.
- Have them draw the design for a building or community for the climate change future. Make sure that they address the issues from Part I and Part II into this drawing. Have them think about the following:
 - What materials are you using for your structure? And why did you choose them?

- Where are you building this structure? Why?
- How will your building's inhabitants connect with their environment?
- How will your building meet the needs of its inhabitants?
- What problems do you foresee with your construction?
- Overall, this final piece should connect all parts of this lesson together. Tie the themes together of what do you really need, how can you connect with nature, and how can you meet the challenges of the future.