US Forces Pacific Culture Guide

SOUTH KOREA

U.S. AIR FORCE

About this Guide

This guide is designed to prepare you to deploy to culturally complex environments and achieve mission objectives. The fundamental information contained within will help you understand the cultural dimension of your assigned location and gain skills necessary for success. (Photo: Girl holds prayer candle during Lotus Lantern Festival in Seoul).

The guide consists of 2 parts:

Part 1 is the "Culture General" section, which provides the foundational knowledge you need to operate effectively in any global environment with a focus on East Asia.

Part 2 is the "Culture Specific" section, which describes unique cultural features of South Korean society. It applies culture-general concepts to help increase your knowledge of your assigned deployment location. This section is meant to complement other pre-deployment training. (Photo: Korean dancers honor US forces during a cultural event).

For more information, visit the Air Force Culture and Language Center (AFCLC) website at www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/ or contact the AFCLC Region Team at AFCLC.Region@us.af.mil.

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PART 1 – CULTURE GENERAL

What is Culture?

Fundamental to all aspects of human existence, culture shapes the way humans view life and functions as a tool we use to adapt to our social and physical environments. A culture is the sum of all of the beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning for a society. All human beings have culture, and individuals within a culture share a general set of beliefs and values.

Members of a culture also usually assign the same meanings to the symbols in that culture. A symbol is when one thing—an image, word, object, idea, or story—represents another thing. For example, the American flag is a physical and visual symbol of a core American value—freedom. At the same time, the story of George Washington admitting to having chopped down a cherry tree is also symbolic because it represents the premium Americans place on personal honesty and leadership integrity.

Force Multiplier

The military services have learned through experience the importance of understanding other cultures. Unlike the 20th-century bipolar world order that dominated US strategy for nearly half a century, today the US military is operating in what we classify as asymmetric or irregular conflict zones, where the notion of cross-cultural interactions is on the leading edge of our engagement strategies.

We have come to view the people themselves, rather than the political system or physical environment, as the decisive feature in conflict areas. Our primary objective hinges on influencing constructive change through peaceful means where possible. We achieve this endeavor by encouraging local nationals to focus on developing stable political, social, and economic institutions that reflect their cultural beliefs and traditions.

Therefore, understanding the basic concepts of culture serves as a force multiplier. Achieving an awareness and respect of a society's values and beliefs enables deploying forces to build relationships with people from other cultures, positively influence their actions, and ultimately achieve mission success.

Cultural Domains

Culture is not just represented by the beliefs we carry internally, but also by our behaviors and by the systems members of a culture create to organize their lives. These systems, such as political or educational institutions, help us to live in a manner that is appropriate to our culture and encourages us to perpetuate that culture into the future.

We can organize behaviors and systems into categories—what the Air Force refers to as "cultural domains"—in order to better understand the primary values and characteristics of a society. A cross-culturally competent military member can use these domains—which include kinship, language and communication, and social and political systems, and others (see chart on next page)—as tools for understanding and adapting to any culture. For example, by understanding the way a culture defines family and kinship, a US military member operating overseas can more effectively interact with members of that culture.

Social Behaviors across Cultures

While humankind shares basic behaviors, various groups enact or even group those behaviors differently across cultural boundaries. For example, all societies obtain food for survival, although agrarian societies generally produce their own food for limited consumption using very basic techniques.

Conversely, industrialized nations have more sophisticated market economies, producing foodstuffs for universal consumption. Likewise, all cultures value history and tradition, although they represent these concepts through a variety of unique forms of symbolism. While the dominant world religions share the belief in one God, their worship practices vary with their traditional historical development. Similarly, in many kin-based cultures where familial bonds are foundational to social

identity, it is customary for family or friends to serve as godparents, while for other societies this practice is nearly non-existent.

Worldview

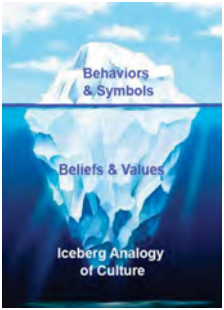
One of our most basic human behaviors is the tendency to classify others as similar or different based on our cultural standards. As depicted in the chart below, we can apply 12 cultural domains to help us compare similarities and differences across cultures. We evaluate others' behavior to determine if they are "people like me" or "people not like me." Usually, we assume that those in the "like me" category share our perspectives and values.

This collective perspective forms our worldview—how we see the world and understand our place in it. Your worldview functions as a lens through which you see and understand the world. It helps you to interpret your experiences and the values and behaviors of other people that you encounter. Consider your worldview as a way of framing behavior, providing an accountability standard for actions, and a logical explanation of why we individually or collectively act in a certain manner.

Cultural Belief System

An important component of any worldview is a belief system. A community's belief system assigns meaning, sets its universal standards of what is good and bad, defines right and wrong behavior, and assigns a value of meaningful or meaningless. Our beliefs form the fundamental values we hold to be true—regardless of whether there is evidence to support those ideas. Beliefs are a central aspect of human culture. They are shared views about world order and how the universe was physically and socially constructed.

While all people have beliefs, their specific components tend to vary depending upon respective world views. What people classify as good or bad, right or wrong depends on our deeply-held beliefs we started developing early in life that have help shape our characters. Likewise, these values are ingrained in our personalities and shape our behavior patterns and our self-identities. Because cultural beliefs are intensely held, they are difficult, though not impossible, to change.



Core Beliefs

Core beliefs shape and influence certain behaviors and also serve to rationalize those behaviors. Therefore, knowledge of individual or group beliefs can be useful in comprehending or making sense of their activities. We will use the iceberg model for classifying culture to illustrate two levels of meaning, as depicted. Beliefs and values, portrayed by the deeper and greater level of the submerged iceberg, are seldom visible, but are indicated / hinted at / referenced by our behaviors and symbols (top level). It is important to recognize, though, that the parts of culture that are not visible (under the waterline) are informing and shaping what is being made visible (above the waterline).

In many cases, different worldviews may present behaviors that are contrary to our own beliefs, particularly in many regions where US forces deploy. Your ability to suspend

judgment in order to understand another perspective is essential to establishing relationships with your host-nation counterparts. The ability to withhold your opinion and strive to understand a culture from a member of that culture's perspective is known as cultural relativism. It often involves taking an alternate perspective when interpreting others' behaviors and is critical to your ability to achieve mission success.

As you travel throughout East Asia, you will encounter cultural patterns of meaning that are common across the region. What follows is a general description of 12 cultural domains which are used to frame those commonalities.

CULTURAL DOMAINS

1. History and Myth

History and myth are related concepts. History is a record of the past that is based on verifiable facts and events. Myth can act as a type of historical record, although it is usually a story which members of a culture use to explain community origins or important events that are not verifiable or which occurred prior to written language.

East Asia includes the present-day countries of China, Japan, Mongolia, North Korea, and South Korea. By the 700s AD, ancient East Asian tribes and peoples had consolidated into unified Chinese, Japanese, and Korean states; Mongolia formed a state in the 13th century.

China has played a central role in East Asian history, influencing the region's culture, philosophy, and politics. Between the 8th and 11th centuries, the people of Japan and Korea adopted several aspects of Chinese culture, including clothing and architecture (Photo: The Great Wall of China).

Despite its predominance, China remained vulnerable to nomadic Mongol tribes living along its northern border. In the

12th and 13th centuries, Mongol forces under the command of Genghis Khan swept through Asia and parts of Europe, conquering China and Korea. Though vast and diverse, the Mongol Empire was ultimately short-lived.

Over the next 500 years, East Asian societies advanced along differing paths. Japan developed largely in isolation, while Korea – a Chinese tributary state – had some limited outside connections. After the Mongol Empire's demise in the 14th century, Mongolia came under Chinese control, which lasted until Mongolia aligned with the Soviet Union (USSR) in 1924. China established overland trade routes with Europe in the 200s BC, and by the 1500s AD, Europeans expanded their control in East Asia.

As Japan industrialized in the mid-19th century, it proceeded to colonize Korea, northeastern China, Taiwan, the southern half of Sakhalin Island and Micronesia. This colonial activity led to conflicts with other powers in the region, angering Japanese colonial subjects (Pictured: 1898 political cartoon depicting European and Japanese rulers dividing China over the protests of a Chinese official).

During World War II (WWII), Japan launched a coordinated attack on the US and other powers in the Asia-Pacific region in 1941. This war caused millions of casualties and lasting bitterness across the region. In 1945, Japan surrendered to the Allied Powers.

Following WWII, Cold War politics shaped East Asia's destiny. In China, USSR-backed communists seized control of mainland China, forcing US-backed nationalists to retreat to the island of Taiwan off the Chinese coast. Korea was divided into the US-controlled South and USSR-controlled North as part of a postwar transition. In 1950 North Korea invaded South Korea, sparking the Korean War and permanent separation.

During the second half of the 20th century, Japan and South Korea became wealthy, democratic societies with developed

economies. China liberalized its economy but did not reform politically. Mongolia followed communist economic policies until the 1990s, when it liberalized both politically and economically. North Korea remains communist and isolated.

2. Political and Social Relations

Political relations are the ways in which members of a community organize leadership, power, and authority. Social relations are all of the ways in which individuals are linked to others in their community. Despite the longevity of its societies, East Asia has experienced substantial political change since the mid-1900s.

As a consequence of the Allied occupation of Japan from 1945-1952, Japan aligned with the US, demilitarized, democratized, and retained its emperor as a symbol of national unity. Japan also was able to rebuild its economy after the war. While the same party has ruled for the most part since 1955, Japan today enjoys economic prosperity and political freedom.

Once the USSR helped China establish a communist stronghold, China asserted sovereignty at the expense of several million casualties from political purges and avoidable famines. In 1978 China's government introduced market reforms that lifted millions out of poverty. Nevertheless, the Chinese Communist Party have maintained a tight rein on power, denying the Chinese people their autonomy.

Arriving in 1949, Taiwan's Chinese nationalists established an authoritarian rule that has promoted rapid economic growth. Today Taiwan has a thriving economy and a vibrant, multiparty democracy. Although China claims sovereignty over Taiwan, the island functions as an independent country.

The two Koreas have followed vastly different paths since their division (Photo: South Koreans protest for North Korean freedom near the border between the Koreas). During the 1960s and 1970s, South Korea was ruled by authoritarians who favored economic

growth over political freedom, prompting the country to industrialize rapidly. Having democratized in the late 1980s, South Korea now has an open, democratic political system and one of the world's most developed economies. North Korea, by contrast, remains militaristic, repressive, and economically weak.

Long a communist state, Mongolia transitioned to democracy after a peaceful revolution in 1990. Although the communist Mongolian People's Party continued to win elections in the early 1990s, several new parties have won majorities in the Mongolian Parliament in subsequent elections.

Regional security threats and mutual distrust motivate military posturing in East Asia. Having the largest military in the region, China lays claim to several disputed territories and defends a wide range of commercial interests. A well-equipped force, China's military has advanced technologically in recent years. The Japanese, South Korean, and Taiwanese militaries are substantially smaller than China's but are professional and well-resourced. Technically still at war with South Korea, North Korea has a massive but poorly trained and equipped military of more than a million troops. Mongolia has no international disputes and only a small military. While nationalism and historical animosity threaten East Asian security, most countries in the region trade or engage diplomatically. All East Asian countries apart from North Korea have US embassies.

Japan and the Koreas are societies made up of an overwhelming ethnic majority. Similarly, 94% of Mongolians are ethnic Mongols, while Turkic people constitute the rest of the population. Although 91% of China's population belongs to the Han ethnic group, the Chinese government also recognizes 55 other ethnic groups. No countries in East Asia have substantial foreign-born or immigrant populations.

Many differences exist among social groups within East Asian countries. Wealth, age, educational attainment, employment,

family background, and marital status factor into a person's social status. In most East Asian countries, city dwellers tend to regard their rural counterparts as backward, less cultured, and less educated. While some generational differences exist, most East Asians consider social and familial harmony paramount. Thus, young people tend to respect elders' wishes.

3. Religion and Spirituality

Religion is a cultural belief system that provides meaning to members of a community. Religious and spiritual beliefs help preserve the social order by defining proper behavior. They also create social unity by defining shared identity, offer individuals peace of mind, and explain the causes of events in a society.

Early East Asians were animists, believing that gods or ancestral spirits inhabited various natural objects and expressed their will in daily life. Today East Asians of many different faiths still follow certain ancient religious practices such as making offerings to ancestral spirits. Japan's indigenous animist religion, Shintoism, stresses the spiritual connection between Japan's land and its people (Photo: Famous Itsukushima Torii gate on Miyajima Island). Similarly, beliefs about shamans and their connection to a spiritual realm persist among some Chinese, Mongolians, and Koreans.

Multiple belief systems historically have coexisted peacefully in East Asia, many of which originated in China and are not linked to specific gods. East Asians typically observe practices from several belief systems simultaneously. In the 6th and 5th centuries BC, Chinese philosophers Confucius and Laozi developed Confucianism and Daoism, respectively. As these philosophies spread, they shaped regional ideas about social harmony. Whereas Confucianism describes how various types of social relationships should function ideally, Daoism emphasizes balance, simplicity, compliance with the natural order, and reverence for ancestors and Laozi.

Around 150 AD, Buddhism spread from the Indian subcontinent into China, eventually reaching other parts of Asia. East Asian

Buddhism has many variations because its adherents have adapted the faith to their cultures, philosophies, and traditions. Many East Asians practice some form of Buddhism today.

While Islam and Christianity have been present in East Asia for centuries, their influence has been limited to certain places. Arriving in China in the 7th century AD, Islam has a long history in western China and Mongolia and has undergone a modest expansion in recent years. Christianity also was introduced to East Asia in the 7th century AD and eventually gained converts among some Mongol tribes. Beginning in the 1500s, European missionaries expanded Christianity's reach. Today most East Asian Christians live in South Korea, where roughly 30% of the population is Christian.

During the 20th century, communist East Asian governments often curtailed religious practice in favor of atheism. China is still officially atheist, and the Communist Party of China forbids party members from following any religion. The North Korean government takes a different approach by promoting ***Juche***, a state-sponsored faith that combines aspects of Eastern and Western belief systems with reverence for Kim Il-sung, the first North Korean President, and his family. Despite these recent examples of religious suppression, East Asians have tended to resume open religious practice as the government permits. For example, Buddhism has thrived in Mongolia since the country abandoned communism in 1990.

4. Family and Kinship

The domain of family and kinship refers to groups of people related through blood ties, marriage, or through strong emotional bonds that influence them to treat each other like family members (often called "fictive kin").

Most East Asians highly value family relationships. Individuals are expected to subordinate their desires to those of their families as a means of promoting harmony and the best interests of the family as a whole (Photo: A Japanese family in 1928). Children are taught

to respect and obey their elders from a young age. In return, parents devote themselves to their children and make many sacrifices for their wellbeing. These sacrifices enable children's success, preserve the family legacy, and ensure that parents will have a caretaker in old age.

Traditionally, East Asian families have been large, close-knit, multi-generational kin groups whose members support each other. Members of the same extended family traditionally have lived in close proximity, an arrangement that provided many benefits in the rural, agricultural villages that once were widespread in East Asia. Although family life still revolves around farming or herding in some rural areas, family life has changed as East Asia has industrialized and urbanized. While caring for elderly relatives is still common, some modern East Asian households, especially in urban areas, consist of nuclear families (2 parents and their offspring) that live far from their ancestral homes.

East Asian dwellings vary widely. In large urban areas like Beijing, Seoul, Tokyo, Ulaanbaatar, and Shanghai, people typically live in either older homes or modern, high-rise apartment buildings. By contrast, rural East Asians typically live with their extended families in freestanding houses. China and Mongolia have especially extensive rural hinterlands. A number of Mongolians continue to live seasonally as nomadic herders in collapsible huts (pictured).

Marriage is a key milestone for East Asians, who typically date and select their own spouses with the advice and approval of elders. Since many young East Asians today delay marriage to pursue educational or career opportunities, the average marriage age has increased. Nevertheless, the traditional expectation that young East Asians will marry, bear children, and care for their elderly parents remains deep-seated.

East Asians commemorate major life stages through a range of ceremonies and celebrations. The birth of a healthy child, for example, is a joyous occasion that prompts parties, gift-giving,

and welcoming and naming ceremonies. Conversely, funerals and other death customs are more somber and demonstrate respect for the deceased.

5. Sex and Gender

Sex refers to the biological and reproductive differences between males and females. Gender is a more flexible concept that refers to a culture's categorizing of masculine and feminine behaviors, symbols, and social roles.

While most East Asian countries provide for legal gender equality, women are subordinate to men in practice. Moreover, cultural norms tend to entrench traditional roles, whereby women remain underrepresented in both business and government. Many of East Asia's predominant philosophies and religions, such as Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, establish men as family providers and direct women to behave subserviently. Nevertheless, East Asian women still make important contributions to society, having enjoyed expanding rights over the past 50 years.

In states under communist influence, women have been allowed to work outside the home, although also expected to continue performing domestic duties. By contrast, women in Japan and South Korea gained social rights more gradually. Today, most East Asian women, particularly in urban areas, have access to training and education equal to that of their male peers.

While women typically receive less pay than men and rarely reach senior levels of leadership, East Asians generally accept women in the workplace. Many women balance career and family responsibilities, although they are more likely than men to leave the workforce to care for children or elderly relatives.

Due to family planning policies and increased use of contraceptives, among other factors, East Asian countries have low birthrates. Of note, China's birthrates have declined more than 40% since the government introduced a One-Child Policy in 1979. Due to an enduring cultural preference for sons, the

policy has driven many Chinese couples to abort female fetuses or give up their daughters for adoption in hopes that their lone child will be a son. These practices have skewed China's gender ratio.

East Asians historically have not regarded homosexuality as an acceptable practice. Consequently, homosexuals in the region typically have assumed heterosexual family roles. Nevertheless, gay rights are beginning to gain traction mostly in China, South Korea, and Japan, although same-sex marriages remain taboo.

6. Language and Communication

Language is a system for sharing information symbolically, whereby words are used to represent ideas. Communication refers to the cultural practice of sharing meaning in interaction, both verbally and non-verbally. In East Asian countries, most inhabitants speak the official language or a similar dialect. For example, more than 99% of people in Japan and the Koreas speak the official state languages, while more than 90% of Mongolians speak Khalkha Mongolian, the official language.

China is East Asia's most linguistically diverse country having 292 spoken languages. A majority of China's population speaks the official Mandarin (Sino-Tibetan) language, although a number of groups continue to speak ethnic languages as a means of preserving their unique identities (Graphic: A Chinese dictionary).

Speakers of Mandarin, Cantonese, and other Chinese languages use an ancient, character-based writing system to record sound and meaning. Developed around 1200 BC, the Chinese writing system has tens of thousands unique characters. Historically, Mongolians, Japanese, and Koreans also transcribed their languages using Chinese characters. While the Japanese and Koreans eventually devised their own writing systems, their languages still use some words and characters borrowed from Chinese. Mongolians have used many scripts to write their language, although they, like Russians, now use Cyrillic.

East Asians typically avoid confrontation, seek consensus, and refrain from displaying emotions in public. In order to maintain social harmony, East Asians often try to “save face”—avoid embarrassment to themselves or others. They tend to begin conversations by discussing neutral topics, such as health, family, and hobbies. While specific greeting customs—such as bows, handshakes, and forms of address—vary by country, all East Asians tend to use both verbal and non-verbal cues to convey respect and reinforce social hierarchy.

East Asians typically are reserved when meeting new people for the first time, particularly foreign nationals. Eventually, they become more comfortable and candid as they get to know a new acquaintance. Being introduced through a well-respected mutual contact alleviates these reservations to some extent.

7. Learning and Knowledge

All cultures require that the older generation transmit important information to the younger generation. This information can be strictly factual (for example, how to fulfill subsistence and health requirements) or culturally traditional (the beliefs, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning to the community). This knowledge transfer may occur through structured, formalized systems like schools or through informal learning by watching adults or peers.

Most East Asian cultures value education. Historically reserved for young male elites, formal education was an essential qualification for prestigious civil service jobs in ancient China, Japan, and Korea, where students often took personal lessons from famous scholars. Scholars and teachers historically have been and continue to be highly respected in East Asia, typically receiving high salaries and esteem.

Today East Asian children across social and economic ranks have access to basic education. Primary education is compulsory throughout East Asia, where literacy rates reach 96%. Although East Asian students tend to be among the world’s top performers on international achievement tests,

some observers criticize East Asian schools for their emphasis on memorization over critical thinking and creativity.

Urban schools tend to be better resourced and staffed than those in rural areas, particularly in China and Mongolia. Unlike their wealthier urban peers, many rural students cannot afford additional tutoring and tend to lag behind on national examinations.

8. Time and Space

In every society, people occupy space and time in ways that are not directly linked to physical survival. In most Western cultures, people tend to be preoccupied with strict time management, devoting less effort to building lasting relationships. Most East Asian cultures consider personal relationships and efficient time management equally essential and not mutually exclusive in professional and social settings.

East Asians typically adhere to deadlines and schedules and may multitask to maximize efficiency. While they typically refrain from taking time to build relationships during meetings, they often use after-work social events to build and maintain personal relationships with coworkers. Accordingly, socializing over meals or drinks helps foster relationships.

East Asians occupy public and private space in ways that may be unfamiliar to Americans. For example, since East Asian cities tend to be crowded, personal space is at a premium. Similarly, people tend to stand in close proximity in social contexts. East Asians keep inside spaces clean, removing shoes and wearing slippers after they enter a home, school, or temple (pictured).

9. Aesthetics and Recreation

Every culture has its own forms of creative expression that are guided by aesthetic principles of imagination, beauty, skill, and style. A country's clothing, games, music, theater, literature, and artwork reflect a variety of historic, cultural, and religious influences as well as its geographic features, climate, and global interconnectedness.

East Asia is known for its rich artistic traditions that emphasize principles such as balance, precision, and harmony, although these traditions vary by culture and time period. While the region has a long tradition of classical dance and music using a range of musical instruments, more recently, some musicians have adopted modern Western styles, particularly pop music.

East Asia also has a long, rich, and well-preserved tradition of literature and folklore. East Asian classics, such as Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, are well-known even in the US. Historically, East Asia's religions and philosophies, particularly Buddhism, Daoism, and folk beliefs, have influenced its arts, crafts, and architecture. Today modern secular influences tend to inspire East Asian artists. By contrast, North Korean art, music, and cinema are limited to themes that honor its leaders.

East Asians enjoy soccer and table tennis. Baseball is popular in Japan and South Korea, while basketball is common in China. Mongolians excel at archery, wrestling, and horseback riding. Martial arts, such as Japan's ***judo*** and ***karate*** or Korea's ***taekwondo***, are popular throughout the region. Many East Asian athletes have excelled in worldwide sports competitions. Notably, China, South Korea, and Japan have hosted the Olympics, collectively earning hundreds of medals.

While traditional clothing varies among and within East Asian countries, it is typically colorful and elaborately decorated. Most East Asians reserve traditional clothing for special occasions. For instance, Koreans wear ***hanbok*** or ***choson-ot***, a 2-piece garment with a short jacket for weddings or funerals. Japanese people often wear the ***kimono***, an ankle-length, long-sleeve robe, for special occasions. Across East Asia, Western-style clothing is the most common style for daily wear.

10. Sustenance and Health

Societies have different methods of transforming natural resources into food. These methods can shape residence patterns, family structures, and economics. Theories of

disease and healing practices exist in all cultures and serve as adaptive responses to disease and illness.

East Asian cuisine varies widely even within single countries. Rice is East Asia's main staple grain featured at most meals as a complement to meat, seafood, or vegetables. Rice is also an ingredient in many desserts. Many East Asian cuisines also include noodles, dumplings, and soups. Although the Koreas share a culinary heritage, North Koreans' diet has less variety and more corn since it is cheaper than rice. Mongolia's cuisine consists largely of meat and dairy from sheep, cows, camels, yaks (indigenous Asian long-haired ox), and goats, with few vegetables or spices due to a lack of arable land.

East Asians regularly drink teas and also enjoy a number of indigenous alcoholic beverages, including Japanese ***saké***, made by fermenting rice, and Mongolian ***airag***, which comes from fermented horse milk.

Although most East Asian countries have experienced gradual increases in life expectancy as they have industrialized, accessibility and affordability of modern medical care vary widely. Preventative care is considered important to maintain health. Many East Asians rely on traditional medicines such as acupuncture and herbal medicines to cure their ailments. Some mainstream medical practitioners have incorporated traditional practices into their clinical healthcare. Of concern is the use of toxic herbal treatments that can harm patients, rare animal species like rhinos and tigers, and the environment.

While most communicable diseases have been eradicated or controlled in East Asia, less healthy lifestyles have contributed to an increase in non-communicable illnesses, such as cancer and cardiovascular diseases. Emerging infectious diseases, such as "bird flu" (avian influenza), can threaten public health and spread rapidly in densely populated cities. In addition to purely medical concerns, China, Japan, and South Korea also face the common problem of financing healthcare for their growing elderly populations. Meanwhile, Mongolia and North Korea still grapple with malnutrition.

11. Economics and Resources

This domain refers to beliefs regarding appropriate ways for a society to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services. It details how countries allocate their resources by sector, trade with other countries, give or receive aid, and pay for goods and services within their borders.

East Asian economic systems range from communism to free market capitalism. With the exception of North Korea, East Asian countries have benefited from industrialization and global trade and investments. China, Japan, and South Korea, in particular, have some of the world's largest economies, ranking 2nd, 3rd, and 12th in the world by nominal gross domestic product (GDP), respectively.

China's shift from planned to free market economics enabled it to realize dramatic economic gains. Since liberalizing its economy, China has experienced economic growth averaging 7% annually, largely due to its exports. This expansion so far has freed 500 million people from poverty, although wealth remains primarily in the hands of China's elites. While China continues to grow, the pace has slowed (Photo: Shanghai skyline).

Japan and South Korea have industrialized, highly developed economies. Since World War II, both countries have achieved large economic gains. In the 1990s, Mongolia abandoned its planned economy and privatized many industries, leading to substantial economic growth and social change. By contrast, North Korea's economy struggles under international sanctions and relies heavily on China to boost its failing economy.

12. Technology and Material

Societies use technology to transform their physical world, and culture heavily influences the development and use of technology. While technological development is often seen as purely positive, governments can also harness technology to monitor their citizens and crackdown on dissent.

Technology has enabled development throughout East Asia, although it has occurred at different rates. For example, while Japan and South Korea have adopted a range of industrial and Internet-enabled technologies, North Korea purposely shuns many of those technologies in order to remain isolated. China, Japan, and South Korea have well-developed physical and telecommunications infrastructures that enable transportation, trade, and connectivity with the entire world.

Transport infrastructure varies widely throughout East Asia. For example, high-speed trains crisscross much of Japan (pictured), while only about 20% of Mongolia's roads are paved. Consequently, most Mongolians travel by foot, on animals, or on motorcycles.

While Japan and South Korea have relatively few mineral resources, Mongolia, China, and North Korea have large mineral deposits. Most East Asian countries use diverse energy sources such as coal and oil, importing substantial quantities of oil and natural gas from other regions. China is the world's 2nd largest oil importer and largest producer and consumer of coal. Apart from North Korea, East Asian countries have sought to develop nuclear power and hydropower as alternative energy sources.

Freedom of the press and Internet vary substantially in East Asia. China and North Korea lack these freedoms, sponsoring state-controlled media outlets. Japan, Mongolia, and South Korea, by contrast, have relatively few restrictions on the press and Internet. While the number of Internet users in China alone exceeds the entire US population, China's government heavily censors online content and monitors its citizens' Internet use. Japanese and South Korean residents are avid Internet users, enjoying some of the world's fastest Internet connections.

Now that we have introduced general concepts that characterize East Asian society at large, we will focus on specific features of South Korean society.

PART 2 – CULTURE SPECIFIC

1. HISTORY AND MYTH

Note: In this guide "Korea" refers to the Korean Peninsula, including both the southern Republic of Korea (ROK) and northern Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

Overview

Historically, Korea's strategic location at the center of Northeast Asia along with its relatively weak political, economic, and military power have rendered it vulnerable to conquest. First to invade were the Mongols (the Yuan Dynasty) in the 13th century, next the Japanese in the 16th century, and then the Qing in the 17th century. As the Qing's power waned, the Korean Peninsula was subjected to the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) and then the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905).

Ruled by the Empire of Japan from 1910-1945, Koreans fought for independence and sovereignty from Japan during the first half of the 20th century. The ROK and DPRK were established in 1948 followed by the North invading the South in 1950. North Korea then fought the United Nations Forces until 27 Jul 53 (the Korean Armistice Day) followed by the US and ROK concluding a Mutual Defense Treaty on 1 Oct 53. The ROK-US Alliance remains one of the world's strongest (Photo: Korean War Montage).

Since the Korean War, South Koreans have struggled against communism and sought economic prosperity and full democracy. In the 1950s, Korea was one of the poorest nations but now ranks as the 14th economic power in Gross Domestic Product and 5th in total export volume in 2017. While South

Korea today is a democracy and economic powerhouse, Korean society, institutions, and government remain an authoritarian culture.

Early Korea

Archaeological evidence suggests that a number of semi-nomadic tribes migrated to the Peninsula about 10,000 years ago. These tribes lived in pit dwellings and used stone tools to hunt, gather, and cultivate food. Over time, as the tribes became increasingly agricultural, they began to form larger societies (Photo: Neolithic Age axes found in Korea).

Early Korean Kingdoms

The formation of larger societies in Korea eventually led to the rise of Gojoseon (Ancient Joseon), which Koreans today regard as the first Korean state. Although it is unknown precisely when Gojoseon was founded, Korean legend dates its establishment to 2333 BC. Gojoseon thrived along the banks of the Taedong River (now in North Korea) for more than 2 millennia before Chinese troops invaded in 109-108 BC and imposed their own government in the region.

After the conquest of Gojoseon, 3 kingdoms (approximately 57-668 AD) arose and competed for dominance: Baekje in the Southwest, Silla in the Southeast, and Goguryeo in Northern Korea and Manchuria. All 3 kingdoms shared a similar culture and language. While their original religions appear to have been shamanistic, they were increasingly influenced by Chinese culture, particularly Confucianism and Taoism. In the 4th century, Buddhism was introduced to the Peninsula and spread rapidly, briefly becoming the official religion of all 3 kingdoms (see p. 2-4 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

Power Struggles

Goguryeo had resisted conquest from Chinese Dynasties (Sui and Tang) and in doing so, protected Baekje and Silla against Chinese invasion. Thereafter, Silla allied with China's Tang Dynasty to conquer Baekje in 660 and Goguryeo in 668 followed by the Chinese turning on Silla. Although Silla successfully

repulsed the attack in 676, it lost much of Goguryeo's territory to the Chinese as its northern border was pushed back to the Taedong River.

At the end of the 9th century as civil war plagued Silla, Goguryeo and Baekje reemerged as independent entities for a brief period. Then in 935, Wang Geon took control of Goguryeo and united Korea under his rule. Wang Geon renamed his kingdom "Goryeo," from which the word "Korea" is derived. Goryeo adopted Chinese-style bureaucratic institutions that stressed Confucian ideals. Nevertheless, Buddhism remained widespread among both leadership and its subjects.

Mongolian Rule: As part of a massive imperial expansion that stretched from the Pacific Ocean to Eastern Europe, Mongols invaded and assumed control of Goryeo in the mid-13th century. While the Mongols allowed the defeated kingdom to retain a degree of internal sovereignty, a combined Mongol-Korean government ruled the Peninsula oppressively until the end of the 14th century.

The Joseon Dynasty

In 1388, as the Mongols waned and China's Ming Dynasty emerged, the last King of Goryeo ordered General Yi Song-gye (depicted) to invade the Liaodong Peninsula and reclaim the lost Korean territory in Manchuria. Instead, General Yi directed his forces against Goryeo, and in 1392, named himself King Taejo of the Joseon Dynasty that lasted until 1910. Mostly isolationist, the Joseon dynasty engaged primarily with China and to a limited extent with Japan.

King Taejo and his supporters sought to remake society in line with Neo-Confucianism (See p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations* and p. 4-5, *Religion and Spirituality*). Lacking justification for his coup d'état, Taejo sought support from the Ming Dynasty in establishing his kingdom and used Confucianism to ouster Goryeo loyalists who were mostly Buddhists. As a consequence, Buddhism lost much of its

influence in court politics. Taejo also moved the capital from Kaesong to Seoul.

The Joseon Dynasty reached its apex under Taejo's grandson, King Sejong (his statue depicted below is located in Seoul), who administered rapid advances in art, science, and technology during his reign (1418-1450). Rapidly declining under later kings, the Joseon Dynasty split into factions as corruption increased while revenues decreased. The rigid Korean hierarchy failed to promote a merit-based society that valued merchants, farmers, and scientists. Consequently, status quo was maintained with no progression in science and technology. Japanese and Chinese attacks in the late 16th and early 17th centuries transformed the Joseon dynasty into a Chinese tributary state that remained until the late 1800s.

The End of Korean Isolation

For most of the 19th century, Korea isolated itself from all countries except China. Britain, France, the US, and other Western countries were unsuccessful in their quest to establish Korea as a trading partner in the 1850s. It was not until about 20 years later that Japan, which had opened to Western trade in 1854 and then industrialized rapidly, ended Korea's isolation.

From 1875-1876, Japan used "gunboat diplomacy"—the threat of force—to compel the Korean government to accept an uneven treaty. Signed in 1876, this Treaty of Kanghwa gave Japanese nationals access to several Korean ports and exempted them from prosecution under Korean laws. The treaty also declared Korea a sovereign, independent state equal in status to Japan. This provision nominally ended Korea's subordination to China even though China did not consent at the time.

During the 1880s, Korea signed additional treaties with Western powers, although Japan was the most assertive in expanding its influence in Korea. Nevertheless, since China had not accepted Korean independence and still treated Korea as a tributary state and a strategic buffer, China and Japan soon went to war. Japan won a decisive victory in 1895, forcing China to renounce its

claims in Korea. In addition, Japan took control of Port Arthur, a valuable Chinese port located on the Yellow Sea.

Russia grew concerned about Japan's expansion in the Far East. Consequently, just days after Japan took control of Port Arthur, Russia aligned with France and Germany to pressure Japan into returning the port to China. By 1898 Russia took control of Port Arthur amid other efforts to expand into China.

Russian and Japanese expansionism eventually led to the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905, which was fought in Korea and northeastern China. Japan prevailed over Russia, establishing itself as the dominant power in Korea. Japan made Korea a protectorate (a state protected and partly controlled by another state) in 1905 and a full colony in 1910.

Colonial Korea

After taking control, Japan replaced Korea's monarchy with a colonial government (Graphic: Seal of the Government-General of Korea under Japanese rule). This colonial government was run by a series of Japanese Army officers with wide latitude to run Korea as they chose.

While Koreans had the same legal rights as Japanese citizens under colonial rule, the Japanese treated them in practice as second-class citizens. For example, the Japanese did not allow Koreans to publish newspapers or establish political groups. In addition, they confiscated land from many Koreans and gave it to Japanese settlers, forcing much of the population to become low-wage laborers working mainly to benefit Japan's economy. Finally, the Japanese executed many former Korean soldiers who had joined a resistance movement.

The brutality and repressiveness of Japanese rule contributed to the growth of Korean nationalism. On March 1, 1919, a small group of Korean nationalists in Seoul issued a Proclamation of Independence, which was followed by demonstrations in many parts of Korea. The Japanese initially responded by loosening

controls, leading to an increase in social and intellectual activity across Korea in the 1920s.

In the 1930s, Japanese leaders grew concerned about Korean nationalism and once again imposed strict controls. They tried to assimilate Koreans, forcing them to learn Japan's history, culture, and language while banning the Korean language. The Japanese also required Koreans to take Japanese names, pledge loyalty to the Japanese emperor, and worship at Shinto (Japan's indigenous religion) shrines.

World War II: Korean misery under Japanese rule reached its apex between 1937 and 1945, when Japan mobilized all of its assets to invade China and fight World War II. Koreans began "volunteering" for the Japanese military in 1938 and were conscripted after 1943. Although the exact total is unknown, hundreds of thousands of Koreans fought for Japan during World War II. During this time, Japan directed as many of Korea's resources to the war effort as possible. In addition to enduring wartime rationing, Koreans were deprived of pots, pans, and other metal items that could be melted and reshaped into equipment. Many Koreans' clothes were in tatters by the end of the war.

Occupation

On August 8, 1945 as Japan was reeling from the US nuclear attack on the city of Hiroshima, the Soviet Union (USSR) declared war against Japan and invaded Japanese-controlled parts of China and Korea. By the time Japan surrendered on September 2, 1945, the USSR had begun a military occupation of northern Korea. Days later the USSR accepted an offer from the US to help occupy Korea and manage its postwar transition. On September 8, 1945, US forces landed at Incheon located near today's capital at Seoul (Photo: US soldiers in Korea in 1945).

The US and USSR agreed to occupy separate zones divided by the 38th parallel (38° N latitude), with the Soviet zone in the

North and the American zone in the South. The 2 countries also agreed to a 5-year occupation, or “trusteeship,” after which American and Soviet forces would leave the peninsula and a reunified Korea would hold democratic elections.

From the start of their occupation of Korea, the US and USSR pursued different goals while mostly ignoring Koreans’ wishes. The US wanted to prevent Korea from becoming a communist, antireligious state like the USSR. US leaders feared that such an outcome would help communism spread and tip the global balance of power toward the USSR, which wanted to turn Korea into a regional ally. In contrast to both foreign powers, most Koreans opposed the 5-year plan, wanting simply to be unified and independent.

From 1945-1947, the US and USSR negotiated plans for a Korean-controlled and unified Peninsula. Nevertheless, their incompatible motives prevented agreement. While the US backed Syngman Rhee (pictured), an anticommunist former dissident and devout Christian who had studied in the US, the USSR supported Kim Il-sung, a communist who had fought for the USSR in World War II. Facing this deadlock, US leaders chose to submit the problem to the newly created United Nations (UN) in 1947.

The UN proposed elections in Korea for 1948. The USSR and Korean communists in the North opposed and boycotted the elections, fearing a communist win was unlikely since southern Korea had twice as many voters. Still, the elections occurred as planned in the South. On August 15, 1948, the Republic of Korea (South Korea) came into existence with Syngman Rhee as President. Weeks later the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea) was established under Kim Il-sung. Both governments claimed to be Korea’s only legitimate government, declaring plans to expand control over the entire peninsula. At the time, North Korea’s military was

larger, better-equipped, and more experienced than South Korea's.

The Korean War

Under a UN agreement, both the US and USSR withdrew from Korea in 1949, each installing military advisors. Meanwhile, border clashes between North and South Korean forces intermittently occurred across the 38th parallel as each side attempted to reinforce its position. After obtaining approval from Stalin and Mao Tze-tung, Kim Il-sung launched a surprise attack against South Korea in the early morning hours of June 25, 1950. The conflict continued until July 27, 1953 and caused an estimated 3 million civilian and military deaths on both sides. Most infrastructure, housing, and industry were in ruins.

South Korea was almost entirely unprepared for the North Korean attack. On the same day of the invasion, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) condemned both the attack and North Korea as the aggressor. Two days later, the UNSC passed resolution 83 requesting member nations provide forces to defend ROK. At the behest of the UK and France, the UNSC passed resolution 84, requesting the US establish and lead a unified command under the UN flag. On July 24, 1950, the UN Command (UNC) was activated in Tokyo under General McArthur's leadership. During the war, 53 nations provided support to the UNC, ranging from combat troops to financial support (Photo: US Marines fighting in South Korea in late 1950).

The UN force landed and launched a counterattack at Incheon in September, retaking the South and sweeping through most of the North by mid-October. China entered the conflict on North Korea's side in November. Eventually with the help of the USSR, Chinese and North Korean troops forced UN and South Korean troops to retreat. The UNC and South Korean troops retook Seoul, restraining the communist. As the tide of war was turning, North Korea requested negotiation for armistice as means to reconstitute and fortify defense. By mid-1951 a stalemate had

developed near the 38th parallel, although violent conflict continued and casualties mounted during the more than 2-year negotiation period. Three days after Stalin died, flag officers from the UNC, North Korean Army, and Chinese People's Volunteer Force signed the Korean ceasefire armistice on July 27, 1953. The armistice served as an interim agreement until the peace treaty establishing a 2.5-mile-wide Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) was established on the line where opposing forces fought.

A Struggling Democracy

The war's aftermath left South Korea one of the world's poorest countries. ROK President Syngman Rhee manipulated the political system to maintain his power, failing to improve the economy. Massive student demonstration forced him into exile in 1960. The parliamentary government that assumed control in his wake shifted power to Prime Minister Chang Myon who was appointed a figurehead President. Since the Prime Minister role went to whichever party commanded a parliamentary majority, political infighting ensued as various factions tried to claim power. Ultimately, the Chang government lasted only 8 months before succumbing to a military coup.

Park Chung-hee: In 1961, Major General Park Chung-hee (pictured left) and a group of officers commanding only 3,600 troops toppled South Korea's government in a bloodless coup d'état. Not long thereafter, Park created the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA) in order to monitor opposition activities that could lead to a counter-coup. In addition, he began introducing economic reforms that eventually would industrialize South Korea's agricultural economy (see p. 2 of *Economics and Resources*). In 1963, he resigned his military post to run for President as a civilian, winning by a narrow margin against his opponent Kim Dae-jung (pictured right), who would later become ROK President and winner of a Nobel Prize in 2000.

Park maintained a somewhat open democracy until 1971, when he started restricting liberties and oppressed his political opposition. For example, in 1973 Park supposedly ordered the KCIA to kill Kim Dae-jung when he openly opposed Park's announcement for a life-term Presidency. Kim was kidnapped but later released. In 1975 Park introduced Emergency Measure Number 9, a notoriously harsh set of restrictions on government criticism and press freedom.

In 1978 and 1979, the Iranian Revolution led to a rapid rise in worldwide oil prices. These "oil shocks" hurt the South Korean economy, worsening social unrest and strengthening Park's political opponents. Park dealt harshly with those opponents, using the Army to suppress demonstrations. At the same time, Park increasingly came into conflict with his own advisors.

One such advisor was the head of the KCIA, who had advised Park to deal with protestors more moderately. On October 26, 1979, during a heated argument about a range of issues that included the treatment of student protestors, the head of the KCIA assassinated Park and several of his supporters.

Today, South Koreans remember Park both for his authoritarian policies and for his rapid expansion and industrialization of the South Korean economy. Under the Park regime, South Korea transformed from a poor, agricultural economy into one that was industrialized, providing its citizens with previously unattainable opportunities. Many South Koreans were willing to accept the Park administration's harsh policies in exchange for prosperity. Even today many South Koreans credit their wellbeing to Park.

Chun Doo-hwan: Park's assassination led to political upheaval. Interim leaders abolished Emergency Measure Number 9, freed political prisoners, and began writing a new constitution. Meanwhile, Lieutenant General Chun Doo-hwan (pictured) gained control over the armed forces and KCIA in May 1980, officially declaring martial law which had been in practice since Park's assassination half a year earlier. After

uprooting the elites of the Park era, Chun resigned from the military and declared himself President in August 1980.

Chun's regime was notoriously oppressive and corrupt. One of its cruelest acts was the Gwangju Incident of May 1980, during which the Army massacred protestors in the southern city of Gwangju. Chun also implemented a series of anti-corruption measure to purge opponents. Chun's close ties with the US government fueled anti-American sentiment in South Korea. Even though President Carter admonished the authoritarian South Korean government's human rights abuses, President Reagan applauded Chun's fervent anti-communism and supported Seoul. The US also supported South Korea's hosting the 1988 Summer Olympics during Chun's administration (see p. 2 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*),

Democracy Established

Despite censorship and political oppression, demonstrations for democracy continued throughout the 1980s, eventually forcing Chun to endorse democratization in 1987. Chun named liberalist and co-supporter of democratization General Roh Tae-woo (pictured) the candidate of the ruling party. On December 16, 1987, Roh won the Presidency in free and fair elections, the first in South Korea's history. As promised he introduced democratic reforms, such as amendments to the constitution and the empowerment of South Korea's legislative and judicial branches (see p. 3-4 of *Political and Social Relations*).

During Roh's Presidency, he grew close politically to Kim Young-sam, a civilian well-known for having opposed Presidents Park and Chun. In 1990, the 2 men merged their political parties to form the Democratic Liberal Party, which later merged with other political parties to form modern South Korea's powerful New Frontier Party (see p. 4 of *Political and Social Relations*). This merger and Roh's backing helped Kim consolidate support and win the 1992 presidential election.

Kim continued Roh's governmental reforms, first by placing the military firmly under civilian control, only to have his government prosecute both Roh and Chun Doo-hwan on corruption charges. Kim's own son was swept up in these anti-corruption efforts, degrading Kim's popularity. The impact of the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997 (see p. 1 of *Economics and Resources*) later reduced Kim's popularity even more.

Modern South Korea

While Kim was unpopular when he left office, his tenure helped establish present-day South Korea's open, democratic political system. Since Kim's time, a series of 4 democratically elected Presidents have ruled South Korea.

Kim's immediate successor was liberalist Kim Dae-jung who took power in 1998. His administration was most notable for its "Sunshine Policy," which emphasized improved ties between the Koreas and led to a meeting in 2000 between their leaders. Taking power in 2003, the next President was Roh Moo-hyun who as a liberal like Kim continued the Sunshine Policy which over a 10-year period provided vast sums of unconditional money to North Korea. Notwithstanding, ROK generosity failed to curtail the North Korean aggression.

On 26 March 2010, North Korea sunk a South Korean Corvette warship, ROKS CHEONAN. On 23 November 2010, North Korea shelled a South Korean territory, Yeonpyong-Island, and in December 2012, successfully launched a Satellite Launch Vehicle. North Korea has conducted nuclear tests despite the international condemnation.

In 2008, conservative Lee Myung-bak became President. He ended the Sunshine Policy and took a harder line on relations with North Korea. Lee also concluded a free trade agreement with the US in 2011. He was succeeded in 2013 by Park Geun-hye, the daughter of former President Park Chung-hee. A conservative like her predecessor, Park became South Korea's first female President (see p. 3 of *Political and Social Relations*).

Myth Overview

Korea's tradition of myth and folklore is as rich and varied as its history. Like Korean values, Korean folklore has changed over time. The more ancient myths typically reflect Buddhist values, with those from the Joseon dynasty indicating Confucian influence. While some myths are meant purely for enjoyment, most convey values or norms. Modern Koreans do not value myth as much as in earlier times.

Story types range from myths of gods and heroes to tales of fools and animals. Bears, tigers, and foxes are the animals that appear most often in Korea's folklore. Bears are portrayed as human-like, while tigers can be good, bad, or strong but gullible. Foxes generally demonstrate cunning and evil. Animals appear in many of Korea's foundation myths. For example, a bear plays a key role in the Myth of Dangun, which describes the founding of Gojoseon and is one of Korea's most ancient and important foundation myths.

The Myth of Dangun

In ancient times, Hwanung, son of the ruler of Heaven, told his father, Hwanin, that it would benefit humans if Hwanung ruled them. Hwanin agreed and armed with 3 heavenly seals and 3,000 spirits, Hwangung descended onto Baekdu Mountain to rule humankind alongside the Earl of Wind, the Master of Rain, and the Master of Cloud.

One day a bear and a tiger petitioned Hwanung to turn them into humans. Hwanung responded by giving them some mugwort (an aromatic medicinal plant) and 20 garlic cloves, telling them that they would become human if they ate nothing but those foods and did not see the sunlight for 100 days. The tiger failed, but the bear met the challenge and became a woman. Since the bear-woman had no one to marry, Hwanung married her. Together they bore a son, Dangun, who founded Gojoseon at the city of Asadal near what is now Pyongyang, the capital of North Korea (Photo: A statue of the bear-woman at a South Korean university).

2. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

Official Name
Republic of Korea
Daehan Minguk
대한민국 (Hangul)

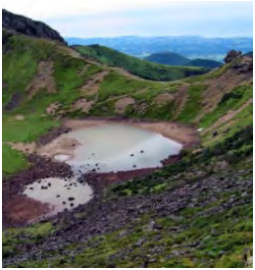
Political Borders
North Korea: 148 mi
Coastline: 1,499 mi

Capital
Seoul

Demographics
South Korea has a population of about 51.8 million, which is twice as populous as North Korea and the 28th most populous country in the world. Yet, South Korea's population growth rate of 0.39% is one of the lowest in the world. Similarly, the country's fertility rate is the world's 6th lowest, at 1.29 children per woman. Due to this low rate, South Korea's population is aging. The country is highly urbanized, with 81.4% of the population living in urban areas, nearly 50% in the Seoul Metropolitan Area, and around 19% in Seoul proper.

Flag
Also known as the ***taegukgi***, the South Korean flag has 3 elements. The central element is the ***taeguk*** symbol, which is similar to China's ***yin-yang*** symbol and consists of a circle with red and blue halves. It represents the origin of the universe and the interdependence of seemingly opposing forces. The second element consists of the black "trigrams" in each corner, which stand for air (top left), water (top right), earth (bottom right), and fire (bottom left). The final element is the white field, which signifies peace and purity.

Geography



South Korea has a total area of 38,502 sq mi (about the same size as Indiana). The country lies on the southern half of the Korean peninsula, sharing its only land border with North Korea. The 2 Koreas are separated by a 2.5-mi-wide Demilitarized Zone (DMZ—see p. 7 of *History and Myth*).

While South Korea consists largely of mountainous and hilly terrain, about 30% of the country is covered by lowland coastal and riverine plains. The latter terrain is most common near the jagged coasts of the South and West, which are surrounded by thousands of small islands. South Korea's coastline meets the Yellow Sea to the West, the East China Sea to the South, and the Sea of Japan (known as the East Sea to South Koreans) to the East, while the Korea Strait separates the southern coast of South Korea from Kyushu, a Japanese island. South Korea's highest point is Mount Halla, which rises 6,400 ft and is located on Jeju, an island off South Korea's southern coast.

Climate

Located across roughly the same latitudes as the southern US, South Korea has a temperate climate with 4 distinct seasons. Weather can vary across regions due to differences in altitude and sea proximity. Winters tend to be long, cold, and dry, with January temperatures ranging from 16-32°F in Seoul and 28-43°F in Busan. By contrast, summers are humid and brief, with August temperatures ranging from 72-88°F in Seoul and 73-84°F in Busan. Rainfall, which averages 39 inches-per-year, is sufficient to support agriculture.

Natural Hazards

Due to extensive deforestation, South Korea is vulnerable to erosion and flooding and also subject to typhoons. Serious droughts occur roughly every 8 years, affecting the Southwest most heavily. While modern South Korea is geologically stable, the Southwest is subject to low-level seismic activity. Notably, Mount Halla was once an active volcano.

Environmental Issues

South Korea's most serious environmental issue is air pollution. Urban air quality tends to be low, leading to health problems. While Seoul has taken measures to improve air quality, many industrial and urban areas have not. South Korea also faces water-related issues. For example, industrial and agricultural runoff damages ecosystems by raising heavy metal levels in the water supply and causing algae blooms that can threaten other species. In addition, South Korea is subject to flooding. The South Korean government is building dams, sewers, and water treatment systems to address these issues.

Government

South Korea is a republic consisting of 9 provinces and 8 autonomous cities (Seoul, Busan, Incheon, Daegu, Daejeon, Gwangju, Ulsan, and Sejong). Ruled by mayors who answer to the central government, autonomous cities effectively have the same status as provinces. After attaining independence from Japan in 1945 (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*), South Korea endured decades of authoritarian rule before beginning a gradual and now complete transition to democracy in the late 1980s.

Executive Branch

A President and Prime Minister head the executive branch. The President is elected directly and is both head-of-state and commander-in-chief of the military. The President also appoints a Prime Minister, currently Chung Jae-in, and a State Council (cabinet of ministers) with the approval of the National Assembly (see below). The nation's first female President, Geun-hye Park, was impeached by the National Assembly in 2016; the current President is Moon Jae-in (pictured) (see p. 12 of *History and Myth*).

Legislative Branch

South Korea's legislature consists of a National Assembly with 300 members who serve 4-year terms—253 elected as single-seat constituencies, 47 by proportional representation. An elected speaker and 2 vice-speakers head the National

Assembly. South Korean legislators are known for their animated approach to legislative debate. For example, they often engage in passionate debate that occasionally descends into physical confrontation. The National Assembly meets for 100 days during the final 4 months of each year. Its responsibilities include making laws, approving budgets, and when necessary, impeaching public officials and declaring war.

Judicial Branch

The judiciary includes a Constitutional Court, a Supreme Court, and appellate and local courts. The 9-member Constitutional Court is the highest court and only oversees cases that pertain to South Korea's constitution. The 14-member Supreme Court is the highest court of appeal and a close-knit group of elites. In the past the courts served as an extension of state power, although gaining greater independence in recent years.

Political Climate

In modern South Korea's open and dynamic democracy, 2 groups—one each liberal and conservative—vie for power, although the political parties within each group frequently merge or adopt new names (Pictured: Emblem of South Korea). The New Frontier Party (NFP) is the primary conservative party, supporting fiscal conservatism, pro-market economic policies, and a harder line on North Korea. The NFP traces its roots to the party of Kim Young-sam and Roh Tae-woo (see p. 11-12 of *History and Myth*). The NFP's liberal opponent is the Democratic Party (DP), which supports human rights, greater government involvement in the economy, and closer ties with North Korea. The NFP held the Presidency until Park's 2016 impeachment while the DP currently holds a majority in the National Assembly with 180 of 300 seats (60%) to the NFP's 103 (34%).

While once extremely polarized, South Korean politics now has developed a substantial moderate and independent middle ground in politics. On the contrary, North Korea remains a 3rd generation dynastic dictatorship ruled solely by Kim Jung-Un. When asked who is second in charge, the official North Korean response is "there is only Kim Jung-Un."

Defense

South Korea's military includes an Army, Navy, and Air Force with a joint strength of approximately 599,000 active-duty and 3,100,000 reserve personnel. Between 2019-2020, active-duty forces were cut by 26,000. Since the Korean War, South Korea's military has been postured to defend against an invasion by North Korea. After North Korean forces shelled Yeonpyong (a South Korean island) and sank the *Cheonan* (a South Korean warship) in 2010, South Korea adopted a looser interpretation of the Armistice-dictated rules of engagement. For years US Armed Forces have held operational control over South Korea's military until recently. In 1994, South Korea regained Armistice operational control and is slated to regain wartime operational control in December 2015.

Army: The Republic of Korea Army (ROKA) is a well-equipped, well-trained force of 464,000 active-duty troops. The ROKA has 47 active-duty and reserve divisions (planned to be cut to 27), 7 special forces brigades, 6 mechanized infantry divisions, one air assault brigade, and numerous combat support brigades.

Navy: Consisting of 70,000 active-duty personnel (including 29,000 marines), the Republic of Korea Navy (ROKN) is a well-equipped force with 2 cruisers, 12 destroyers, 13 frigates, and 15 submarines. In 1995, the South Korean government initiated a plan to transform the ROKN into a "blue-water" navy (one that can operate across open seas and far from home shores).

Although the ROKN has yet to achieve this extended capability, it has made major improvements since 1995, now participating in US-led anti-piracy patrols. Once it develops the necessary capabilities, the ROKN plans to conduct extended operations in East Asia and short-term operations in the Persian Gulf.

Air Force: The primary mission of the Republic of Korea Air Force (ROKAF) is to provide air support to the ROKA in countering the North Korean threat. Consisting of 65,000 active-duty personnel, the ROKAF has 450 fighter aircraft and 27 squadrons. Current procurement priorities include replacing obsolete fighters and upgrading surveillance capabilities.

South Korean Air Force Rank Insignia

Private 2nd Class | Private 1st Class | Corporal | Sergeant | Staff Sergeant | Sergeant 1st Class | Master Sergeant | Sergeant Major | Warrant Officer

2nd Lieutenant | 1st Lieutenant | Captain | Major | Lieutneant Colonel | Colonel | Brigadier General | Major General | Lieutenant General | General

Security Issues

North Korea: South Korea's main security concern is North Korean hostility. Having a massive standing military of 1,280,000 personnel, North Korea continues to threaten to attack the South, although there is speculation that the North's conventional military capabilities are eroding. As of late 2017, North Korea had conducted 6 nuclear weapons tests and is believed to have fewer than 10 nuclear weapons, but enough material to build 20-25 more. In addition, it has developed a wide range of asymmetric warfare capabilities. These include a large special operations force, a fleet of Yugo Class (miniature) submarines, a chemical weapons stockpile, offensive cyber-warfare capabilities, and long-range artillery capable of reaching Seoul and other major cities. North Korea also may possess biological weapons.

Regional Tensions: While South Korea has relatively stable relations with most East and Southeast Asian countries, some low-level tensions exist. The most notable example is an ongoing territorial dispute between South Korea and Japan over the Liancourt Rocks, referred to as the Takeshima Islands in Japan and as Dokdo in Korea (Photo: A watchtower on the Liancourt Rocks). This dispute occasionally leads to friction between the countries as well as nationalist demonstrations in South Korea. In addition to this dispute, China's increasing ability to project military power abroad is a source of concern for South Korea.

Foreign Relations

Despite having a strong economy and military, South Korea's influence is limited by powerful regional countries, specifically China, Japan, and Russia. Consequently, South Koreans view their country as a small power surrounded by larger ones that sometimes refer to South Korea as a "shrimp among whales."

As a leader in technology and industry, South Korea's foreign policy centers on economic interest, even though relations with major trading partners can be uneasy. China, for example, imports nearly 27% of South Korea's exports, but also concerns South Korean leaders with its increasingly assertive foreign policy and growing ability to project military power.

Similarly, South Korea has a strong but troubled relationship with Japan. The 2 countries' security interests align closely, and Japan also purchases a large share (5%) of South Korea's exports. Nevertheless, anti-Japanese sentiment persists in South Korea due to Japan's colonial occupation of Korea (see p. 4-6 of *History and Myth*).

Relations with North Korea: While South Korea is strongly committed to reunification with the North, the government's approach is driven to a large extent by domestic politics. South Korea's primary liberal party favors closer relations with North Korea. Under liberal Presidents from 1998-2008, South Korea pursued the Sunshine Policy, which stressed reconciliation and unconditional aid to North Korea (see p. 12 of *History and Myth*) (Graphic: North Korea's flag).

When conservatives regained power, they placed conditions on aid to North Korea, pressing the country to abandon its nuclear weapons program. North Korea reacted with hostility and by 2011 most Sunshine Policy programs had been suspended or canceled. North Korea's reaction prompted a shift in South Korean public opinion away from the conservative hardline. While South Koreans again elected a conservative President in 2012, many observers expected she would take a somewhat more lenient approach toward relations with North Korea.

Regardless of domestic political concerns, South Korea works with several major powers on North Korean issues, including China, Japan, and Russia. In recent years, North Korea has grown increasingly dependent upon China for economic and diplomatic support. South Korea resents China's support for North Korea and has sought ways to prevent North Korea from falling further under Chinese influence.

Relations with North Koreans: In contrast to the hostility that has characterized the governmental relations between South and North Korean, relations between the 2 populations have been more mixed. Most South Koreans have felt that Korea should be reunified. Moreover, during the Sunshine Policy era (see p12 of *History and Myth*), South Koreans perceived little threat from the North and regarded their neighbors warmly.

Recently, however, South Koreans' opinions of the North have shifted as North Korea has demonstrated a more aggressive posture. In addition to testing nuclear devices, the North performed 2 acts of war against South Korea in 2010 (see "Defense" and p. 12 of *History and Myth*). Some Southerners now feel threatened by North Korea, although skeptical that war will occur. Others view their government's response to the crises of recent years as weak, while a substantial majority oppose resuming aid to North Korea until it apologizes for its actions in 2010 (Photo: A caravan of North Korea-bound food aid being trucked across the DMZ in 1998).

In addition to concerns about North Korea's recent aggression, some South Koreans also worry about the economic realities of reunification. South Korea, which is wealthy and capitalist, has a radically different economic system from North Korea, which is poor and communist. Integrating their 2 economies would involve massive wealth transfers from the South to the North and potentially lead to social problems. After decades in which the 2 countries have developed along very different paths, South Koreans increasingly see the North as a distinct country with a different culture. Consequently, they fear the costs and doubt the rewards of reunification.

Despite these economic and security concerns, South Koreans' interests in reunification remains strong, albeit somewhat faded. For most South Koreans, the desire to reunify stems from familial ties: they still regard North Koreans as brothers and sisters, especially given that many families were divided when the country was partitioned.

Relations with the US: South Korea and the US have been allies since the US entered the Korean War in 1950 (see p. 8 of *History and Myth*). After the war, South Korea and the US agreed to a Mutual Defense Treaty, making both countries responsible for defending each other in the event of an attack by a third country. While South Korea has contributed troops to support the US in Afghanistan and Iraq, the US maintains a force of nearly 35,000 troops in South Korea (Photo: Then-South Korean President Park Geun-hye with then-US President Barack Obama).

Today South Korea remains an important US ally, especially in dealing with North Korea and other sources of instability in the Asian-Pacific region. As a middle power on the global stage, South Korea is well-positioned to support US policy in Asia. From the South Korean perspective, an alliance with the US deters North Korean aggression and bolsters regional stability. Both countries benefit from deep economic ties, which were reinforced in 2011 when they signed a Free Trade Agreement.

Relations with Americans: While South Koreans support the US alliance, some anti-American sentiment exists. US backing of the Chun regime (see p. 10-11 of *History and Myth*) led to a rapid spread of anti-Americanism in the 1980s. In the 2000s, hardline US policies on North Korea conflicted with the Sunshine Policy, widening the rift between the countries. Other incidents, such as when a US armored vehicle accidentally struck and killed 2 South Korean schoolgirls in 2002, also have strained ties.

Despite these setbacks, South Koreans strongly support the US alliance. They view the US more favorably than any other foreign partner, including Japan and China. Approximately 71% of South Koreans view US ties positively, and 92% believe that a US-South Korea alliance will remain necessary. A number of South Koreans consider a US alliance necessary to counter China in the event of Korean reunification.

Ethnic Groups

South Korea's population is mostly homogeneous ethnically, as nearly all native South Koreans consider themselves as ethnic Koreans. Nevertheless, there are some regional differences, and socioeconomic divisions continue to widen. In addition, South Korea has a large foreign-born population.

Regionalism: People who live in different parts of South Korea exhibit minor cultural differences, particularly those residing in Seoul as opposed to elsewhere. Seoul residents sometimes regard people from other parts of the country as backwards and uncultured. By contrast, people from the provinces regard themselves as more open and friendlier than Seoul residents and resent their insulting attitude. There are also differences between provinces. For example, people from Jeolla and Gyeongsang provinces have different accents and historically have displayed animosity toward one another.

North Koreans: The South Korean constitution states that the country's territory extends across the entire Korean peninsula. Consequently, South Korea typically has granted citizenship to North Korean defectors who reach South Korea. About 30,000 North Koreans have defected to the South, although many experience great difficulty adapting to a notably different society. North Koreans are easily recognizable in South Korea by their distinct accents.

Foreign Nationals: In 2019, South Korea had about 2.5 million foreign residents (4.8% of the population). Many of those foreign residents, particularly those from China, Pakistan, the Philippines, and other parts of Asia, work as unskilled laborers. In general, South Koreans are disposed more favorably toward Western immigrants than they are toward Asian immigrants.

Incidents between US military personnel and South Koreans typically receive media coverage and contribute to a somewhat negative opinion of the US military. Consequently, US civilians sometimes attempt to distinguish themselves from US military personnel when traveling in South Korea.

Social Relations

Traditionally, Korean society has been organized hierarchically in accordance with the teachings of Confucius (pictured), a 6th-5th century BC Chinese philosopher. Yet, social relations in modern South Korea are changing. While South Koreans still follow many Confucian social patterns, they also have incorporated many aspects of modern, Western-style social customs.

Confucian Social Relations

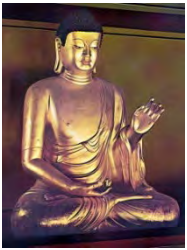
According to Confucian philosophy, social relations should promote social harmony rather than individual happiness. In order to promote this ideal, Confucian philosophy describes the nature of 5 basic social relationships: between friends, there should be faithfulness; between father and son, affection; between husband and wife, attention to proper roles; between old and young, order; and between leader and subject, righteousness.

Modern Social Relations

The once rigid rules of the Confucian system have relaxed as South Korea has developed economically. Perhaps the most notable result of South Korea's rapid economic growth was the decline of the ***yangban***, once an elite landholding class, and the rise of 2 new classes: a middle class and an elite class of industrialists. In addition, family structures (see p. 1 of *Family and Kinship*) and gender roles (see p. 1 of *Sex and Gender*) have shifted. Both changes were hastened by reforms to land policy and education (see p. 2 of *Learning and Knowledge*).

Despite these effects of modernization, many aspects of the Confucian system persist. In business contexts, for example, young employees continue to act respectfully and deferentially toward older employees. In addition, the level of respect with which South Koreans treat each other still depends upon their respective social circles. South Koreans may be less courteous to people they do not know or who belong to a different social circle. Finally, Confucian influence persists in how and when South Koreans display strong emotions.

3. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY



Overview

Slightly less than 50% of South Korean's 51.8 million citizens profess some religious affiliation. That affiliation is spread among a great variety of traditions, including Christianity (28%), Buddhism (16%), Confucianism (0.2%), and shamanism. South Korea's constitution provides for the separation of church and state and guarantees freedom of religion. Consequently, its government lacks an official religion and forbids religious instruction in public schools. It does, however, finance the preservation of historic Buddhist temples and observes both Christmas and Buddha's birthday as holidays. South Korea is religiously diverse, with a variety of churches, temples, shrines, and mosques located throughout the country. Although there has been some religious tension and intolerance among South Koreans, interfaith relations are usually peaceful (Photo: Statue of Buddha at Bulguksa Temple).

Religion and Spirituality in Historical Perspective

Few Koreans identified with a single religious tradition prior to the 20th century. Instead, most Koreans incorporated a variety of customs into their spiritual lives. Their religious activities included prayers at Buddhist temples, Neo-Confucian rituals to honor deceased ancestors, and visits to local shamans (see next page) who communicated with nature spirits.

This tradition of engaging with a diversity of religious traditions began to shift in the 20th century. While only 4% of South Korea's population identified with a single religion in 1940, 12% claimed a singular affiliation by 1964. That figure reached 42% in 1985 and today exceeds 43%.

This increase is directly linked to Christianity's growth over the last century. With its clearly defined doctrine and requirements for church membership, Christianity has altered the way South Koreans of all religious backgrounds think about spirituality and religious identity.

For example, today most South Korean religious communities follow the Christian custom of relying upon certain written creeds that distinguish various denominations. Some religious communities even have adopted the Christian practice of holding religious services on Sunday. Adherents of all religions are expected to support their religious organizations with donations and public proclamations of their membership. Of note, although the total number of self-identified Christians and Buddhists has increased dramatically in recent years, the ratio of Christians to Buddhists has varied little since 1960.

Despite these shifts in the nature of religious identity in South Korea, about half the population remains reluctant to claim just one religious orientation. Many South Koreans continue to feel more comfortable with a range of religious symbols and rituals from different traditions.

Indigenous Beliefs and Practices

Historically, ancient Koreans recognized a variety of spirits and gods. Many Koreans were animists who traditionally believed that a spiritual presence resided in all things, both animate and inanimate, such as animals, rocks, and rivers. In addition, they honored the spirits of departed ancestors.

Koreans also recognized a pantheon of spiritual beings from mountain spirits and those inhabiting trees or caves to house gods, a fire god, and "general" gods who ruled the heavens and underworld. Neither inherently good nor bad, members of the pantheon sometimes provided security and protection or if treated improperly, they could also cause natural disasters, sickness, family discord, and other forms of misfortune.

Korean Shamanism: The term "shamanism" usually refers to a religious belief system in which a shaman (ritual specialist) tries to communicate with gods and spirits. Shamans often perform rituals in a trance state, accompanied with music or dance (Graphic: 1805 depiction of a shaman performing a ritual).

Today many South Koreans, both Buddhists and Christians, may engage a shaman (***mudang***) to perform a ceremony (***kut***) reputed to resolve specific problems, appease spirits, or bring good fortune. For example, a politician might consult a ***mudang*** in order to guarantee an election victory to which the ***mudang*** might advise moving an ancestor's remains to a more favorable location. Similarly, the spirits of people who die prematurely, unmarried, or childless are thought to be reluctant to join the spirit world. Consequently, the person's relatives might visit a ***mudang*** to intercede and avoid problems.

The ***kut*** may be simple, consisting of one ***mudang*** and a client, or more elaborate, involving several ***mudang*** in colorful costumes, a large audience, and sometimes animal sacrifice. Attendees usually provide lavish offerings of food and drink to attract the spirit, while the ***mudang*** sings or chants to a drumbeat and then dances as the spirit makes contact with her (most Korean ***mudang*** are female). Many ceremonies involve the use of ritual objects, such as knives, fans, or lanterns.

Buddhism

Buddhism traces its beginning to around 500 BC, when Siddhartha Gautama, a South Asian prince, attained spiritual insight through meditation. Buddhists believe that humans are fated to suffer due to greed or desire, although suffering can be stopped by following a spiritual path of unselfish living and meditation. Their ultimate goal is to achieve nirvana, a state of peace and unity with the universe (Photo: South Korean monks celebrate Buddha's birthday in Seoul).

Buddhism gradually spread from southern to central Asia and was introduced to the Korean peninsula via China in 372 AD. Buddhism became prominent in the Silla Kingdom, which declared it the official state religion in 535 (see p. 2 of *History and Myth*). At that time, Buddhism coexisted and intermingled with indigenous beliefs systems. For example, many Buddhist temples from the period include halls devoted to nature spirits.

Buddhism continued to flourish during the Goryeo dynasty (935-1392), when Buddhist monks enjoyed significant influence at the royal court and Buddhist architecture, scholarship, and art flourished. Toward the end of the Goryeo dynasty, leaders began introducing Confucian ideals of social relations (see below and p. 3 of *History and Myth*)

Buddhism lost its official status and much of its political influence when the Joseon dynasty took power in 1392 (see p. 3 of *History and Myth*). Accusing Buddhist monks of corruption and conspiring with the enemy, the king drove them from Seoul, the capital. Forced to retreat to isolated temples, Korea's Buddhist monks continued their work among rural populations.

Today, many South Koreans associate Buddhism with the past and consider its temples more as important cultural sites than places of worship. Usually clad in gray robes, Buddhist monks—both men and women—number around 25,000. While some monks retreat to isolated temples and focus on meditation and self-discipline, others remain in urban areas to serve followers or perform university research. South Korea has more than 7,000 Buddhist temples, many of which offer non-Buddhists lodging and retreat in picturesque locations (Photo: Beomeosa Buddhist Temple).

Neo-Confucianism

Chinese Confucian ideals were well-established early in Korean history but did not predominate until after 1392, when Joseon dynasty leaders reformed Korea's social order in accordance with the ideals of Neo-Confucianism (see p. 3 of *History and Myth* and p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*). Since it does not involve deity worship, Neo-Confucianism is not considered a true religion even though it functions like one in many ways. Instead, Neo-Confucianism is better described as a social philosophy and system of ethics incorporating certain religious practices such as ancestor worship.

Most South Koreans still respect the Neo-Confucian principles of virtue, morality, and respect for one's parents and ancestors. Similarly, many South Koreans continue to perform rituals to honor their ancestors on holidays such as the Lunar New Year and the Autumn Moon Festival.

Christianity

Christianity was introduced to Korea by a Korean scholar who was baptized a Catholic while visiting Beijing, China, in 1784. Upon returning home, he founded Korea's first Christian church and converted many Koreans. Suspicious of the Catholics' refusal to perform ancestor worship rituals, the Joseon dynasty banned Catholicism and persecuted or killed several followers, including foreign missionaries. Despite these challenges, about 4,000 Korean Catholics had formed close-knit communities by the end of the 18th century. By the 1860s, Korea was home to about 17,500 Catholics.

Protestant missionaries from the US first arrived in Korea in the 1880s, just as persecution of Catholics was easing. This increased tolerance extended to the Protestant missionaries, who were able to preach and meet openly without fear of government interference. Missionaries from the Presbyterian and Methodist denominations were especially successful in their efforts to spread Christianity across the Korean peninsula on a grand scale (Photo: American Methodist Church in Seoul around 1900).

Several factors contributed to the rapid spread of Christianity in the ensuing decades. First, since they provided healthcare and education in addition to religious instruction, Protestants in particular played a significant role in Korea's modernization. Consequently, the authorities tolerated them. Second, during Japan's occupation of Korea (see p. 4-5 of *History and Myth*), Christians played a key role in the peninsula's independence struggle. As a result, Christianity became positively linked with Korean nationalism (see p. 5-6 of *History and Myth*).

Following independence, Christianity continued to thrive due to 2 factors: the US Army Military Government's support of a Christianity-friendly environment and President Rhee's vow to rule South Korea as a Christian nation (see p. 7 of *History and Myth*). Later, as South Korea urbanized in the 1960s, new city-dwellers found replacements for their village-based family and friend networks in Protestant and Catholic organizations.

With almost a third of its population claiming Christian identity, South Korea is considered the second "most Christian" country in Asia after the Philippines. Of note, South Korea is home to several Christian "mega" churches, including Yoido Full Gospel Church, which with 830,000 members, is the world's largest.

Approximately 20% of South Koreans attend Protestant churches. Methodism and Presbyterianism remain the largest denominations, although Pentecostal groups are growing rapidly. Catholics constitute about 8% of the population. Completed in 1898, the Myeong-dong Gothic Cathedral (pictured) in Seoul is considered the symbol of Catholicism in South Korea. When he visited for the bicentennial of Korean Catholicism in 1984, Pope John Paul II canonized 93 Korean Catholics who were killed during Catholic persecution in the late 19th century.

New Religions

About 1% of the population practices what the South Korean census classifies as "new" religions. The best known example is ***Cheondogyo*** (Religion of the Heavenly Way)—South Korea's first modern, home-grown religion. Followers first began worshiping and affirming shared beliefs during a peasant rebellion in the 19th century. ***Cheondogyo*** is founded in Confucianism but also incorporates elements of Buddhism, Daoism (an ancient religion and philosophy that originated in China), and Christianity (such as worshiping God in church on Sundays). Followers of ***Cheondogyo*** reject the idea of an afterlife or eternal reward, focusing instead on spreading righteousness and world peace.

Other “new” religions include Won Buddhism, a variant of Buddhism that combines traditional Buddhist doctrine with a concern for social reform, and ***Taejonggyo*** (Great Ancestral Religion), which has as its central tenet the worship of Dangun, the legendary founder of Korea (see p. 13 of *History and Myth*).

Islam

In 2001, there were only 34,000 Muslims living in Korea; today there are more than 150,000. It is expected to continue growing with the steady global migration from Muslim-majority countries (Photo: Seoul Central Mosque).

Other Religious Movements

Like other East Asian countries, South Korea is home to a variety of other religious movements. One example is the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity founded by self-proclaimed messiah Sun Myung Moon in 1954. Known for its mass weddings, the Unification Church has expanded across the globe and pursues commercial interests in industries ranging from manufacturing to media.

Religion and Politics

South Korean politicians have often been criticized for allegedly favoring certain religious traditions over others. For example, two Protestant Presidents have been accused in the past of choosing cabinet ministers on the basis of religion. Similarly, Buddhist leaders once claimed that a Catholic presidential candidate favored Catholics over Buddhists.

Although some of her predecessors experienced challenges in working with the Buddhist community, former President Park Geun-hye (see p. 3 of *Political and Social Relations*) worked to establish positive ties with leaders of all faiths. Some observers suggested that Park was well-positioned to avoid the appearance of religious favoritism: Park claimed no religious affiliation but relied upon the social connections of her Buddhist mother and prominent Protestant associates to garner support in their respective communities.

4. FAMILY AND KINSHIP

Overview

South Koreans traditionally have regarded the preservation of the extended family unit as their highest priority. In recent years, modernization and globalization have served to weaken family ties as South Koreans have become more individualistic.

Family Structure

South Koreans traditionally lived together in large extended family units that included not just nuclear family members (a married couple and their children) but also uncles, aunts, cousins, and grandparents (see p. 11 of *Part 1 Culture General*). In accordance with Confucianism (see p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*), these family units were patriarchal, meaning that the eldest male served as household head. Women were responsible for domestic work and childrearing (see p. 1 of *Sex and Gender*) (Photo: A 1901 painting of a Korean family).

South Koreans traditionally regarded the extended family as a single entity and when a member misbehaved, the entire family was considered responsible. Similarly, since the family relied on rice for subsistence, they all contributed to its cultivation. Elderly parents traditionally lived with their first-born son, who was responsible for providing for their needs during old age.

Modern Changes: Various aspects of this traditional structure remain intact. For example, South Korean women still perform nearly all domestic tasks, while men are considered authority figures and primary breadwinners (p. 1 of *Sex and Gender*). Yet, other aspects of South Korean family structure have changed. As a result of industrialization and development (see p. 1 of *Economics and Resources*), families have splintered and shrunk as adult children typically leave their parents' homes and form their own households. Consequently, many South Korean families, especially in urban areas, now live as nuclear families.

Children: South Koreans value children and traditionally have had large families. Historically they preferred sons, who were better equipped to support elderly parents financially. This preference has weakened as the economic prospects of South Korean women have improved (see p. 1-2 of *Sex and Gender*). Most South Korean parents attempt to raise their children to be obedient, cooperative, and respectful of elders.

Residence

South Korean housing has changed significantly since 1960 when most structures were under 10 stories. Urbanization and a doubled population have ushered in high-rise apartment buildings to the major cities.

Traditional: Today traditional homes are found primarily in rural areas and coastal lowlands (Photo: A ***hanok***, or traditional Korean home). In most cases, they are made from wood or clay and are covered with a thatched, slate, or tile roof. Most traditional homes are small, low structures with few windows and doors, a design that helps retain heat. Some traditional homes are designed in line with Confucian ideals (see p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*). For example, men and women may live in separate quarters, while elders may live in the most comfortable quarters.

Modern: Most South Koreans live in nearly identical blocks of high-rise apartment buildings (pictured in Seoul). Apartments tend to be small—approximately 30% smaller than apartments in the US and Canada—and typically feature a small balcony and 2-3 bedrooms. While many people own apartments, others lease them through ***chunsae***, a traditional deposit system. Most South Koreans value square footage, as their peers generally consider the size of a family's home a reliable indicator of that family's wealth.

Rites of Passage

South Koreans observe numerous rites of passage that mark different stages in a person's life and development.

Birth: Following birth the mother and child stay secluded for 3 weeks to avoid disease while the child's immune system develops. After ***samcheelil*** (21 days), family and friends typically visit the mother and child. During a child's first 2 years, he is rarely separated from his mother who carries the child almost everywhere (Photo: *Mother and Child*, courtesy of Culture Grams, ProQuest 2014).

Baegil* and *Tol*:** South Koreans observe special celebrations when a child reaches 100 days (baegil***) and 1 year (***tol***) of life, although today some families combine the celebrations. ***Tol*** typically is larger and includes a unique custom in which the child is allowed to select from several items, such as books, money, or thread displayed on a table. South Koreans believe that the items children grasp indicate something about their futures. For example, they might expect a child who chooses a book to become a professor.

Coming-of-Age Day: On the 3rd Monday in May, individuals nearing age 20 observe "Coming-of-Age Day" to mark their entrance into adult society. During the celebration, the participants sometimes wear traditional attire (see p. 1 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*).

Marriage

South Koreans traditionally regarded marriage as a means of producing a male heir and perpetuating a lineage rather than a union based on love and companionship. Accordingly, South Koreans depended upon ***jungmae*** (matchmakers) or relatives to find socioeconomically compatible potential spouses.

Today, while some people still use a variant of this system, almost all South Koreans decide who they marry. Most youth find spouses by dating co-workers or classmates or through family-arranged blind dates with potential partners.

Weddings: Modern South Korean weddings typically incorporate both traditional Korean and Western-style elements and occur in large wedding halls. The Western-style ceremony usually occurs first followed by a private traditional ceremony exclusive to immediate family members. Guests typically eat while the second ceremony occurs. The marriage concludes with a reception at which the newlyweds may wear traditional clothing (see p. 1 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*) while mingling with guests (Photo: Newlyweds and their fathers wear Western attire while the mothers dress traditionally, courtesy of Culture Grams, ProQuest 2014).

Divorce: Along with economic development and modernization, (see p. 1 of *Economics and Resources*), South Korea's divorce rate has increased rapidly to become among the world's highest. Observers often cite female economic empowerment and an increased sense of individualism as key causes of this trend. The traditional social stigma associated with divorce has weakened as the practice has become more common.

Death

Traditionally, South Korean death customs have consisted primarily of Confucian rituals, including days of mourning, funerals in the home, and burials in private graveyards. In modern South Korea, these customs have changed in several ways. First, due to the rapid spread of Christianity since the 1880s (see p. 5-6 of *Religion and Spirituality*), many South Koreans today incorporate Christian rituals. In addition, a growth in medical infrastructure (see p. 4 of *Sustenance and Health*) has increased the number of South Koreans who expire in hospitals. This trend prompted a number of hospitals to add funeral halls in the 1980s, leading to a broader shift of funerals from homes to hospitals. Finally, as land has become scarce and cremation acceptable, traditional burial has declined. Despite these changes, many South Koreans continue to honor deceased ancestors by performing ancestral memorial rites (see p. 2-3 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

5. SEX AND GENDER

Overview

South Koreans traditionally consider sexual matters as private and define gender roles according to Confucian values (see p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*) that grant men higher status than women. While Confucian ideals remain influential, South Korea has made strides toward gender equality.

Gender Roles and Work

Domestic Labor: By Confucian tradition, a woman's primary duty is tending to the home. South Koreans traditionally have regarded women as the "inside" spouses who raise children and perform domestic work and men as the "outside" spouses responsible for supporting the family financially.

Today, women still perform most domestic work in South Korea. According to a 2015 survey, South Korean men spend an average of 45 minutes per day on domestic tasks, less than men in any other developed country. Still, many South Korean women hold substantial power at home, making most decisions about family finances and children's education.

Labor Force: South Korean women tend to be highly educated as indicated by the country's high literacy rate (see p.1 of *Learning and Knowledge*). Yet they often hold lower positions than men, earning only about 65% as much in wages. In addition, women who work outside the home generally are expected to perform their domestic work as well. Some women find it hard to perform both roles, particularly since few firms offer services like childcare to accommodate employed mothers. While the law provides for a year of subsidized maternity leave, long absences can hamper a woman's career. Moreover, business culture often requires long workdays (see p. 1 of *Time and Space*) and after-hour social activities. These conditions compel some women to delay marriage or leave the workforce until their children are grown.

Gender and Politics

Since 2004, South Korean law requires that women comprise at least 30% of each party's candidates for the 253 National Assembly seats elected by single constituencies. In addition, the law has mandated that there be no less than 50% of women candidates for the 47 seats elected at the national level. Yet, the law does not require that women win any seats. Currently, women hold 17% of National Assembly seats, a share slightly lower than the 24% in the US Congress.

Nevertheless, women have made strides in other parts of government. Most notably, in 2012 South Korea elected Park Geun-hye (pictured) as its first female President. Women also have gained greater access to government jobs since 1996, when the government introduced a quota requiring at least 30% of non-police, non-military government hires to be women. By 2003, female hiring had increased so much that the quota was revised to require at least 30% male hires as well.

Gender and the Law

Despite the existence of South Korean law dictating gender equality, traditional Confucian values often prevail. For example, even though women have legal inheritance rights equal to those of men, lower courts tend to favor men. This tendency stems from the Confucian tradition of providing sons greater inheritance rights than daughters. Similar traditions sometimes override other statutes that establish equal rights with respect to marriage, divorce, and child custody.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

While South Korea recently strengthened its laws against sex crimes, official statistics show that, in 2014, 87.2% of all reported victims of violent crime were women, a significant increase from 1995's 72.2%. Due to traditional views, some South Koreans consider perpetrators of sex crimes as having committed only a minor mistake. Moreover, some South Koreans blame female victims for GBV, claiming that they cause incidents by dressing provocatively or drinking excessively.

Sex and Procreation

In line with Confucianism (see p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*), men traditionally initiated and women submitted to romantic encounters. Moreover, women have been held to strict standards of premarital virginity and marital fidelity not expected of men. In contemporary society, these and other traditional attitudes such as childbearing tendencies have changed among young, liberal-minded South Koreans.

South Korea has one of the world's lowest birth and fertility rates (see p. 1 of *Political and Social Relations*) by today's standards, yet was among the highest in 1960. Two factors account for much of this change. First, the rapid economic growth since 1960 (see p. 1 of *Economics and Resources*) has spurred wealth and an associated tendency towards lower fertility rates. Second, family planning policies were implemented from 1965-2005 in order to limit family sizes. Even though large families are encouraged again, high education costs and long workdays discourage many adults from procreating (Photo: *Mother and Child*, courtesy of Culture Grams, ProQuest 2014).

Prostitution: Prostitution is prevalent in Korea and produces more of the GDP than agriculture. Its banning in 1961 has been loosely enforced. Stricter laws passed in 2004 halved the industry by 2007, yet prostitution remains common and often associated with legal activities. For example, some of the so-called "juicy bars" near US bases have been tied to prostitution. US military personnel are prohibited from patronizing businesses tied to prostitution or human trafficking.

Homosexuality

While prohibitive attitudes have begun to shift, South Koreans traditionally have frowned upon homosexuality. Consequently, it has been common historically for homosexual men to marry women and have children while secretly pursuing same-sex relationships. Although gay marriage is still illegal, discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is also illegal.

6. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Language Overview

Korean is the first language of most South Koreans. Although Korean bears similarities to several Asian languages such as Japanese and Mongolian, most linguists do not consider it a member of any language family. Of note, Korean is not related to Chinese, although the languages share many words due to the close proximity of their speakers. During Japan's colonial occupation of Korea (see p. 4-5 of *History and Myth*), speaking Korean became a way of retaining a uniquely Korean cultural identity and continues a similar role today.

Korean and Hangul

The term ***Korean*** refers to the official spoken language of South Korea. ***Hangul*** is its writing system devised in the 15th century and used widely since the 20th century. Like letters of the Latin alphabet, ***Hangul's*** 24 characters each represent a single sound and are combined with other characters to form words. ***Hangul*** characters are grouped and stacked into blocks in order to form syllables. Consequently, seemingly short words may have many syllables (Graphic: The word "***Hangul***" written in ***Hangul***, with English letters showing the sound contributed by each ***Hangul*** character. The shape of the mouth represents each particular sound). While Koreans now write nearly all Korean words in ***Hangul***, they still record some words in ***Hanja***, a variant of the Chinese writing system that was used to document Korean before the creation of ***Hangul***.

South Koreans have several dialects and accents each typically associated with a particular region. Except for the dialect of Jeju, an island off South Korea's southern coast, dialects in the South are mutually intelligible. The Korean language has evolved differently between the 2 Koreas. Unlike the North, people in the South use many English "loan" words in their everyday speech. The dialect of the capital city Seoul is considered standard Korean and is taught in all South Korean schools (see p. 3-4 of *Learning and Knowledge*).

English

English has a long history in Korea, initially gaining significance during the Korean War (see p. 8 of *History and Myth*). It remains popular today due to its widespread use in international business. South Koreans are more likely to study and speak English as a second language than any other language. (Photo: Signs in Seoul with Korean and English writing).

Besides receiving 6 years of English instruction in school (see p. 3 of *Learning and Knowledge*), many South Korean students also hire tutors or take outside classes. Nevertheless, very few of them, particularly in rural areas, reach fluency because they have few opportunities to practice with native English speakers. As part of an effort to address this issue, about 20,000 native English speakers, including Americans, teach English in South Korea each year. In addition, many South Koreans send their children to school in English-speaking countries.

Communication Overview

While speaking Korean enables effective communication in South Korea, the ability to interact in culturally competent ways also helps. Communicating competently involves paralanguage (speech, volume, rate, intonation), nonverbal communication (personal space, touch, gestures), and interaction management (conversation initiation, turn-taking, termination). When used properly, these forms of communication ensure that statements are interpreted as the speaker intends.

Communication Style

Confucian doctrine (see p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*) has influenced South Koreans' communication protocols. For example, in line with Confucian social relations, they typically treat people of different ages, genders, and backgrounds with varying levels of respect. South Koreans also often behave in ways that reflect the Confucian emphasis on social harmony. For example, they tend to be deferential toward people of high status. Most South Koreans avoid talking to strangers.

Due to their emphasis on courtesy and “saving face” (avoiding embarrassment to themselves or others), South Koreans prefer indirect communication. Consequently, they often talk around contentious issues or avoid them entirely. Similarly, they may avoid bad news or keep negative opinions to themselves. They consider it impolite to critique others in public, which may lead to shame or dishonor. South Koreans typically hesitate to offer frank opinions, although are more likely to offer sincere replies to open-ended questions (as opposed to firm “yes or no”) or asked within the context of a trust-based relationship.

While South Koreans tend to smile and laugh frequently, this behavior is not to be interpreted as indicating amusement. South Koreans may laugh when they are uncomfortable and not sure how to respond or as a means of dispelling tensions. South Koreans generally do not appreciate sarcasm and often misunderstand its intent.

Greetings

Bowing is South Korea’s most common greeting (Photo: Sung Kim, US Ambassador to South Korea, bows at the waist while receiving an item from then-President Park Geun-hye). The South Korean bow takes several forms. Between people with similar social status, it may consist simply of a deferential nod. Between people with different social statuses, the person of lower status bows low and from the waist. This type of bow is also common on formal occasions. South Koreans of lower social status usually initiate an exchange of bows.

In professional contexts, and especially between men, a 2-handed handshake frequently follows bows, with the person of higher status typically initiating the exchange. Compared to the US, South Korean handshakes are long and involve a gentler grasp. When meeting new people, South Koreans exchange business cards, also using both hands to indicate respect, and briefly glance at each other’s cards to show interest.

Verbal greetings vary depending on the relative status of the people involved. South Koreans conversing with people of similar or lower status say "*Annyong haseyo*?" which means "Hello" during an initial greeting. Young people tend to greet each other more casually, omitting the term "*haseyo*" that indicates politeness and using only "*Annyong*" ("Hi"). When greeting people senior in age or rank, South Koreans add the phrase ***hashimnikka*** to show greater respect.

Forms of Address

South Koreans use different forms of address to indicate levels of respect and solidarity. When addressing elders or people of high status, South Koreans use professional or honorary titles rather than first or last names. They consider it insulting to call elders—even siblings or people close in age—by first names.

In business contexts, subordinates usually address superiors by titles rather than names (in English, an example might be "Mr. Manager"). Peers in the workplace tend to use polite titles, such as ***Son-seng-nim*** (***Son-seng*** meaning "teacher" and ***nim*** indicating honor), with a last name. Peers also tend to be less formal, using coworkers' first names and the suffix ***shi*** to show familiarity and respect. South Koreans address older siblings and friends by their first name and a gender-specific title that means "older brother" or "older sister."

In addition to respectful titles, the Korean language has distinct forms of the words "you," "we," "us," and accompanying verbs. The specific pronoun or verb conjugation varies with the level of respect required. Words that differentiate gender such as "he," "she", "Sir," or "Ma'am" do not exist in Korean, so foreign nationals should not be offended if Koreans refer to them with a term of the incorrect gender. When speaking English, foreign nationals should speak formally and politely, addressing the Korean member with the English version of their Korean title if possible. Since there are many variations of titles, foreign nationals are advised to ask South Koreans for guidance.

Names

South Korean family names (last names) usually contain only one syllable. The most common family names are Kim, Park, Rhee, Lee, and Yi (the latter 3 names are variants of a single name). Family names precede given names (first names). Consequently, the "last name" of a person named Kim Min-jun would be Kim. South Korean women do not take their husbands' family name when they get married.

Conversational Topics

South Koreans typically begin conversations with questions about family, hobbies, marital status, occupation, education, and age. These inquiries help South Koreans determine each other's social status and, if the conversation occurs in Korean, appropriate pronouns and titles. Similar topics, including family, health, food, and positive observations about South Korea are appropriate subjects for foreign nationals to discuss with South Koreans. By contrast, foreign nationals should avoid discussing local politics, other people's spouses, Japan, communism, and socialism. South Koreans often ask about age, income, marital status, and cost of various goods and services—unlike Americans, Koreans do not consider such questions rude.

Gestures

Like people from most cultures, South Koreans use gestures to augment their words. While some gestures resemble American versions, they may have different meanings. For example, the American gesture for "go away," which involves waving one's fingers together with the palm down, indicates "come here" to a South Korean. Similarly, the gesture for "money" resembles the American sign for "OK." Finally, South Koreans "point" at people by extending their arm with an upward palm instead of using the index finger (considered rude in South Korea).

Language Training Resources

Please view the Air Force Culture and Language Center website at www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/ and click on "Resources" for access to language training and other resources.

Useful Translations

English	Romanized Korean	*Hangul*
Hello	annyŏng haseyo	안녕하세요
How are you?	chal jinaeshyŏssŏyo?	잘 지내셨어요?
I am fine, thank you	chal jinaesssŏyo	잘 지냈어요
What is your name?	sungham ee uttoke daesipnika?	성함이 어떻게 되십니까?
My name is ___	chŏ-nŭn ___ imnida	저는 ___ 입니다
Pleased to meet you	mannasŏ bangapsŭmnida	반갑습니다
Yes	ne	네
No	aniyo	아니요
Thank you	kamsahamnida	감사합니다
You are welcome	pyŏl malssŭmŭlyo	별 말씀을요
Excuse me	shillehagessumnida	실례하겠습니다
Do you speak English?	yŏngŏ hal jul aseyyo?	영어 할 줄 아세요?
Goodbye	annyeonghi gyeseyo (if speaker is leaving)/ annyeonghi gaseyo (if staying)	안녕히 계세요/ 안녕히 가세요
Go straight! Then, turn left/ right.	Tchuk ka-se-yo! Kŭ da-ŭ-me woen/o-rŭn tcho-gŭ-ro jom ga-se-yo.	쭉 가세요! 그 다음에 왼/오른 쪽으로 좀 가세요
Write it down please.	Chŏ-gŏ ju-se-yo.	적어 주세요
I don't understand	Mo-na-ra-dŭt-kke-ssŏ-yo.	못 알아 듣겠어요.
Where is the toilet?	Hwajangsiri eodiyeyo?	화장실이 어디예요?
How much is this?	Ige eolmayeyo?	이게 얼마예요?
Can you help me?	Chom to-wa-ju-shil ssu i-ssŭ-shi-na-yo?	좀 도와주실 수 있으시나요?

7. LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

Literacy

- Total population over age 15 who can read and write: 99.9%
- Male: 99.9%
- Female: 99.9% (2015 estimate)

Early History of Education

Korea has a long history of formal education dating to the Three Kingdoms era (see p. 2 of *History and Myth*) when King Sosurim of Goguryeo founded the peninsula's first educational institution in 372 AD. Based on a Chinese model, Korean education aimed to teach young elites to be leaders. Inhabitants of Goguryeo later established private schools to teach martial arts and the Chinese writing system to non-elites (Graphic: Young Korean women receiving music instruction).

The Silla Kingdom also developed a formal education system after conquering Baekje and Goguryeo in the 600s AD (see p. 2 of *History and Myth*). Also influenced by the Chinese education system, Silla's schools focused on preparing young men for national defense. Buddhism was the original basis for the curriculum, although Confucian influence grew during the 7th and 8th centuries, eventually supplanting Buddhism (see p. 3-4 of *Religion and Spirituality* and p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*). Subsequently, Silla's bureaucrats-in-training studied Confucian texts, while the education system increasingly focused on tests and certifications.

This emphasis on preparing elites for exams continued during the Goryeo and Joseon dynasties (see p. 2-3 of *History and Myth*). During the former dynasty, the highest elites studied Confucian texts, while lower elites studied technical disciplines. During the latter dynasty, education focused on instilling morality into future leaders. Scholarship was highly respected, with the topmost honors reserved for students who passed the most rigorous exams. Education was open only to male elites and became a major symbol of elite status.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Korean education system grew rapidly. In addition, the government increasingly incorporated Western-style reforms in an effort to compete with major global powers. Schools reduced their prior emphasis on Confucianism and gave equal educational opportunities to both genders. When the Japanese annexed Korea as a colony in 1910 (see p. 5 of *History and Myth*), they discontinued these initiatives in an effort to suppress Korean nationalism and force Koreans to assimilate to Japanese culture and society.

Education after World War II

When the US military took control of southern Korea at the end of World War II (see p. 6-7 of *History and Myth*), it replaced the Japanese education system with one based on US practices. Emphasizing democratic ideals, the US education system was popular enough that South Koreans augmented and retained it after reclaiming control of their country in 1948.

During South Korea's first few years of independence, teachers were scarce and illiteracy was high, partly due to the effects of the Korean War (see p. 8 of *History and Myth*). Despite these challenges, the South Korean government invested heavily in education over the next few decades. By the end of the 1960s, South Korea had met its target of near-perfect (almost 100%) literacy. Having since achieved several decades of educational improvements, South Korea today has one of the world's best-educated populations.

Modern Education System

Today South Korea's primary and secondary education systems are renowned as some of the world's finest. This reputation is based on graduation rates, post-secondary enrollment rates, international test scores, among other factors. Observers attribute the success of South Korea's education system to the population's respect for education and its strong support for students and teachers, the latter of whom are well-paid and highly respected.

Despite this reputation, some people criticize the South Korean education system for its emphasis on memorization rather than

analytical and creative skills. Some observers also suggest that the South Korean education system is inefficient. For example, South Korean students spend more hours studying each day and 30 days more in school each year than students in Finland, which actually achieves better educational outcomes.

Primary: Consisting of 6 grades and starting at age 6, primary school is both compulsory and free in South Korea. Almost all (99%) children of the appropriate age enroll. Subjects include math, science, Korean, social studies, ethics, music, art, and physical education. Students also begin learning English in 3rd grade (Photo: Three South Korean girls attend English language camp, courtesy of Culture Grams, ProQuest 2014).

Secondary: Almost all South Korean students eventually enroll in secondary school, which consists of middle school and high school. Of those who begin secondary school, 98% finish.

Consisting of grades 7-9, middle school is compulsory and free. Students are divided by ability for certain core courses, including math, science, social studies, Korean, and English, but are not divided for others such as art, music, ethics, and physical education. Elective courses include home economics, environmental education, technology, and foreign language.

High school consists of grades 10-12 and is neither compulsory nor free. Nevertheless, nearly all appropriately aged students enroll in high school. In major cities, students are allocated to specific high schools through a lottery system. In other parts of South Korea, admissions decisions are based on a mix of middle school grades and entrance exam scores.

South Korea has 3 types of high schools: general academic, special purpose, and vocational. The majority of high school students attend general academic schools, which are designed to prepare them for university entrance exams. These students complete a broad-based general curriculum while also focusing in-depth on a single subject, which usually becomes their major when they enroll at a university.

Around 10% of high school students attend special purpose academic schools, where they focus on specific subjects, such as foreign languages or science. Although students in special purpose schools study a narrower curriculum than students in general schools, they attend the same types of universities.

Approximately 30% of students attend vocational high schools, where they receive one year of general training and 2 years of job-focused training. Courses include agriculture, commerce, industry, and home economics. Many vocational graduates go on to pursue degrees in skilled trades at junior colleges.

"Examination Hell": High school education in South Korea is defined by exams. Both regular high school and university entrance exams are highly competitive. Consequently, students face heavy pressure from parents to keep up their grades while studying intensively for university entrance exams. On average, high school students study for an estimated 13 hours per day, often suffering from poor emotional health and risk of suicide.

Hagwons*:** One major aspect of the South Korean education system are ***Hagwons, or private facilities that offer after-school classes designed to prepare high school students for university entrance exams. Most parents and students consider ***Hagwon*** attendance essential, resulting in an attendance rate of about 75% of students. Critics of this system argue that it puts too much pressure on students and that excessive studying is inefficient because exhausted students study poorly.

Post-Secondary: Around 94% of South Korean high school students eventually pursue higher education at one of their country's 137 junior colleges or 203 universities. South Korea has two universities in the top 100 world institutions, with its top ranked Seoul National University coming in in 64th (Photo: entry gate to SNU). Sungkyunkwan University (SKKU) is positioned at 89th. Nevertheless, since domestic alumni networks play a major role in getting good jobs, students face strong pressure to attend a top South Korean university despite the existence abroad of academically superior universities.

8. TIME AND SPACE

Overview

Punctuality and efficient time management are integral to the professional and social lives of most South Koreans. Although they traditionally have avoided physical and eye contact in public, norms have shifted as South Korea has modernized.

Time and Work

South Korea's work week extends from Monday-Friday, with hours varying by establishment type. Most banks are open from 9:30am-4:00pm, and ATMs from about 7:00am-11:00pm. Both private businesses and government offices, including post offices, typically are open from 9:00am-6:00pm. Some government offices may close earlier during winter months while many state-run museums close on Mondays. Most stores are open from 10:00am-8:00pm on all days but Sunday, although some stores keep longer hours or open every day.

Working Hours: South Korean employees tend to work long hours, sometimes resulting in negative effects such as low productivity and greater odds of workplace injury. To address these issues, the government passed a law in 2004 that provided for the gradual introduction of a 40-hour limit to the work week. While average weekly working hours declined from almost 50 in 2004 to about 42 in 2012, some firms expect employees to perform the same amount of work in fewer hours. In addition, some firms have cut back on vacations.

Time Zone and Date Notation: South Korea adheres to Korea Standard Time (KST), which is 9 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) and 14 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time (EST). South Korea does not observe daylight savings time. When writing dates, South Koreans record the day first and then the month and year. For example, they would record the last day of 2013 as 31 December 2000 or 31/12/2000.

Emergency Exercises: On the 15th day of all months except January, February, July, and December, the government holds nationwide civil emergency exercises in which transportation systems stop, sirens sound, and authorities randomly ask people to take shelter in train stations or basements. Foreign nationals are not required to participate in these exercises.

Holidays

National Holidays

- January 1: New Year's Day
- March 1: Independence Movement Day
- May 5: Children's Day
- June 6: Memorial Day
- August 15: Independence Day
- October 3: National Foundation Day
- October 9: Korean Alphabet Day
- December 25: Christmas

Lunar Holidays (dates vary year-year)

- ***Seollal***: Lunar New Year (Winter)
- ***Seokga Tansinil***: Buddha's Birthday (Spring)
- ***Chuseok***: Korean Thanksgiving (Autumn)

Time and Business

While South Koreans value punctuality and respect deadlines, they often are flexible about changing their specific schedules, especially when trying to accommodate superiors. Accordingly, foreign nationals should arrive at meetings and finish work on time but should not be offended if a South Korean announces new plans at the last minute.

Daily work activities tend to progress slower in South Korea than in the US. This tendency is due partly to a general preference among South Koreans to establish personal relationships before conducting business, often involving after-work socializing at bars and restaurants. It also stems from South Korean decision-making techniques which usually involves a blend of seniority and consensus.

Personal Space

In social settings, South Koreans like Americans typically stand about an arm's length apart while conversing. Strangers may stand slightly farther apart, while friends may stand closer. Pedestrians often push and elbow while navigating the congested public spaces of South Korean cities. This behavior is socially acceptable and does not require an apology.

"Rude" Behavior

Apart from pushing and elbowing, South Koreans may exhibit other behaviors in public that seem inappropriate to Americans. For example, South Koreans commonly spit in public spaces. Similarly, public smoking is a common social activity (only 3% of women smoke, while nearly half of men do). Finally, South Koreans frequently litter in cities, parks, and beaches, although middle-aged women sometimes mitigate the resulting mess by forming groups and cleaning public spaces.

Touch

Conversational touching between family and friends is common in South Korea. As a sign of respect, foreign nationals should allow the locals to initiate first contact during greetings and conversations, especially with new acquaintances. Generally, interpersonal touching corresponds with social norms of respecting elders and upholding proper gender relations. South Koreans consider it disrespectful for a younger person to touch an older person, especially on the head or shoulders. Touching members of the opposite gender connotes intimacy. Although kissing in public is considered inappropriate, holding hands is acceptable among the same and different genders.

Eye Contact

While South Koreans traditionally do not make eye contact during conversations, the practice has become more common as South Korea has modernized. Most middle-aged or younger South Koreans establish periodic eye contact when conversing with peers. Nevertheless, many South Koreans still avert their eyes when conversing with people senior in age or status.

Physical Taboos

Certain physical actions are inappropriate in South Korea. For example, since South Koreans consider feet unclean, they find it impolite when people prop their feet on furniture or show the soles of their feet or shoes. South Koreans also find it rude when people cross their legs while sitting or use only the left hand to greet, pass items, or eat. South Koreans usually cover their mouths while laughing, yawning, picking their teeth, or otherwise exposing the inside of their mouths. Finally, South Koreans usually remove their shoes when entering the home and some restaurants and workplaces.

Photographs

Foreign nationals are advised to gain permission before taking pictures of South Koreans, especially in Buddhist temples or at shamanist ceremonies (see p. 2 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Foreign nationals should not take pictures of police or while in or near the DMZ (see p. 2 of *Political and Social Relations*).

Driving Habits

While most South Korean drivers follow basic traffic laws, the country's road deaths per capita are around 20% less than those of the US and 2.5 times higher than those of Japan. This relatively high rate stems in part from South Korean driving habits. For example, many South Koreans run red lights, drive too fast, or change lanes without signaling. Bus drivers tend to be aggressive, while motorcyclists may dart in and out of traffic, sometimes even riding on sidewalks. Finally, South Korean drivers commonly fail to yield to pedestrians (Photo: expressway in Seoul).

Traffic Laws: South Koreans, like Americans, drive on the right side of the road and have a few unique laws. For example, left turns are permitted only when indicated by a green arrow and right turns at red lights usually are allowed. Wearing seatbelts and having insurance are mandatory. Drivers are considered intoxicated if their blood alcohol content (BAC) is 0.05% or higher. This limit is lower than the standard US threshold of 0.08% and can be reached with just one drink.

9. AESTHETICS AND RECREATION

Overview

Like other East Asians, Koreans traditionally have found artistic inspiration in nature. For thousands of years, Koreans have blended their own ideas and skills with those of neighboring China and Japan to produce unique styles of dress, music, dance, theater, and fine arts. In recent decades, South Korean styles have shifted due to urbanization and globalization.

Dress and Appearance

Most South Koreans wear Western-style clothes for daily wear. While young people's preferences for modern styles support a vibrant domestic fashion industry, older South Koreans prefer conservative styles. South Koreans tend to dress more formally than Americans. In business contexts, for example, most South Korean men wear full suits and ties, typically shunning the "business casual" style preferred by many Americans.

Traditional: Known in Korean as ***hanbok***, traditional Korean dress usually is made from brocade silk (a thick fabric woven with raised designs). Male ***hanbok*** consists of a long jacket with wide sleeves worn over a vest and loose pants. Some men also traditionally wore the ***gat*** (pictured above), a tall, black, wide-brimmed horsehair hat historically associated with government officials. Female ***hanbok*** consists of multi-layered undergarments worn under a ***chima*** (long, wide skirt) and a ***chogori*** (short jacket closed on the side with a ribbon).

Traditionally, South Korean girls and women have worn bright colors such as red, pink, and purple. By contrast, boys and men have worn neutral shades of white, light gray, or light blue. Today most South Koreans reserve ***hanbok*** for special occasions, such as holidays, children's birthdays, weddings, and funerals (see p. 3 of *Family and Kinship*).

Recreation

South Koreans traditionally socialized in teahouses, while today they meet in coffee shops, restaurants, and bars, usually with colleagues. ***Noraebang*** (karaoke) is a popular recreational activity for South Koreans of all ages. Outdoor enthusiasts enjoy camping, hiking, and snow skiing in national parks located in mountainous and coastal regions. During festivals and holidays, South Koreans enjoy many traditional games, such as tug-of-war and see-saw competitions.

Sports

Baseball: Introduced to Korea by US Christian missionaries in 1905, baseball is South Korea's most popular spectator sport and also widely played. Competition is especially intense at the college and high school levels. South Korea has a popular professional league, although a number of South Koreans belong to Major US League Baseball teams.

Soccer: Since its introduction in 1882, soccer has developed into South Korea's second most popular spectator sport. South Korea has consistently fielded successful national teams and in 2013 qualified for its 8th consecutive World Cup. South Korea joined with Japan to host the 2002 World Cup, during which South Korea's national team, the Taeguk Warriors, finished its best ever 4th place.

Other Sports: Other popular sports include ***taekwondo***, a native Korean martial art, and ***sirom***, a traditional form of wrestling. South Koreans also enjoy bowling, golf, tennis, table tennis, basketball, volleyball, and swimming (Photo: South Korean sailor performs taekwondo demo).

Olympics: South Korean athletes have earned medals in a variety of events at both the summer and winter Olympics, having been especially successful at archery and short track speed skating. South Korea hosted the 1988 Summer Olympic Games in Seoul, which was a defining moment for Koreans. It also hosted the 2018 Winter Olympics in the northeastern city of Pyeongchang.

Music

South Koreans appreciate a variety of musical styles and are fond of singing at social events, whether informal ***noraebang*** or a formal performance.

Traditional: Traditional Korean music (***Gugak***) includes both choral and instrumental versions. Traditional instruments include the ***gayageum*** (a 12-stringed zither), the ***haegum*** (a 2-stringed fiddle), a barrel drum, an hourglass-shaped drum, and a variety of gongs, bells, and flutes. While some traditional musical styles were reserved for royal courts or Buddhist rituals, others were popular among common people. Still others characterized Korean theater and dance performances.

Western Classical Music: Western classical music is popular, and South Korea has more than 30 symphony orchestras devoted to the genre. In addition, South Korea has produced a number of internationally renowned classical musicians.

Modern: The dominant form of modern music in South Korea is Korean pop or "K-pop." BoA and Rain are popular K-pop artists, while successful K-pop groups include Bigbang and Girls' Generation. In much of the world, the most famous example of K-pop is the 2012 single "Gangnam Style" by Psy, a rapper (pictured). Known for its infectious rhythm and Psy's unorthodox dance moves, the song describes aspects of a lifestyle associated with Gangnam, an upscale part of Seoul.

Dance and Theater

These genres have a long history in South Korea. In the past, professional troupes performed dances and plays at royal courts, while villagers entertained themselves with their own amateur performances. South Koreans today retain an interest in traditional performing arts, several of which enjoy official recognition. For example, the government recognizes the mask

dance (***choyongmu***), crane dance (***hakchum***), and dance of the spring nightingale (***chunaengjon***) as cultural assets.

During these and other dances, performers wear brightly colored masks made from paper, gourds, or wood, with each mask representing a certain character in the story. Performers also may carry items such as knives or fans that have certain symbolic meanings (Photo: Professional dancers perform the ***buchaechum*** or fan dance).

Various musical and percussion groups perform throughout the country, striving to preserve traditional styles of music and theater. One example of revived ancient practices is ***p'ansori***, a type of performance in which a soloist sings or recites poetry to music or drumbeats. Themes explored by ***p'ansori*** typically include Confucian principles (see p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*), love, and nature.

Arts and Crafts

Some of the earliest surviving Korean paintings are wall murals in tombs dating to the 6th century AD (see p. 2 of *History and Myth*). Depicting nature and daily living, these murals mark the beginning of a long tradition of painting and calligraphy on the Korean peninsula. This tradition reached its peak in the 18th century when court-appointed artists developed new forms of landscape painting to realistically portray daily events. These so-called "folk" paintings remain popular today.

After its introduction to Korea in the 4th century AD, Buddhism began to influence all areas of artistic activity. This influence is most evident today in the peninsula's thousands of Buddhist temples and pagodas, which house paintings, stone and bronze sculptures, and rock carvings related to Buddhist themes. For many South Koreans, Buddhist and non-Buddhist alike, these works have great significance.

Around 1,000 years ago, Korean artisans began producing ceramics using techniques borrowed from China. By the 12th century, they had perfected the production of ***celadon***, a type

of green-glazed ceramic ware prized across Asia for its refined form and translucence.

Today South Korean artists and artisans blend these uniquely Korean themes and techniques with Western artistic traditions. Museums and galleries throughout the country display South Korean artwork, including paintings, ceramics, sculpture, fine furniture, jewelry, and metalwork.

Cinema and Television

Over the past 2 decades, South Korean television and film have enjoyed growing popularity across Asia in a movement that has been dubbed ***hallyu***, or the "Korean wave." Several South Korean films and directors have earned international recognition, such as being featured in global film festivals.

Literature

Koreans traditionally passed down legends, plays, poems, and stories orally or recorded them with Chinese characters. After the invention of ***Hangul***, a Korean alphabet, in the 15th century (see p. 1 of *Language and Communication*), Korean literature expanded to include novels, poems, biographies, and travelogues (Pictured: ***Jikji***, a 1377 Korean manuscript and the earliest known book printed with moveable metal type).

Since independence, many South Korean writers have focused on interpreting the social, political, and historical events shaping modern South Korea. For example, contemporary author Park Wan-suh explores the trauma of war and its effects on family relations in her novels. Similarly, poet Ko Un, whom many consider South Korea's greatest living writer, describes his experiences during the Korean War in works that combine popular speech with traditional Korean poetic forms.

A number of contemporary South Korean authors have enjoyed international commercial success, receiving major literary prizes. For example, in 2011 Shin Kyung-sook became the first South Korean to win the Man Asian Literary Prize for her best-selling and critically acclaimed novel *Please Look After Mom*.

10. SUSTENANCE AND HEALTH

Sustenance Overview

Traditional cuisine and dining etiquette play an important role in defining South Korean culture. Many dishes represent South Korea's passion for balance and harmony by offering contrast between hot and cold; spicy and mild; and sweet and sour.

Dining Customs

Although South Koreans traditionally dined while sitting on the ground at low tables, today they typically sit in chairs at Western-style tables. Nevertheless, South Koreans still prefer chopsticks to forks or knives, although they use spoons to eat rice or soup. At most meals South Koreans use chopsticks to take food from communal bowls, although not touching their mouths with the chopsticks. In addition, they do not leave chopsticks lodged vertically in food—a custom reserved exclusively for offering food to ancestors.

Most South Koreans eat 3 meals daily, with the largest meal in the evening. Hosts generally serve dishes all at once. Since South Koreans eat heated food piping hot, they often slurp loudly as a cooling effect. Younger members usually wait to eat after their elders have started. South Koreans generally dine in silence, reserving any socializing for after meals. After guests finish their meals, they can expect to receive and in turn decline several offers for additional servings. Conversely, guests who desire more food are expected to decline initially as a gesture of politeness, accepting on the second or third offer.

Diet

South Koreans generally prefer zesty foods prepared with garlic, salt, red pepper paste, sesame oil, and a wide variety of spices as flavoring agents. A typical meal includes white rice, bean and vegetable soup, ***kimchi*** (spicy pickled cabbage), and a wide range of ***banchan*** (vegetable-based side dishes).

Kimchi*:** The most popular ***banchan is ***kimchi***, which is made by pickling cabbage, radishes, or cucumbers with spices, fish, or seaweed. Specific ***kimchi*** recipes vary by region and family. While ***kimchi*** is available in stores, South Koreans traditionally have made ***kimchi*** at home using family recipes. ***Kimchi*** is usually prepared in autumn and fermented in buried clay pots.

Popular Dishes

Alongside rice, soup, ***kimchi***, and other ***banchans***, South Koreans enjoy ***bulgogi*** (strips of marinated and grilled beef); ***galbi*** (short ribs); ***japchae*** (clear sweet potato noodles with meat and vegetables); ***bibimbap*** (rice mixed with meat, vegetables, and fried egg); and ***mandu*** (dumplings). Primary sources of protein include beef, pork, chicken, and fish. Cabbage, spinach, zucchini, cucumbers, and seaweed are basic vegetables. Relatively few South Koreans eat ***gaegogi*** (dog meat), traditionally considered a health-promoting delicacy. For dessert, South Koreans may serve such fruits as persimmons or ***bae*** (Asian pears).

Restaurants

South Koreans eat out regularly, where visits likely last for hours. Restaurants range from street kiosks selling chicken, fried breads, fish, ***jeon*** (Korean pancakes), and other fast foods (pictured) to upscale restaurants offering a range of global culinary specialties. Perhaps the best-known types of Korean restaurant are those offering ***bulgogi***, ***galbi***, and other forms of “Korean barbecue.” Tipping is uncommon in South Korea.

Beverages

South Koreans enjoy ***boricha*** (barley tea), ***nokcha*** (green tea), and other teas made from citrus fruit, dates, and ginseng. In addition, the popularity of ***keopi*** (coffee) has grown in recent years. South Koreans also enjoy several rice-based alcoholic beverages, such as ***soju***, a distilled liquor, and ***makgeolli***, a rice wine roughly as strong as beer. While ***soju*** is usually about half as strong as vodka, it has a reputation for being easy to over-consume, leading to hangovers and prolonged sickness.

Health Overview

South Koreans' overall health has improved dramatically since the end of the Korean War. Nearly all South Koreans now have access to clean water, sufficient food, and modern healthcare. Moreover, the South Korean National Health Insurance (NHI) system covers 97% of the population. Between 1960 and 2020, the South Korean life expectancy at birth increased from 54 to 82.6 years. Meanwhile, infant mortality (the proportion of infants who die before age 1) decreased by a factor of 19 to just 3 deaths per 1,000 live births. Nevertheless, socioeconomic change has increased the prevalence of so-called "lifestyle" diseases, while demographic trends are expected to cause higher healthcare costs in coming years.

Traditional Medicine

Traditional medicine in a given region is derived from the cultural beliefs, experiences, and theories of the native population and used to protect or restore health. Traditional Korean medicine centers on using non-surgical methods to identify and treat the basic causes of illness. Common traditional treatments include herbal medicine, mineral baths, and acupuncture, a process in which a practitioner inserts thin needles into various parts of a patient's skin. Reputed to improve circulation, acupuncture is often combined with "moxibustion" or "***chuna*** therapy," processes in which a practitioner burns or massages herbs into acupuncture points. Another common technique is "cupping," in which suction cups are used to draw blood from acupuncture points (Pictured: A page from the ***Dongui Bogam***, a 17th-century manual of Korean medicine).

東醫寶鑑目
內景篇一 身形精氣神
內景篇二 血 夢 聲音 言語 津液 痰飲
內景篇三 五臟六腑 肝臟 心臟 脾臟 肺臟 腎臟 膽 胃腑 小腸腑 大腸腑 膀胱腑 三焦腑 肚 蟲
內景篇四

Traditional medicine is popular in South Korea, accounting for about 5% of healthcare spending. Approximately 86% of South Koreans have used traditional medicine at some point in their lives, and the elderly in particular consider it safe and effective. The government partially supports this view, as the NHI system covers acupuncture, moxibustion, cupping, and 68 different herbal medicines.

Modern Healthcare System

Since the 1980s, the South Korean healthcare system has transformed from an inadequate and relatively exclusive collection of hospitals and private insurers into a world-class medical infrastructure serving nearly the entire population. Despite having lower per-person healthcare costs than most developed countries, South Korea has one of the world's longest life expectancies, surpassing by 2 years (82.6 versus 80.3) the average US life expectancy. In addition, South Koreans are more likely than residents of most developed countries to have access to hospitals with cutting-edge technology.

In 2017, South Korea had 2.4 physicians per 1,000 people, slightly lower than the US ratio of 2.6 but higher than average for the Pacific region. While South Korean healthcare facilities are concentrated in cities, underserving rural areas, its healthcare spending is growing faster than other developed countries (Photo: Joint US medical team at Kunsan AB).

Health Challenges

As in most other developed countries, communicable diseases like malaria and tuberculosis are no longer the leading causes of death and illness in South Korea. Instead, the country's rapid economic growth has led to an increase in non-communicable "lifestyle" diseases, such as diabetes, heart disease, and some cancers. Similarly, deaths from car accidents, smoking, suicide, and other preventable causes have increased. Meanwhile, as South Korea's population has aged (see p. 1 of *Political and Social Relations*), chronic illness has become more prevalent.

Chronic and non-communicable disease now account for 80% of all deaths in South Korea. In 2016, the top causes of death were cancer (30%), circulatory diseases (23%), and preventable "external causes" (10%) such as car accidents. Suicide is the 4th most common cause of death with 40 suicides every day—a higher rate than that of any other developed country. Suicide is particularly high for South Korean youth age 10-24 and attributed to family conflict, depression, and exam stress.

11. ECONOMICS AND RESOURCES

Overview

In the aftermath of World War II and the Korean War (see p. 6-8 of *History and Myth*), South Korea was a poor, underdeveloped country with an agricultural economy. Notwithstanding, during the next half century it developed into one of the world's wealthiest and most industrialized countries, experiencing average Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth of 7% per year between 1960 and 2010. This substantial transformation was due mostly to foreign aid and government policies that encouraged industrialization. In 2018, the average South Korean earned around $39,661 per year after taxes, on par with Slovenia and Israel, but about 37% lower than Americans.

South Korea's industrialization occurred in phases. Initially, the government promoted growth in light industries, such as clothing manufacturing. The 1970s brought a shift to heavy industries, such as iron and chemical production. High technology, such as electronics manufacturing, became the centerpiece of the 1980s. Through all these phases, the government supported large corporations known as ***chaebols***, encouraging them to focus on exports to developed countries (Photo: Seoul's Jung-gu or Central District).

Although South Korea's export-oriented development strategy has been successful, it has been prey to external economic vulnerabilities. A 1997 debt-fueled financial crisis spread throughout much of Asia, forcing South Korea to accept an international bailout and reform components of its economy. Then, the 2007-2008 Global Financial Crisis hit South Korea especially hard. The country recovered quickly after both events. Today, South Korea's main economic challenges are inflation, ineffective regulations, an aging population (see p. 1 of *Political and Social Relations*), and continued reliance on energy and specialized technology imported from abroad.

Agriculture

The agricultural sector includes farming, livestock, fishing, and forestry and is the smallest component of South Korea's economy, accounting for 2% of GDP and 5% of employment. Most South Korean agriculture occurs on small farms in rural areas.

Farming: About 15% of South Korea's territory is suitable for cultivation. Primary food crops include rice, cabbage, potatoes, soybeans, wheat, and barley, while flowers, tobacco, tea, and ginseng (a root often used in food and medicine) are notable cash crops (Photo: A rice paddy in South Korea).

Livestock and Fishing: South Korea's most common livestock are pigs and cattle and its top agricultural products after rice. Fish are also an important commodity. While South Korea's fishing industry once relied mainly on coastal fisheries, most of its output now comes from inland fish farms.

Forestry: Although forests cover about 2/3 of South Korea, the timber industry is small and limited mostly to the eastern half of the country. Consequently, South Korea imports most of the timber it needs, usually from Indonesia and Malaysia.

Industry

Manufacturing, construction, and mining comprise the industrial sector, which is the second largest component of South Korea's economy, accounting for 35% of GDP and 25% of employment. Industry is primarily responsible for South Korea's rapid economic development, although services have surpassed it in recent years.

Manufacturing: Centered in Seoul, manufacturing is the integral part of the industrial sector. South Korean companies produce electronics, semiconductor devices (essential components of computers), cars, and ships. In fact, South Korea is the world's largest shipbuilder, having recently surpassed Japan, and one of the world's largest producers of semiconductor devices.

Many South Korean ***chaebols*** participate in a range of different industries, not only in manufacturing but also in construction and services. For example, Samsung, known in the US as an electronics manufacturer, also has units devoted to insurance, financial services, chemicals, construction, shipbuilding, and other industries. Similarly, LG Corporation, known in the US as an electronics and appliance manufacturer, has units devoted to chemicals, solar energy, and telecommunications services, among other industries.

Construction: While industry centered on manufacturing and infrastructure during the 1970s, its focus shifted to residential construction in the 1980s. At roughly the same time, South Korean firms began to win bids for construction work abroad, mainly in the Middle East. Of note, Samsung was the lead contractor for 4 of the world's tallest buildings.

Mining: Since South Korea has few natural resources, mining is not a large industry. The country has only modest supplies of graphite, tungsten, coal, iron ore, lead, zinc, gold, and silver.

Services

Accounting for 54% of GDP and 70% of employment in 2018, the services sector is the largest and fastest-growing component of the South Korean economy. Important services sector industries include retail sales, tourism, insurance, and financial services. While large department stores have made inroads into South Korea in recent years, small, traditional shops still account for most retail sales. Since the 1997 financial crisis, the South Korean government has worked to reform the financial services industry by facilitating mergers, introducing new regulations, and allowing foreign investment.

Tourism: South Korea's natural beauty and ancient historical and religious sights attracted nearly 15.35 million tourists in 2018 (Photo: Seoul's Deoksugung palace, a popular tourist attraction). Japanese, Chinese, and Taiwanese accounted for about 63% of tourists. The remainder was mostly Americans and expatriate South Koreans.

Currency

The currency is the South Korean won (₩), issued in 4 banknote values (1,000, 5,000, 10,000, 50,000) and 4 coin values (10, 50, 100, 500). Although exchange rates vary, $1 averaged about ₩1,128 over the last 5 years, ₩1,197.15 in 2020. ATMs and credit cards are used widely, although small shops and a number of restaurants still require payment in cash.

Foreign Trade

South Korea's economy is anchored in foreign trade. Exports in South Korea increased by 5% to USD $604.86 billion in 2018, compared to USD $577.4 billion in 2017. Exports consist of steel, petrochemicals, cars, ships, semiconductor devices, computers, and wireless telecommunications equipment. Imports include oil, plastics, machinery, electronics, and transport equipment and amounted to USD $535.2 billion. South Korea's largest trading partners are China, Japan, and the US, jointly accounting for about 43% of foreign trade (Photo: Seoul's World Trade Center).

Foreign Aid

In the wake of World War II, South Korea received substantial foreign aid, mostly from the US. Between 1946 and 1978, the US provided South Korea with about $60 billion in grants and loans—just 15% less than it donated to all African countries during the same period. Aid was used primarily for postwar relief and reconstruction until the 1960s, when it was channeled toward economic development. By the early 1980s, South Korea had become wealthy enough that it no longer needed foreign aid.

South Korea since has transformed into an aid provider, having disbursed around $2.52 billion in Official Development Assistance (ODA) in 2019. The Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), a group similar to the US Agency for International Development (USAID), oversees many South Korean technical assistance programs. South Korea also has a program called World Friends Korea (WFK) that is similar to the Peace Corps.

12. TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIAL

Overview

South Korea has one of the world's most advanced physical infrastructures, including efficient public transit systems, an extensive network of roads, and several nuclear power plants. In addition, South Koreans enjoy affordable and high-quality communications, including widespread mobile phone service and some of the world's fastest Internet speeds.

Transportation

In addition to private modes of transit, such as walking, cycling, and driving cars, South Koreans have access to modern, efficient public transit in most major cities. In and around Seoul, for example, travelers can use a rechargeable "T-money" card to ride subways, buses, trains, ferries, and certain taxis. Bus travel, both within and between urban areas, is especially common. From urban areas, buses typically depart every 15 minutes for other cities and every hour for smaller towns, with both express and local service available (Photo: A city bus in Daegu). In addition, taxis are widely available. Of note, taxi drivers do not usually expect tips. Ferries are also a common means of transit, linking South Korean cities not only with offshore islands but also with other countries, including China, Japan, and Russia.

Roadways: South Korea had about 62,403 mi of roadways in 2016, of which about 57,660 mi were paved. Most South Korean roads are in good condition. Since South Korea's first multilane highway opened in 1969, the network has expanded rapidly, especially in the 1980s, and now connects most cities. While South Korea's government previously discouraged car ownership, it reversed that position to support the domestic car industry. Nevertheless, South Korean car ownership levels are relatively low. It had 338 cars per 1,000 people in 2016, well short of Japan's 483 and the US's 809. In addition, driving in South Korea tends to be risky (see p. 4 of *Time and Space*).

Railways: In 2016, South Korea had approximately 2,472 mi of railways extending across most of the country. Korea Railroad Corporation, a state-owned firm also known as Korail, operates South Korea's rail network. Although rail passenger numbers were falling in the early 2000s, they began to recover in 2004 with the opening of the Korean Train Express, a high-speed rail link between Seoul and Busan. In addition, following Seoul's opening a subway system in 1974, five other cities—Busan, Daejeon, Daegu, Gwangju, and Incheon—have followed suit.

Ports and Waterways: Due to its long coastline and strategic location between China, Japan, and Russia, South Korea is a Northeast Asian shipping hub with the world's 9th largest fleet of commercial ships. Major ports include Incheon (Northwest), Yeosu (South), Gwangyang (South), Busan (Southeast), Ulsan (Southeast), and Pohang (East). South Korea also has 1,000 mi of inland waterways navigable only by small boats.

Airways: Of South Korea's 111 airports and airstrips, 71 have paved runways. The primary air transit hub is Incheon International Airport located on an island 30 mi west of Seoul. Incheon is linked by a shuttle to the country's domestic airport at Gimpo situated 10 mi west of Seoul. Other major South Korean airports include Gimhae International Airport in Busan and Jeju International Airport on Jeju Island located off South Korea's southwestern coast. The country is home to 2 major airlines: Korean Air, the national carrier, and Asiana Airlines (Photo: A Korean Air Boeing 747).

Energy

Internationally, South Korea is the 9th largest electricity producer and the 6th largest consumer. In addition, it is the 4th largest coal importer and 3rd largest natural gas importer. Fossil fuels generated about 70% of South Korea's electricity generation in 2018, while 23% came from nuclear power, and 6% came from renewable sources, including hydroelectricity. The country has 4 nuclear plants and is the world's 5th largest nuclear power producer after the US, France, China, and Russia.

Media

South Korea's constitution guarantees freedom of the press, which journalists often use to criticize the government. Newspapers are popular among South Koreans who have access to more than 100 local and national newspapers published in Korean and other languages. South Korea's most popular newspapers include ***Chosun Ilbo*** ("Korea Daily") and ***Dong-A Ilbo*** ("East Asia Daily") written in Korea and the English-language *The Korea Times* and *The Korea Herald*. Some South Koreans also access news online, mainly through social networks like Twitter. In addition, South Korea has one of the world's largest blogging communities.

Radio and TV: The state-owned Korean Broadcasting System (KBS) is the largest South Korean broadcaster. Private broadcasters, such as Seoul Broadcasting System (SBS) and Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) also have extensive reach. These and other large broadcasters typically offer both radio and TV programming. Cable and satellite TV services are also available. Popular radio programming is syndicated across the nation and distributed by affiliates and local stations.

Telecommunications

South Korea's telecommunications system is among the world's best and includes universal mobile phone coverage and widespread broadband Internet access. Notably, South Korea has more mobile phone subscriptions (66.4 million) than people (51.8 million). Mobile carriers include SK Telecom, Korea Telecom Freetel, and LG Telecom.

Internet: Approximately 96% of South Koreans are regular Internet users, enjoying faster upload and download speeds than people from any other country or region. South Korea has the world's 9th highest number of broadband connections, even without adjusting for population size. Nevertheless, South Korea has some unusual Internet restrictions, including a curfew for online games and a ban on people using false names online (Photo: Internet café in Seoul).

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