



South Korea in Perspective

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South Korea in Perspective: Contents

Geography	7
Introduction	7
Geography and Topographic Features	8
<i>The Central Mountains</i>	8
<i>The Southern Plain</i>	8
<i>The Southwestern Plain</i>	8
Climate	9
Bodies of Water	9
<i>Seas</i>	9
<i>Rivers</i>	10
Major Cities	11
<i>Seoul</i>	11
<i>Busan</i>	12
<i>Incheon</i>	13
<i>Daegu</i>	13
<i>Daejon</i>	13
<i>Gwangju</i>	14
Environmental Concerns	14
Natural Hazards	15
Geography: Endnotes	17
Geography: Chapter 1 Assessment	21
History	22
Introduction	22
Korean Origins	23
The Three Kingdoms	23
The Unified Silla Kingdom (668–935)	24

The Koryo (918–1392)	24
The Chosun Dynasty (1392–1910)	25
Japanese Colonialism (1910–1945)	27
A Divided Nation (1945–1949)	27
The Korean War	28
The Aftermath of War	28
On the Road to Democracy (1961–1987)	29
Modern Korea (1987–2012)	30
A New Era (2012-2014)	31
Current Events	32
History: Endnotes	33
<i>History: Chapter 2 Assessment</i>	40
Economy	41
Introduction	41
Agriculture	42
Manufacturing/Industry	43
Energy	44
Natural Resources	45
Trade	45
Tourism	46
Banking and Finance	46
Standard of Living	47
Employment Trends	48
Outlook	49
Economy: Endnotes	50
<i>Economy: Chapter 3 Assessment</i>	57
Society	58

Introduction	58
Ethnic Groups and Languages	59
Religion	60
<i>Shamanism</i>	60
<i>Buddhism</i>	61
<i>Christianity</i>	61
Cuisine	62
Traditional Dress	63
Gender Issues	64
Arts	65
<i>Pottery</i>	65
<i>Painting</i>	66
<i>Literature and Folklore</i>	66
<i>Dance</i>	66
<i>Music</i>	67
Sports and Recreation	67
<i>Traditional Games</i>	68
Society: Endnotes	69
<i>Society: Chapter 4 Assessment</i>	75
Security	76
Introduction	76
Relations with the United States	77
Relations with Neighbors	78
<i>North Korea</i>	78
<i>China</i>	79
<i>Japan</i>	80
Police	80
Military	81

Issues Affecting Stability.....	82
Security: Endnotes.....	84
<i>Security: Chapter 5 Assessment</i>	89
<i>South Korean in Perspective: Final Assessment</i>	90
<i>South Korea in Perspective: Further Reading</i>	93



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*Namhansanseong Fortress
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Geography

Introduction

The Korean peninsula is strategically located in northeast Asia between Japan and mainland China. The Korea Strait, an important east–west waterway, connects the Sea of Japan with the East and South China Seas.^{1,2} Since 1953, the mountainous peninsula has been divided near the 38th parallel by one of the most heavily fortified frontiers in the world. The divide was established through an armistice that effectively ended the Korean War. The armistice left the two Koreas without a permanent peace agreement.^{3, 4}

Occupying the southern 45% of the Korean peninsula, South Korea covers an area of 99,720 sq km (38,502 sq mi) and is slightly larger than the state of Indiana.^{5,6} It is bordered on the north by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea), on the east by the Sea of Japan (known as the East Sea in Korea), on the west by the Yellow Sea (known as the West Sea in Korea), on the south by the East China Sea, and on the southeast by the Korea Strait.⁷ More than 3,400 islands belonging to South Korea are located along the peninsula’s coast.⁸

Geography and Topographic Features

The Central Mountains

Mountains cover about 70% of South Korea.⁹

The mountains are not particularly high, but many are extremely steep.¹⁰

The Taebaek Mountains (Taebaek-san) run in a mostly north–south direction along the eastern coastline,

and extend into North Korea. The tallest peak in

this chain is northeastern Mount Sorak (Sorak-san) at 1,708 m (5,604 ft). The Sobaek Mountains crisscross the nation from southwest to northeast. Mount Jiri (Jiri-san), at the southern end of this range, is the tallest peak on the mainland (1,915 m; 6,283 ft).¹¹

Approximately 25% of the South Korean population live in towns and villages in the Central Mountains, and most depend on agriculture for their livelihoods.¹²

The Southern Plain

South of the Central Mountains are the gently rolling hills and floodplain of the Nakdong River. Often called the breadbasket of the country, the plain is home to about 25% of the population and includes the port city of Busan. This region includes the volcanic island of Cheju (Cheju-do), off the southern tip of the Korean peninsula. It is part of the Ring of Fire and home to Mount Halla (Halla-san), the tallest mountain in the country (1,950 m; 6,398 ft).^{13, 14}

The Southwestern Plain

Approximately half the nation's people live in this region, which borders North Korea and includes the capital, Seoul. Urbanization and industrial growth are replacing much of the area's agricultural land. The region is important for hydroelectric power generated from the Han River. During the summer months, when typhoons often strike, the Southwestern Plain is one of the most vulnerable regions.¹⁵



*Map of South Korea
Courtesy of CIA*

Climate

The monsoonal flow shapes the nation's climate and its four distinct seasons.^{16, 17}

The winters are long, dry, and cold. The summers can be quite humid, particularly during the monsoon seasons when rains are frequent and sometimes accompanied by flooding. Spring and autumn are pleasant but short.^{18, 19}

The humid Korean summer lasts from the middle of June through the middle of September. Nearly 70% of annual rainfall occurs during the monsoon season, late June through early July. In August, the hottest month, temperatures across the country average 25°C (77°F) to 29°C (84°F). By comparison, winters are much colder and last from the middle of November through March. During this time, the average temperature in Seoul is about -5°C (23°F). In Busan, on the southeastern coast, temperatures average 2°C (36°F).^{20, 21}

Spring and fall weather is pleasant. Fall is the shortest season, from mid-September to mid-November. Temperatures during the day range from about 13°C (55°F) to 18°C (64°F). Spring lasts from April to the middle of June and is equally pleasant, although rainfall typically increases.²²

Bodies of Water

The East China Sea, the Yellow Sea (West Sea), the Sea of Japan (East Sea), and the Korea Strait surround South Korea on three sides. The Cheju Strait, which lies completely within South Korea's territorial waters, is formed between the mainland in the south and the country's main island of Cheju-do. The country has several major rivers, and most flow in either a southerly direction to empty into the Korea Strait or a westerly direction to empty into the Yellow Sea. A few of the nation's shorter rivers flow from the Taebaek Mountains and drain eastward. All the rivers are broad and shallow with seasonal variations in water flow.^{23, 24}

Seas

The East China Sea, which is part of the Pacific Ocean, is shallow and has an average depth of about 350 m (1,148 ft). Bordering southern Korea, it extends to Japan's most



*Cloudy Skies Busan
Flickr / Jens-Olaf Walter*



*Korean Port
Flickr / Cindy Lee*

southeastern main islands, and stretches northwest past the Korean island of Cheju to China.²⁵

The Yellow Sea (Hwang-hae) is an inlet of the western Pacific between China and South Korea. Located north of the East China Sea, it forms South Korea's western border. The name derives from the color of the silt draining into the sea from various Chinese rivers.^{26, 27}

The Sea of Japan, which is known as the East Sea (Donghae) in South Korea, forms the country's eastern border and separates South Korea from Japan. The sea is bordered by Japan and Sakhalin Island, North and South Korea, and Russia. It connects with surrounding bodies of water through several straits including the Tsushima,

Tatar, La Perouse, Kanmom, and Tsugaru Straits, as well as the Strait of Korea.²⁸

The Strait of Korea is a passageway between the East China Sea and the Sea of Japan (East Sea). The strait is only about 90 m (295 ft) deep and forms the border between the southeastern section of South Korea and the Japanese island of Tsushima.²⁹ The first South Korean naval victory in the Korean War occurred in this strait in 1950 when the navy sank an armed North Korean troop ship just off the coast of Busan.³⁰

Rivers

The longest river in South Korea is the Nakdong. It begins in the Taebaek Mountains and empties into the Korea Strait near the port city of Busan in the southeast.³¹ The river is navigable for 350 km (217 mi) from its mouth near the city of Andong. Nearly one-quarter of its basin forms a rich agricultural area and supplies water for the cities along its path.³²



*Boating in Jaecheon South Korea
Flickr / Luke Hoagland*

The Han River, the nation's second-longest river, rises in the Taebaek Mountains and flows through Seoul. It empties into the Yellow Sea (West Sea).^{33, 34} A portion of the river

is navigable for 320 km (200 mi), providing an important transportation source. Like the Naktong, the Han River basin is important for agricultural drainage. In the upper mountains, the river is a major source of hydroelectric power from numerous dams built along its course. The demilitarized zone (DMZ), the buffer region separating South and North Korea, extends from the mouth of the Han River in the west to just south of the North Korean town of Kosong in the east.³⁵

The Kum River in the southwestern part of the country empties into the Yellow Sea (West Sea). The river is short and navigable for only 130 km (81 mi). The cities around its middle course depend on the river for water and hydroelectric power.³⁶ One of the most important of these cities is Daejon, around which the Kum River forms a protective moat-like semicircle. South Korea's main Seoul–Busan transportation links (rail and highway) cross the Kum River near Daejon, which is important militarily because of its location. During the Korean War, UN forces blew up bridges on the Kum River in an attempt to stop the North Korean advance.³⁷

Major Cities

City	Population ³⁸
Seoul	10,349,312
Busan	3,678,555
Incheon	2,628,000
Daegu	2,566,540
Daejon	1,475,221
Gwangju	1,416,938

Seoul

Located on the Han River in the northwestern region of South Korea, Seoul is the nation's capital and one of the largest metropolitan areas in the world. Its metropolitan population of 20–25 million represents about half of the South Korean population.^{39, 40, 41} The population of the city proper is declining due to high housing costs and an aging population.⁴² Seoul has



*Seoul, South Korea
Flickr / Minyoung Choi*

been continuously inhabited for 2,000 years. Except for a short period at the beginning of the 15th century, Seoul served as the capital of Korea from 1394–1948. The city has been known by a variety of names throughout its history and was formally named Seoul when it became the capital of the newly formed nation of South Korea in 1948.⁴³

Seoul is the nation's cultural, political, educational, and financial center.^{44, 45} The city has drawn millions of people from other parts of the country, especially rural youth seeking a better quality of life. Because Seoul is the center of power and opportunity in the nation, many are reluctant to live or work outside its confines.⁴⁶ But as the city has lost residents between the ages of 20 and 40, its economic productivity has declined. This suggests that Seoul may no longer be the nation's economic growth engine.⁴⁷

Busan

Located at the mouth of the Naktong River on the southeastern coast, Busan is the capital of South Gyeongsang province (Gyeongsangnam-do). Dating to about 935, the city today is home to a number of colleges and universities including the National Korea Maritime University. It is developing into a major tourist hub because of its beaches.^{48, 49,}



*Busan, South Korea
Flickr / grego1402*

⁵⁰ Busan is the center of the nation's fishing industry and a major industrial center.⁵¹ Busan Harbor is the nation's principal deep-water port. During the Korean War, Busan was a temporary capital of the nation and a crucial port for receiving supplies.^{52, 53}

Incheon

Incheon is a port city located near the mouth of the Han River, 40 km (25 mi) west of Seoul and 32 km (20 mi) south of the demilitarized zone separating the two Koreas. General Douglas MacArthur landed there with United Nations forces in 1950, stifling North Korean invaders. A huge statue of General MacArthur stands in Jayu Park near the port. The tidal range in the area is the second largest in the



*Incheon, Eulwangni Beach
Flickr / travel oriented*

world at about 18 m (59 ft); tidal basins have been built to deal with the 10-m (33-ft) difference between high and low tides. The city is a major seaport and home to a new international airport serving the Seoul metropolitan area. It is a major industrial and manufacturing city. Kanghwa Island (Kanghwa-do), just north of the city, is a popular destination and has many cultural and historical sites.^{54, 55}

Daegu

A major industrial center, Daegu is South Korea's largest textile producer. It is the capital of North Gyeongsang province (Gyeongsangbuk-do) in the southeastern part of the country. Encircled by mountains, Daegu is reputed to have the hottest summers and the coldest winters among Korea's major urban centers. The city served as a major cultural and administrative center in the nation's early history. During the Chosun Dynasty (1392–1910), it was one of the nation's three major market cities. Today, Daegu is famous for its apples, which are exported throughout much of Asia. The city is also home to several major universities and historical sites, including a World Heritage Buddhist site at Haein Temple (Haeinsa), which houses Asia's most complete set of Buddhist religious texts.^{56, 57, 58}

Daejeon

Daejeon is the provincial capital of South Chungcheong province (Chungcheongnam-do) in the west central portion of the country. Nearly 70% of the city was destroyed during the Korean War, when the city served as a temporary capital for South Korea. As the nation's science and technology capital, Daejeon houses an Expo theme park commemorating the 1993 World Expo held there. Within the city is the Daedeok Research and Development Specialized Zone. This complex of more than 250 research

institutes, universities, and high-tech companies employs more than 20,000 of the nation's leading engineering graduates.^{59, 60, 61}

Gwangju

Gwangju is the capital of South Cholla province (Chollanam-do) in the southwestern section of the country. The city has been an important center of trade since the beginning of the Three Kingdoms period in 57 B.C.E. During the Korean War it served as a major military training center. Today Gwangju is one of the most important manufacturing and industrial centers, as well as an important transportation hub for southwestern Korea. In 1980, the city was the site of a bloody student uprising against the military government of then-President Chun Doo Hwan. The event is remembered every 18 May with a festival; the memorial park is a powerful reminder of the event. The city is also home to a number of historical sites and major universities.^{62, 63}



*Smog hanging over Seoul
Flickr / Austin King*

Environmental Concerns

Within four decades, rapid industrialization transformed agrarian South Korea into one of the world's most industrialized economies. The nation is now scrambling to address serious air and water pollution, along with other environmental problems.⁶⁴

Air pollution, especially in the cities, is a major environmental concern. South Korea is one of the world's top 10 emitters of carbon dioxide.^{65, 66} The main sources are industrial facilities and automobiles.⁶⁷ A brown haze often lingers over the larger cities and contributes to acid rain. Acid snow fell in the nation in 2014. Factories that dump untreated or improperly treated chemical

waste into the water supply are one of the main causes of water pollution.^{68, 69, 70} But air quality has improved. Seoul now has a fleet of natural-gas buses. Certain areas have been designated as green belts.⁷¹ Nevertheless, both air and water pollution combine to produce serious health risks for residents.^{72, 73, 74} In response to this problem, the government has instituted an aggressive waste management policy to reduce waste through recycling and to reduce pollution generated by waste incinerators.^{75, 76, 77}

Another serious environmental problem is the disposal of nuclear waste. One-third of Korean electricity is generated through nuclear power. The government's plans to build 11 new reactors and raise nuclear energy production by 40% will only increase the problem. The government has been unable to find a solution for the permanent storage

of the waste. Currently the radioactive waste is held in temporary storage facilities. The first permanent waste storage facility, completed in 2015, is now disposing of nuclear waste.^{78, 79, 80, 81}

There are concerns about a large seawall built in North Cholla province (Chollabuk-do). The Saemangeum project involved the construction of a seawall to reclaim wetlands for agricultural use. Opponents argue that the wetlands are an important breeding ground for fish and shellfish and a habitat for migrating birds. Since the project's completion in 2010, protests have led the government to declare some wetlands protected.^{82, 83, 84}

Deforestation from clearing most of the nation's forests has caused erosion and led to flooding. Starting in the 1960s, South Korea began a series of reforestation policies that have helped to cover the area with foliage.^{85, 86, 87}

Natural Hazards

Every spring, fine sand known as yellow dust (hwangsa) blows across the Korean peninsula from China and Mongolia. The toxic dust reportedly contains radioactive materials leaked from nuclear power plants in other countries, including China and Japan.^{88, 89} The dust blankets South Korea and is most severe in the western



*Yellow dust in Busan
Flickr / Jens-Olaf Walter*

parts of the country, including Seoul. Warnings frequently advise residents against going outdoors, while schools and factories close. Each year a number of people die as a result of complications from the dust. The storms normally come in the spring, but in recent years have occurred as early as Christmas.^{90, 91, 92} In December 2013, dust from China blanketed the capital. The government issued its first-ever pollution advisory. The thick dust caused the cancellation of domestic flights and prompted South Korean officials to go to Beijing to talk about potential solutions.⁹³

Typhoons occasionally cause serious damage. These storms generally originate in the east Philippines and occur during July and August. The southern coast of South Korea is particularly vulnerable and experiences one or two mild typhoons a year.⁹⁴ In recent years, some severe typhoons have caused considerable damage and death.^{95, 96, 97, 98}

Monsoonal weather patterns, particularly in the summer months, can cause flooding and mudslides. In 2011, at least 67 people were killed by mudslides resulting from flash

flooding. Homes in Seoul were flooded, roads were closed, and telecommunications were disrupted.^{99, 100} Severe flash flooding in 2014 near the Busan region killed five people after a heavy downpour and forced the closure of a nuclear plant. Flooding can unearth landmines remaining from the Korean War.^{101, 102}

Low-level seismic activity is another natural hazard, particularly in the southern and western parts of the country. The most potentially active regions include the cities of Seoul and Busan.¹⁰³ Over 90% of the buildings in Seoul do not meet earthquake safety standards; an estimated three-quarters of the city's buildings would be destroyed or seriously damaged in a magnitude 7 earthquake.¹⁰⁴ Historically, the nation has experienced a number of damaging earthquakes, but the risk today is relatively low.¹⁰⁵

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Geography: Chapter 1 Assessment

1. South Korea has no nuclear energy plants.

False

One-third of the electricity in South Korea is generated through nuclear power. The government plans to build 11 more facilities to help meet national energy needs.

2. South Korea has four distinct seasons.

True

Winters are long, dry, and cold. Summers can be humid, particularly during the monsoon season when rains are frequent and sometimes accompanied by flooding. Spring and autumn are pleasant, but short.

3. About half the nation's population lives in Seoul.

True

With a population of 20–25 million, Seoul is one of the largest metropolitan agglomerations in the world.

4. The toxic yellow dust called hwangsa is most severe in the fall.

False

Every spring, fine sand known as yellow dust (hwangsa) blows across the Korean peninsula from China and Mongolia. In recent years it has been seen as early as Christmas.

5. Busan is a major port city west of Seoul.

False

Busan is a major port city located at the mouth of the Naktong River on the southeastern coast. Busan Harbor is the nation's principal deep-water port. Incheon is the port city west of Seoul.



*War Memorial of Korea
U.S. Army / Edward N. Johnson, IMCOM-Korea*

History

Introduction

Evidence suggests that people lived on the Korean peninsula more than 30,000 years ago, although facts about their existence are vague. Knowledge of Korean history dates from around 4000 B.C.E., when people probably migrated there from what are now Russia, Mongolia, and China. These early settlers created a mixed-race group with Caucasian and Asian characteristics. They were most likely hunters, fishers, and farmers who came with a developed village culture.^{1,2}

From the earliest times, the settlers merged into clans and tribal states. To fend off threats from the Chinese, Korean tribes formed confederations and eventually kingdoms.^{3,4} These kingdoms operated independently until the seventh century C.E., when Korea was first united under the Silla Kingdom. Near the end of the ninth century, Korea once again split into several kingdoms, only to be united by the Koryo in 918. The nation's present boundaries were largely established at that time. Although Korea as a whole became independent at the end of the Sino-Japanese War in 1895, South Korea did not emerge as an independent nation until 1948.^{5,6,7}

Korean Origins

The Korean legend of Tangun is often used to explain the origins of the Korean people and the founding of the early Korean state of Chosun. Tangun, a god-like figure, is the son of a bear-woman and the god Hwan-Ung. Tangun moved to Pyongyang, the current capital of North Korea, and united the people of the land. He named his new kingdom the “Land of the Morning Calm” (Chosun) in 2333 B.C.E. The Chosun Kingdom lasted for more than 1,000 years. Each year Koreans celebrate Tangun Day, or National Foundation Day, on 3 October.^{8,9}

Recorded Korean history largely begins in 108 B.C.E., when China attacked Chosun. China ruled the Chosun territory north of the Han River, dividing it into four districts. In 75 B.C.E., the Koreans regained control of three of these four districts. The fourth district, Lolang, remained under Chinese control. Many Chinese influences, such as writing systems, governance structures, and religious thought, were adopted in Korea during this time.^{10,11}

The Three Kingdoms

The Koreans organized into 70 independent clans grouped into 3 tribal confederations. Tribes in the East established the Silla Kingdom in 57 B.C.E., the first of three rival kingdoms^{12,13} With its capital near Gyeongju, it was the richest and most cultured kingdom.^{14,15,16} Tribes in the Northeast formed the Goguryo Kingdom in 37 B.C.E. and established their capital in Pyongyang, the current capital of North Korea. The Goguryo was the most powerful kingdom at the beginning of the three kingdoms’ existence. Its control extended into Manchuria and across the northern and central parts of the Korean peninsula.^{17,18,19} The tribes in the Southwestern Region formed the Paekjae Kingdom in 18 B.C.E. Their capital was near present-day Seoul.²⁰



Goguryeo hunter mural
Wikimedia / Public Domain

Around the second century, Confucianism came to Korea.^{21,22} Its impact on Korea has been profound. The first National Confucian Academy had already been established when Buddhism was introduced to the region in 372.^{23,24} Each of the three kingdoms embraced the new faith. The Goguryo were the first to adopt Buddhism as its official religion, followed by the Paekjae. The Silla were the last to do so, in 528.^{25,26}

The Goguryo continued their expansion into Chinese territory in the sixth and seventh centuries but came into conflict with the Sui dynasty in China. The Silla, on the other hand, forged an alliance with the Chinese Tang dynasty in 618. The united Tang-Silla forces began to expand their control in the region. The Silla conquered the Paekjae Kingdom in 660 and in 668 defeated the Goguryo, cementing control and unifying Korea.^{27, 28, 29}

The Unified Silla Kingdom (668–935)

The years of Silla rule are known as the Golden Age of Korea. During this time, the Silla kings tried to create an ideal Buddhist state. For the kingdom's first 215 years, art, literature, science, architecture, and culture flourished. Inequality lessened, and farmers gained more control over the land. Foreign trade opened to China and Japan.

By the late eighth century, internal power struggles and arguments over the rights of succession caused a decline of the kingdom.^{30, 31} Toward the end of the ninth century, the two previously defeated states, the Paekjae and the Goguryo, reemerged to threaten Silla rule. The Paekjae took control of the southwestern part of Korea in 892, and the Goguryo ruled the central region by 901.^{32, 33, 34}



*Silla burial mounds
Flickr / Rick Cox*

The Koryo (918–1392)

Upon seizing the Goguryo throne in 918, Wang Kon changed the name of the kingdom to Koryo, from which the name Korea comes. Wang moved the capital to Songak (the present-day city of Kaesong in North Korea) and extended his territorial claims to what is now the border between North Korea and China. Additionally, under his rule the Koryo successfully eliminated all resistance from the Silla and Paekjae. Korea was reunited by 935.^{35, 36, 37, 38}

During the rule of the Koryo, society, culture, and the economy continued to expand. Important cultural advancements included the development of Korea's famous celadon pottery and the invention of the first movable type press, more than 200 years before it appeared in Europe. Educational development soared with the establishment of six



*Koryo Museum, Kaesong
Flickr / Dan*

colleges in the 12th century. Perhaps the greatest changes came from the increasing influence of Confucian thought, particularly in areas related to politics and ethics. A new social order with an aristocracy emerged.^{39, 40}

Neo-Confucian thought supported the belief that good government depends on the personal character and knowledge of able men from all classes.⁴¹ Under this form of thought, the distribution of power changed. Civil service positions were no longer inherited. Rather, individuals who passed the civil service exams had access to positions of power in the military and government as well as admission to the aristocracy. In the 12th century, members of the new aristocracy—civil servants—began to struggle with the kings for power until the military took

control in 1170. Thereafter, all kings ruled only as figureheads.^{42, 43, 44}

The Koryo Empire was further threatened by a series of Mongol invasions that began in 1231. Attacks by Japanese pirates from 1350 onward weakened the dynasty's power. The Chinese defeated the Mongols in 1368, and Koryo once again gained its independence. But a Chinese rebel army known as the Red Banner Bandits sacked the capital in Kaesong and left Koryo in ruins. Rather than following orders to attack the rebel forces, General Yi Song-Gye joined them and revolted against the Koryo. General Yi took the throne in 1392, moved the capital to Seoul, and changed the country's name to Chosun.^{45, 46, 47}

The Chosun Dynasty (1392–1910)

Under the Chosun, now firmly linked to the Ming dynasty by General Yi's support against the rebels, Korea became a Chinese tributary state in 1392.^{48, 49} To strengthen the new government, General Yi confiscated large landholdings controlled by Buddhist monks and denounced Buddhism as corrupt. Confucianism became more dominant as a form of political and social thought, while Buddhism retained little influence. Without organized religion, the country reverted to shamanism, geomancy, and fortune-telling.^{50,}

⁵¹

The most important ruler of the Chosun Dynasty was King Sejong (1418–1450). He is credited with creating the Korean alphabet (Hangul) and making other advances in science, technology, medicine, agriculture, and the arts.^{52, 53} Western ideas gained ground during this time. The philosophy of practical learning known as Sirhak rejected

much of Confucian thought in favor of Western science and philosophy. Sirhak also showed respect for Korean history and culture. Despite these advances, Catholic teachings against the Korean cultural practice of ancestor worship outraged the Chosun government. By 1785, the government had banned all Western learning and closed the nation to outside influence.^{54, 55, 56}

Although British, Russian, and French merchants had made their way to Korea by the 1840s, it was the Japanese who broke the isolationism in 1876 by forcing Korea into an unequal treaty. The treaty granted extraterritorial rights to Japan and opened three ports to Japanese trade. China, angered by the treaty, tried to counter the Japanese



*Chosun Palace
Flickr / Christopher Jetton*

initiatives. To further reduce Japanese influence, Korea signed treaties with several international powers, including the United States, Britain, Italy, and Russia.^{57, 58}

In 1894, a peasant uprising against government corruption known as the Donghak movement brought Japanese troops to Korea. This led to conflict with China and eventually resulted in the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895). With Japan's victory over both the Donghak rebels and the Chinese, Korea gained its independence from China. However, Korea's independence was short-lived as it came under increasing Japanese domination.^{59, 60, 61}

Meanwhile, Russian claims to Korea's forests and mines increased tensions with the Japanese and escalated into the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905). After its victory, Japan ended Korea's independence by making it a protectorate in 1905 and a colony in 1910, when Chosun rule formally ended.^{62, 63, 64}

Japanese Colonialism (1910–1945)

The Koreans were theoretically entitled to the same status as Japanese citizens under the rules of colonialism. But the Japanese treated them as an inferior people and attempted to exploit the nation's natural resources. Life under

Japanese rule was brutal.

Until 1921, Koreans were not allowed to publish their

own newspapers or to organize political or intellectual groups. Increased Japanese control over the Korean education system included shutting down many private schools. Thousands of Koreans were imprisoned, and many more fled to other countries, leading to a rise in nationalist sentiments and a proclamation of Korean independence on 1 March 1919.^{65, 66, 67}

Japan's initial response to the rebellion was to loosen its controls over Korea. But as the sense of Korean nationalism grew over the next 20 years, the Japanese again tightened control. Their aim was to completely assimilate the Koreans into Japanese culture. Koreans were conscripted into the army and were required to worship at Shinto shrines, and all Koreans were forced to assume Japanese names. The Japanese language became the medium of instruction in Korean schools, and the curriculum focused on Japanese language and culture. It was illegal to speak the Korean language.^{68, 69}

Japan's desire for more territory continued through the 1930s. Korea gained strategic importance as the base for Japan's launching of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937. This war continued until Russia's invasion of Manchuria and Korea in August 1945. The Japanese, severely weakened by World War II, could not fend off the Soviets.^{70, 71}

A Divided Nation (1945–1949)

After Japan's surrender to the United States in 1945, the Korean peninsula regained independence.⁷² The country was temporarily divided near the 38th parallel. Soviet troops occupied the northern peninsula. United States troops remained in the South and set up provisional governments to replace the Japanese structures. Efforts to reunify Korea failed as talks between the United States and Russia deteriorated. The temporary



Martial law, Korea 1900s
Wikimedia / Public Domain by Homer Hubert

division of the nation remained. In 1947, separate governments were in place in the two sections of the country. Because the Russians refused to allow national elections in the North, only the South held elections in 1948. In that year, the National Assembly officially formed the new nation of South Korea and elected Rhee Syng-Man (Syngman Rhee) president. In response, the Communists announced the formation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea).^{73, 74, 75}



*Korean girl carries her brother past an M-26 tank
Maj. R. V. Spencer*

The Korean War

With U.S. troops out of the country, North Korean troops entered South Korea on 25 June 1950.^{76, 77, 78} Under the direction of Kim Il-Sung, the North Koreans quickly gained the upper hand against a poorly equipped South Korean military and occupied the entire peninsula.^{79, 80} On 30 June 1950, the United States sent troops back into South Korea. Douglas MacArthur landed in Incheon on 15 September 1950 and repelled the North Korean invaders. Within a few weeks, UN troops had retaken most of South Korea and much of North Korea. In October, Chinese troops surged across the border, forcing a UN retreat to Seoul by early 1951.^{81, 82}

For 3 years the war continued with no clear victor. Finally, an armistice agreement was signed on 27 July 1953. The South Koreans had gained approximately 3,885 sq km (1,500 sq mi) of territory during the conflict. But they strongly objected to the armistice, which left the two nations divided and in a technical state of war.^{83, 84, 85}

The Aftermath of War

President Rhee was elected to office by the National Assembly in 1948. He made changes to the constitution, and these kept him in power until 1960. In response to opposition support for a parliamentary form of government, Rhee declared martial law in 1952. He forced passage of an amendment allowing popular election of the president. After winning the election with 72% of the vote, he again amended the constitution, allowing himself to hold office indefinitely. But corruption and his age (81 years) caused popular unrest. In 1960, Rhee won a fourth presidential term. Perceptions that the



*Demilitarized Zone (DMZ)
Flickr / Uri Tours*

election was fraudulent led to civil disorder.^{86, 87} Rhee was forced to resign in April of that year after police killed 142 student protesters. The next day, all members of the vice-presidential family committed suicide. Left with a power vacuum following the resignation and deaths, General Park Chung-Hee mounted a successful military coup and became president in May 1961.^{88, 89, 90}



*Park Chun Hee coup
Wikimedia / Public Domain*

On the Road to Democracy (1961–1987)

Under pressure to end military rule, Park retired from the army in 1963. He was narrowly reelected president as a civilian later that year. In 1971, fearing the democratization movement that was gaining popularity, he announced a state of national emergency and assumed virtually total control of the nation. The next year, he declared martial law, dissolved the National Assembly, closed the nation's colleges and universities, suspended all political activities, and censored the press. Park made it a crime to criticize the constitution or to report opposition views. His repressive term ended in 1979 when the head of the Korean CIA assassinated him.^{91, 92, 93}

After Park's assassination, Choe Kyu-Ha was elected president. Although Choe retained the official presidency, a military coup vested real power in General Chun Doo-Hwan, head of the Defense Security Command.^{94, 95, 96} In response to student demonstrations that were fueled by demands to end martial law, Chun closed Korean universities and banned political gatherings.^{97, 98, 99}



*Park Chun Hee card stunt
Wikimedia / Public Domain*

One of the most important events in South Korea's struggle for democracy is the Gwangju massacre. General Chun gave orders to quash student protests. From 18–27 May 1980, students in the southwestern city of Gwangju clashed with special forces soldiers, resulting in the deaths of an estimated 500–2,000 people.^{100, 101, 102} In the process of putting down the revolt, the army arrested about 1,800 protestors. One effect of these events (which are commemorated annually) was a deepening division between the northern and southern provinces of South Korea.¹⁰³

Chun resigned from the military in August 1980 and was elected president that same month, officially replacing Choe.^{104, 105} Chun's response to the Gwangju massacre was to place the nation under a constitutional dictatorship that lasted from October 1980–June 1981.¹⁰⁶ Although somewhat successful in improving the economy and expanding international diplomacy, Chun and his government were brought down by a student movement in 1987. Chun named Noh Tae-Woo as the presidential candidate for the ruling party. In a surprise move, Noh promised sweeping reforms and the restoration of civil rights. Noh's election marked the first peaceful, fair election in South Korean history.^{107, 108}



*Seoul Subway
Flickr / Brent Schmidt*

Modern Korea (1987–2012)

Noh's presidency tried to restore democracy and establish stronger diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union and its allies. Relations also improved with China. In December 1992, South Korea elected its first civilian president in 30 years, Kim Young-Sam.¹⁰⁹ Kim's presidency asserted the power of the civilian government over the military. Kim's policy of globalization opened Korea to the rest of world. During his presidency, thousands of corrupt officials were removed from office and political prisoners were freed. Kim's government also reinstated local government control by allowing the election of city mayors.^{110, 111}

Improving relations with North Korea was the focus of opposition candidate Kim Dae-Jung. He had previously been charged with treason and imprisoned for his involvement in the pro-democracy movement, and later exiled to the United States.¹¹² When Kim Dae-Jung won the presidential election in 1997, he pursued greater cooperation between the two Koreas. The aim of this "sunshine policy" was reunification. In 2000, Kim received the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts, which included a historic summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il. But his

administration was plagued with corruption, and his soft stance toward the North met with international derision.^{113, 114}

In 2003, Roh Moo-Hyun was elected president. Roh had a long history of support for democratic rights and reforms. But Roh encountered stiff opposition from conservative members of the government and was impeached in 2004. He temporarily stepped down from office but resumed the presidency after being acquitted in May of that year.¹¹⁵ Still under a cloud of investigation after leaving office, he reportedly committed suicide in 2009.¹¹⁶

Mounting Tensions

South Korea entered a new phase of relations with North Korea under Lee Myung-Bak, who overwhelmingly won the presidential election in 2007. Lee took a much more hard-line stance toward the North than his predecessor. North Korea retaliated in 2008 by announcing plans to close its borders and its telephone communications with the South. The North canceled all military and political agreements, as well as planned economic and business ventures with South Korea.^{117, 118}

Tensions escalated in 2010 when the South Korean warship Chonan was sunk. Investigations confirmed that the warship was hit by a North Korean torpedo. Later that year, North Korea fired missiles into the South Korean island of Yeonpyeong, killing several civilians and destroying homes.^{119, 120}

After the death of North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il in December 2011, President Lee warned North Korea to avoid provoking the South. Although he also opened the doors to nuclear talks, North Korea has failed to ease its stance toward the South and continues to call for President Lee to apologize for his actions against the North. Relations between the two nations remained tense.^{121, 122, 123}

A New Era (2012-2014)

The next presidential election in South Korea introduced a new era. In 2012, South Korea elected its first female president. Park Geun Hye, daughter of former president, Park Chung-Hee, was sworn into office on 25 February 2013.¹²⁴ One of her first moves was to announce a less conciliatory policy toward North Korea. Her new policy, trustpolitik, represented a harder stance while allowing flexibility in her dealings with the North. Her plans included strengthening the nation's military and taking decisive actions against any provocations.^{125, 126}

Tensions mounted despite Park's promise not to antagonize the North, and in April 2013, North Korea removed its 53,000 workers from a jointly run industrial park in Kaesong inside North Korea. The plant remained closed for 5 months. Promised visits by South Koreans to relatives in North Korea were cancelled.^{127, 128, 129} To help ease the mounting tensions, six South Koreans detained in the North were repatriated in October 2013.¹³⁰ Tensions remained high on the Korean peninsula. In October 2014, the

two sides exchanged fire at the demilitarized zone. Shortly thereafter, the two Koreas met for high-level military talks but failed to resolve their differences.^{131, 132}

In addition to other foreign relations challenges with China and Japan, President Park battled domestic issues, including a struggling economy.^{133, 134, 135} President Park's administration has been accused of corruption over allegations of interfering in the presidential campaigns and tampering in the electoral process. Some have even called for her resignation.¹³⁶ The government remained gridlocked and passed few pieces of legislation since Park's election. This sparked talk of constitutional reforms that would transfer political power from the president to the prime minister.¹³⁷



*President Geun-hye Park
Flickr / Republic of Korea*

Current Events

By 2015, Park's approval ratings had tanked and a new anti-Park faction emerged in the South Korea's parliament. Political relations between the president and the ruling party are tense and are unlikely to get better in the near term.¹³⁸ Meanwhile, President Park continued to be active on the international stage meeting with various world leaders including those from China, Japan, and the United States.^{139, 140, 141}

In August 2015, tensions with North Korea escalated after two South Korean

soldiers were injured by mines allegedly planted there by North Korea's military near the demilitarized zone (DMZ).¹⁴² In response, South Korea began broadcasting propaganda messages over loudspeakers at the border. The messages infuriated the North Koreans who threatened military action if the broadcasts continued. Both sides exchanged artillery fire, North Korea's leader, Kim Jeong-un, placed his frontline troops in a "quasi-state" of war ordering them to be ready for battle.^{143, 144, 145} Hoping to avoid full-out war, the two sides met in high-level meetings during which Seoul agreed to stop the broadcasts and Pyongyang agreed to express its regret over the maiming of the two ROK soldiers.¹⁴⁶

On the domestic front, President Park has again angered many South Koreans with her declaration that she intends to replace all school history books with one state-approved version. The opposition is gearing up for another fight with what they regard as the increasingly authoritarian rule by the government.^{147, 148} Some South Koreans believe that North Korea is behind the growing opposition to the history book decision. They suggest that

History: Endnotes

North Korea is attempting to inflame passions against the South Korean government.¹⁴⁹

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History: Chapter 2 Assessment

1. In the first century B.C.E., Korea was divided into three rival kingdoms.

True

By 18 B.C.E. the Koreans had organized themselves into three tribal confederations. Tribes in the East established the Silla Kingdom. Tribes in the Northeast formed the Goguryo (later called Koryo) Kingdom. Tribes in the southwestern region formed the Paekjae Kingdom.

2. The Chosun Dynasty ruled until 1910.

True

The Chosun Dynasty came to power in 1392 and ruled the nation until it became a Japanese colony in 1910.

3. The whole of Korea became an independent nation in 1948.

False

At the end of the Sino-Japanese War in 1895, the whole of Korea became an independent nation. In 1948, the Russians refused to allow national elections in the North. Only the South held elections. South Korea became its own nation in that year.

4. The Chinese set up a provisional government in the northern region of Korea following World War II.

False

After World War II, independent Korea was temporarily divided near the 38th parallel. Soviet troops occupied the northern peninsula, while U.S. troops remained in the South and set up provisional governments to replace the Japanese structures.

5. The civil service system instituted by the Koryo changed the way power was allocated in Korea.

True

The Koryo instituted a civil service system based on the Chinese form, which resulted in the reallocation of power in society. Positions of power could be obtained by passing the civil service examination rather than through inheritance.



*Trade Mission Delegation
Flickr / World Economic Forum*

Economy

Introduction

In 1948, the Korean peninsula was formally divided into two nations. North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) had most of the industrial and mineral resources, while South Korea (Republic of Korea) possessed most of the agricultural assets. After the Korean War (1950–1953), the government of South Korea immediately began implementing land reform and building an industrial base. These efforts and the willingness of South Koreans to work hard resulted in rapid economic growth beginning in the 1960s. By the 1980s the country had developed strong industrial and service sectors, and South Korea burst onto the international economic stage.^{1,2} Today, less than 70 years after its founding, this small Asian nation has one of the largest economies in the world.^{3, 4, 5, 6}

But the path to economic success was not always smooth. By 1997, the financial situation in the country had weakened. The economy was crippled and many businesses were forced to close. As the national currency devalued, banks shut their doors.⁷ The International Monetary Fund stepped in and South Korea restructured its economy once again. Another significant action included the increased privatization of companies

previously held by the government.⁸ By 2000, the South Korean economy was one of the fastest growing in the world.^{9, 10}

The economy continued to grow, although slowly, in 2012 and 2013. In 2014, the economy slowed and growth will likely remain sluggish in the short term.^{11, 12} Inflexible labor markets, poor relations between management and labor, underdeveloped financial markets, and a lack of transparency combined limit South Korea's future growth. In 2014, the country has slipped to 26 on the list of the world's largest economies. This was its worst performance in a decade.^{13, 14} By 2015, it ranked 11th or 12th in the world.^{15, 16} Korea's aging population is another factor likely to negatively affect the economy. As the nation ages, there are fewer workers to help pay the costs for the elderly.^{17, 18, 19} An extensive "brain drain" is occurring in the areas of science and engineering. Some students in these fields are leaving the country to secure employment abroad, while others are opting to study other subjects.^{20, 21, 22, 23}

Agriculture

Little of South Korea's rugged landscape is arable: roughly 15% of the land is suitable for agriculture.^{24,}

^{25, 26} Today, approximately 6% of the workforce in South Korea is engaged in agriculture.²⁷ In 1953, 70% of the labor force worked in agriculture, a number that began to rapidly decrease after the Korean War.^{28, 29} The

main agricultural crops in South Korea include rice,

root crops, barley, vegetables, and fruit. In 2014, this sector contributed about 2% to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).³⁰ Ginseng is a small but important export product. Livestock is also an important segment of the agricultural sector. After rice, the top three agricultural products are pork, beef, and milk.³¹

After the Korean War, the size of a typical farm was about 3 hectares (7.4 acres). By 2011, that number had shrunk to about 0.5 hectares (1.2 acres).^{32, 33} Increased agricultural productivity is accomplished through the use of higher-yielding seeds and other means. To further enhance productivity, new emphasis is being given to mechanization and modernization of farming techniques.^{34, 35, 36, 37}



*Rice Harvest
Flickr / Brian Yap*

South Korea is a major importer of food. This trend continues despite three decades of strengthening its agricultural production, creating strong barriers for imports, and providing government farm subsidies. The importation of rice, which is a dietary staple, has been particularly contentious. Beginning in the 1970s, the government launched a campaign to achieve self-sufficiency in rice production. The two-pronged policy placed limits on rice consumption and increased production. Today, South Korea is self-sufficient in rice production partly because of the steady decline in rice consumption since 1987.^{38, 39, 40, 41}

Fishing

A significant fishing industry supports a major component of the South Korean diet. Though the country once depended on fishing fleets, it is turning to aquaculture, or fish farming. Aquaculture has nearly doubled its output since 2000 and is now South Korea's largest fishery source. As reliance on aquaculture output grows, the number of fishing vessels will likely decline. Other factors contributing to the reduction include the aging population of fishermen, a lack of interest from youth in pursuing fishing as a career, and government efforts to reduce the number of fishing boats (to prevent overfishing). But even with aquaculture, South Korea does not produce sufficient fish to meet domestic demand. The consumption of imported fish and fishery products has risen steadily since the late 1990s, a trend that is likely to continue. South Korean fish exports continue to decline, widening the trade imbalance.^{42, 43}

Manufacturing/ Industry

At the end of the Korean War in 1953, the government began creating an environment that encouraged industrial growth and development. After President Park Chung-Hee took control of the government in a military coup in 1961, he began to shift the South Korean economy away from its agrarian roots toward rapid industrialization.^{44, 45} By 2014, the industrial sector had increased to about 38% of GDP and employed approximately 24% of the workforce.⁴⁶



*Hydraulic hose manufacturing
Flickr / Republic of Korea*

Part of President Park's economic strategy was to focus on export manufacturing, including textiles, steel, and automobiles. Today, South Korea is the world's second-largest producer of semiconductors and the world's largest shipbuilder; South Korea filled 50% of all international ship orders in 2011. Some of the high value-added vessels produced in South Korea include drill ships, liquefied natural gas carriers, and large container ships.^{47, 48, 49, 50}

Large family-owned conglomerates with strong ties to the government, known as chaebols, are often credited with much of South Korea's economic success. Each group specializes in different businesses but all have interrelated management. By the 1980s, chaebols dominated all sectors of the Korean economy, particularly manufacturing. At that time, nearly one-quarter of all manufacturing shipments and 8.5% of the labor force were controlled by the five biggest conglomerates.⁵¹

In spite of their significant contributions to the economy, these conglomerates are not always regarded in a positive light. Complaints about chaebols and the extent of their control in the country have prompted investigations, arrests, and calls for reform. Some members of the National Assembly have promised to clamp down and end the chaebols' domination.^{52, 53, 54, 55} But the chaebols remain defiant and vow to fight any reforms.^{56, 57}

Energy

South Korea is one of the largest consumers and net importer of energy in the world.^{58, 59, 60} In 2014, South Korea was the world's fifth-largest importer of oil, the fourth-largest importer of coal, and the second-largest importer of liquefied natural gas (LNG).^{61, 62} Although the nation has no oil reserves of its own, it is home to some of the world's most advanced oil refineries.⁶³



*Electrical Tower
Flickr / Tonio Vega*

Coal is the largest energy source in the country, supplying nearly 30% of domestic energy. Roughly one-quarter of the energy needs are met by LNG.⁶⁴ Another 25% of the nation's electricity is generated by 20 nuclear reactors. The country plans to build 11 reactors to help meet energy needs. With the world's sixth-largest nuclear generation

capacity, South Korea is poised to become a major producer of nuclear energy. The government intends to become a major exporter of nuclear technology. So far, South Korea has sold reactors to the United Arab Emirates. South Korea is currently marketing reactors to Turkey, Jordan, and several other countries. The industry is expected to become one of the most profitable, following automotives, semiconductors, and shipbuilding.^{65, 66, 67, 68} South Korea is developing green energy and other alternatives. The government is set to invest a significant amount of money in a giant offshore wind farm.^{69, 70, 71, 72}

Natural Resources

Unlike North Korea, South Korea lacks significant natural resources. South Korea's tremendous economic success since the Korean War is due largely to its innovations in manufacturing and exports.⁷³ For 40 years following the war, at least half of all investment in the country went into business, with the greatest portion of that going into the manufacturing sector.⁷⁴ South Korea has more than compensated for its lack of natural resources with a population of highly trained and educated people who possess a strong work ethic. Today it is one of the most highly educated nations in the world. This wealth of human capital has been a key factor in the rapid rise of the economy and the standard of living.⁷⁵



*JaeJu
Flickr / Graeme Lennon*

Trade

In the 1950s, South Korea was one of the world's poorest nations; exports and imports accounted for about 3% and 13% of the nation's GDP, respectively. Responding to this situation, the government forged policies to step up exports by rewarding companies that were able to expand the export sector.⁷⁶

The economy is largely driven by trade; for the last several years the nation has maintained a strong trade surplus.^{77, 78} But January 2012 figures revealed the first trade deficit in 2 years, because of declining exports.^{79, 80} In 2014, the country once again enjoyed a trade surplus but that surplus declined in the last half of the year.⁸¹

South Korea is among the 10 largest importers and exporters in the world. Machinery, electronics and electronic equipment, oil, steel, optical instruments, transport equipment, organic chemicals, and plastics are the major imports.^{82, 83} Major exports are semiconductors, wireless telecommunications equipment, motor vehicles, auto parts, computers, display, home appliances, wire telecommunication equipment, steel, ships,

and petrochemicals.^{84, 85} The country has established a number of free-trade agreements to further increase trade.⁸⁶ China is the nation's largest trading partner; roughly 21% of all of South Korea's trade is with China.⁸⁷ Other important partners include the United States, Japan, and the European Union.^{88, 89}



*Hotel On a Hill
Flickr / Brian Yap*

Tourism

The service sector is the largest economic sector in South Korea. It accounts for about 60% of GDP and employs about 70% of the labor force.⁹⁰ Tourism is one of the fastest-growing segments. In 2015, the tourism industry's total contribution to GDP was nearly 6%.⁹¹ Although the nation has an excellent transportation infrastructure as well as historical and cultural sites, South Korea remains only the sixth-most popular destination in Asia. Nearly 10 million international visitors traveled to South Korea in 2011, but 75% of them were from Japan, China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.^{92, 93} In 2013, more than 12 million visitors landed in

South Korea.⁹⁴ The Chinese are flocking to South Korea and now account for 35% of international tourists, ahead of Japanese.^{95, 96} Factors that negatively affect South Korea's ability to attract more tourists are the low priority for tourism development, a low affinity for travel and tourism, an unwelcoming attitude toward foreign visitors, and the relatively high cost of travel.⁹⁷

The top tourist destinations include the volcanic island of Cheju (Cheju-do), Seoul, and heritage centers such as Gyeongju. Additionally, medical tourism is expanding rapidly, bolstered by demands for plastic surgery. Most medical tourists come from the United States, but Russia, Mongolia, Hong Kong, and Vietnam also contribute significantly.^{98, 99} In addition to plastic surgery, travelers seek treatment for spinal injuries and cancer, including cyberknife treatment, a noninvasive robotic radiosurgery system.^{100, 101, 102}

Banking and Finance

The Bank of Korea acts as the nation's central bank. It issues banknotes, formulates and implements monetary and credit policy, and serves as the bankers' and government's bank.¹⁰³ The worsening economic situation is straining the industry. Commercial soundness and profitability are declining. Still, the financial sector is stable and should be able to withstand any serious economic shocks, at least in the near- to mid-term.^{104, 105}

The national currency is the Korean won (KRW). In November 2015, USD 1 equaled approximately KRW 1,132.¹⁰⁶ In 1997, the Ministry of Strategy and Finance allowed the value of the KRW to be determined by supply and demand. The KRW is a floating currency, but the Bank of Korea can intervene if the exchange rate becomes too volatile.^{107, 108}



*Golden Pigs
Flickr / bebouchard*

In the 1960s, the government nationalized most commercial banks, and retained the power to appoint the heads of all national commercial banks and to control foreign exchange. Banks functioned as an arm of the federal government by carrying out federal policy plans. As the power of the chaebols (large, family-owned conglomerates) increased over the economy, the government became increasingly unable to unilaterally change fiscal policy.¹⁰⁹

The extreme degree of interconnectedness among the chaebol management and its heavy reliance on credit contributed to financial vulnerability. The chaebols' preferential relationship with the banks helped fuel South Korea's financial meltdown in 1997.^{110, 111} Structural reforms have led to

an increase in bank mergers and a focus on profitability. Foreign banks now operate in South Korea.¹¹² In 2013, there were 39 branches of foreign banks throughout the country.¹¹³ Although the government has assisted ailing banks, stringent conditions have applied.¹¹⁴

The nation continues to reform its financial system. Current projects include speculative, high-risk hedge funds that could yield large profits. Investment banks that can compete internationally are under development.¹¹⁵ The financial sector is facing more restructuring as banks and financial institutions attempt to bolster earnings.^{116, 117,}

¹¹⁸

Standard of Living

South Koreans enjoy a high standard of living.¹¹⁹ The average annual individual salary was, 31,051 in 2013 compared to USD 42,050 for the United States.¹²⁰ Average household income in the second quarter of 2014 was approximately USD 45,000.¹²¹ Costs for items such as food and medical treatment are lower than in the United States, but housing can be expensive depending on location.^{122, 123, 124} In 2014, Seoul ranked as one of the most expensive cities in the world.¹²⁵

Life expectancy in South Korea has increased from about 52 years of age in 1960 to about 80 years today (77 for males/83 for females).^{126, 127} Increased access to affordable

healthcare under the National Health Insurance Program partly explains much of this increase.¹²⁸ Other contributing factors include a reduced level of infant mortality and better treatment for cardiovascular disease, including high blood pressure.¹²⁹

South Korea's 49,115,196 people live in a relatively small land area. The population density is about 492 people per sq km (1,276 people/sq mi).¹³⁰ The majority of people live in apartment buildings, most of which have between 15 and 30 stories, although some have as many as 60.¹³¹ Apartments are generally small, averaging between 33 and 49.5 sq m (350 and 525 sq ft).¹³² Most South Koreans own their apartments.¹³³



*Namsaemun Market
Flickr / Emmanuel DYAN*

Employment Trends

South Korea's population growth rate has declined since 2000. In 2015, only four countries worldwide had lower fertility rates than South Korea's rate of 1.25.¹³⁴ The nation is also one of the fastest "graying" societies in the world.^{135, 136}

Recent demographic data show that about 13% of the population is over the age of 64.¹³⁷ Projections suggest that 40% of South Koreans will be 65 or older by 2050.¹³⁸ Estimates say that the number of working-age Koreans will peak in 2016.¹³⁹ By 2040, the working-age population will shrink by about 20%.¹⁴⁰ This has left South Koreans wrestling with issues of an aging workforce and mandatory retirement ages.^{141, 142, 143}



*Humphreys Job Fair
Flickr / USAG- Humphreys*

In South Korea, retirement age is normally set by each company and negotiated with workers and unions. Although the average retirement occurs at about age 53, it appears to be increasing. In 2011, about one-third of employees were aged 50 or older.¹⁴⁴ The

elderly remain quite active in the labor force. The participation rate of those aged 50 or higher well over 50%. Nearly three in four Koreans in their 50s worked. That number dropped to 58% for those aged 60 to 64.¹⁴⁵

Analysts are concerned that the proposal to extend the retirement age to 60 will increase labor costs, place more obligations on younger workers, and create a tighter job market.^{146, 147, 148, 149} Recent data lends credence to those fears. Finding a job is increasingly difficult for young people in South Korea's tight job market. Despite a highly educated population, it takes nearly one year to secure a job after graduating. Only 44% of individuals aged 15–29 are active in the labor force.¹⁵⁰ Each year, approximately 50,000 more students graduate from a university than the job market is able to absorb. By some estimates, 40% of college graduates are “overeducated” with respect to the needs of the job market.¹⁵¹ But older workers look favorably on proposals to increase the retirement age. Among the elderly, 62% expressed a desire to work until they were 72.¹⁵²

Outlook

In September 2015, the unemployment rate in South Korea was 3.2%.¹⁵³ Growth in GDP slowed to around 1% in 2015 and the nation's central bank warned of possible downside risks that could limit projected growth.^{154,}

^{155, 156} South Korea's exports have plummeted and, in August 2015, were off nearly 15% from the previous year.

This could be calamitous for the country since 41% of total economic output derives from exports.¹⁵⁷ A slowdown in China's economy has reduced demand for South Korean exports. Increased demand from the United States and Europe could help offset China's reduced demand. Reduced demand for domestic products and fewer new jobs could also slow general economic growth.^{158, 159, 160} Inflation is anticipated to stay below 3% for 2015.¹⁶¹

Although the economy looks healthy, some economists warn that South Korea could be heading for recession. GDP growth is expected to be sluggish at around 2% in 2016. Consumers have amassed large amounts of household debt. People are saving more and spending less. The uncertain economic climate is pushing South Korean companies to hold onto cash and delay investment. The government has introduced a series of measures designed to spur the economy.^{162, 163, 164, 165}



*Apartment construction
Flickr / Paul Kim*

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Economy: Chapter 3 Assessment

- 1. Less than 10% of South Koreans are employed in agriculture.**

True

Today, approximately 6% of the workforce in South Korea is engaged in agriculture. In 1953, 70% of the labor force worked in agriculture, a number that began to decline after the Korean War.

- 2. The South Korean shipbuilding industry is the largest in the world.**

True

The South Korean shipbuilding industry, the largest in the world, filled 50% of all international orders for ships in 2011. High value-added vessels produced in South Korea include drill ships, liquefied natural gas carriers, and large container ships.

- 3. Chaebols are government-owned conglomerates.**

False

A chaebol is a family-owned conglomerate that historically has had strong ties to the government. Often credited with South Korea's economic success, chaebols dominated all sectors of the South Korean economy by the 1980s.

- 4. Aquaculture has replaced deep-sea fishing as the nation's largest fishery source.**

True

Once dependent on its fishing fleets, South Korea has turned to aquaculture, which has nearly doubled its output since 2000. Aquaculture is the nation's largest fishery source.

- 5. South Korea has the lowest fertility rate in the world.**

False

In 2015, only four countries worldwide had lower fertility rates than South Korea's rate of 1.25.



*Hanbok parade
Flickr / Republic of Korea, Jeon Han*

Society

Introduction

South Korea is a monocultural country where nearly everyone is Korean. People are fiercely proud of their 5,000-year history, and bridle when it is referred to as Japanese or Chinese history.^{1,2} Family is central to life and family members have many mutual obligations and are expected to exhibit loyalty and responsibility.³ But changes in perceptions of family obligations are increasingly apparent. Government polls reveal that only 37% of children believe it is their responsibility to take care of aging parents.⁴

South Koreans believe it is inappropriate to express emotions in public, although no such restrictions exist in private settings. People place a high value on humility and are uncomfortable being singled out for achievements.⁵ Respect and politeness are important, although the South Korean concept of these traits differs from Western ideas. South Koreans often shove and push, disrespect lines, and are otherwise “rude” to others. Yet, if one is not a member of a social circle, it is impossible to be “impolite.”^{6,7} South Koreans are generous toward others as long as those people are known within their social circles. Often, South Koreans bring gifts home after traveling and never arrive empty-handed at a house when visiting.⁸

It is difficult to understand South Korean culture without knowing that its most significant influence is Confucianism. Principles of Confucian thought underlie and define life in South Korea, the most Confucian nation in Asia.^{9, 10} Society is hierarchical. Interaction among individuals depends on status, which is determined largely by a combination of factors including job and age. Virtually all aspects of social life and behavioral conventions are prescribed.^{11, 12}

South Korean culture values hard work and diligence. Education is considered the key to success. In fewer than 60 years, South Korea has moved from a poor agrarian society, largely in ruins, to a developed nation with one of the highest levels of educational attainment in the world.^{13, 14, 15} The survival of Korean culture for more than 5,000 years despite invasions, occupations, attempts at cultural eradication, and other adversities testifies to its adaptability and endurance.^{16, 17, 18, 19}

Ethnic Groups and Languages

Koreans are a mixed racial group with characteristic Caucasian and Asian features.^{20, 21} Despite extensive cultural contacts, Koreans avoided mixing with outside groups and hence did not experience the ethnic assimilation found in other parts of the world. Contemporary South Koreans, still keenly

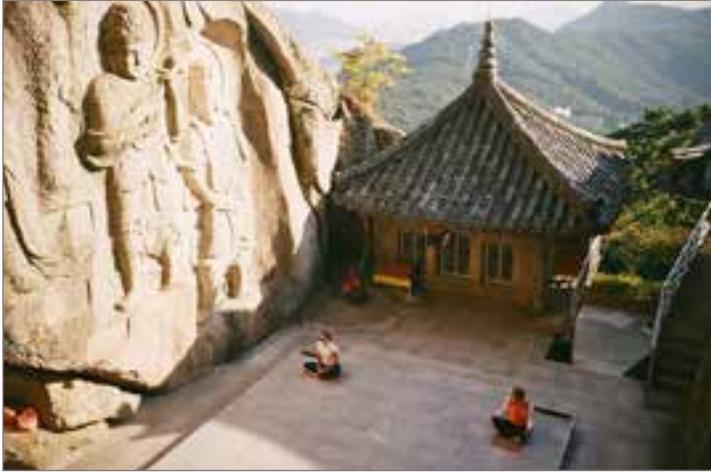


*Korea Spring of Insadong
Flickr / Republic of Korea*

conscious of ethnic differences, work to preserve their unique culture and heritage.²² This intense focus on maintaining Korean identity and safeguarding the culture has created a cultural rigidity. From an outside perspective, it can seem as if all things Korean are good and everything else is inferior. In addition, the oppressive Japanese occupation of Korea (1910–1945) led to a distrust of most things foreign, including visitors (particularly the Japanese).^{23, 24, 25, 26}

Korean is one of the oldest living languages and one of the most widely spoken in the world. Its grammar system is similar to those in Japanese and Chinese.^{27, 28, 29} There are at least four major dialects of the South Korean language. The standard form is called Pyojunmal and is based on the dialect from Seoul. The version of Korean spoken on the southern island of Cheju (Cheju-do) is largely unintelligible to other Korean speakers. This has caused some linguists to suggest it may be a different language.^{30, 31 32, 33}

The alphabet, Hangeul, was devised by King Sejong in the mid-15th century. It comprises 28 characters, although only 24 are used today. The 14 consonants and 10 vowels are combined into blocks of syllables. Words may have more than one syllable block, and there is a space between each written word. Hangeul is often called the single most efficient, scientific alphabet in the world; consonant shapes are based on the shape of the mouth when making the sound. There is a saying that a wise man can learn Hangeul in a day and even a stupid man can master it in 10 days.³⁴ The written form was vertical until the 1980s, but today the language is read from left to right.^{35, 36}



*Seokbulsa Temple
Flickr / Alex LA*

Religion

South Koreans are constitutionally guaranteed freedom of religion. Today an estimated 32% of Koreans are Christian, 24% are Buddhist, and 43% have no religious affiliation. In reality, the lines between the religions blur, and beliefs and rituals have merged with traditional shamanistic beliefs.^{37, 38}

Shamanism

Shamanism, the oldest form of religion in South Korea, teaches that people can be possessed by negative spirits. Shamanists believe that all things have a spirit that is neither good nor bad.

If treated badly, spirits can bring misfortune to individuals. But when the spirits are worshipped, they can be summoned to prevent problems and to bring good luck.^{39, 40} Certain shamanistic practices are still evident in modern South Korea, including the *goot*, a ritual carried out through dance, song, and prayer.^{41, 42, 43} Other shamanistic rituals are popular in ceremonies to open new office buildings or when Eastern and Western medicine fail to cure ailments.^{44, 45} Many South Koreans visit fortunetelling establishments known as *jeomjip* or *saju* cafes, especially before weddings or university entrance exams, or while job-hunting.^{46, 47}

The shaman, or *moodang*, in South Korea is generally a woman.⁴⁸ Male shamans, *paksu moodangs*, are more rare.⁴⁹ *Moodangs*, who are believed to have the ability to communicate with spirits, have played an important historical role because of their relationships with rulers and kings. The role can be inherited, and families of *moodangs* can earn a living by visiting villages to perform ritual ceremonies.^{50, 51} Despite her powers, a *moodang* occupies one of the lowest social classes; many people still seek out a *moodang*, but such visits can be a source of shame in modern South Korea.⁵²

Buddhism

Buddhism came to Korea in about 372, becoming the official religion during the period of the Three Kingdoms (57 B.C.E–668 C.E.). The religion flourished under the Koryo Dynasty (935–1392) but lost favor when the Chosun (Yi) Dynasty came to power in 1392; Buddhism was blamed for government corruption, and Buddhist monks were expelled from Seoul. The religion experienced a



*Buddhist Deities Lanterns
Flickr / Baron Reznik*

resurgence under Japanese occupation (1910–1945).^{53, 54, 55, 56} Today, there are more than 900 traditional Buddhist temples and approximately 20,000 total throughout the nation.^{57, 58} In South Korea, nearly every temple has a chapel that contains a shrine dedicated to the mountain spirit. This helps to avoid angering the god on whose land the temple sits.⁵⁹

Most temples have several gates that visitors must pass through before reaching the Main Hall. The first gate, known as the One Pillar Gate, symbolizes that an individual is taking the first step toward the Pure Land. The second gate, the Four Guardians' Gate, comprises four deities who defend the temple from demons. These guardians generally have a lute, a sword, a dragon, or a pagoda in one hand. The Main Hall is a temple's spiritual center and houses a statue of Buddha.⁶⁰

In Buddhist belief, salvation comes by relinquishing worldly goods and desires and living a life of moderation. Believers can reach a state of nirvana or ultimate peace and no longer experience pain or worry.⁶¹ In Korea, Buddhism evolved into a unique type. It absorbed the values of the traditional culture, so it became concerned with national glory and the pursuit of peace, and focuses on harmony and conciliation.^{62, 63, 64}

Christianity

Koreans were first exposed to Christianity in the 1600s. Catholicism was not brought by Westerners, but by Korean scholars who learned of the faith while studying in China. Christianity gained a foothold when Western Catholic missionaries entered the country in 1785. Protestant missionaries arrived in the 1880s.^{65, 66} Early Korean converts to Catholicism refused to perform traditional rites of ancestor worship, leaving the new faith at odds with traditional Confucian principles. The government suppressed the

religion, killing many of its converts and beheading missionaries in the persecutions of 1801, 1839, and 1866.^{67, 68}

Christianity in contemporary society reflects a blending of Confucian tradition and Christian principles. Despite Christian preachings of equality, the notion of societal hierarchy has merged into Christian philosophy.⁶⁹ Korean Christianity also focuses strongly on faith healing and physical health.⁷⁰ One of Seoul's megachurches credits some of its success to its followers' belief that prayer can lead to better health.⁷¹

Most of South Korea's Protestant denominations are fundamentalist.^{72, 73, 74} Seoul is home to 10 of the largest Christian congregations in the world, including the world's largest Pentecostal Church. The Yoido Full Gospel Church has approximately 700,000 members.^{75, 76, 77, 78} One of the most controversial churches is the Unification Church, founded in North Korea by the Reverend Sun Myung Moon in 1954. After being jailed in the North, Moon fled in 1956 to South Korea, where his followers consider him to be the new messiah.^{79, 80}

Only 11% of South Koreans are Catholic, but some argue the nation could become the future of the church. Unlike in many parts of the world, most of South Korea's Catholics are young, and the Church there is growing. Parishioners are often wealthy and well-educated. The nation's geographic distance from Rome and the fact that Catholicism was founded by Koreans has enabled its clergy to develop autonomously through a broadly decentralized church structure. The Church there also has a unique independent streak.^{81, 82}

Cuisine

A common greeting in South Korea is *pom mogossoyo?* (Have you eaten rice?) Food is generally less salty than Japanese food and less oily than Chinese food. The three main spices used in cooking are garlic, red pepper paste, and salt. Sesame oil is often used to add more flavor to dishes.⁸³

Sticky white rice is served at virtually every meal and is accompanied by up to 12 vegetable side dishes (panchan). Popular side dishes include spinach (shigumchi), sweet black beans (gongjaban), mung bean sprout salad (sookju namul), pickled cucumbers



*Korean Cuisine
Flickr / Ali Utku Selen*

(oi jee), fried zucchini (hobakjun), and cold spiced potato cubes (kamja chorim).^{84, 85}
⁸⁶ The most common panchan is kimchi, a fermented cabbage dish that can vary from quite mild to extremely spicy. Each family usually develops its own recipe for kimchi and each region has its own version.⁸⁷ Meals generally include a broth soup containing fish, bean paste, beef, tofu, or bean sprouts.^{88, 89} Most meals are concluded with a seasonal fruit. Favorites include persimmons (gam), Asian pears (pae), and a Korean melon known as chamweh.^{90, 91}

Several South Korean dishes are popular, particularly among foreign visitors. Bulgogi is made from thin strips of grilled marinated beef. It is sometimes called Korean barbecue. Chopjae is another popular dish made from clear noodles mixed with a variety of meats and vegetables. Bibimbap, which is served hot or cold, is a bowl of rice topped with meat, vegetables, and a fried egg, mixed with gochujang, a spicy red pepper paste. Mandu is a dumpling filled with vegetables and/or meat. It can be fried or steamed and is often used in hot soups.^{92, 93}

In general, South Koreans drink tea, except with dinner when soup broth is preferred. Common teas are green tea (nok cha) and barley tea (bori cha). Black tea (hong cha) is less common. Coffee is a popular beverage, especially when socializing at a coffee shop.^{94, 95} Traditional alcoholic beverages include soju, a distilled rice liquor, and makkoli, made from fermented rice wine.^{96, 97}

Traditional Dress

The traditional attire, known as hanbok, dates as far back as 57 B.C.E.; it is a loose-fitting garment with no zippers, buttons, or pockets. Although this traditional Korean attire was commonly worn until the 1960s, today most South Koreans dress in Western styles. Older Koreans in rural areas may still wear hanbok, including a tall black hat (sodkut) made from horsehair. But traditional clothing is generally reserved for ritual celebrations and weddings.^{98, 99}



*Women in Hanbok, Seoul
Flickr / Republic of Korea, Jeon Han*

There are different hanbok for specific occasions, including the New Year, weddings, funerals, and first birthdays. The male hanbok consists of baggy pants (paji) and a short jacket (jogori). A vest (jokki) or a long overcoat (durumagee), cloth belt, hat, and silk

shoes with embroidered floral patterns (kotseen) complete the look. The female's hanbok is a very short jacket (jogori), long skirt (cheema) with a long sash tied in a bow on the side, white cotton socks (bosun), and boat-shaped shoes. For adornment, there is a white collar (dongjong). Long trousers are worn under the skirt along with voluminous underskirts.^{100, 101, 102, 103}

Each hanbok color has a symbolic meaning.¹⁰⁴ White, symbolizing a pure and modest spirit, was generally worn by commoners. Red symbolized wealth and good fortune. Indigo was worn by people from the royal court. Yellow, signifying the center of the universe, was reserved for members of the royal family.^{105, 106, 107} Colors also convey social information. For example, a blue cheema means that a woman has sons; at weddings, she will wear blue or jade (a blue-green color) while the mother of the bride generally wears red. Brighter colors signify youth, while darker or muted colors indicate middle age.¹⁰⁸

Today, men generally wear white, light gray, or light blue colors. Traditionally, men represent the east, and blue is the color of east. The basic color of the female hanbok is red, light pink, or purple. Young people generally wear a blue vest, while gray vests are reserved for older people. The overcoat is white in summer and black in winter.¹⁰⁹

Gender Issues

The South Korean constitution declares that all citizens are equal under the law and prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender. Yet South Korean women are frequently victims of discrimination.^{110, 111} South Korea ranked 117 out of 142 countries on the 2014 Global Gender Gap report.¹¹² On that same index, South Korea ranked 124th on women's participation in the labor force, with only 51% of women employed.¹¹³



*President Park Geun-hye in Davos, Switzerland
WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM/swiss-image.ch/Nicola Pitaro*

Confucian hierarchical ideals relegate women to a lower social status than men. Traditionally, a woman did not work outside the home but was responsible for all domestic chores, including caring for the husband's parents.¹¹⁴ The Confucian ideal of namjon yobi (honored men and subservient women) pervades South Korean thought

and explains much of the gender inequality in the nation. Many still believe that a woman's first duty is to home and family.^{115, 116}

The strong patriarchal values of South Korea's culture have contributed to high rates of domestic violence. Some studies suggest that one-third to one-half of South Korean women experience some sort of domestic violence. Many instances go unreported because of the pervasive belief that domestic abuse is a family issue rather than a social or legal one. The nation is struggling to come to grips with the issue. New regulations for such cases make 28 to 56 hours of counseling mandatory.^{117, 118, 119}

South Korean women are still tasked with most of the domestic and childcare duties. The Korean culture forces employees to work long hours and to socialize for long hours after work. This makes it difficult for women to find good jobs. Many women who wish to pursue a career have responded to the situation by conducting a "baby strike." Approximately 15% of South Korean women have decided not to marry.^{120, 121, 122, 123} But even those who enter the labor force find that they receive, on average, only 44% of what their male colleagues make.¹²⁴ Still, women are entering professional fields in larger numbers and holding positions of political power.^{125, 126}

Arts

The history of Korean art dates more than 1,500 years, when hunting scenes were first painted on the walls of tombs. While some of the cave art shows a clear Chinese influence, hunting scenes from the period of the Goguryo Kingdom are uniquely Korean.¹²⁷ Today in South Korea there is a vibrant culture of art, music, and dance. Schoolchildren learn traditional art forms and numerous traditional skills.



*Korean celadon pottery
Flickr / Andy Eick*

Pottery

Koreans are famous for their ceramic products. Celadon porcelain (chongja) from the Koryo period was first produced around 1050 C.E. and displays intricate inlaid designs and copper glazing. The distinctive jade-green coloring was developed by Korean artisans to reflect natural colors. True Korean celadon is easily distinguished from Chinese versions. Korean porcelain became revered for its simplicity, but by the end of

the Koryo period many of the techniques associated with the art form had been lost.^{128, 129, 130} The village of Ichon is a well-known pottery-making center where Korean artists have produced ceramics for more than 600 years.^{131, 132}

Painting

Minhwa are folk paintings that illustrate stories of everyday life. They include motifs such as tigers, birds, and symbols of longevity. A frequently occurring theme is that of commoners besting the ruling class. Korean paintings of the 18th century emphasize order and ritual. Korean art virtually stopped during the years of colonization and the Korean War (1910–1953). Art was revived in the 1970s as the nation became more prosperous. Popular artists in the 1980s used paintings (minjung misul) to depict social and political protest. Nam June Paik, the founder of “video art,” achieved international recognition in the avant-garde art world.^{133, 134, 135}

Literature and Folklore

Reflecting social divisions, literature developed along two lines: works for scholars and the wealthy aristocracy and those for the common people. Poetry was a favored form of literature among the wealthy. Sijo, a short lyric form of poetry, maintains a place in current literature. Commoners preferred myths and legends. Long ballads, or pansori, were performed by troupes of traveling minstrels who often sang to the accompaniment of drums. Censorship has stifled contemporary literature, but modern authors have published works dealing with topics such as family life, loyalty to the state, and suffering.^{136, 137, 138}

Korean mythology has a relatively limited scope and contains nothing relating to the creation of the universe, the origins of people, or struggles between gods. Rather, the stories tell about the earliest kings. They are largely shamanistic interpretations of the lives of the founding royalty and reveal family pedigrees and history.¹³⁹ Korean folk legends, apart from mythology, often involve the tale of a monster that threatens villagers and is eventually defeated by a hero.¹⁴⁰

Dance

Traditional folk dances survive and are regularly performed. One of the most common dances, dating from the time of the Silla Kingdom, is the mask dance (choyongmu). Mask dances traditionally allowed performers to express anger and disappointment with civil and religious officials. Drums, gongs, and flutes provide the musical accompaniment; after the dance, the masks are burned because they are believed to be contaminated by the spirits.¹⁴¹ The Koryo Kingdom’s crane dance (hakchum) and spring nightingale (chunaengjon) are also popular forms that have survived.¹⁴² Unlike choreographed Western dances, Korean dances are improvisational. The dances are meant to convey feelings. The fluid movements of hands and feet are more important than dance steps.¹⁴³

Traditional Korean dances may be religious or secular. The religious dances are often performed by a shaman (moodang), who goes into a trancelike state. Other religious dances reflect Confucian tradition and incorporate the stiff, ceremonial forms that originated in China. The folk dances performed by farmers and accompanied by drums and gongs are the oldest surviving dances in the nation; they are regularly performed to drive away evil spirits.^{144, 145, 146}



*Korean Folk Village
Flickr / Verino77*

Music

Jongak is traditional Korean music that was enjoyed primarily by nobles and the aristocracy. It includes Confucian music, court music, and Chinese secular music. Minsogak, a musical form that was popular among commoners, included influences from shamanism and Buddhist traditions.^{147, 148, 149} Nongak is popular folk music that revolves around traditional rural life in Korea. It is based on rhythms and chants for various activities, ranging from plowing the field to burying the dead. These songs and rhythms have endured in rural areas but are less common in urban areas. Nongak is likely to be added to UNESCO's cultural heritage list as a central part of Korean national heritage. In an effort to preserve this tradition, percussion troupes called samulnori, which have become very popular, perform throughout the country. Samulnori use four instruments: kwatenggwari (small gong), ching (large gong), janggo (hourglass-shaped drum with two heads), and pook (barrel drum).^{150, 151, 152}

Sports and Recreation

The single sporting activity associated with South Korean national identity these days is hiking. Each weekend thousands of South Koreans dressed in fashionable hiking garb and lugging multi-course meals rush along the many mountain trails in the nation. The sport has become so popular that both traffic and trails are heavily congested.^{153, 154}

One of the oldest national sports enjoyed by both men and women is archery. Numerous clubs exist in the country, with competitions.¹⁵⁵ One of the nation's best-

known sports is taekwondo. This 2,000-year-old traditional martial art became an Olympic event in 2000; in that year, South Koreans took home three gold medals.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁷ Sheeruhm is a Korean form of wrestling that originated around 1,500 years ago. It resembles Japanese sumo wrestling. Unlike sumo, which originated as entertainment for the aristocracy, sheeruhm was developed for commoners. It was the most popular sport in the 1990s but has experienced a decline in recent years. Especially popular among fishermen and farmers, the sport is taught in middle and high schools.^{158, 159}



*South Korean flag at World Cup
Flickr / The Chosun Bimbo*

More familiar sports include soccer and baseball. Soccer was introduced in 1882. The country's soccer team is a perennial power in Asia and placed fourth in the 2002 World Cup in South Korea—the first Asian team ever to reach the semifinals in the world competition.¹⁶⁰ In the 2012 summer Olympics, the national team took the bronze medal.¹⁶¹ Baseball was introduced to Korea in 1905 by Christian missionaries from the United States. There are several professional teams. The nation has achieved some international recognition in the sport. South Korea won the Little League World Series in 1984, and 17 South Koreans have played for U.S. major-league teams, including pitcher Park Chan Ho.^{162, 163}

Traditional Games

Although many traditional Korean games (jeontongnori) have Chinese origins, they are still played, particularly on Korean holidays. Paengee-chigee is a popular top-spinning game often played by children. In badook, a board game played with black and white stones, players compete to capture each other's stones. Noltweegi is a game of seesaw played by Korean women. The object is to see who can jump higher. The origin of the game stems from women trying to see outside castle walls. Jaegichagi, similar to hacky sack, is popular among young boys. Another popular game played among members of the Korean royal families and the aristocracy is tuho. The game is similar to horseshoes. Competitors try to throw arrows into a pot or other container. One of the most popular board games still played today is yunnori. The game is a family favorite on Lunar New Year and other traditional holidays.^{164, 165, 166, 167}

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Society: Chapter 4 Assessment

1. Confucian thought is the most significant influence on South Korean culture.

True

Principles of Confucian thought underlie and define life in South Korea, the most Confucian nation in Asia. Confucianism prescribes virtually all aspects of social and behavioral conventions.

2. The largest religion in South Korea is Buddhism.

False

Today, about 32% of Koreans are Christian, about 24% are Buddhist, and about 43% have no religious affiliation.

3. The South Korean shaman or moodang is generally a man.

False

The shaman, or moodang, in South Korea is generally a woman. Male moodangs are relatively rare.

4. Politeness and respect are considered important in South Korea.

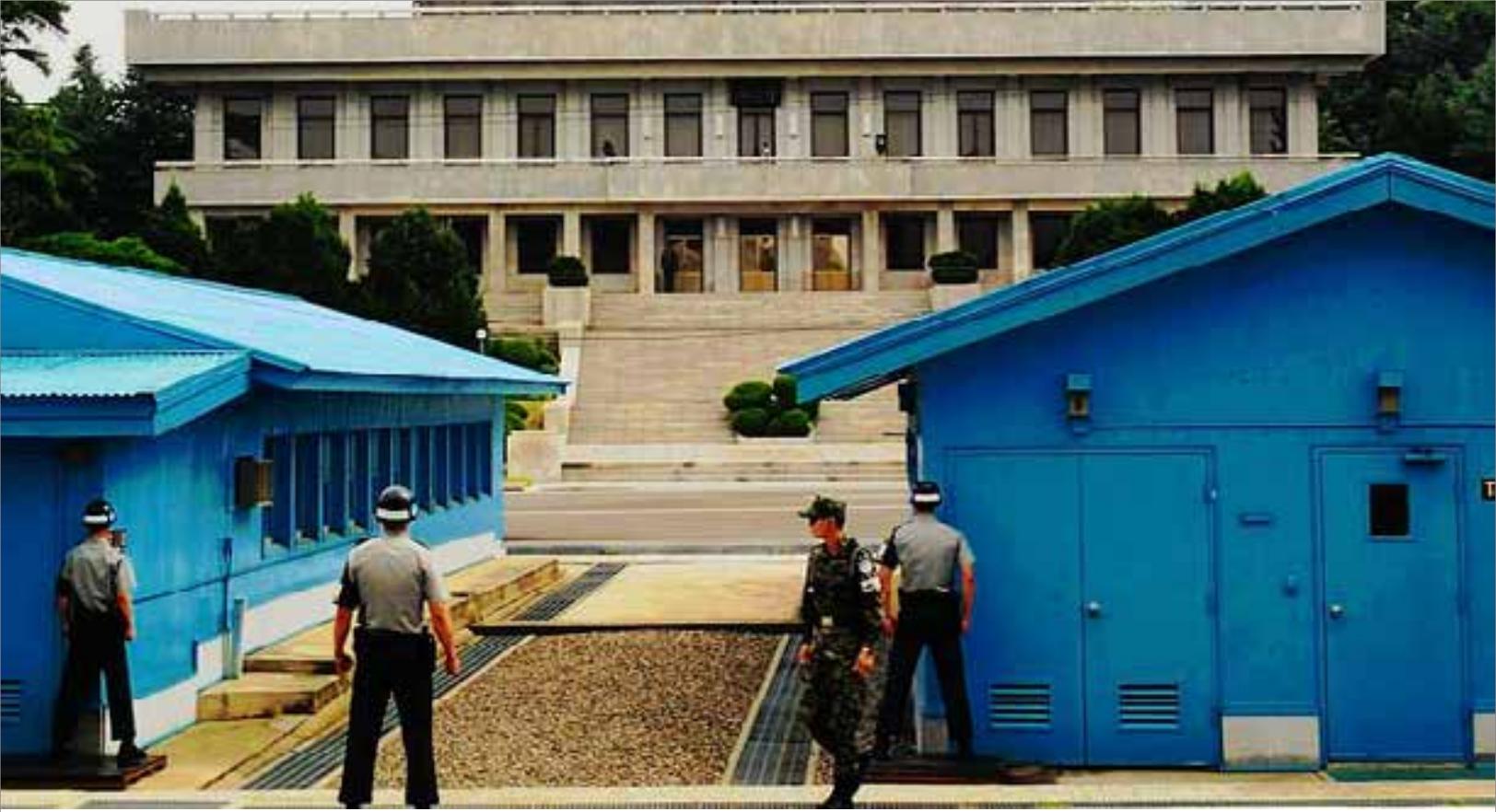
True

Respect and politeness are important, although what constitutes these traits in South Korean society differs from Western concepts.

5. Because of its complexities, the Korean alphabet Hangeul is difficult to master.

False

Hangeul consists of 14 consonants and 10 vowels that are combined into blocks of syllables. Hangeul is often called the single most efficient, scientific alphabet in the world.



*North & South Korea Borders DMZ
Flickr / SarahTz*

Security

Introduction

Although South Korea's foreign policy is rooted in its relations with North Korea, the country is also working to build or maintain strong links with China, Russia, Japan, the United States, and others. South Korea's focus on globalization has expanded its economic relations throughout the world, particularly in the European Union, Central and Eastern Europe, the former Soviet republics, and countries in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).^{1,2}

Since taking office in 2013, President Park Geun Hye has initiated her new foreign relations strategy. She is focused on building trust and stabilizing relations, particularly with North Korea, China, and Japan. Her policy, dubbed trustpolitik, is a three-pronged strategy that has met with mixed success.^{3,4}

Although South Korea remains largely aligned with the United States, it maintains a significant military of its own. South Korean troops have been deployed to Afghanistan and with UN peacekeeping forces.^{5,6} South Korea is modernizing its forces to match those of neighboring countries. The nation is striving to develop a self-reliant military capable of operating independently from the United States, which maintains an active

presence in the country.⁷ Military cooperation and exchange agreements with Japan, the United Kingdom, Russia, and others have further expanded its military alliances.⁸

Tensions with North Korea are high. But provocations by the North Koreans have not caused the South Korean government to waver on its policy of alignment. The South has responded forcefully to North Korean provocations but continues to engage the North by providing humanitarian aid and conducting high-level talks. Park's efforts have led to easing tensions with China. Foreign policy efforts have been less successful with Japan, and relations remain troubled.^{9, 10, 11, 12}



*Korea / USA relations
Flickr / USAG- Humphreys*

Relations with the United States

At the end of the Korean War hostilities in 1953, the United States signed a bilateral Mutual Security Agreement with South Korea. In 2014, approximately 28,500 U.S. troops were stationed at one navy base, two air force bases, and 12 army bases throughout the nation.^{13, 14, 15} South Korea remains the most important strategic and economic partner in Asia. Current relations are strong, and South Korea is one of the United States' closest allies in East Asia.¹⁶

Although the U.S. military presence in South Korea has sparked some anti-American sentiment, much of the ill will stems from individual actions by U.S. service personnel

or recent environmental concerns.^{17, 18, 19, 20} Despite frustrations with the large U.S. military presence, the South Korean people generally favor continued U.S. relations.^{21, 22} The downsizing of U.S. forces in recent years did not signify a reduced commitment; rather, it increased South Korean responsibility for its own security.^{23, 24} As a result, U.S. forces have redeployed south, away from the demilitarized zone.^{25, 26} In 2011, then-U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to South Korea, and there are no plans to further downsize forces in the country.²⁷

Bilateral trade relations between the United States and South Korea are strong. In 2014, bilateral trade amounted to roughly USD 114 billion. South Korea is the United States' sixth-largest trading partner.²⁸ A free-trade agreement (FTA) was approved by both nations in 2011 amid loud protests by South Korean activists. Although an overall assessment of the agreement on bilateral trade is yet to be determined, it has led to an increase of about 3% in trade.^{29, 30, 31}

Relations with Neighbors



*DMZ
Flickr / Ian Cochrane*

North Korea

Neither the North nor the South Korean government formally recognizes the other.³² No official diplomatic relations exist between the two, although cooperative agreements, dialogs, and exchanges have occurred.³³

Relations have worsened since South Korea's policy of engagement ended in 2008.^{34, 35} In May 2009, North Korea declared that the two nations were still at war. Further provocations in November set off a state of heightened alert eventually culminating in armed confrontation. North Korea shelled the demilitarized zone (DMZ), allegedly torpedoed and sank a South Korean naval vessel (the

Cheonan), and shelled the South Korean island of Yeonpyeong in November 2010.³⁶

³⁷ The two sides exchanged naval fire in 2014 after a North Korean vessel crossed into South Korean waters.³⁸ Both sides again exchanged gunfire near the demilitarized zone (DMZ) in October 2014.³⁹ In August 2015, tensions heightened when South Korea began propaganda broadcasts over loudspeakers near the DMZ following the injury of two soldiers in a mine blast.⁴⁰

South Korea has expressed a willingness to have dialogs with Kim Jong Un.⁴¹

At high-level meetings held in South Korea in October 2014, both sides agreed to more talks.⁴² The meetings were abandoned following a dustup near the DMZ. Both sides have rejected further talks.^{43, 44} President Park has laid the groundwork for an eventual reunification but North Korea rejected her overtures.⁴⁵

Some economic cooperation efforts have been successful. Approximately 120 South Korean companies employ 47,000 North Koreans in the Kaesong Industrial Zone, located in North Korea. The North gains about USD 33 million annually from this venture. The plant closed for five months in 2013 when tensions flared.^{46, 47}

More than 26,000 refugees have defected to South Korea since 1953 and are aided in their resettlement efforts by the South Korean government.^{48, 49, 50} But Seoul has recently been less hospitable as it attempts to staunch the increasing tide. The government continues to offer services to help refugees overcome culture shock and fit into South Korean society, and to provide them health support and educational training.⁵¹ But the government has steadily lowered its assistance payments since 2008.^{52, 53, 54}

China

South Korean relations with China are characterized by fundamental mistrust and they center primarily on expanding trade.^{55, 56}

Fears that China is closing the technology gap with South Korea—creating the possibility that China could become South Korea's largest economic rival in the region—have caused friction in recent years.^{57, 58} China is now South Korea's largest trading partner, accounting

for roughly 21% of all of South Korea's trade.⁵⁹ Relations between the two have improved in recent years. In 2014, China's president visited South Korea.^{60, 61} Both nations have established strong cooperation on cultural, political, and security affairs. Tourism between the two countries is growing. South Korea is the destination of more Chinese students (60,000) than any other nation.⁶²

In spite of improving relations, tensions persist. China's maritime policies in the region could be problematic. In October 2014, Chinese fishermen and the South Korean Coast Guard clashed in the Yellow Sea (West Sea), resulting in the death of one fisherman.⁶³ Another serious point of divergence is China's support of North Korea.^{64, 65, 66, 67} China's support has diminished since Kim Jong Un assumed leadership of the North. The Chinese have not yet visited North Korea nor invited its leader to China.^{68, 69} Nevertheless, the South Korean government distrusts China's intentions on the Korean peninsula and is equally suspicious of its influence in the North. South Korea worries that China would intervene militarily if the North Korean state were to fail.^{70, 71}



*China and North Korea relationship
Flickr / Roman Harak*



*Korean and U.S. Navy exercise in East Sea/Sea of Japan
Flickr / Naval Surface Warriors*

Japan

Memories of the brutality of the Japanese colonial occupation (1910–1945) have scarred relations between Japan and South Korea. Diplomatic links were not restored until nearly 20 years after the end of World War II.⁷² Relations have worsened under the Park administration. Neither Seoul nor Tokyo seems willing to compromise. The two nations seem caught in a vicious circle over their historical roles and relations.^{73, 74, 75}

Seoul remains suspicious of Japanese intentions and rows occur periodically over disputed islands such as Dokdo (Takeshima Island in Japan).⁷⁶ The island is important to both countries because of hydrocarbon reserves, fishing, and

issues of national pride.^{77, 78, 79} But mutual fear of North Korea has fostered continued collaboration. The need to retain Japan as a counterweight to both North Korea and China has kept relations cordial despite some potentially damaging incidents.⁸⁰ Increasing nationalism in Japan is worrisome to Seoul. Japan's decision to alter its defense posture and to allow its troops to fight outside of its national borders has triggered more distrust from South Korea.⁸¹

Despite other political disagreements, Japan is one of South Korea's most significant trading partners.^{82, 83} But in recent years, South Korea has decreased its dependence on Japan as an economic partner. Any motivation to improve trade relations and increase trade volume appears weak at the moment.⁸⁴

Police

The Korean National Police Agency (KNPA) is a highly centralized and bureaucratic agency that comprises a National Police Headquarters, four authorities, and seven bureaus.^{85, 86} It has approximately 42,000 officers. Local agencies operate at the provincial, metropolitan, or special city level with more than 800 branch offices. Each municipal agency has a chief and deputy chief, three directors general, and six divisions.^{87, 88}

In addition to the KNPA, there are several thousand officers of the Agency for National Security Planning (NSP). The NSP functions as the nation's equivalent of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. Its main functions are to protect and investigate threats to national security.⁸⁹ Another unspecified number of officers work in the Presidential Security Service (PSS). The agency is charged with the protection of the president-elect,

president, and the immediate presidential family while in office and for 7 years thereafter.⁹⁰

Because conformity is an important value in South Korean society, citizens have historically regarded police as authority figures rather than crime fighters. Police are viewed as the last line of defense in managing behavior that cannot be controlled by social or family obligations. Other historical factors have influenced



*Korean police officer
Flickr / Freshly Diced*

public perceptions of police in South Korea: they are also often regarded as agents of government bureaucracy. Until the end of the 20th century, citizens exhibited high degrees of distrust toward the police, believing that their role was to oppress the people and serve the government.^{91, 92} In 2000, a new program was initiated to change police organizational practices and improve community relations.⁹³

Although the crime rate in the country is low, there are organized crime groups in South Korea. One of the most powerful is the kangpae, similar to the Japanese yakuza (an organized crime syndicate). Gangs have become more active, and inter-gang violence is becoming increasingly common.^{94, 95}

Military

The Korean armed forces consist of an army (ROKA), a navy (ROKN), and an air force (ROKAF). The army has 522,000 active and 600,000 active reserve personnel. Most army efforts remain confined to the demilitarized zone.⁹⁶ The South Korean Air Force (ROKAF) has 65,000 active personnel and 55,000 reserves.⁹⁷ The South Korean Navy (ROKN) has a force of 41,000 sailors and 27,000 marines.⁹⁸

All Korean males, with some exemptions, are obligated to serve in the military.^{99, 100} Even though terms of service are as short as 18 months for most army recruits, military service is becoming increasingly unpopular.^{101, 102} The lack of professional officers as well as non-commissioned officers, particularly at the platoon and company levels, compromises combat readiness and effectiveness. Morale is low. Several conscripts committed suicide in 2014. The tendency to emphasize rank over ability also creates issues.¹⁰³

The ROKN is modern and is developing advanced submarine technology. In addition to its marine vessels, the navy supports land troops with insertion and extraction operations and other amphibious operations. Naval and marine conscripts serve 26 months and 24 months, respectively. Although there is a lower percentage of conscripts in the navy, their short terms are proving problematic as ships and other systems become increasingly complex. Still, the navy enjoys high levels of morale and professionalism.¹⁰⁴



*Soldiers from Korea's 52nd Infantry Division
Flickr / Republic of Korea Armed Forces*

The ROKAF personnel are well-trained and well-equipped. The most advanced airbase is located on the west coast, at Seosan/Haemi. The force's primary focus is the creation of independent operational capabilities including long-range precision strikes. The air force currently possesses 800 aircraft and several surface-to-air missile sites. Conscripts are the majority of the force. The limited time of service has created problems for the air force. Good technicians are in demand by private industry, which often lures away personnel. The air force is highly professional and morale is generally high.¹⁰⁵

To increase South Korea's military independence, the United States agreed to hand over wartime operation control, but that move has been postponed at the request of South Korea.^{106, 107} South Korean troops would remain under U.S. command in time of war.^{108, 109}

Issues Affecting Stability

South Korea is a modern industrialized country with a sound financial system. There is little immediate risk of economic, political, or financial problems. New trade agreements and continuing demand for South Korean products suggest that the economic risk to internal stability remains marginal. Although corruption appears to be decreasing, it is still a problem that needs to be addressed. The government is facing increasing pressure to end corruption. The nation's government is stable, and its infrastructure is solid. Although the stability outlook is promising, there are some potential risks.^{110, 111, 112}

North Korea's nuclear and missile-development programs, as well as North Korea's new leadership, represent threats. Other dangers include North Korea's conventional army and its chemical and biological weapons.^{113, 114} Although the possibility of full-scale conflict between the two nations remains remote, the North Korean regime change makes the situation less certain.¹¹⁵ A more likely threat is that of reunification, which



*Models of North Korean rockets in Pyongyang
VOA / Steve Herman*

could cause serious disruptions and stresses on the South's economic system and resources.^{116, 117, 118}

South Korea ranks among the top three nations in the world in terms of energy insecurity.¹¹⁹ South Korea is among the world's largest importers of liquefied natural gas, coal, iron ore, and oil. South Korea depends on the Middle East for most of its energy needs. Disruptions in supply or a surge in costs could seriously affect the economy.^{120, 121, 122} South Korea has the world's sixth-largest nuclear generation capacity.^{123, 124, 125} The nation is rapidly running out of storage for the nuclear waste produced by such reactors. Problems with storing the waste could increase the risk of nuclear accidents.^{126, 127, 128, 129}

South Korea's rapidly aging population and low birthrate pose a risk to economic growth.^{130, 131} About 13% of the population is over the age of 64.¹³² By 2050, 40% will be 65 or older.¹³³ The number of working-age Koreans will peak in 2016.¹³⁴ By 2040, the working-age population will shrink by about 20%.¹³⁵ Aging workers are thought to pose a risk of lowered adaptability and productivity.^{136, 137}

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Security: Chapter 5 Assessment

1. **The rise in anti-American sentiment has left Koreans wishing that U.S. forces would leave the peninsula.**

False

The U.S. military presence in South Korea has sparked some anti-American sentiment. Much of the ill will stems from individual actions by U.S. service personnel, as well as environmental concerns. Despite frustrations with the large U.S. military presence, the South Korean people generally favor continued relations with the United States.

2. **North and South Korea have no formal diplomatic relations.**

True

Neither the North nor the South Korean government formally recognizes the other. No official diplomatic relations exist between the two, although cooperative agreements, dialogs, and exchanges have occurred.

3. **Fear and mistrust characterize South Korea's relations with China.**

True

South Korean relations with China are characterized by a fundamental mistrust of China's intentions on the Korean peninsula. South Korea worries that China would intervene militarily if the North Korean state were to fail. South Korea also fears that China is closing the technology gap, which could make it a formidable economic rival in the region.

4. **Since President Park Geun Hye has been in office, relations between South Korea and Japan have warmed.**

False

Japan-South Korea relations have worsened under the Park administration. Neither Seoul nor Tokyo seems willing to compromise. The two nations seem caught in a vicious circle over their historical roles and relations.

5. **South Korea is one of the most energy-insecure nations in the world.**

True

South Korea ranks among the top three nations in the world in terms of energy insecurity. South Korea is among the world's largest importers of liquefied natural gas, coal, iron ore, and oil.

South Korean in Perspective: Final Assessment

Answer All: True or False?

1. The landscape of South Korea is dominated by mountains.
2. Approximately half the country's population is located in the Southern Plain.
3. Daegu is South Korea's major center for science and technology.
4. South Korea today faces a high risk of devastating earthquake activity.
5. South Korea's eastern border is the Sea of Japan.
6. The Goguryo Kingdom was the first to unify the country.
7. South Korea's first president was Rhee Syng-Man.
8. Historically, the Koreans and the Japanese have had friendly relations.
9. President Kim Dae-Jung's "sunshine policy" promoted more cooperation with North Korea and supported the goal of reunification.
10. North and South Korea remain technically in a state of war.
11. More than half of South Korea's economic output comes from exports.
12. South Korea is one of the world's largest energy consumers.
13. South Korea has one of the largest economies in the world.
14. South Korea is the world's largest producer of semiconductors.
15. The United States is South Korea's largest trading partner.
16. The extreme cultural homogeneity of South Korea is one factor that has led to a distrust of foreigners.
17. Hiking has become South Korea's new national pastime and is closely associated with national identity.
18. The South Korean constitution declares that men and women are equal.

19. Family no longer occupies the central role in South Korean life.
20. The traditional Confucian ideals of male and female no longer play a significant role in South Korea.
21. All males, with some exceptions, are required to serve 3 years in military service.
22. South Korea is one of the United States' closest allies in East Asia.
23. The country's aging population and low birth rate pose an economic risk.
24. South Korea no longer offers official government support to North Korean refugees.
25. South Korean police have a positive image among citizens.

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