

Unit 12d: Country Area Studies--the Korean Peninsula

Objectives

At the end of this unit, you will

Be aware of the following

- Eclectic nature of South Korean religious practice
- Prominence of Buddhist and Christian practice in South Korea
- Shaman practice in Korea
- Variety within the Korean character
- Impact of Japanese occupation of Korea, 1910-1945
 - Religious freedom issues in North Korea

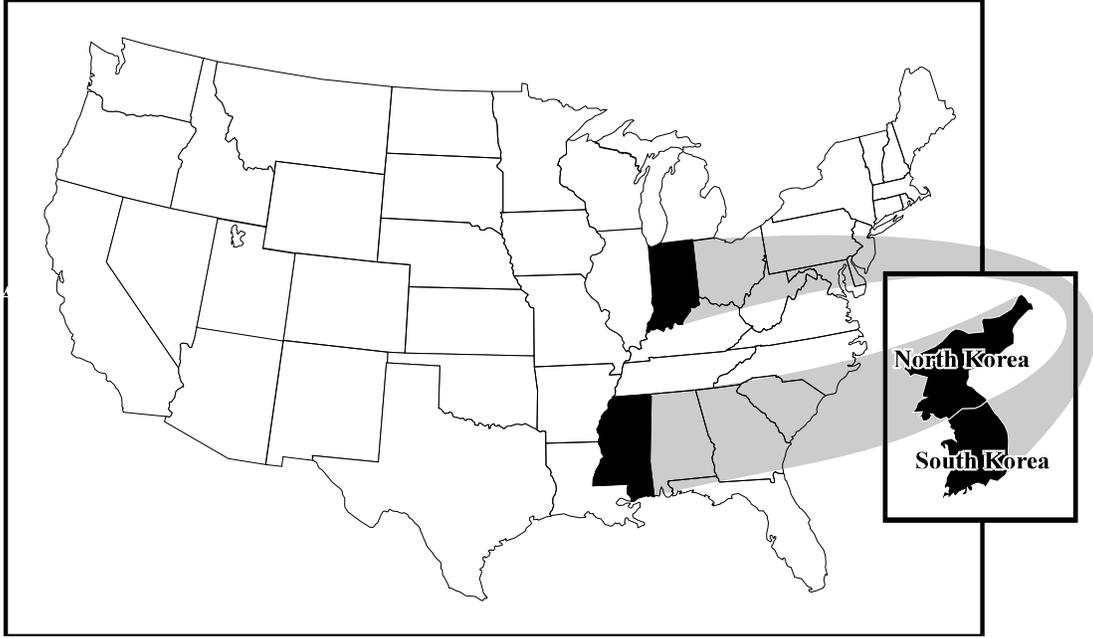
Identify

- Ch'ondogyo, minjung, kisaeng, yangban
- Unification Church
- Shamans
- Admiral Yi, "turtle boats"
- Neo-Confucianism, filial piety
- Honorific languages
- King Sejong, Koryo dynasty
- Silla Kingdom, Yi dynasty
- Kwangju incident
- Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong II
- Pyongyang
 - Chuch'e

Realize

- Impact of Buddhist and Confucian thought on Korean belief
- New religious groups in Korea
- Homogeneous ethnic makeup of Korean Peninsula
- Historical class divisions within Korea
- Historical factors leading to current Korean society

South Korea



<u>Population</u>	45,553,882
% under 15 years	23%
<u>Commo</u>	
TV	1:67
Radio	1:5
Phone	1:20
Newspaper	no figure
<u>Health</u>	
Life Expectancy	Male 67/Female 73
Hospitals	1:74
Doctors	1:370
IMR	27:1,000
<u>Income</u>	\$1,000.00 per cap
<u>Literacy Rate</u>	99%

1. Religious Groups

"Koreans, like other East Asians, have traditionally been eclectic rather than exclusive in their religious commitments. Their religious outlook has not been conditioned by a single, exclusive faith but by a combination of indigenous beliefs and creeds imported into Korea."

(Unless stated otherwise, all quotations come from the Library of Congress Country Studies/Area Handbook--South Korea)

a. Buddhist (47%)

b. Christianity (48%) *"Roman Catholic missionaries did not arrive in Korea until 1794, a decade after the return of the first baptized Korean from a visit to Beijing. However, the writings of the Jesuit missionary, Matteo Ricci, who was resident at the imperial court in Beijing, had been brought to Korea from China in the seventeenth century. It appears that scholars of the Sirhak, or practical learning, school were interested in these writings. Largely because converts refused to perform Confucian ancestor rites, the government prohibited the proselytization of Christianity. Some Catholics were executed during the early nineteenth century, but the anti-Christian law was not strictly enforced. By the 1860s, there were some 17,500 Roman Catholics in the country.*

There followed a more rigorous persecution, in which thousands of Christians died, that continued until 1884. Protestant missionaries entered Korea during the 1880s and, along with Catholic priests, converted a remarkable number of Koreans. Methodist and Presbyterian missionaries were especially successful. They established schools, universities, hospitals, and orphanages and played a significant role in the modernization of the country.



During the Japanese colonial occupation, Christians were in the front ranks of the struggle for independence. Factors contributing to the growth of Protestantism included the degenerate state of Korean Buddhism, the efforts made by educated Christians to reconcile Christian and Confucian values (the latter being viewed as purely a social ethic rather than a religion), the encouragement of self-support and self-government among members of the Korean church, and the identification of Christianity with Korean nationalism.

A large number of Christians lived in the northern part of the peninsula where Confucian influence was not as strong as in the south. Before 1948 Pyongyang was an important Christian center: one-sixth of its population of about 300,000 people were converts. Following the establishment of a communist regime in the North, however, most Christians had to flee to South Korea or face persecution."

c. Chinese religions (3%)

"Daoism, which focuses on the individual in nature rather than the individual in society, and Buddhism entered Korea from China during the Three Kingdoms period (fourth to seventh centuries A.D.). Daoist motifs are seen in the paintings on the walls of Koguryo tombs.



Buddhism was the dominant religious and cultural influence during the Silla (A.D. 668-935) and Koryo (918-1392) dynasties. Confucianism also was brought to Korea from China in early centuries, but it occupied a subordinate position until the establishment of the [Yi] Dynasty and the persecution of Buddhism carried out by the early [Yi] Dynasty kings."

d. New Religions

(1) Ch'ondogyo (.2% CHUHN-doh-kyoh) *"Ch'ondogyo, generally regarded as the first of Korea's new religions, is another important religious tradition.*

It is a synthesis of Confucian, Buddhist, shamanistic, Daoist, and Catholic influences.

Ch'ondogyo grew out of the Tonghak Movement (also called Eastern Learning Movement) established by Ch'oe Cheu, a man of yangban background who claimed to have experienced a mystic encounter with God, who told him to preach to all the world. Ch'oe was executed by the government as a heretic in 1863, but not before he had acquired a number of followers and had committed his ideas to writing.

Tonghak spread among the poor people of Korea's villages, especially in the Cholla region, and was the cause of a revolt against the royal government in 1894. [This revolt led to the Sino-Japanese War in 1895]. While some members of the Tonghak Movement--renamed Ch'ondogyo (Teachings of the Heavenly Way)--supported the Japanese annexation in 1910, others opposed it. This group played a major role, along with Christians and some Confucians, in the Korean nationalist movement.

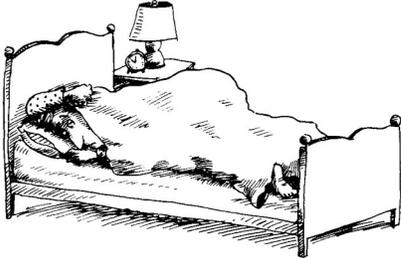


Ch'ondogyo's basic beliefs include the essential equality of all human beings. Each person must be treated with respect because all persons contain divinity; there is God in man. Moreover, men and women must sincerely cultivate themselves in order to bring forth and express this divinity in their lives. Self-perfection, not ritual and ceremony, is the way to salvation.

Although Ch'oe and his followers did not attempt to overthrow the social order and establish a radical egalitarianism, the revolutionary potential of Ch'ondogyo is evident in these basic ideas, which appealed especially to poor people who were told that they, along with scholars and high officials, could achieve salvation through effort. There is reason to believe that Ch'ondogyo had an important role in the development of democratic and anti-authoritarian thought in Korea. In the 1970s and 1980s, Ch'ondogyo's antecedent, the Tonghak Movement, received renewed interest among many Korean intellectuals."

(2) Taejonggyo, Chungsanggyo and Wonbulgyo

(TAY-chong-kyoh, CHUNG-sahng-dyoh, wohn-pul-kyoh) "Apart from Ch'ondogyo, major new religions included Taejonggyo, which has as its central creed the worship of Tangun, legendary founder of the Korean nation.



Chungsanggyo, founded in the early twentieth century, emphasizes magical practices and the creation of a paradise on earth. It is divided into a great number of competing branches.

Wonbulgyo, or Won Buddhism, attempts to combine traditional Buddhist doctrine with a modern concern for social reform and revitalization. There are also a number of small sects which have sprung up around Mount Kyeryong in South Ch'ungch'ong Province, the supposed future site of the founding of a new dynasty originally prophesied in the eighteenth century."

(3) New religion Christian groups

(a) Chondogwan (CHUHN-doh-kwan) "Several new religions derive their inspiration from Christianity. The Chondogwan, or Evangelical Church, was founded by Pak T'ae-son. Pak originally was a Presbyterian, but was expelled from the church for heresy in the 1950s after claiming for himself unique spiritual power. By 1972 his followers numbered as many as 700,000 people, and he built several Christian towns, established a large church network, and managed several industrial enterprises."

(b) Unification Church "Because of its overseas evangelism, the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of the World Christianity, or Unification Church (T'ongilgyo), founded in 1954 by Reverend Sun Myong Moon (Mun Son-myong), also a former Christian, is the most famous Korean new religion. During its period of rigorous expansion during the 1970s, the Unification Church had several hundred thousand members in South Korea and Japan and a substantial (although generally overestimated) number of members in North America and Western Europe.

Moon claimed that he was the messiah designated by God to unify all the peoples of the world into one family, governed theocratically by himself. Like Pak's Evangelical Church, the Unification Church has been highly authoritarian, demanding absolute obedience from church members.



Moon, for example, has arranged marriages for his younger followers; United States television audiences were treated some years ago to a mass ceremony at which several hundred young Moonies were married.

Also like Pak, Moon has coupled the church's fortunes to economic expansion. Factories in South Korea and abroad manufacture arms and process ginseng and seafood, artistic bric-a-brac, and other items. Moon's labor force has worked long hours and been paid minimal wages in order to channel profits into church coffers.

Virulently anticommunist, Moon has sought to influence public opinion at home and abroad by establishing generally unprofitable newspapers such as the Segye Ilbo in Seoul, the Sekai Nippo in Tokyo, and the Washington Times in the United States capital, and by inviting academics to lavish international conferences, often held in South Korea.

At home, the Unification Church was viewed with suspicion by the authorities because of its scandals and Moon's evident desire to create a state within a state. His influence, however, had declined by the late 1980s."

e. Shaman (SHAH-mahn)

"Belief in a world inhabited by spirits is probably the oldest form of Korean religious life, dating back to prehistoric times.

There is a rather unorganized pantheon of literally millions of gods, spirits, and ghosts, ranging from the god generals who rule the different quarters of heaven to mountain spirits (sansin).



This pantheon also includes gods who inhabit trees, sacred caves, and piles of stones, as well as earth spirits, the tutelary gods of households and villages, mischievous goblins, and the ghosts of persons who in many cases met violent or tragic ends. These spirits are said to have the power to influence or to change the fortunes of living men and women.

Korean shamans are similar in many ways to those found in Siberia, Mongolia, and Manchuria. They also resemble the yuta found on the Ryukyu Islands, in Okinawa Prefecture, Japan. Cheju Island is also a center of shamanism [where most mudangs are males].

Shamans, most of whom are women, are enlisted by those who want the help of the spirit world. Female shamans (mudang) hold kut, or services, in order to gain good fortune for clients, cure illnesses by exorcising evil spirits, or propitiate local or village gods. Such services are also held to guide the spirit of a deceased person to heaven.

Often a woman will become a shaman very reluctantly-- after experiencing a severe physical or mental illness that indicates possession by a spirit. Such possession allegedly can be cured only through performance of a kut. Once a shaman is established in her profession, she usually can make a good living.

[While Buddhism and Confucianism was the main religious expression among the ruling classes and educated elite, shamanism flourished among rural, uneducated farmers. Church practice today still contains remnants of shamanistic practice].

Many scholars regard Korean shamanism as less a religion than a medicine in which the spirits are manipulated in order to achieve human ends. There is no notion of salvation or moral and spiritual perfection, at least for the ordinary believers in spirits. The shaman is a professional who is consulted by clients whenever the need is felt.



Traditionally, shamans had low social status and were members of the ch'ommin class. This discrimination has continued into modern times.

[Indigenous] beliefs are strongly associated with the culture of fishing villages and are primarily a phenomenon found in rural communities. Shamans also treat the ills of city people, however, especially recent migrants from the countryside who find adjustment to an impersonal urban life stressful. The government has discouraged belief in shamanism as superstition and for many years minimized its persistence in Korean life. Yet in a climate of growing nationalism and cultural self-confidence, the dances, songs, and incantations that compose the kut have come to be recognized as an important aspect of Korean culture.

Beginning in the 1970s, rituals that formerly had been kept out of foreign view began to resurface, and occasionally a Western hotel manager or other executive could even be seen attending a shamanistic exorcism ritual in the course of opening a new branch in Seoul. Some of these aspects of kut have been designated valuable cultural properties that should be preserved and passed on to future generations.



The future of shamanism itself was uncertain in the late 1980s. Observers believed that many of its functions in the future probably will be performed by the psychiatric profession as the government expands mental health treatment facilities. Given the uncertainty of social, economic, and political conditions, however, it appears certain that shamans will find large numbers of clients for some time to come."

f. Religion in contemporary South Korea

(1) Statistics *"Except for the Christian groups, who maintain a fairly clear-cut distinction between believers and nonbelievers, there is some ambiguity in these statistics. ...there is no exact or exclusive criterion by which Buddhists or Confucianists can be identified. Many people outside of formal groups have been deeply influenced by these traditions. Moreover, there is nothing contradictory in one person's visiting and praying at Buddhist temples, participating in Confucian ancestor rites, and even consulting a shaman and sponsoring a kut. Furthermore, the statistics may underrepresent the numbers of people belonging to new religions. Some sources have given the number of adherents of Ch'ondogyo as over 1 million."*



(2) Impact "Given the great diversity of religious expression, the role of religion in South Korea's social development has been a complex one.

Some traditions, especially Buddhism, are identified primarily with the past. Buddhist sites such as the Pulguksa Temple and the Sokkuram Grotto in Kyongju and the Haeinsa Temple near Taegu are regarded by most South Koreans as important cultural properties rather than as places of worship.

Confucianism remains important as a social ethic; its influence is evident in the immense importance Koreans ascribe to education.

Christianity is identified with modernization and social reform. Many Christians in contemporary South Korea, such as veteran political opposition leader Kim Dae Jung, a Catholic, have been outspoken advocates of human rights and critics of the government. Christian-sponsored organizations such as the Urban Industrial Mission promote labor organizations and the union movement.

New religions draw on both traditional beliefs and on Christianity, achieving a baffling variety and diversity of views. It has been estimated that there were as many as 300 new religions in South Korea in the late 1980s, though many were small and transient phenomena."

2. Ethnic/Racial Groups

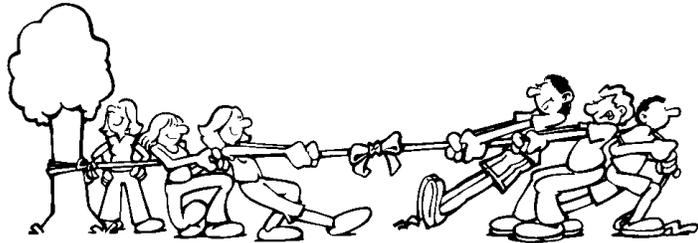
"The Republic of Korea is a racially homogeneous country with no ethnic minorities of significant number. Citizenship is based on blood, not location of birth, and Koreans must show as proof their family genealogy.

Ethnic Chinese born and resident in Korea cannot obtain citizenship or become public servants and may have difficulty being hired by some major corporations. Due to legal as well

as societal discrimination, many formerly resident ethnic Chinese have emigrated to other countries since the 1970's. Amerasian children are usually able to obtain Korean citizenship, and no legal discrimination against them exists. Informal discrimination, however, is prevalent, making it more difficult for Amerasians to succeed in academia, business, or government." (U.S. Department of State, Human Rights Practices 1996--South Korea)

Foreigners can become Korean citizens after living for an extended period in the country and taking a lengthy battery of language, history and culture tests. Only a handful of Westerners possess Korean citizenship.

3. Gender Issues



a. Domestic violence *"Violence against women remains a problem, and some women's rights groups maintain that such violence, including spousal abuse, has worsened in the past few years. The law does not provide adequate protection to victims of abuse."*

b. Harassment *"Rape remained a serious problem, with 6,173 cases reported in 1994 (the last year for which statistics are available). Many incidents of rape go unreported because of the stigma associated with being a rape victim. The activities of a number of women's groups have increased awareness of the importance of reporting and prosecuting rapes as well as offenses such as sexual harassment in the workplace. According to women's rights groups, cases involving sexual harassment or rape generally go unprosecuted, and perpetrators, if convicted, often receive very lenient sentences."* Sexual harassment is so serious that certain subway cars are designated "Female Only" during peak hours.

c. Equality *"The amended Family Law, which went into effect in 1991, permits women to head a household, recognizes a wife's right to a portion of the couple's*

property, and allows a woman to maintain greater contact with her children after a divorce. Although the revisions helped abused women, divorce remains a social taboo, and there is little government or private assistance for divorced women. These factors, plus the fact that divorced women have limited employment opportunities and have difficulty remarrying, lead some women to stay in abusive situations." Additionally, sons still receive all inheritance, daughters being excluded.



The Government has created some shelters for battered women and increased the number of child care facilities, providing women in abusive situations with more options, but women's rights groups say that they fall far short of dealing effectively with the problem.

A conservative Confucian tradition has left women subordinate to men socially and economically. There has been some limited and gradual change in social mores and attitudes affecting women; for example, women have full access to education, and a few have become government officials and hold elected office. Despite the passage of equal employment opportunity legislation in 1988, however, few women work as company executives or leading officials in government.

The Women's Affairs Ministry continued its efforts to expand employment opportunities for women, and during the year the air force implemented a program to encourage women to become pilots and seek other senior positions." Just recently, women are now able to enter the military academies.

4. Conflicts "International disputes: Demarcation Line with North Korea; Liancourt rocks claimed by Japan." (CIA 1996 Factsheet)

5. Holidays and Festivals (The following material, adapted from Holidays, Festivals and Celebrations of the World Dictionary, compiled by Sue Thompson and Barbara Carlson, (Detroit: Omnigraphics, 1994), is instructive.



a. Burning the Moon House (fifteenth day of the first lunar month)

- Pays tribute to the moon
 - Participants watch moon rise through a moon house or moon gate, a carefully constructed pile of pine twigs which are set on fire
- Also celebrated on the eve of the First Full Moon
- People climb hills and build bonfires to welcome the moon
- Folklore beliefs concerning harvest and weather are associated with the color and brightness of the moon on this night



b. Cherry Blossom Festival, Chinhae Naval Port
(CHIN-heh, early April)

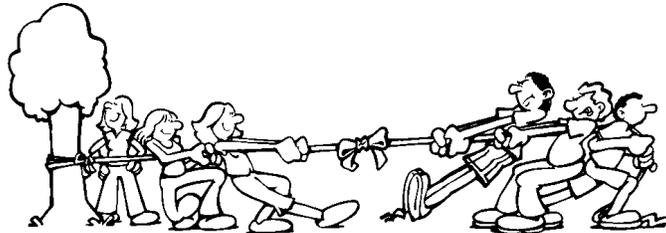
- Festival in Chinhae, Korea (headquarters of the Korean Navy) to celebrate blossoming cherry trees and honor Korea's Admiral Yi Sun-shin
- Admiral Yi defeated the Japanese in several sea battles during the latter's invasions of the late sixteenth century
 - Yi is famous for developing "turtle boats," the first iron-clad naval vessels

c. Feast of Excited Insects (5 March)

- Feast of Excited Insects (Kyongchip) marks transition from winter to spring
 - Farmers sow rice and wheat, families lay flowers on graves of ancestors to welcome spring

d. The Great Fifteenth (fifteenth day of first lunar month)

- Marks the end of the New Year holiday season
- Number nine is considered lucky on this day, and people routinely repeat their actions nine times, particularly children
- Kite flying and fighting is common
 - Kite strings are covered with glass dust, enabling cutting matches



- Tug-of-war also popular
 - In some areas, an entire town or county is divided into two opposing teams, the winning side being assured of a good harvest and protection from disease in the coming year

e. Liberation Day (15 August)

- Remembrance of surrender of Japan to the Allies in 1945, liberating Korea from Japan's thirty-five-year occupation.
- Commemorates also the formal proclamation of the Republic of Korea in 1948.

f. Lunar New Year (first day of first lunar month)



- Offerings to the household gods, house-cleaning and new clothes, banquets, ancestor worship, and firecrackers all are part of the celebration
- On New Year's Eve, torches are lit in every part of the home, and everyone sits up to "defend the New Year" from evil spirits
- In Seoul, church bells ring thirty-three times at midnight.
- One of the many games played is girls' seesawing. In early times men forbade women to have any outdoor exercises. Korean girls took to using a seesaw behind garden walls, standing up--so as to get a possible glimpse of male friends outside

g. Mid-Autumn Festival (fifteenth day of the eighth moon)

- Honors the moon goddess Hangawi
- Ch'usok literally means autumn (Ch'u) eve (sok)
- Family reunions are traditional, like American Thanksgiving
 - People travel long distances to be together for exchanging presents, feasting, and eating moon cakes.

h. National Foundation Day (3 October)

- National holiday (Tangun Day), to commemorate the founding of the Korean nation in 2333 B.C. by Tangun.



- Legendary myth associates the Korean people with a heavenly origin.