

Vocabulary List: Korea

Ch'ommin (CHUN-mihn) Below the commoners, the "base people" or ch'ommin did what was considered vile or low-prestige work. They included servants and slaves in government offices and resthouses, jailkeepers and convicts, shamans, actors, female entertainers (kisaeng), professional mourners, shoemakers, executioners, and for a time at least, Buddhist monks and nuns.

Ch'ondogyo (.2% CHUHN-doh-kyoh) Ch'ondogyo, generally regarded as the first of Korea's "new religions." It is a synthesis of Confucian, Buddhist, shamanistic, Daoist, and Catholic influences.

Chuch'e (choo-cheh) North Korean ideology of cultural distinctiveness, self-reliance and self-sufficiency.

Chungin (CHOONG-yihn) Below the yangban yet superior to the commoners were the chungin, a small group of technical and administrative officials. They included astronomers, physicians, interpreters, and professional military officers, as well as artists.

Kim Il Sung Many if not most observers of North Korea would agree that the country's official religion is the cult of Kim Il Sung. North Korean Christians attending overseas conferences claim that there is no contradiction between Christian beliefs and the veneration of the "great leader" or his secular chuch'e philosophy.

Kim Jong Il Son of Kim Il Sung, now preeminent ruler of North Korea.

King Sejong (SAY-jong) Han'gul was invented by scholars at the court of King Sejong (1418-50), not solely to promote literacy among the common people as is sometimes claimed, but also to assist in studies of Chinese historical phonology.

Kisaeng (KEY-sahng) Female Korean entertainers. Girls were originally chosen from the lower classes to train for the life of a courtesan in a wealthy household. Today, most kisaeng women are prostitutes, sanctioned by the government and used to promote tourism.

Koryo Dynasty (KOHR-ee-ah, 918-1392) Founded by Wang Kon who overthrew what remained of the Silla Dynasty (c.350- c.935).

Kwangju Incident Prodemocracy demonstration on 18 May 1980. After right-wing dictator Park Chung Hee was assassinated 1979, political unrest ensued. American and Korean troops were called to the city of Kwangju to help restore order. Demonstrators and leaders of the government opposition were arrested, tortured, and killed.

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.

Minjung (mihn-chung) During the 1980s, the concept of minjung (the masses) became prominent in the thinking and rhetoric of radical students, militant labor unionists, activists identified with the Christian churches, and progressive but generally non-Marxist intellectuals.

Pyongyang Largest North Korean City, once an important religious center.

Samguk (SAM-guhk) Seven-hundred year historical period known as the Samguk or "Three Kingdoms." Though debated, the Paekche, Koguryo, and Silla kingdoms were established in 18, 37, and 57 B.C.E. respectively. Period ended in C.E. 668, when Silla conquered the other two kingdoms to form the Unified Silla Kingdom. The Unified Silla period is considered the Golden Age of Korean history.

Sangmin (SAHNG-mihn) The commoners, or sangmin, composed about 75 percent of the total population. These farmers, craftsmen, and merchants alone bore the burden of taxation and were subject to military conscription. Farmers had higher prestige than merchants, but lived a hard life.

Shamans Spiritual leaders, most of whom are women, 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.

Silla Kingdom The Silla united Korea in 668, remaining in power until 918 C.E. Pulkuksa Temple (780 C.E.) and Sokkuram Grotto, which contains a giant granite Buddha, are considered icons of Silla achievement in art, religion, and government. The hangul phonetic alphabet was invented in the mid-1400s by King Sejong. Though Chinese was still the prominent language, hangul allowed for the possibility of Korean literature.

Unification Church (T'ongilgyo) Group founded in 1954 by Reverend Sun Myong Moon (Mun Son-myong), 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.

Yangban (YUHNG-bahn) In the strictest sense of the term, yangban referred to government officials or officeholders who had passed the civil service examinations that tested knowledge of the Confucian classics and their neo-Confucian interpreters. They were the Korean counterparts of the scholar-officials, or mandarins, of imperial China.

Yi Dynasty (yee) The Yi or Choson Dynasty (1392-1910) was founded by General Yi Song-gye. Yi ruled under the name Yi T'aejo and moved the capitol to Hanyang, the present day Seoul.



"There is great satisfaction in serving one's country, one's community, or one's fellow citizens...Commitment transcends the bounds of material gain."

General Carl Vuono



Part 1--Multiple Choice Place the letter of the most correct answer in the blank provided.

1. _____ In South Korea, the percentage of the Buddhist and Christian population is roughly
 - a. the same--46 percent each.
 - b. drastically different.
 - c. unknown--Korean Christian groups keep no records.

2. _____ The Unification Church was founded by
 - a. Nigel Turner.
 - b. Sun Myong Moon.
 - c. Shirley McLain.

3. _____ Most shamans in Korea are
 - a. men.
 - b. women.
 - c. equally divided--men and women.

4. _____ Admiral Yi, of the late sixteenth century, is famous for developing
 - a. "turtle boats"--the first iron-clad naval vessels.
 - b. bearskin blankets and kimchi food.
 - c. underground tunnels to curb aggression.

5. _____ Traditional yangban social class members were
 - a. scholar-officials, like mandarins of China.
 - b. technical and administrative officials.
 - c. low-prestige workers.

6. _____ One result of the Korean War was

- a. the South Korean military, as a profession, received renewed respect.
 - b. the military continued to suffer low prestige status.
 - c. anti-Western feeling intensified on the Peninsula.
7. _____ The single most important factor affecting social mobility in South Korea in the 1990s is
- a. military achievement.
 - b. economic gain.
 - c. education.
8. _____ Hangul, the Korean language, was invented by scholars in the court of
- a. King Sejong (1418-50).
 - b. Admiral Yi (late 16th).
 - c. the Silla Kingdom (57 BC - 935 AD).
9. _____ In North Korea, the concept of Chuch'e emphasizes
- a. "internationalizing" culture in the country.
 - b. developing potential using North Korean resources and creativity alone.
 - c. the Confucian past as a guide to the future.
10. _____ The role of literature and art in North Korea is to
- a. teach state ideology and push for reunification.
 - b. further isolate North Korea from the rest of the world.
 - c. demonstrate--with subtlety and grace--the beauties of Korea's distant past.

Part 2--True/False Place a T or an F
in the blank provided.



1. _____ Koreans, like many other East Asians, are traditionally exclusive and rigid in their religious commitments.
2. _____ Sun Myong Moon is known for his favorable Communist leanings.
3. _____ During Korea's Japanese occupation, Christians were in the front ranks in the struggle for independence.
4. _____ Traditionally, Confucian influence was stronger in the northern part of Korea.
5. _____ Shamans believe in a world inhabited by spirits-- and _____ is perhaps the oldest form of Korean religious life.
6. _____ The Republic of Korea is racially heterogeneous-- many different ethnic groups comprise the population.
7. _____ Rapid social transformation of Korea occurred after Japanese annexation in 1910.
8. _____ In South Korea, kisaeng women (prostitutes) are sanctioned by the government.
9. _____ The Kwangju incident in 1980 renewed interest in defense against North Korean Communists.
10. _____ Many observers see North Korea's religion as the cult of Kim Il Sung.



"What you do out here in a typical week is stuff that most people back home wouldn't do in a year. It's really important work. It's very unique work, and you ought to be willing to pat yourself on the back for it."

Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Jay Johnson, All Hands Call on USS Germantown (LSD 42), 16 March 1997
