



**BRIEF HISTORY OF KOREA**  
**—A Bird's-EyeView—**

**Young Ick Lew**

*with an afterword by*  
**Donald P. Gregg**

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# PREFACE

This is a revised, updated version of my booklet, *Brief History of Korea*, published in 1994 by the Korean Educational Development Institute in Seoul. It is an outgrowth of my lectures to English-speaking students, teachers and writers who have had little or no prior exposure to Korean history and culture. It situates Korea's political and cultural development within the general context of East Asian and world history. My aim is to provide a concise yet broad introduction to the long and colorful history of Korea, and I hope that it will serve to whet the reader's appetite for further reading on Korean history.

In Romanizing the Korean, Chinese and Japanese words, I have followed the McCune-Reischauer, the Pinyin, and the Hepburn systems, respectively, with the exception of the names of a few well-known places and people.

I wish to express my profound appreciation to my colleagues, Professor Key-Hiuk Kim, retired, of the University of California at Davis, Professor Steven Lee of the University of British Columbia, and to my assistant Ellie Choi, who perused the draft of this version and gave valuable comments on both its content and style.

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# **I**

## **FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF ANCIENT STATES**

**From Prehistoric Times to Unified Silla**

**(500,000 BCE~ca. 900 CE)**

Korea is a peninsular country in the northeastern corner of the Asian continent. Its territory, which is now divided into North and South Korea, occupies 220,911 square kilometers, or 84,500 square miles. Its size is comparable to the state of Minnesota in the United States, or to the combined area of England, Scotland and Wales. The present population of both North and South Korea is approximately 68 million, about 10 million less than that of Germany. With about 45 million people, South Korea ranks as the 26th most populated country in the world.

Korea is bounded to the north by two giant neighbors, China and Russia, and to the east and south it faces the islands of Japan across a 120-mile strait. The United States, another Pacific power, maintains significant strategic and economic stakes in South Korea, and both North and South Korea remain a fulcrum of power politics among the great powers of the world

Korea belongs to the temperate zone. Its continental climate is determined by the winds that sweep southward from Siberia and eastward from China across the Yellow Sea. There are four distinct seasons: a hot and humid summer, a very cold winter, a warm spring and a cool autumn. Nearly all of Korea is mountainous, and only a fifth of the land is arable. Its craggy but beautiful mountains, criss-crossed by rivulets, have provided native artists with an enduring source of inspiration throughout the ages.

Koreans are ethnically and linguistically distinct from the (Han) Chinese. The Korean people belong to the Tungusic branch of the Mongoloid race. Their polysyllabic, agglutinative language is a branch of the Altaic language family, which includes other tongues such as Turkish, Mongolian and Japanese. The Chinese culture has had a profound impact on Korea; Chinese elements found in today's Korean culture are a result of the Korean people's conscious and deliberate emulation of Chinese culture from mainly the second century BCE to 1895 CE.

Various artifacts of Paleolithic provenance unearthed in Korea indicate that human beings inhabited the peninsula from at least 500,000 BCE. It is premature to assume that these Paleolithic inhabitants of the peninsula were the ancestors of the present-day Koreans. Most archaeologists agree, however, that the semi-nomadic people who fashioned comb-marked and plain-brown pottery under the influence of a Shamanistic culture during the Neolithic Age from about 3,000 to the eleventh century BCE, constitutes the main branch of the race identified today as Korean.

Legend, as recorded by Monk Iryŏn in his historical account, *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms* (1285), says that Ancient Chosŏn, the first Korean state, was organized in 2,333 BCE by the national progenitor, Tan'gun. While the Tan'gun legend remains a popular element of North and South Korean mythology, anthropological findings show that Korea's earliest political entities, styled walled town-states or chiefdoms, evolved during the Bronze Age from about the eleventh century BCE. Further political progress was a consequence of the introduction of iron from China in the fifth century BCE. Early Chinese historical records reveal that numerous tribal states arose across Manchuria and the Korean Peninsula from the fourth through the second century BCE. These included Puyŏ in the Sungari River basin in northern Manchuria, and Chin, south of the Han River. The state of Chin later split into three indigenous proto-kingdoms in the southern part of the peninsula, namely, Mahan, Chinhan and Pyŏnhan.

Ancient Chosŏn, whose expansive territory stretched from the Taedong River to the Liao River, was undoubtedly the most advanced of the early Korean states, and it was ruled successively by kings claiming descent from the mythical Tan'gun. Before the third century BCE, under pressure from the incessantly warring Chinese states to the north, the capital of Ancient Chosŏn was moved from the Liaotung Peninsula to what is now P'yŏngyang. The kingship of Ancient Chosŏn was usurped by Wiman (Wei Man in Chinese), a Korean-Chinese defector from northern China.

In 108 BCE, Emperor Wu of the Former Han Dynasty attacked and destroyed Wiman Chosŏn. Four commanderies were then set up in the conquered Korean territory by the Han Chinese. Because of strong resistance from the indigenous population, however, all but the Lelang (Nangnang in Korean) Commandery were soon recalled. The Lelang Commandery, which was based in the northwestern part of Korea near P'yŏngyang, survived until 313 CE when it was seized by a rising regional power known as Koguryŏ. Prior to its demise, the commandery exerted a profound political and cultural influence on the native Korean population, much like the Roman commanderies did to the native Britons when they

occupied the British Isles. This Chinese outpost served as a conduit through which the culture of ancient China, particularly its ideographic writing system and Confucianism, seeped into the Korean Peninsula. Koreans then transmitted these elements of Chinese learning to the Japanese. Through the Lelang Commandery, Koreans were exposed to the Chinese model of a centralized monarchy, a form of government that they soon emulated. Today, the strength of Chinese influence is still felt in Korea's Confucian-based laws, political norms and bureaucratic institutions.

In the two centuries after Koguryō absorbed the Lelang Commandery, two other regional hereditary monarchies began to centralize and consolidate their power: Paekche and Silla. The rise and fall of the Three Kingdoms is chronicled in the oldest extant historical record in Korea, *History of the Three Kingdoms*, written by Kim Pu-sik in 1145 CE. It states that Koguryō was founded by a Puyō prince, Chumong, in 37 BCE; that Paekche was created by another Puyō nobleman Onjo in 18 BCE; and that Silla was first led by an elected native leader Pak Hyokkose in 57 BCE.

Koguryō (37 BCE-668 CE) was originally based in the middle reaches of the Yalu River in southern Manchuria and was by far the most politically and culturally advanced of the three. At the peak of its power in the fifth century, it was an empire controlling a far-flung territory extending over southern Manchuria and the northern half of the Korean Peninsula. Increasingly militant, Koguryō established its capital at P'yōngyang in 427, and there pursued cultural development, mainly through the promotion of Sinicization. Korea's first National Confucian Academy was established in Koguryō in 372. That same year, Koguryō also became the first of the Three Kingdoms to accept Buddhism as the state-sponsored religion.

Koguryō's increasingly aggressive stance toward its neighbors, which was evident in its seeking an alliance with the Tujue, a central Asian nomadic race, aroused the suspicion and ire of China and inspired fear among its Korean neighbors. Koguryō was consequently subject to preemptive invasions from the Sui and T'ang Dynasties of China in the late sixth and early seventh centuries. As General Ŭlchi Mundōk's celebrated victory in 612 against the 300,000-strong Sui expeditionary forces illustrates, Koguryō fought valiantly against the superior Chinese forces. However, Koguryō fell in 668 as it was no match for the coalition of the Tang and Silla forces amassed against it.

The people of former Koguryō then were incorporated in 698 into a mixed Korean-Manchurian state, Parhae (Po-hai in Chinese), in the eastern stretch of Manchuria and northern Korea. The surviving Koguryō aristocrats held dominion over the population of Parhae, which was composed mainly of Malgal (Mo-he in Chinese) people. At the peak of its power in the late eighth century, Parhae's control extended over all of southeastern Manchuria and the bulk of northeastern Korea, earning it the title of "Prosperous Kingdom of the East across the Sea" (*Haidong shengguo* in Chinese; and *Haedong sōngguk* in Korean) from its neighbors, China and Japan. Parhae dominated the region until it was destroyed in 926 by the Qidans, a Manchurian tribe that established the Liao Dynasty in northern China in 947. After the collapse of Parhae, Korea never regained its dominion over Manchuria.

The second major native Korean kingdom that emerged in the first century BCE was Paekche (18 BCE-660 CE), which was founded in what is today the area around Seoul by the same stock of Puyō people who had built Koguryō. These were also the same people who had conquered and absorbed the indigenous Han [Korean] ethnic groups in southwestern Korea. Paekche was able to develop into a rich, sophisticated kingdom in part because it had at its disposal the most fertile agricultural lands in all of Korea. Much of Paekche's flourishing culture was influenced by the same Buddhism and Confucianism that had first been introduced into Koguryō from China in the late fourth century.

Paekche strove for friendly relations with Yamato Japan and served as a bridge in transmitting continental culture to the Japanese archipelago. Unfortunately for Paekche, the ethnic differences between its ruling class and the general populace prevented it from ever becoming a strong cohesive state. In the face of constant threats posed by its militaristic neighbor Koguryō, Paekche was forced to relocate its capital city not once but twice. In the second half of the sixth century, Paekche also lost control of the strategically advantageous Naktong Delta and the Han River estuary to Silla. In 660, Silla mounted a joint attack with Tang China against the weaker Paekche Kingdom. Although Paekche received the assistance of Japan in this conflict, the kingdom fell without significant resistance. In the aftermath of the

## The Height of Koguryŏ Expansion (5th Century)



Koguryŏ, at the height of its power and expansion in the 5th century, was an empire controlling a vast territory that extended over southern Manchuria and the northern half of the Korean Peninsula. As the most politically and culturally advanced of the Three Kingdoms, Koguryŏ dwarfed the other two kingdoms Paekche and Silla. In 427 CE, Koguryŏ established its capital at P'yŏngyang.



defeat, refugees from the fallen kingdom poured into Japan and were instrumental in transmitting Sinicized Korean culture across the Strait of Korea.

Silla (57 BCE-935 CE), the third native kingdom that had emerged in the first century, developed from a minor walled-town state in the region around present-day Kyōngju. The political and cultural efflorescence of Silla was rather slow compared to that of the other two Korean kingdoms, Koguryō and Paekche, in part because Silla's ruling elite was conservative and cautious compared to those of its two neighbors. Silla did not embrace Buddhism until 535, about one and a half centuries after Koguryō and Paekche had done so. In the long run, however, Silla managed to surpass its neighbors thanks to a variety of institutional strengths inherent in its body politic.

Unlike Paekche, whose ethnic heterogeneity had produced conflict between the rulers and the ruled, Silla's proto-democratic institution, the Court of Nobles (*Hwabaek*), served as a cohesive force that encouraged solidarity among its ruling aristocrats. In addition, its highly stratified social structure, known as the bone-rank (*kolp'um*) system, provided stability essential to the establishment of a centralized state. The Silla kings were able to recruit highly motivated military leaders for service through a unique paramilitary educational institution, known as the Flower Youth Band (*Hwarang-do*). The Silla leaders were also adept at international diplomacy, as demonstrated by the fact that they were able to form an alliance with Tang China across the Yellow Sea in 648.

These advantages aided Silla in its efforts during the sixth century to gain control over the fertile area west of the Nakdong River, called Kaya. This region, which some Japanese historians erroneously identified as the site of an ancient Japanese outpost, Mimana (?369-562), was famous for its production of iron and its flourishing maritime trade with the Lelang Commandery and the Wa (Wae in Korean) people in Japan. Kaya had been formerly ruled by a federation of half a dozen tribal chiefdoms, including Pon-Kaya (Original Kaya) whose center was located in modern day Kimhae and Tae-Kaya (Great Kaya) located in present-day Koryōng. Allegedly founded by the legendary King Suro in 42 CE, Pon-Kaya had been the hegemon of the early Kaya federation until Tae-Kaya overran it in 400 CE. Tae-Kaya is believed to have been founded by the Ijinsi somewhat after the creation of Pon-Kaya. Sandwiched between the two ambitious kingdoms of Silla and Paekche, the Kaya federation never managed to develop into a solid, unified monarchy. Consequently, Silla annexed Pon-Kaya and Tae-Kaya in 532 and 562, respectively.

By 551, Silla also managed to wrest the Han River basin away from Koguryō and Paekche. Having thus achieved a direct sea route to China, Silla was able to concentrate on the task of eliminating its rivals on the Korean peninsula. Silla destroyed Paekche in 660 with military support from Tang China and then unified the whole peninsula in 668 by overpowering Koguryō. The kingdom was embroiled in an eight-year war against the Tang, its erstwhile ally until the latter's veiled intention to colonize all of the Korean peninsula threatened Silla's new domain. Silla emerged as the victor in this conflict known as the Tang-Silla War of 676 and thus became the ruler of the southern two-thirds of the peninsula below the line stretching from the Taedong River to the Bay of Wōnsan.

Today, nationalist Korean historians still lament Korea's lost dominion over Manchuria, which they blame on Silla's decision to seek military assistance from China to defeat its Korean rivals. Nevertheless, the historical significance of Silla's eventual dominion over the other two kingdoms should not be overlooked. The society and culture of Silla served as the mainstream of subsequent Korean history; therefore, modern South Korean historians recognize Silla as a legitimate transmitter of Korean tradition.

The Unified Silla period (668-935) was marked by sustained peace and prosperity. Silla soon became a tributary state, its rulers maintaining harmonious relations with Tang China, the hegemon of East Asia and the unrivaled center of world civilization at that time. During the eighth and ninth centuries, the Silla Koreans redoubled their efforts at Sinicization by borrowing heavily from the Tang model of political and legal institutions, while closely guarding their own indigenous tradition.

Buddhism was adopted as the state religion during the Unified Silla period, and it enjoyed a broad appeal over both the high and low classes in society. The Sōkkuram Grotto and the Pulguksa Temple in Kyōngju, both established in 751, attest to the splendor of Silla's Buddhist culture during its apex.

## The Unified Silla and Parhae Kingdoms (8th Century)



The Unified Silla period (668-935) was a prosperous time of sustained peace and stability. By 676, with the help of Tang China, Silla defeated and overpowered both the Paekche and Koguryŏ Kingdoms. In 698, the people of former Koguryŏ were incorporated into a mixed Korean-Manchurian state, Parhae, which stretched from eastern Manchuria to the northern half of the Korean Peninsula.

Confucianism also received patronage from the Silla monarchs as is evidenced by the establishment of the National Confucian College in 682. Many Silla scholars, monks and merchants traveled to China in search of religious truth, fame, and fortune during the Unified Silla period, benefiting under the umbrella of Tang China's cosmopolitan policy towards non-Chinese people. Hyech'o, one of the Silla monks in the Tang capital, traveled to India in the early eighth century in search of Buddhist Law and wrote a famous travelogue, *An Account of the Journey to the Five Indian States*. Chang Po-go, a Korean merchant-adventurer of the tenth century, amassed a fortune in the Shandong Peninsula and became a merchant prince who dominated the Yellow Sea. In no other pre-modern dynasty were Koreans ever again able to make their mark in East Asia to the degree the Silla Koreans had made. After the tenth century, both China and Korea adopted more seclusionist policies toward the world outside their borders.

## **II**

# **POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT AND CULTURAL EFFLORESCENCE DURING THE MIDDLE AGE**

**Koryŏ and Early Chosŏn**

**(918~ca. 1600)**

Silla, the longest enduring dynasty in Korean history, enjoyed a rich and dramatic dominance over the peninsula, but by the mid-ninth century it began to decline. The kingdom's demise was due in part to difficulties associated with its bone-rank system. The "true-bone" aristocrats of the ruling class were hereditarily ascribed the highest positions in Silla society. The reform-minded intellectuals drawn mainly from a level of the hierarchical system known as the (non-aristocratic) "head-rank six" stratum, chafed under the rigid delineations that marked Silla's social ordering. They joined forces with the regional magnates who were disgruntled for similar reasons and rose up in revolt against the Silla royal house. Toward the close of the ninth century, Silla plunged into a state of civil war that involved a struggle among three regions, which are referred to as Later Paekche (892-936), Later Koguryŏ (901-918), and Unified Silla. Collectively, the three entities are known as the Later Three Kingdoms. Wang Kŏn (King T'aejo, r. 918-943), a magnate-general who had been a prime minister of Later Koguryŏ, emerged from this period of strife (892-936) as the ultimate victor. Combining military prowess and nimble diplomacy, Wang Kŏn in 918 founded a new dynasty, named Koryŏ, from which the words "Korea" in English and "Corée" in French were originally derived. Its capital was located at Songak, present-day Kaesŏng.

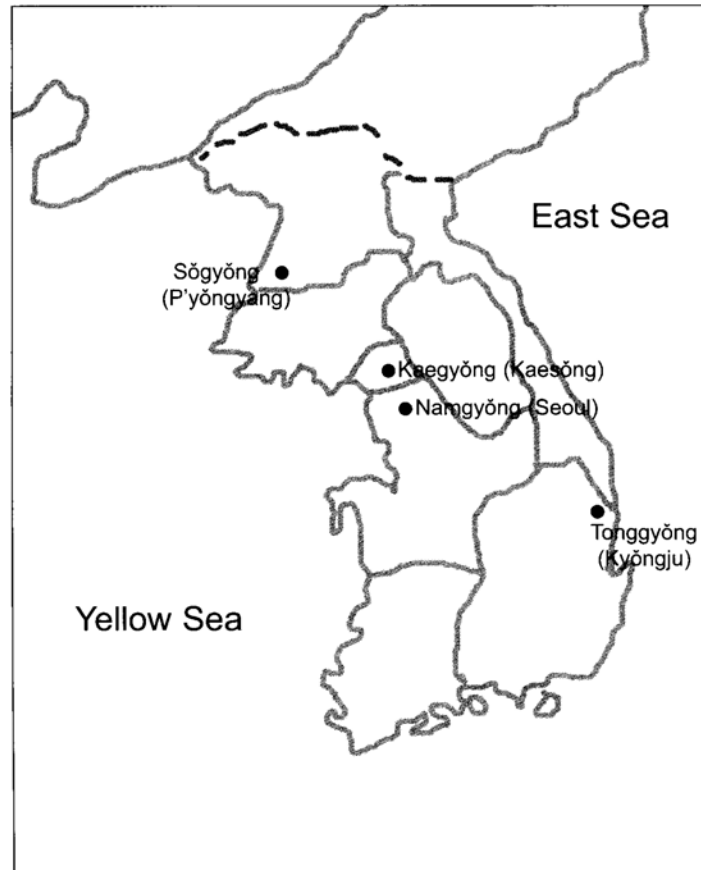
A salient feature of the early Koryŏ Dynasty (918-1392) was its governing body of civil aristocratic lineages closely linked to the royal family. The kings of early Koryŏ maintained friendly diplomatic, commercial and cultural relations with the deteriorating Song government in southern China. At the same time, it kept at bay the Qidans and Nuzhens, menacing people from northern China who successively founded the Liao and Jin dynasties. Sinicization efforts were greatly intensified during this period with the adoption of such Chinese-modeled bureaucratic institutions as the six ministries and the civil service examination (*kwagŏ*) system. The Chinese-style civil service examination, adopted in 958, tested a prospective government official's mastery of the Confucian ethics and Chinese history and literature. The curricula of Korean educational institutions were thus designed to prepare young students to become *kwagŏ* examination takers. Although this examination system signaled increased social mobility for talented Koreans of lower birth with aspirations to be bureaucrats, the rote memorization inherent in its pedagogy tended to stifle intellectual creativity and, until its abrogation in 1894, it meant that all educated Koreans were necessarily Sinophiles.

Although the Koryŏ central government endeavored to perpetuate Confucian ideals in the political arena, in the realm of personal religion, the Koryŏ people of both high and low birth embraced Buddhism. The early Koryŏ period shone with the full resplendence of Buddhist culture. The 81,000 woodblocks of the Buddhist Tripitaka, carved from 1236 to 1251 and now preserved in the Haeinsa Temple in southern Korea, attest to the glory of Koryŏ Buddhism at its height. The refinement and exacting aesthetic standards of Koryŏ culture are also evident in its celadon pottery, acclaimed by connoisseurs as some of the greatest masterpieces in the history of pottery.

In 1170, the civilian government of early Koryŏ was overthrown in a coup d'état engineered by a group of military officers under General Chŏng Chung-bu. The coup ushered in an era of military rule for Koryŏ. In its initial stages, the military rule was marked by widespread social unrest and power struggles among the upstart military satraps, but the situation stabilized somewhat after 1196 with the emergence of strongman, General Ch'oe Ch'ung-hŏn. By eliminating his rivals and by suppressing peasant and slave rebellions, General Ch'oe was able to establish firm control over the country. The house of Ch'oe, under the hereditary title of Director of Decree Enactment, ruled Korea for sixty years until 1258. Their reign was comparable to that of the Kamakura bakufu in Japan of the same era. The Ch'oe dictators are remembered favorably in history as military leaders who for some forty years were able to withstand the waves of the Mongol invaders threatening their northern borders. The Koryŏ court, however, ended up surrendering to the Mongols in 1270, following the overthrow of the Ch'oe family from power.

The Mongol domination of Koryŏ should be seen in the context of the spread of the Mongol empire into China and Eurasia. The Mongols, however, did not attempt to destroy Koryŏ sovereignty *in toto* as they had attempted in other parts of their conquered territory. Instead, by marrying Mongol princesses to Koryŏ kings, they opted to control Koryŏ as a son-in-law state of the East Asian Mongol

## The Koryŏ Kingdom (11th Century)



Wang Kŏn, the founder of the Koryŏ Dynasty (918-1392), intended that this new dynasty be the direct successor of the Koguryŏ Kingdom, thereby making northern expansion a basic policy. Based on geomantic theories, Wang Kŏn re-established Koguryŏ's capital, Pyongyang, which he referred to as Sŏgyŏng (Western Capital).

Khanate. As a result, Koryŏ was ruled by seven half-Korean, half-Mongol monarchs until the Mongols were driven out in 1270.

The Mongol rule in Korea was a harsh and repressive one. Khublai Khan, from his capital city of Beijing, forced Koreans against their will to participate in his disastrous invasions of Japan in 1274 and in 1281. However, even though the prolonged Mongol domination brought untold misery and humiliation to the Korean people, it was not without some cultural benefits. Korean intellectuals who visited Beijing as diplomats, hostages and captives were exposed to new Chinese ideas, technology and Europeans. One of the Koryŏ scholars who visited Beijing in the 1270s brought back to Korea books on Neo-Confucianism, thus exposing to Korean intellectuals for the first time an ideology that was to become state orthodoxy during the Chosŏn dynasty. Another scholar visiting southern China in the 1370s "smuggled" cotton seeds out of China on his return to Korea, and thus introduced the fiber that would revolutionize Korean dress in a subsequent era.

A majority of the Koreans harbored nothing but ill-will for their "barbarous" Mongol overlords, and therefore welcomed the dynastic changes that occurred in both China and Korea in the late fourteenth century. General Yi Sŏng-gye (King T'aejo, r. 1392-1398) earned a hero's reputation through a string of decisive battles he led against Chinese rebel bandits, Mongol predators, Nuzhen marauders and Japanese pirates, who threatened Korean autonomy. Then, in 1392, General Yi succeeded in overthrowing the pro-Mongol Koryŏ dynasty and founded a new, pro-Ming (Chinese) dynasty, called Chosŏn. Yi's carefully planned palace coup d'état was assisted by a group of literati officials (*sadaebu*) imbued with Neo-Confucian idealism and eager for ideological renewal. The new dynasty was based in Hanyang (modern-day Seoul) and endured for more than five centuries until 1910. It was the last ruling house in Korean history.

The infrastructure of Chosŏn was determined by the land-owning Confucian literati-officials who had aided General Yi in the founding of the new dynasty. Chosŏn adopted an isolationist policy towards the outside world with the exception of China and, to a lesser degree, Japan. The kingdom cultivated relations with the Ming and later with the Qing by paying regular tributes to the Chinese imperial court. This tributary policy encouraged the Confucian mentality of "serving the superior." Towards the Japanese, whom the Koreans considered as cultural inferiors, the Chosŏn government maintained limited contact. Mindful of its tributary obligations to China, Chosŏn allowed the destitute inhabitants of Japan's Tsushima Island to obtain needed goods from Korean merchants only at specified ports in southern Korea. In addition, it dispatched diplomatic-cultural missions, called Communication Envoys, to Edo (modern-day Tokyo) when a new shogun ascended to power.

Chosŏn adopted Neo-Confucianism as the state orthodoxy and relegated other belief systems to secondary positions. As a result, Buddhism lost its domination over Korean religious life. Other religious practices such as shamanism and eventually Christianity were proscribed by the Chosŏn government. Economically, Chosŏn bureaucrats invested in agriculture as the sole means of economic sustenance, and they allotted very little attention to the development of industry, commerce or foreign trade. Adherence to this policy, which reflected the characteristic Confucian disdain for commerce and trade, meant that Korea remained an impoverished agrarian state throughout the Chosŏn dynasty.

The population of Korea during this period was approximately seven million, composed mainly of commoners (*yangin* or *sangmin*) and low-born people (*ch'ŏnmiri*) ruled by a civilian aristocratic caste called *yangban* (literally, officials of the "two orders"). There was also a small group of hereditary functionaries concentrated in Seoul, called "middle people" (*chungiri*), who provided the *yangban* officials with services in such areas as medicine, foreign languages, computation, calligraphic writing and the art of divination.

Chosŏn society achieved much of its socio-political stability by promoting a Confucian-based educational system in the public and private schools scattered across the country. The Chosŏn educational institutions, which trained student candidates for the civil service examination, consisted of the National Confucian College in Seoul, the public schools (*hyanggyo*) and private academies (*sŏwŏn*) in the major local counties and numerous private elementary tutorial schools (*sodang*). The strict adherence to Neo-Confucianism as the state orthodoxy and the Confucian-oriented education in the schools resulted in the

transformation of Chosŏn into a model Confucian state. The intense intellectual milieu of the Chosŏn period produced many eminent philosophers of the Chu Hsi (Zhu Xi) school of Confucian thought.

One should not assume, however, that there was no diversity or creativity in intellectual pursuits because of the preponderance of Confucian thought. Desire to invest in and preserve a decidedly Korean culture led to the invention in 1443 of *Han'gŭl* (Great [Korean] Script), a phonetic writing system that was created as the written representation of native Korean speech. *Han'gŭl* was created under the sponsorship of King Sejong the Great (r. 1418-1450), who is revered today as a preserver of "Korean-ness." Also incepted under these cultural drives in the seventeenth century was *sirhak*, or Practical Learning, a school of thought advocating research and writing on issues indigenous to Korea. In 1860, *tonghak*, or Eastern Learning, a nationalistic religious cult that appealed primarily to the peasantry, was founded by a provincial Confucian scholar. Catholicism, first called *sŏhak*, or Western Learning, flowed into Chosŏn in the late eighteenth-century, and the church's teachings set a precedent for the introduction of Protestantism a century later.

The reign of King Sejong was the era in which Chosŏn witnessed the full efflorescence of its politics, culture and influence. Besides expanding Korean territory to the Amnok (Yalu in Chinese) and Tuman (Tumen in Chinese) Rivers, which together form Korea's northern boundary, King Sejong promoted the invention of many scientific instruments, including a rain gauge. Most significant, however, at least in comparison to achievements in other parts of the globe, is the large-scale printing of books using movable type. The Chinese invented a non-metallic movable type in the eleventh century, and the Koreans used a metal-plated version to print books as early as 1234, that is, about two hundred years before Johannes Gutenberg printed the Bible with his metallic movable type in Germany. Hence, the world's first extensive use of metallic movable type to print books occurred in Korea under Sejong's court with eight printing projects undertaken as part of his kingdom's program to further scholastic excellence.

Unfortunately, the Chosŏn dynasty began to decline in the wake of the catastrophic seven-year Japanese (Hideyoshi) invasions between 1592 and 1598. This was followed closely by the Manchu invasions of 1627 and 1636. Chosŏn warded off the Japanese invaders by mobilizing volunteer guerrilla forces, called the "righteous army" (*ŭibyŏng*), and by securing military aid from China. Admiral Yi Sun-sin, a Korean naval hero, helped bring the war to a close by debilitating the Japanese navy with his famous "turtle ships" (*kŏbuksŏn*), which were warships with iron-plated decks. Exhausted as it was by the seven-year naval struggle with the Japanese, the Chosŏn dynasty was in no condition to face yet another military challenge from the Manchu barbarians just thirty years after the Hideyoshi invasion. In 1636, Chosŏn fell under Manchu domination. Soon after the Qing dynasty of the Manchus was established in China, Chosŏn remained a faithful tributary to this conquerer state until 1895 when Japan defeated Qing China in the first Sino-Japanese War.



# **III**

## **KOREAN ENCOUNTER WITH THE MODERN WORLD AND ATTEMPTS AT ENLIGHTENMENT**

**Later Chosŏn**

**(ca. 1600~1910)**

The Korean's initial encounters with Europeans took place at the close of the sixteenth century. The first Westerner to set foot on Korean soil was Father Gregorio de Cespedes, a Spanish Jesuit priest who visited southern Korea as a chaplain in the train of Japanese soldiers during 1593-1595. The next Western visitors to Korea were thirty-nine shipwrecked Dutch seamen, three in 1628 and thirty-six in 1653. One of the Dutchmen who was forcefully detained in Korea by the Chosŏn government was Hendrik Hamel. He escaped from Korea in 1666 and eventually wrote *An Account of the Shipwreck of a Dutch Vessel on the Isle of Quelpart, together with the Description of the Kingdom of Corea*. Published in 1668, the book introduced Korea for the first time to wide Western readership.

Korean envoys who regularly visited Beijing came under the influence of Western science and Christianity early in the seventeenth century and shared their newly-acquired knowledge with Koreans at home. For example, religious and scientific tracts written by Matteo Ricci, an Italian Jesuit missionary stationed in Beijing, were brought home by the Korean envoys as early as 1608. By 1620, information on various aspects of Western civilization had been carefully considered by Korean intellectuals. The information thus acquired of the West gave rise to the so-called Western Learning among the *yangban* scholars who had fallen out of political favor with the royal court. One such enthusiast of Western Learning, Yi Sung-hun, journeyed to Beijing in 1783 and was baptized a Catholic by the French missionary Father Louis de Grammont.

The Catholic movement in Korea was launched in 1784 with the organization of the first Catholic church in Seoul by Yi Sung-hun and his fellow converts. The conversion of Koreans to Catholicism first took place among the declassé *yangban*, but it soon became popular with the commoners and the low-born. The first French missionary to Korea selected three Korean youths and sent them to Macao in 1836 for theological training at a seminary operated by La Société des Missions Étrangères de Paris. Two of these Koreans, Alexander Kim and Thomas Ch'oe, were ordained as priests in 1844 and 1849, respectively.

In 1785 the Korean government proscribed Catholicism as heterodoxy through a special royal edict and continued to persecute its followers. Despite such persecution from the government, the Catholic community in Korea continued to expand. By 1865, there were some 23,000 converts under the care of twelve French missionaries. It was against this group that a massive, final purge was launched by the xenophobic regent, the Taewŏn'gun ("Prince of the Great Court") from 1866 to 1867. Some 8,000 Korean converts and nine French missionaries are said to have been killed as a result of this persecution.

Korea maintained an isolationist policy and kept its land borders and seacoasts sealed until 1876. Despite the French, British, American, and Russian ships that frequented its borders, foreign contact was kept to a minimum during the 1850s and 1860s. In 1860, Russia became Korea's neighbor by acquiring Maritime Province from China, and this only further reinforced Korea's exclusionist tendencies. The Taewŏn'gun's mistrust and dislike of foreigners were clearly evident in his 1866 order to burn down an American merchant schooner, the *General Sherman*, which had dared to sail into the Taedong River without the consent of Korean authorities. A French naval squadron that invaded Kanghwa Island at the estuary of the Han River in 1866, intending to chastise the Korean government for its persecution of the French missionaries, was peremptorily dispelled. In 1871, the Taewŏn'gun similarly repulsed an American naval expedition to Kanghwa Island. As the late 1800s progressed, it proved more and more difficult for Korea to remain a hermit among the imperialist nations. This is evident in the near collision with Japan that occurred in 1873 when the expansionistic Meiji government, indignant of Korea's refusal to open its doors, seriously considered a "conquest" of Korea. This occurred completely unbeknownst to the Korean government, and although the proposal was abandoned, it illustrated the intensity of the peninsular country's vulnerable isolationist policy.

Korea's stance toward the outside world changed after-December 1873 when the Taewŏn'gun relinquished control of the country to his son, King Kojong (r. 1864-1907). Kojong was an enlightened but weak-willed monarch who relied heavily on the advice of his consort, Queen Min (Empress Myŏngsŏng). In February 1876, under the threat of Japanese gunboat diplomacy, Kojong's government reluctantly signed the Treaty of Kanghwa with Japan. This was the first modern unequal treaty that Korea entered into with an imperialist power.

After 1880, King Kojong tried to implement reforms for the "self-strengthening" and "enlightenment" of the country. He also developed a keen interest in establishing diplomatic ties with the United States, an ideal potential ally which could help fend off the growing Russian threat to the Korean Peninsula. Negotiations for a Korean-American treaty were conducted at Tianjin, China between Chinese Viceroy Li Hung-chang (Li Hongzhang) and Commodore Robert W. Shufeldt. These negotiations resulted in the Korean-American Treaty of Amity and Commerce, which was consummated at Inch'ön in May 1882. This was Korea's first treaty with a Western power, and it was followed by subsequent treaties with Great Britain and Germany in 1883, Italy and Russia in 1884, France in 1886, Austria-Hungary in 1892 and Denmark in 1902. Korea, as the last East Asian country to be opened to the West, thus entered into the realm of modern diplomacy.

The Korean government immersed itself in a flurry of self-strengthening activities after forging treaties with Japan and the Western nations. A group of some thirty Koreans visited Tokyo in 1876 to learn about Japan's Westernization efforts. This was the first official Korean mission to the Japanese capital since the last Korean Communication Envoy had visited Edo in 1763. In 1881, the Korean government dispatched another group consisting of some sixty representatives to study Japan's political structure. Another team of forty students and artisans was sent to China to acquire the methods and skills needed for self-strengthening. In 1883, the American government sent Lucius H. Foote as minister to Korea, and in 1885 and 1888, Korea established diplomatic legations in Tokyo and Washington, DC, respectively.

Although the string of unequal treaties Korea signed with Japan and the Western powers did not bring tangible diplomatic or economic benefits to the Chosŏn dynasty, the influx of Western ideas and goods after the country's opening had a revolutionary impact on Korean life. Of the Westerners who entered Korea at this time, the Protestant missionaries from America contributed significantly to the future of Korea by propagating modern concepts of human equality and political democracy. The Protestant educational and medical institutions, in addition to their successful evangelism of the gospel, bore visible fruits of their attempts to actuate the above values. The first modern schools for boys and girls in Seoul were founded in the mid-1880s. The Protestant missionary institutions, such as the Paejae [Boys'] School and the Ewha [Girls'] School, were the mentoring grounds for a large number of leaders who would later distinguish themselves in the national independence movement. As a result of the endeavors of these missionaries, South Korea is today the leading Protestant nation in East Asia.

This does not mean, however, that Western ideas and goods were well received by the majority of the Korean population. In fact, the opposite was the case. The open-door policy that King Kojong and Queen Min pursued in the early 1880s provoked the Soldiers' Riot of 1882 (*Imo kullan*), a violent military uprising of conservative soldiers who felt threatened by the influx of foreign practices and political norms. Qing China, Korea's suzerain, then used the incident as an excuse to intervene in Korean affairs militantly for the first time since 1636. China dispatched a large-scale expedition to restore order to Seoul, suppressed the riot, and then kidnapped the Taewŏn'gun, their suspected ringleader, to China. China then unilaterally forced an unequal trade agreement on Korea, taking it upon itself to appoint foreign affairs advisers to the Korean king. The subsequent Chinese domination of Korean politics was supported by the 3,000-strong Chinese garrison force that remained in Seoul.

In December 1884, the unprecedented Chinese intervention in Korean affairs prompted members of the Enlightenment Party, a nascent political party of pro-Japanese and pro-American inclination, to stage a coup d'état against the Chinese-dominated regime. The coup leaders had obtained a verbal promise of support from the Japanese minister in Seoul. The attempted sabotage of Kojong's court, which is remembered as the Kapsin Political Turbulence (1884), was aborted after three days because of the unanticipated mobilization of the Chinese garrison to suppress the coup and because the Japanese minister reneged on his promise of support. In October 1885, China tightened its control over Korea by appointing Yuan Shikai as Chinese "resident" in Seoul to oversee Korea's internal and external affairs. Japan, another power with a vested interest in the Korean Peninsula, acquiesced to this arrangement after signing a treaty, the Li-Itō Convention, at Tianjin in early 1885. In this agreement both China and Japan consented to

withdraw their troops and military advisers from Korea. Japan deferred to China on this matter because it sought China's cooperation in checking Russia's territorial ambitions in Northeast Asia.

The precarious balance of power on the Korean peninsula was disrupted in the spring of 1894 with the outbreak of a massive Tonghak-affiliated peasant uprising. The Tonghak Peasant Uprising provided an opportunity for the Japanese to involve themselves once again in the affairs of Korea. Under the pretext of preserving order in Korea, the Japanese government sent a military expedition to Korea. This action provoked the Chinese to defend their interests in Korea. The ensuing Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895 marked a major turning point in modern Korean and East Asian history. As a result of the war that China ignominiously lost, the balance of power in Korea tilted decisively in favor of Japan, and the Sinocentric world order that had dominated East Asia met its demise, never to be restored.

A pro-Japanese modernization movement, known as the Kabo (1894) Reforms, was initiated during the war by Korean officials receptive to modern ideas. With Japanese backing, the Korean reformers attempted to make major institutional changes that were regarded as crucial for Korea's survival in the modern world of great power imperialism. The traditional Chinese-style bureaucratic system was discarded, and the structure of government was reorganized along the Western and Japanese models. The time-honored delineation between the *yangban* and the commoners was abolished, together with the institution of slavery. Modern military and police systems were instituted to bolster the authority of the newly organized central government. Monetary and taxation systems were modeled after their Western equivalents, and a modern judicial system was introduced. The traditional Confucian academies whose primary purpose had been to prepare students for the Chinese-style government examinations were replaced with modern educational institutions.

Among the great world powers only Russia challenged Japan's newfound influence in Korean politics. In October 1895, as part of an effort to maintain Japan's power in Korea, Japanese officials plotted and carried out the murder of the pro-Russian, pro-American Queen Min. Then, in February 1896, King Kojong fled from the Japanese-controlled palace to the Russian legation. Korea was temporarily run from the Russian legation and, accordingly, under Russian supervision.

After 1896, the kingdom of Korea was like a ship adrift at sea without a compass. King Kojong decided to declare Korea an empire in 1897, thereby making himself an emperor, but the aggrandizing title was in name only for the monarch had lost what little direction he had had, surrounded as he was by a coterie of inflexible and conservative officials with no clear vision for Korea. In frustration, a group of reform-minded officials and intellectuals in Seoul had organized an incipient political party, called the Independence club, in April 1896. Its leader was Sŏ Chae-p'il (Philip Jaisohn), a former member of the unsuccessful Kapsin coup and a medical doctor who had been educated in the United States.

The Independence Club and its members became the voice of reform in Korean society and demanded that Emperor Kojong implement changes in government similar to those outlined in the Kabo Reforms. The club also clamored for the establishment of a national assembly that would launch Korea's transformation into a constitutional monarchy. Although initially tolerant, Kojong and his entourage began to feel increasingly threatened by the activities of the group, and in December 1898, the emperor disbanded the club, mobilizing soldiers and mobsters and strong-arming the demonstrators. This proved to be self-defeating because in destroying the club, the emperor had unwittingly quelched the only political body capable of rejuvenating the declining Chosŏn Dynasty. Accordingly, when the Russo-Japanese War broke out in 1904, the emperor and his coterie were not in a position to call upon the more enlightened members of the Korean society to help withstand foreign encroachment.

Japan provoked the war with Russia because it wanted to be the only world power to have a voice in Korean politics. In September 1905, Japan defeated Russia in a series of land and sea battles and then in November imposed a protectorate treaty on the helpless Korean government. The United States and Great Britain upheld Japan's expansionist policy toward Korea: the former by entering into the secret Taft-Katsura Agreement between the U.S. Secretary of War William Howard Taft and Japanese Prime Minister Katsura Taro in July 1905, and the latter by renewing the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in February 1905. Patriotic Koreans demonstrated against the protectorate treaty by forming "righteous armies" (*ũbyŏng*), a volunteer force of guerrilla fighters who harassed the Japanese aggressors. Some 20,000

righteous army volunteers died fighting the Japanese military in numerous skirmishes from 1905 to 1912. Unfortunately, this resistance effort on the part of the Koreans did little to stymie the Chosŏn dynasty's rapid decline, and its fate was sealed by the imperialist powers who fashioned a string of policies toward Korea without consulting the Koreans themselves.

# **IV**

## **THE STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE AND THE BIRTH OF RIVAL REGIMES**

**Japanese Colonial Rule and U.S.-Soviet Occupation**

**(1910~1948)**

In 1905, in the wake of the Russo-Japanese War, the Japanese government unilaterally declared that Korea would henceforth be a Japanese protectorate. In August 1910, this status was altered, and Korea became a formal colony of the Japanese empire. This was the first time in Korea's long history that the entire country and its people were subjugated under alien rule. What made this situation even more galling was the fact that historically the Korean people had always considered themselves Japan's cultural mentors.

The untimely Japanese occupation stymied Korea's modernization process just as the country was taking steps to implement self-initiated reforms. Some historians who condone Japanese policy towards Korea claim that considerable progress was made in Korea's economic and educational systems during the colonial period. They argue that the Japanese occupation was in the long run beneficial to the modernization of Korea. Although it cannot be denied that there was some degree of economic progress between 1910 to 1945, the main beneficiaries were the Japanese and a handful of Korean collaborators. The majority of the Korean populace was reduced to a state of impoverishment and illiteracy.

Japan ruled Korea through the office of a Governor-General, who was usually a military man from the Japanese army or navy. During the first stage of the occupation (1910-1919), the Koreans were controlled by a draconian gendarmerie-police system, which deprived them of many basic civil freedoms. The stringent social controls finally produced a massive, nation-wide demonstration on 1 March 1919, referred to as the March First Movement. It compelled the Japanese to loosen their constricting grip on the Korean populace. During the second phase of colonial rule (1919-1932), the Government-General permitted the Korean people a degree of freedom of expression and assembly. In the early 1920s, for example, three Korean newspapers were published in the vernacular, and in 1927, a Korean political party composed of both rightist and leftist nationalists, the Sin'ganhoe (New Korea Society), was established. Because of the relatively tolerant political climate, even the socialists were able to get away with forming a clandestine Korean Communist Party in Seoul in 1925. It was also during this period that some modern colleges, including the Japanese-sponsored Keijo [Seoul] Imperial University and a half a dozen private Korean colleges were organized with public or private funding.

The third phase of Japanese rule (1932-1945) saw a return of draconian rule to Korea as the Japanese ruthlessly exploited Korean manpower and resources to support their war efforts in Manchuria (after 1932), mainland China (after 1937), and the Pacific (after 1941). The Korean people were forced to stop using their own language, to adopt Japanese names and to worship at Shinto shrines. In the end, however, such ruthless measures served only to further incense the Korean population and to fuel nationalist fervor.

The Japanese occupation period was marked by Korea's refusal to accept its protectorate status and annexation. The massive March First Movement inspired people from all rungs of society to fight for independence; its leadership was heterogeneous and consisted of members from Ch'öndogyo (formerly, Tonghak), Protestant, and Buddhist organizations. The size and intensity of the movement stunned the Japanese who had assumed that their brutal policies would eventually break the backbone of the Korean national spirit, not strengthen it. Although the movement subsided after 1919, Korean resistance at home continued in many forms: student demonstrations, labor strikes, tenancy disputes, and boycotts against Japanese goods. Despite renewed Japanese efforts to quell political resistance, Korean nationalists and communists continued to agitate against the Japanese in scattered movements throughout the country. In August 1944, for example, a clandestine political coalition, the Korean Independence League, was formed under the leadership of Yö Un-hyöng, a leftist nationalist. It was this league that later formed the Committee for the Preparation of Korean Independence (CPKI), the interim government that was established in Seoul immediately after the Japanese surrender in August 1945.

Korean expatriates in Shanghai, China, organized the Korean Provisional Government (KPG) in the wake of the March First Movement with Dr. Syngman Rhee as president. The KPG was the center of nationalist rightist activity, and it received financial support from Chiang Kai-shek's (Jiang Jieshi's) Nationalist Government in China as well as from Korean emigrant communities in the United States and Russia. It functioned from the 1930s until Korea's liberation in 1945 under the leadership of Chairman Kim Ku. When Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941, the KPG tried to gain formal Allied recognition of

its legitimacy. Its representatives in Washington, D.C., including Syngman Rhee, lobbied the U.S. government. The KPG also enthusiastically supported the U.S. Army Office of Strategic Services in north China. Unfortunately, all this proved futile and the government-in-exile was largely ignored by world powers until the end of World War II.

The communist Yen-an Faction was another expatriate Korean group in China, which had fought the Japanese with Mao Zedong's Red Army in northwestern China. This group shaped the Korean Independence League and the Korean Volunteer Army in 1941 under the leadership of Kim Tu-bong and Mu Chŏng. Like the KPG, it also held as its ultimate objective the restoration of Korean independence. There was also another group of Koreans in China, identified in history as the Kapsan Faction or the Partisan Faction. This group conducted guerrilla attacks against the Japanese Kwantung Army in southwestern Manchuria after 1932, and the group's activities were part of the Northeast Anti-Japanese Allied Forces organized by the

Chinese Communist Party. One of its leaders was Kim Sŏng-ju, later known as Kim Il-sung. Kim's guerrilla unit, which numbered about three hundred at most, was composed mainly of Korean residents of Jiando (Kando in Korean) in southeastern Manchuria. In the early spring of 1941, it sought refuge from the Kwantung Army attacks in Vladivostok in the Russian Maritime Province. There, Kim and his band were incorporated into the 88th Regiment, a special task force of the Far Eastern Command of the Soviet Army. They received special training at the Okeanskaya Field School in Vladivostok and later at other similar institutions in Khabarovsk while awaiting the end of World War II.

When the war ended with the Japanese surrender on 15 August 1945, the Korean people received the news of their liberation with both jubilation and dismay: they were overjoyed that they were freed from the Japanese yoke but dismayed because their country was to be divided along the 38th parallel into two military occupation zones. The 38th parallel decision was masterminded by U.S. policy-makers in Washington, D.C. throughout the nights of 10-11 August as the best means of preventing the Russians from occupying the entire peninsula of Korea (a likelihood considering the fact that the Soviets had declared war on Japan on 8 August, one day after the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima).

President Harry S. Truman secured Marshal Joseph Stalin's promise to honor the 38th parallel on 16 August without ever having consulted a Korean. Apparently, neither of these Allied leaders fathomed that their rash decision would result in the permanent division of the country, which had been a unified political entity since 668, nor that it would pave the way for a devastating war within five years. Below the 38th parallel, South Korea was occupied by the United States' armed forces in September, a month after the Soviet military had begun to occupy the North. The U.S. occupation forces organized a military government, the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) in Seoul and ruled South Korea for three years with the support of the Korean Democratic Party, a conservative party comprising of landlords and the bourgeoisie. The USAMGIK refused to recognize the Korean People's Republic, an indigenous Korean government that had been hastily formed on 6 September by leftist nationalists and communists to replace the CPKI, which had been under the leadership of Yŏ Un-hyŏng. Consistent with the virulent distrust of communism, which characterized U.S. foreign policy at the time, the USAMGIK outlawed the Korean Communist Party, which had emerged under the leadership of Pak Hon-yong, a veteran communist agitator of the so-called Domestic Faction. It also refused to recognize the KPG and its leaders were allowed to return to Korea as private citizens, not as government officials. (Kim Ku and his group returned to Korea in November 1945, three months after the liberation.)

In the Cairo Declaration, issued on 1 December 1943 by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, the three Allied leaders, in anticipation of Japan's defeat, promised to grant independence to the Korean people "in due course." Marshal Stalin showed his support of this declaration in July 1945 when he signed the Potsdam Declaration. Although the world powers professed to give priority to Korean independence, it was never clear just how Korean autonomy was to be reinstated, as the phrase "in due course" connoted. During World War II, American leaders had entertained the idea of placing Korea under a joint trusteeship of four powers, the U.S., the USSR, China, and Great Britain, for an unspecified period of time before granting Korea full-fledged independence. It was this idea that ultimately became the basis of the



Moscow Agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union. Finalized in December 1945, four and a half months after the end of World War II, the Moscow Agreement clarified the procedure by which the Korean transition to autonomy would be conducted. The initial stage was entrusted to a U.S.-Soviet Joint Commission, which was to meet in Seoul to consult with Korean political leaders. The Joint Commission's mandate was to organize a provisional Korean democratic government.

All Koreans, with the exception of communists under Soviet influence, opposed the trusteeship plan as it was seen as a new type of colonialism. The Korean nationalists demanded immediate independence and engaged in various campaigns to frustrate it. Unperturbed, the U.S.-Soviet Joint Commission met in Seoul in the spring of 1946 and again in May 1947. It failed to agree on a feasible model for a unified Korean government because the U.S. and Soviet delegations could not agree on which Korean political group should be consulted in creating a new Korean government. In retrospect, it seems clear that the intensifying distrust in the Cold War between the U.S. and the Soviet Union made a negotiation of a bilateral agreement in Seoul unlikely. Finally, unable to break the impasse in the Korea situation through the Joint Commission, the United States opted to refer the issue to the United Nations. This was done in September 1947, forsaking its trusteeship plan *in toto*.

The General Assembly of the United Nations adopted a resolution in November 1947 calling for the establishment of a united Korean government through a general election that the UN would supervise. It organized a nine-nation commission, the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK), and authorized it to take necessary measures to hold a nation-wide election in Korea. The Soviet Union, which had vetoed the UN resolution, refused to cooperate with the UNTCOK's activities on the peninsula. UNTCOK nevertheless recommended that the proposed election be held in the areas where it was feasible, that is, only in the southern half of Korea. The Interim Committee (Little Assembly) of the UN General Assembly approved this recommendation in February 1948, and the proposed general election was eventually held in South Korea in May 1948. A Korean National Assembly thus formed and adopted the constitution in July and elected Syngman Rhee as the first president of the Republic of Korea (ROK). President Rhee proclaimed the birth of the ROK on 15 August 1948. The UN recognized the ROK on 12 December 1948 as "a lawful government having effective control and jurisdiction over the part of Korea where the [UN] Temporary Commission was able to observe and consult." The United States recognized the ROK on 1 January 1949 and withdrew its troops from the peninsula by late June of that year.

**V**

**NATION-BUILDING  
AND  
MODERNIZATION  
IN  
A DIVIDED KOREA**

**From a Hot War to an Armed Truce**

**(1950~1990s)**

After August 1945, nation-building proceeded in the northern half of Korea under Soviet auspices. The Soviet military in northern Korea were in fact better prepared for this task than their American counterpart in the south. They opted to deal with the liberated Koreans through indirect military control, and they initially recognized the indigenous "people's committees," which had sprung up as branches of the Seoul-based CPKI. An example of one of these groups was the People's Committee of Five Northern Provinces in P'yŏngyang under the leadership of Christian nationalist Cho Man-sik, the "Korean Gandhi." From mid-October, however, the Soviet occupation forces began supporting Kim Il-sung, who recently returned from Russia as a Soviet army captain, to lead a prospective Soviet satellite in northern Korea. In December 1945, the thirty-three year-old Kim became the head of the North Korean Branch of the Korean Communist Party, and in February 1946, he assumed the chairmanship of a de facto North Korean regime, euphemistically styled as the North Korean Provisional People's Committee. In its first few years of existence, the regime maintained the facade that its three major political factions supported a united front. When the Korean Workers Party (i.e., North Korean Communist Party) was organized in June 1949, for example, Kim became its chairman with Kim Tu-bong of the Yen-an Faction and Pak Hŏn-yŏng of the Domestic Faction as its vice-chairmen.

Thus, by February 1946, North Korea had a de facto government that was completely alienated from the political activity in the south. The northern leaders did not formalize their regime as a separate government until after the United Nations took the lead in creating the ROK. In 1947, the North Korean People's Assembly drafted its own constitution, which was adopted a year later. In August 1948, a nationwide election was held to establish the Korean Supreme People's Assembly, and this Assembly ratified the constitution and elected Kim Il-sung as its premier. Kim then proclaimed the inauguration of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) on 9 September 1948. The Soviet Union was quick to recognize the DPRK as the only lawful government in Korea and completed the withdrawal of its occupation troops by the end of the year.

The two regimes that emerged in Korea represented two conflicting ideological orientations. Both were committed to national reunification but only within their own separate ideological specifications. It should not have been a surprise that once the foreign occupation forces withdrew from the peninsula conflict would arise. In 1949, Mao Zedong's Communist Party triumphed over the Nationalists in the Chinese civil war, and some 40,000 Korean communist veterans who had participated in Mao's war efforts returned to Korea to take part in the nation-building of North Korea. Although Stalin was initially reluctant to support a North Korean attack on the South, he agreed to buttress Kim Il-sung and Pak Hŏn-yŏng's strategy "to reunify their fatherland" by recourse to a blitzkrieg in April 1950. The Chinese communists were informed of the plan in May and pledged their support. The North Korean leaders, who had a decisive edge over the South in military strength, launched the Korean War with a surprise attack on 25 June 1950. Mindful that unchecked local aggression could spiral into a global war, a lesson learned from the 1930s in Europe and China, President Truman immediately committed U.S. forces to drive the North Koreans back to their half of the peninsula. The Americans used UN machinery to enforce the concept of global collective security.

The ensuing three-year Korean War was a holocaust in terms of the number of lives lost: some three million Koreans, both military and civilian, over a million Chinese "volunteers," and about 54,000 American soldiers perished amidst the fighting. The responsibility for driving the North Korean soldiers back was shared by the South Korean military and the troops from a sixteen-member coalition of the United Nations under the command of U.S. General Douglas MacArthur. On 1 October 1950, the UN forces crossed over the 38th parallel in hot pursuit of the North Korean invaders, deliberately violating the truce line. This caused Mao to send troops from the People's Republic of China as he had promised he would should the UN forces cross the 38th parallel. Consequently, what began as an ideological conflict within one country erupted into an international calamity involving the world's great powers. The war was waged up and down the peninsula as each seeming victory proved to be shortlived. The UN forces were forced to retreat from the ground that they had taken in the North, and Seoul was once again evacuated. A few months later, UN forces reclaimed their offensive stance.

The United States was deeply disturbed at the morass that the war was turning into and wanted to ensure that it remain a regional conflict. By the spring of 1951, a military stalemate developed around the 38th parallel. The United States government responded to a Soviet initiative for truce talks in mid-1951, again without consulting Korea. The negotiations commenced at Kaesŏng in July 1951 and dragged on for two years at P'anmunjom until armistice was signed on 27 July 1953. South Korean leaders, including President Rhee, were virulently opposed to ending the war. They felt that millions of Koreans had died for no purpose and demanded that the war be continued until the country was reunified. The U.S. appeased South Korean leaders by signing a mutual defense treaty in October 1953.

Hope for reunification was the primary reason that the people of Korea took up arms and fought each other. Ironically, however, the way that this internecine conflict was concluded made reunification an even more remote possibility. The war never resolved any of the central issues and resulted in tension-ridden post-war relations between North and South Korea. After 1953, the two rival regimes each came to amass armed forces of more than half a million men, each well-equipped with costly weapons to fight the other should fighting recur. Both Koreas were thus transformed into heavily armed military camps, spawning military-dominated, authoritarian political cultures.

For South Korea, the next several decades would bring drastic changes in government and also tremendous economic growth as the country dragged itself out from the ravages of war and into a sophisticated era dominated by advanced technology and industrial development. The First Republic (1948-1960), in name, a liberal civilian democratic government under the leadership of an increasingly authoritarian leader, President Syngman Rhee, was toppled in April 1960 by a student uprising. The Second Republic (1960-1961), a liberal democratic regime with Premier Chang Myŏn at its helm, lasted only eight months before being overthrown by a military coup d'état led by Major General Park Chung-hee in May 1961. President Park Chung-hee presided over the Third (1961-1973) and Fourth Republics (1973-1979) as a dictatorial yet effective ruler until he was assassinated by the head of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency in October 1979.

Another military strongman, General Chun Doo-hwan, emerged from the chaos that ensued after Park's assassination. Seizing power through another coup in December 1979, Chun became president of the Fifth Republic (1980-1988) after ruthlessly suppressing popular demonstrations advocating a return to civilian rule. Most famous among these demonstrations was the Kwangju Democratization Movement in May 1980. Despite Chun's repressive measures to control the populace, student-led demonstrations for a return to democracy characterized the political environment of the Fifth Republic. The riots came to a head in June 1987 with the Grand March for Democracy in Seoul, which forced President Chun to concede to a Democratization Manifesto proposed by former General Roh Tae-woo, the chairman of the ruling Democratic Justice Party. A new constitution calling for direct presidential elections was subsequently adopted, and President Roh's Sixth Republic was inaugurated in February 1988. In December 1994, after more than thirty years of military rule, the South Korean people celebrated their successful return to a civilian democracy. A neutral cabinet under Prime Minister Hyon Sung-jong supervised the presidential election, and Kim Young-sam, a civilian statesman of the ruling Democratic Liberal Party, became Korea's new leader.

In fifty years, the ROK has been transformed from an agrarian society into an urban-industrial one with about 80% of its population residing in cities. The unforeseen astronomical economic growth of Korea has been called the "Miracle on the Han River," with an average annual growth rate of about 9% in real terms since the mid-1960s. The ROK's per capita GNP leaped from \$67 in 1953 to \$7,500 in 1994. Today, the ROK is a member of the global village, maintaining diplomatic relations with roughly one hundred and fifty countries, including the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Republic of China. It has now achieved the highest level of education in the world with a 99% literacy rate and approximately 20% of its 44.5 million population possesses a college degree. It was on the combined strength of these achievements that the ROK was successfully able to host the 24th Olympic Games in Seoul in 1988.

However in 1997, the South Korean economy experienced its first significant setback. Major financial institutions and corporations went bankrupt and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)

intervened. The outcome was an economic program involving layoffs and industrial restructuring. Amidst the economic turmoil referred to as the "IMF crisis," a new civilian president with a brilliant record of anti-dictatorship struggle, Kim Dae-jung, was elected in December 1997. Appealing for national unity, President Kim Dae-jung brought together representatives of labor, business and government to discuss the economic situation and to plan and restructure for the future. He also promised to open dialogue with North Korea and to improve South Korea's economic conditions by the turn of the century.

As the South made headway in achieving stability as a liberal democracy, North Korea was transformed into a socialist state through a series of reforms undertaken with Soviet military backing. Initially in the 1960s and 1970s, the DPRK registered steady economic growth, particularly in the field of agriculture. However, its socio-economic progress eventually stagnated. This was due to the state's dogmatic adherence to socialist Juche (autonomy) ideology, its lopsided emphasis on heavy industry, the reduction of foreign economic assistance, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the prolonged dictatorship of Kim Il-sung. The DPRK today remains one of the world's most impenetrable regimes, and since the mid-1990s, its population has experienced one of the worst famines of the 20th century.

The reunification of South and North Korea has remained the ultimate goal of the Korean people since 1945, when the country was bisected against its will by foreign powers. Although the Korean War was fought to reunify the peninsula, it has had the opposite effect. The two regimes have kept their territories inaccessible to each other by militarily fortifying both sides of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), the cease-fire line established in 1953 in lieu of the 38th parallel.

Tension between the ROK and the DPRK eased somewhat in July 1972, when the two governments pledged to participate in a program of peaceful reunification. This concession, however, was never actuated: there was too much mutual distrust to overcome, aggravated by the fact that their supporters, the USSR and the U.S., were engaged in a chilling Cold War. Subsequently, only a minimum exchange of ideas, manpower and goods took place across the DMZ under Red Cross supervision. However, with the historic thaw of the Cold War, symbolized by the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, the Koreans have once again begun to believe that reunification is possible. North and South Korea resumed bilateral talks in that year in the hope of achieving a new age of reconciliation and cooperation. A series of high-level [premiers'] talks consequently hosted in Seoul and Pyöngyang resulted in joint declarations for non-aggression and denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. Three months earlier in September 1991, the prospect of reconciliation had appeared promising when the two countries agreed on a joint induction into the United Nations. The death of Kim Il-sung in July 1994, coupled with improved relations between the U.S. and North Korea, makes the reunification of Korea an imminent reality and no longer a source of despondency for the Korean people.

# AFTERWORD

Most summits are long on pomp, short on substance, and soon forgettable. Quick, name all the stops on President Clinton's last trip to Europe that culminated in a ho-hum summit in Moscow. Some summits can be dangerous—for example, President John F. Kennedy's rough encounter with Soviet Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev in Vienna, which led to the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. Yet, a few are truly inspired, as was President Richard M. Nixon's meeting with Mao Tse-tung (Mao Zedong) in 1972.

The 13-15 June summit in P'yŏngyang deserves to be in that rare third category. It appears to have opened the way to a new era of reconciliation between North and South Korea, and gives hope to millions of Koreans that they may be able to see long-lost relatives cut off for a half-century. How did this come about?

The P'yŏngyang summit did not just "happen." It developed as a result of careful planning in South Korea and of a convergence of several factors in North Korea. There are two keys to successful summitry: thorough preparation and realistic expectations. Failures in either preparation or expectation management can lead to anything from chagrin and embarrassment to disaster. Fortunately for South Korea, it has in President Kim Dae-jung an experienced and highly accomplished summiteer. President Kim's summit meeting with President Clinton last year and his recent trip to Europe, where he held substantive summits in Italy, France and Germany, showed how skilled he is when meeting with top-level world leaders. The results of these meetings have helped place South Korea in the strongest diplomatic position it has ever enjoyed. Planning for these meetings was thorough, and in all cases, the results exceeded expectations.

Even before his inauguration, South Korea's President-elect Kim Dae-jung was laying the foundation for a new set of relationships with his neighbors, China, Russia and Japan. He was determined to bring them all "into the game" of reaching out to P'yŏngyang. His inaugural address, in February 1998, focused on creating a new dynamic with North Korea to remove the Cold War structure that had held the Korean Peninsula in its grip for half a century. As president, Kim has never wavered from this goal.

In February of this year, a major conference was held in Seoul to discuss the efficacy of Kim's sunshine policy toward North Korea. Representatives from China, Russia and Japan all expressed strong support for the policy. Russian Ambassador Evgeny Afanasiev put it best, "It should be mentioned with satisfaction that the Republic of Korea has become one of our most significant partners in the Asia Pacific region. . . . In this rare moment of history, the major powers of Northeast Asia are free from open regional rivalry and military confrontation. . . . One should not miss this window of opportunity."

It appears North and South Korea have taken full advantage of this opportunity to reach out to each other, knowing their neighbors supported this process of reconciliation. The P'yŏngyang summit rested on a strong foundation of regional approval; the positive post-summit comments from Beijing, Moscow and Tokyo are clear proof of this.

Within North Korea, at least four factors contributed to Kim Jong-il's decision to host the summit. First was the strength of his leadership position. After almost six years, Kim Jong-il is clearly in charge of North Korea. He felt free to leave his country to visit China, and his actions during the summit exuded confidence. He was ready for any opportunities it offered.

Second, the North Koreans had finally recognized that President Kim Dae-jung is the best available partner for them. They now seem to accept the fact that he is not trying to undermine or swallow the North and is sincere in his expressed desire to improve North-South relations and help the North develop economically.

Third, North Korea received reliable advice from China, which has quite consistently acted as a good neighbor to both Koreas for the past few years. China has urged P'yŏngyang to reestablish a strong dialogue with Seoul. This should be recognized and appreciated in Washington.

Fourth, and most important, North Korea desperately needs economic assistance that only South Korea can provide. Its agricultural sector is a disaster, and massive aid and technical assistance will be

required. China has helped with food aid, but the South will now become the main provider of aid and know-how. For P'yŏngyang, this was the key goal for the summit.

The United States has had an opportunity to act constructively in the wake of the summit by lifting economic sanctions against North Korea. This will make it easier for North Koreans to follow the advice that President Kim gave them about improving relations with Japan and the United States. Ending sanctions will also enable North Korea to export goods to the U.S. and give U.S. businessmen a chance to find economically feasible ways of helping North Korea's development. The more the North Korean economy improves, the less the need for P'yŏngyang to rely on missile sales as a source of foreign exchange.

The accord signed by both Korean leaders was as significant for what it did not contain as for what it included. Positive points included the following: a specific date-15 August-for the beginning of dispersed-family visits; the establishment of talks between government officials to implement points in the accord; and Kim Jong-il's agreement to visit Seoul for a reciprocal summit.

While it has been reported from Seoul that President Kim discussed U.S. concerns and related security issues in his talks with Kim Jong-il, there was no mention in the accord of North Korean missiles, nuclear issues or the stationing of U.S. troops in Korea.

This is all to the good, for it gives the parties maximum flexibility in the future. Security issues will need to be discussed, but they involve the interests of other countries and did not require a prominent place in this first, all-Korean meeting.

Is there a downside to the summit? I do not see one, as long as all concerned are careful not to get carried away by the emotions of the event. That could lead to carelessness regarding the many difficult issues still to be addressed.

The central fact is, the issues that make the Korean Peninsula one of the world's most dangerous flash points are now being discussed by the people who can solve them: the Koreans. The greatest progress toward peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula was made from 1989 to 1992, when the two Koreas had an active dialogue, and a series of high-level visits. The Basic Agreement, signed by the two Koreas on 13 December 1991, is regarded by Kim Dae-jung as "the bible for inter-Korean relations." His key objective has been the full implementation of that agreement.

If the just-concluded summit starts a process of dialogue and reconciliation between Seoul and P'yŏngyang, it will become harder to hang the "rogue state" label on North Korea. This may well discomfit some in Washington, who have been using North Korea's past bad behavior as justification for pursuing the expensive and unproven theater missile defense option. That is another significant benefit that may result from the 13-15 June summit in P'yŏngyang.

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Former U.S. Ambassador to Korea

New York  
July 2000

# **APPENDIX A**

## **Comparative Chronology**



## Korean History

**ca. 500,000 BCE:** Appearance of the Paleo-Asiatic man in the Korean Peninsula

**ca. 3,000 BCE:** Beginning of Neolithic culture

**2,333 BCE:** Legendary founding of the Ancient Chosŏn Kingdom by Tan'gun

**ca. 1000 BCE:** Emergence of bronze technology from the Scytho-Siberian tradition

**ca. 400 BCE:** Advent of Iron Age technology and culture; the rise of the Puyŏ tribal state in northern Manchuria and Chin south of the Han River; Chin later splits into three proto-kingdoms of the Han tribes

**194 BCE:** Take-over of Ancient Chosŏn by Wiman

**108 BCE:** Fall of Wiman Chosŏn and the establishment of the Han (Chinese) Commanderies in northeast Korea

**57 BCE:** Founding of the Silla Kingdom

**37 BCE:** Founding of the Koguryŏ Kingdom

**18 BCE:** Founding of the Paekche Kingdom

**313 CE:** End of the Chinese Commanderies in Korea

**372:** Official adoption of Buddhism and the establishment of a Confucian college in Koguryŏ

**427:** Establishment of the new Koguryŏ capital at P'yŏngyang

**527:** Official adoption of Buddhism in Silla

**551:** Silla's control of the Han River

**562:** Silla's absorption of Tae-Kaya

**612-618:** Military victories of the Koguryŏ army against the Sui (Chinese) invading forces

## World History

**ca. 3,000 BCE:** Rise of Egyptian, Mesopotamian and Indus Valley civilizations

**ca. 1,500 BCE:** Founding of the Shang (or Yin) Empire

**ca. 1,300 BCE:** Birth of Moses

**ca. 1000 BCE:** Aryan peoples migrate to the Ganges Valley

**563 BCE:** Birth of Buddha

**551 BCE:** Birth of Confucius

**469 BCE:** Birth of Socrates

**336-323 BCE:** Alexander the Great's expedition against the East

**ca. 268-232 BCE:** Reign of King Ashoka

**221 BCE:** First Emperor of Qin unites China

**91 (or 87) BCE:** Sima Qian completes writing of the *Records of the Historian (Shiji)*

**27 BCE:** Rome becomes an empire

**ca. 4 BCE:** Birth of Jesus Christ

**68 CE:** Buddhism introduced into China

**313 CE:** Emperor Constantine converts to Christianity

**396:** Roman empire splits into the eastern and western divisions

**552 (or 538):** Buddhism introduced to Japan from Korea

**570:** Birth of Mohammed (d. 632)

**589:** Unification of China by Sui

**604:** Seventeen-article "Constitution" is decreed by Prince Shotoku of Japan

**618:** Founding of the Tang Dynasty in China

## Korean History

- 645-662:** Repulsion of the Tang (Chinese) invading forces by Koguryŏ
- 648:** Formation of the Silla-Tang alliance
- 663:** Destruction of Paekche by the combined forces of Silla and Tang
- 668:** Unification of the Three Kingdoms by Silla following the destruction of Koguryŏ by the combined Silla-Tang forces.
- 676:** Silla's Victory in the Silla-Tang war
- 682:** Establishment of the National Confucian College in Kŭmsŏng (modern Kyŏngju), Silla
- 699:** Founding of the Parhae Kingdom in the former Koguryŏ territory
- 751:** Construction of Pulguksa Temple and Sokkuram Grotto in Kŭmsŏng
- 846:** Chang Po-go's demise
- 895:** Founding of Later Koguryŏ
- 900:** Founding of Later Paekche
- 918:** Founding of the Koryŏ Kingdom by Wang Kŏn
- 935:** Surrender of the last Silla king to Koryŏ
- 936:** Overthrow of the Later Paekche by Wang Kŏn
- 958:** Adoption of the Chinese civil service examination system
- 993, 1018:** Invasions of the Qidans
- 1104:** Invasion of the Nuzhens
- 1135-1136:** The rebellion of Monk Myo-ch'ong
- 1145:** Completion of Kim Pu-sik's *History of the Three Kingdoms (Samguk sag)*
- 1170:** General Chŏng Chung-bu's coup d'état
- 1196:** General Ch'oe Ch'ung-hŏn's coup and the establishment of the Ch'oe house dictatorship
- 1231:** The first Mongol invasion
- 1232:** Flight of the Koryŏ court to Kanghwa Island

## World History

- 712:** *Kojiki (Ancient Matters)* is compiled in Japan
- 751:** Tang suffers a major defeat by the Saracen army at the Battle of Talas River
- 800:** Charlemagne, King of the Franks, becomes the first Holy Roman Emperor
- 907:** Fall of the Tang Dynasty in China
- 960:** Founding of the Song Dynasty in China
- 1096-1099:** The First Crusade
- 1179:** Chu Hsi (Zhu Xi) School of Neo-Confucianism reaches full development
- 1189:** Temujin becomes Khan of the Mongols
- 1192:** Minamoto no Yoritomo is appointed shogun and establishes Kamakura bakufu
- 1215:** King John of England signs the Magna Carta

## Korean History

- 1234:** Invention of metallic movable type
- 1259:** Establishment of peace with the Mongols and acceptance of Mongol domination
- 1270:** Return of the Koryŏ court to Songak (now Kaesong); the rebellion of the Three Elite Patrols (*Sambyŏlch'o*)
- 1274, 1281:** The first and the second Mongol-Korean expeditions to Japan
- 1285:** Completion of Monk Iryŏn's *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms* (*Samguk yusa*)
- 1388:** General Yi Sŏng-gye's coup d'état
- 1392:** Founding of the Chosŏn Dynasty by General Yi Sŏng-gye
- 1394:** Designation of Hanyang (now Seoul) as the capital of the Chosŏn Kingdom
- 1443:** Invention of the Korean alphabet, *han'gŭl*, under the sponsorship of King Sejong
- 1470:** Publication of National Code (*Kyŏngguk taejŏn*)
- 1592-8:** Japanese (Hideyoshi) Invasion of Chosŏn; Admiral Yi Sun-sin's great naval victories
- 1593:** Arrival of Father Gregorio de Cespedes in the train of Japanese army

## World History

- 1260:** Khublai Khan becomes ruler of the Mongols in China
- 1269:** The square or Phags-pa Mongolian script is invented
- 1272:** End of the (seventh) Crusade
- 1275:** Marco Polo visits China
- 1279:** Fall of the Song Dynasty in China
- 1313:** Beginning of the Renaissance in Italy
- 1337-1452:** Beginning of the Hundred Years' War
- 1368:** Founding of the Ming Dynasty in China
- 1405:** Zheng He's first expedition to the Indian Ocean
- 1453:** Fall of the Eastern Roman Empire
- 1492:** Columbus' discovery of America
- 1498:** Vasco de Gama's rounds the Cape of Good Hope
- 1517:** Beginning of the Reformation by Martin Luther
- 1521:** Cortez conquers Mexico (fall of the Aztec empire)
- 1534:** Founding of the Society of Jesus by Ignatius Loyola; founding of the Church of England
- 1542:** Portuguese arrival at Tanegashima, Japan
- 1549:** Francis Xavier arrives in Kyushu, Japan
- 1565:** Spanish occupation in the Philippines
- 1582:** Matteo Ricci arrives in China
- 1588:** England defeats the Spanish Armada
- 1600:** British East India Company founded
- 1603:** Founding of the shogunate in Edo (modern Tokyo)
- 1607:** Colony of Virginia founded in North America

## Korean History

**1614:** Yi Su-gwang's writings on Christianity in his book, *Chibong yusöl*

**1627:** The First Manchu invasion

**1628:** Arrival of 3 Dutchmen in Korea

**1636:** The second Manchu invasion; King Injo's surrender to the Qing [Manchu] Emperor

**1653:** Arrival of 36 survivors of a shipwrecked Dutch vessel at Cheju

**1654, 1658:** Engagement of Korean musketeers in a campaign against the Russians in northern Manchuria

**1784:** Yi Süng-hun's conversion to Catholicism in Beijing, or the official beginning of the Catholic movement

**1812:** The rebellion of Hong Kyöng-nae

**1831:** Arrival of the first French Catholic priest, Father Pierre Philibert Maubant

**1854:** Survey of the Korean coasts by a Russian man-of-war

**1860:** Founding of *tonghak* ("Eastern Learning") by Ch'oe Che-u; Russian occupation of the Maritime Province across the Tumen River

**1864:** Beginning of the Taewö'n'gun's "regency" for King Kojong

**1866:** A large-scale anti-Catholic persecution; the destruction of an American merchant ship, the *General Sherman*; invasion of French naval force at Kanghwa Island

## World History

**1613:** Romanov Dynasty founded in Russia

**1644:** Qing Dynasty gains control of China

**1682:** Peter the Great ascends the throne of Russia

**1688:** The Glorious Revolution in England

**1689:** Treaty of Norchinsk determines border between China and Russia

**1701:** Founding of the Kingdom of Prussia

**1715:** British East India Company establishes rights in Kwangtung (Canton)

**1727:** Treaty of Kiakhta between Russia and China determines Mongolian-Siberian border

**1774:** Beginning of the Industrial Revolution

**1776:** American Declaration of Independence

**1789:** Outbreak of the French Revolution

**1804:** Napoleon becomes Emperor of France

**1806:** Dismemberment of the Holy Roman Empire

**1814:** Congress of Vienna

**1823:** United States of America proclaims Monroe Doctrine

**1830:** July Revolution in France

**1839-1842:** Opium War in China; Treaty of Nanking (1842)

**1845:** Annexation of Texas by the United States

**1846-1848:** Mexican War

**1854:** Conclusion of U.S.-Japanese Treaty of Kanagawa

**1860:** Anglo-French expedition to Beijing

**1861:** Beginning of the Civil War in the U.S.

**1867:** U.S. purchases Alaska from Russia; Karl Marx completes *Das Kapital*

## Korean History

- 1871:** Invasion of Kanghwa Island by American naval squadron
- 1873:** End of the Taewön'gun's regency
- 1876:** 26 February, signing of the Kanghwa Treaty with Japan
- 1880:** Beginning of King Kojong's "enlightenment" or "self-strengthening" policy
- 1881:** Establishment of the Office for the Management of State Affairs; dispatch of the Courtiers' Observation Mission to Japan
- 1882:** 22 May, signing of a treaty with the United States; 23 July, outbreak of the *Imo* Soldiers' Riot
- 1883:** Signing of the Korean-British and the Korean-German Treaties; the publication of the first modern Korean newspaper, *Hangsŏng Sunbo*
- 1884:** Dispatch of the Korean Special Mission to the United States; signing of the Korean-Russian treaty; arrival of the first Protestant missionary, Dr. Horace N. Alien, in Seoul; 4-6 December, the *Kapsin* coup d'état of the Enlightenment Party
- 1885:** 15 April, occupation of Komun Island (Port Hamilton) by the British navy; 18 April, the signing of the Li-Itō Convention of Tianjin between China and Japan; founding of the Paejae [Boys'] School by American missionary Henry G. Appenzeller; appointment of a Chinese resident, Yuan Shikai to Seoul in October
- 1886:** Founding of the Ewha [Girls'] School by American missionary Mary F. Scranton; signing of the Korean-French treaty
- 1888:** Opening of the Korean legation in Washington, D.C. by Minister Pak Chŏng-yang
- 1894:** Outbreak of the Tonghak Peasant Uprising; 23 July, the start of the Sino-Japanese War; the beginning of the *Kabo* Reforms
- 1895:** 17 April, signing of the Treaty of Shimonoseki, ending the Sino-Japanese War; 8 October, assassination of Queen Min
- 1896:** 1 January, adoption of the Gregorian calendar; 11 February, flight of King Kojong to the Russian legation; July, the establishment of the Independence Club by Dr. Philip Jaisohn (Sŏ Chae-p'il)
- 1897:** 20 February, return of King Kojong from the Russian legation; 12 October, the renaming of the Chosŏn Kingdom to the "Empire of Great Man" and the adoption of imperial title by Kojong
- 1898:** 26 December, dissolution of the Independence Club

## World History

- 1868:** Meiji Restoration in Japan
- 1869:** Opening of Suez Canal; completion of railroad across North America
- 1871:** Formation of the German Empire; unification of Italy
- 1884-1885:** Sino-French War
- 1885:** Signing of the Li-Itō Convention
- 1887:** Establishment of French Indo-China
- 1894-1895:** The first Sino-Japanese War and the Treaty of Shimonoseki
- 1898:** Spanish-American War; Hundred Days' Reform in China

## Korean History

**1904:** 8 February, outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War; 29 July, the Taft-Katsura Agreement; 5 September, signing of the Portsmouth Treaty, conclusion of the 1905 Russo-Japanese War; 17 November, the signing of the Japanese-Korean "Protectorate Treaty"

**1906:** 1 February, the opening of the Japanese Residency-General in Seoul and the arrival of Itō Hirobumi as the first Resident-General

**1907:** Arrival of Emperor Kojong's envoys at the Hague; 20 July, abdication of Emperor Kojong in favor of Emperor Sunjong; 31 July, disbandment of the Korean army and the intensification of anti-Japanese guerrilla warfare by the "righteous armies"

**1909:** 26 October, assassination of Ito Hirobumi by An Chung-gūn

**1910:** 22 August, the signing of the Treaty of Annexation, resulting in the demise of the Chosŏn Dynasty and Korean independence

**1912-1913:** Trial of the "Conspiracy Case" of 105 Korean Christian leaders

**1918:** Completion of the land survey by the Japanese colonial government

**1919:** 1 March, beginning of the March First Movement; 11 April, establishment of the Korean Provisional Government (KPG) in Shanghai, China; 6 September, inauguration of Dr. Syngman Rhee as its "provisional president"

**1920:** Publication of two vernacular newspapers, *Chosŏn Ilbo* and the *Tong-a Ilbo*, in Seoul

**1924:** 2 May, opening of the Keijō [Seoul] Imperial University

**1925:** 18 April, founding of the Korean Communist Party in Seoul

**1926:** 10 June, students' independence demonstrations in Seoul

**1927:** 15 February, founding of the New Korea Society (Sin'ganhoe)

**1929:** 3 November, eruption of the Kwangju student movement

**1932:** 29 April, the bomb incident of Yun Pong-gil at Hungk'ou Park in Shanghai

**1935:** September, forced attendance at Shinto shrines

## World History

**1899-1902:** Boer War in South Africa

**1900:** Boxer Uprising in China

**1902:** First Anglo-Japanese Alliance

**1904-1905:** Russo-Japanese War and the Treaty of Portsmouth

**1908:** Revolution of the Young Turks Party

**1911:** Republican Revolution in China; U.S. enters World War I

**1919:** Beginning of the Paris Peace Conference (Treaty of Versailles); formation of the Comintern in Moscow; May Fourth Movement in China

**1920:** Formation of the League of Nations

**1921-1922:** Washington Disarmament Conference; founding of the Chinese Communist Party (1921)

**1922:** Formation of the Fascist government under Mussolini in Italy

**1928:** Chiang Kai-shek's (Jiang Jieshi's) Northern Expedition

**1929:** Stock market crashes on Wall Street, New York

**1931:** Manchurian Incident and Japanese conquest of Manchuria

**1934:** Hitler becomes the head of the German state; beginning of Chinese Communist Army's Long March

## **Korean History**

- 1937:** 4 June, the Poch'ŏnbo raid by Kim Il-sung and his guerrillas
- 1940:** 11 February, promulgation of the ordinance concerning the adoption of Japanese-style names; closure of the Korean vernacular newspapers; 17 September, founding of the Korean Restoration Army in Chungking, China
- 1941:** 9 December, declaration of war by the KPG against Japan and Germany; organization of the Korean Independence League at Yen-an, China by Kim Tu-bong
- 1942:** Drafting of Korean youths into the Japanese Imperial Army
- 1943:** 1 December, the Cairo Declaration by the Allied leaders, promising Korean independence "in due course"
- 1944:** 23 August, promulgation of the ordinance on the "comfort [women] corps"
- 1945:** 8 August, declaration of war by the Soviet Union against Japan; 10-11 August, the U.S. decision to divide Korea into two military zones along the 38th parallel; 15 August, Japanese surrender to the Allies and liberation of Korea; establishment of the Committee for Preparation for Korean Independence (CPKI) in Seoul; 6 September, formation of the People's Republic of Korea; 11 September, inauguration of the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK); 17 December, Kim Il-sung becomes the chairman of the North Korean Branch of the Korean Communist Party; 27 December, the Moscow Agreement
- 1946:** 3 January, nation-wide anti-trusteeship strikes and demonstrations; 8 February, nomination of Kim Il-sung as the chairman of the North Korean Provisional People's Committee; 14 February, establishment of the Representative Democratic Council in Seoul; meeting of the first U.S.-USSR Joint Commission (again, May-October 1947); 1 October, the Taegu insurrection
- 1947:** 3 June, establishment of the South Korean Interim Government; 14 November, adoption of the resolution on Korea by the UN General Assembly
- 1948:** 3 April, uprising on Cheju Island; 19 April, visit of Kim Ku and Kim Kyu-sik to P'yŏngyang for a conference with Kim Il-sung and Kim Tu-bong; 10 May, general election in South Korea under the supervision of the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK); 7 July, adoption of the constitution by the National Assembly; 20 July, election of Dr. Syngman Rhee as the president of the Republic of Korea (ROK); 15 August, inauguration of the ROK and its government; 9 September, inauguration of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in North Korea with Kim Il-sung as its premier; October, the Yosŭ-Sunch'ŏn Mutiny; 9 December, UN recognition of the ROK; December, completion of the Soviet troops withdrawal from North Korea
- 1949:** 29 June, completion of U.S. withdrawal of troops from South Korea

## **World History**

- 1939:** German Army invades Poland; beginning of World War II
- 1941:** Atlantic Charter; attack on Pearl Harbor by Japan, beginning of the Pacific War
- 1945:** Yalta Conference; Potsdam Conference; creation of the United Nations; end of World War II
- 1946:** The Philippines gains independence
- 1947-1956:** Formation of Cominform
- 1949:** People's Republic of China (PRC) proclaimed

## **Korean History**

**1950:** 25 June, North Korean invasion of South Korea, i.e., beginning of the Korean War; 7 July, formation of UN forces under General Douglas MacArthur; 15 September, amphibious landing of UN troops at Inch'on; 1 October, crossing of the 38th parallel by South Korean forces; 25 October, entry of Chinese "volunteers" into Korea

**1951:** 11 February, the Kōch'ang incident; 11 April, dismissal of General MacArthur by President Truman

**1952:** 18 January, the declaration of the Rhee (Peace) Line

**1953:** 14 June, release (by President Rhee) of 27,000 anti-Communist North Korean and Chinese prisoners-of-war; 27 July, the cease-fire agreement between the UN forces and the communists at P'anmunjōm, bringing an end to the Korean War; 1 October, the conclusion of the Korea-U.S. Mutual Defense Treaty

**1955:** 28 December, Kim Il-sung's speech on the Juche ideology

**1960:** 19 April, the student uprising in Seoul; 27 April, resignation of President Rhee and his cabinet; 23 August, the inauguration of the Second Republic of Premier Chang Myōn

**1961:** 16 May, General Park Chung-hee's military coup d'état; organization of the Supreme Council for National Reconstruction; establishment of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA)

**1963:** 17 December, inauguration of the Third Republic with Park Chung-hee as President

**1965:** 22 June, signing of the South Korean-Japanese Normalization Treaty; October, dispatch of South Korean troops to Vietnam

**1968:** 21 January, attempted assassination of President Park by North Korean commandos

**1972:** 4 July, the statement concerning the opening of North-South political dialogue in Seoul and P'yōngyang; 30 August, first North-South Red Cross talks; 21 November, a national referendum on the Yusin (Revitalization) Constitution in South Korea; December, North Korea's adoption of the Socialist Constitution and the election of Kim Il-sung as premier; 15 December, establishment of the National Conference for Unification (NCU) in South Korea; 23 December, re-election of President Park by the NCU; 27 December, the inauguration of the Fourth Republic

**1973:** 8 August, abduction of Kim Dae-jung by the KCIA from Tokyo; suspension of all North-South talks

**1978:** 7 July, re-election of President Park for the fourth term of office by NCU

**1979:** October, student demonstrations in Pusan and Masan; 26 October, assassination of President Park by the head of the KCIA; 6 December, election of Ch'oe Kyu-ha as president by NCU; 12 December, General Chun Doo-hwan's coup

## **World History**

**1951:** San Francisco Peace Conference

**1954:** Geneva Conference

**1958:** First successful launching of U.S. satellite

**1964:** China conducts a successful nuclear test

**1965:** U.S. bombing of north Vietnam

**1975:** Vietnam War ends

**1979:** Establishment of full diplomatic relations between China and U.S.



## **Korean History**

**1980:** May 18, eruption of the Kwangju Democratization Movement; August 27, election of General Chun Doo-hwan as president by NCU; Kim Il-sung appoints his son Kim Jong-il to three powerful party positions

**1981:** Election of Chun Doo-hwan as the President of the Fifth Republic

**1983:** 1 September, the downing of Korean Airline Flight 007 by Soviet missiles; 9 October, a North Korean-engineered bomb blast at Rangoon, Myanmar, killing seventeen South Korean cabinet members and senior officials accompanying President Chun Doo-Hwan on an official state visit

**1986:** September 20, the 10th Asian Games

**1987:** June 29, political liberalization measures in South Korea following President Chun's acceptance of the "Democratization Manifesto" presented to him by Roh Tae-woo, the chairman of the ruling Democratic Justice Party; 16 December, election of Roh Tae-woo as president

**1988:** 25 February, inauguration of the Sixth Republic under President Roh Tae-woo; September-October, the 24th Olympic Games held in Seoul

**1989:** The ROK's establishment of diplomatic relations with Hungary, Poland and Yugoslavia

**1990:** 5 June, summit meeting between President Roh and General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev in San Francisco; 4 September, high-level meeting between North and South Korea; 30 September, establishment of diplomatic relations between South Korea and USSR

**1991:** 17 September, simultaneous membership of North Korea and South Korea into the United Nations; 13 December, signing of a reconciliation and non-aggression pact between North and South Korea

**1992:** 24 August, establishment of diplomatic relations between the ROK and the People's Republic of China (PRC); 18 December, election of Kim Young-sam as president

**1993:** 25 February, inauguration of President Kim Young-sam's presidency and restoration of civilian government in South Korea

**1994:** March, North Korean ambition for nuclear weapons capability revealed; 8 July, death of President Kim Il-sung

**1996:** 14 June, North Koreans and Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) sign a transportation and communication protocol for the implementation of the light-water reactor project

**1997:** 1 December, ROK applies for a \$570 million loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to overcome the economic crisis; 18 December, Kim Dae-jung is elected president of the ROK

## **World History**

**1983:** Deng Xiaoping elected chief of the Military Affairs Commission

**1987:** Soviet Union begins *perestroika* reforms

**1989:** Fall of the Berlin Wall

**1990:** Reunification of Germany

# APPENDIX B

## Suggested Readings

- Chung, Henry. *Korea and the United States Through War and Peace, 1943-1960*. Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 2000.
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- Grayson, James Huntley. *Korea: A Religious History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Gurtov, Mel, et al. *Korea's Amazing Century: From Kings to Satellites*. Edited by Ray E. Weisenborn. Seoul, Korea: Korea Fulbright Foundation and Korea-American Educational Commission, 1996.
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- Lee, Ki-baek. *A New History of Korea*. Translated by Edward W. Wagner with Edward J. Shultz. Seoul: Ilchohak Publishers and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984.
- Macdonald, Donald Stone. *The Koreans: Contemporary Politics and Society*. London: Westview Press, 1990.
- Nahm, Andrew C. *Korea: Tradition & Transformation-A History of the Korean People*. Elizabeth, New Jersey: Hollym International Corporation, 1988.
- Oberdorfer, Don. *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History*. New York: Basic Books, 1999.
- Oliver, Robert T. *A History of the Korean People in Modern Times, 1880 to the Present*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1993.
- Rees, David. *A Short History of Modern Korea*. New York: Hippocrene Books, 1988.

## YOUNG ICK LEW

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