HISTORY AND CULTURE OF KOREA
Korea is a peninsula located between China and Japan. Some consider the Korean language as one a “language isolate”, a natural language with no demonstrable genealogical relationship with other languages; others note possible links to Altaic, or Japanese.
Modern Korea

- One of the world’s fastest growing economies
- Korean GDP ranked No. 12 in the world
- World’s 8th largest exporter

South Korea is a developed country and has had one of the world's fastest growing economies from the early 1960s. Korean GDP ranked No. 12 in the world. As of 2009, South Korea is the world's eighth largest exporter. Well known Korean brands include Samsung, Hyundai, LG, and Kia motors.
Korean Wave (Hallyu): Korean Cultural Export since early 1990s

- Korean movies, TV dramas, and pop-music are very popular around the world; rapidly spreading beyond Asian countries
- Korea is among the world’s top ten cultural exporters

Click the pictures to watch music videos and excerpts from TV dramas.

The Korean Wave (Hallyu, 한류, 韓流) refers to the increased popularity of South Korean culture around the world since 1990s. The term was coined in China in mid-1999 by Beijing journalists surprised by the fast growing popularity of South Koreans and South Korean goods in China. South Korea is among the world’s top ten cultural exporters and the Korean wave began with the export of Korean TV dramas such as “Autumn Fairy Tale”, “Winter Sonata”, “Dae Jang Geum” (Jewel in the Palace), and “Princess Hours” across East and Southeast Asia. The growing success of Korean dramas was soon matched by Korean movies, popular music, food and language. While popular throughout Asia, the Korean Wave’s influence is most visible in China, Japan and Southeast Asia, spreading to the Middle East and Russia.

The Korean Wave is rapidly expanding beyond Asia through the internet and has a substantial presence in North, Central and South America, and is increasingly becoming popular in the United States and Canada. It is gathering positive interest in North Africa. Currently, the Korean wave is starting to hit Europe (including United Kingdom, France, Spain, Germany), New Zealand, and Australia.
The history of Korea dates back almost 5,000 years. The country started modernization and economic development in the late nineteenth century, a process blocked by Japanese colonial annexation in 1910. Rapid economic and industrial development began again in the 1960s.
According to Korean mythology King Dan-gun was the founding father of Go-Joseon; his father was the son of a deity and his mother, a woman transformed from a bear. The Story of Dan-gun from the 13th century Remnants of the Three Kingdoms explains that a tiger and a bear prayed to be transformed into humans. The deity instructed them to eat only garlic while avoiding sunlight by staying in a cave for 40 days. Tiger could not stand it and left the cave before 40 days. The bear stayed in the cave for 40 days and became a woman, Woong-nyeo (in Korean it means bear woman) and married Hwan-woong, son of the deity. Woong-nyeo may have been a princess of a tribe worshiping bear, Hwan-woong, perhaps a prince of a strong tribe.
Go-Joseon was divided into three kingdoms, Goguryeo, Baekje, and Shilla. Shilla unified the peninsula by forming an alliance with Chinese Tang dynasty and attacking Goguryeo simultaneously. Descendants of Goguryeo established Balhae in the northern territory. Unified Shilla prospered with splendid artistic and cultural achievements for nearly 300 years. Gyeongju historic area, capital of the Shilla kingdom (57 BC – 935 AD), is a superb showcase of the kingdom’s achievements in arts, science, architecture, and landscape design. The area was designated as UNESCO’s World Cultural Heritage in 2000. Buddhism was introduced to Korea during the 4th century and later became a state religion from late three kingdoms to Goryeo dynasty. Most of the national treasures of South Korea are Buddhist artifacts.
Lee Sung-gye overthrew Goryeo dynasty and established Joseon. He expanded territory to Yalu river. Current boundary between China and North Korea, Yalu river and Doo-man river, was established at this time. The fourth king, Sejong (1418-1450) brought many innovations to government, most famously Hangul, the Korean phonetic alphabet.
Japanese Rule

- Japan annexed Korea by force in 1910.
- Japan in 1938 outlawed use of Korean language in an attempt to eradicate Korean national identity.
- Deep lament and resentment toward invaders prevailed in Korean literature and music, along with attempts to grapple with new, modern forms.

<table>
<thead>
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Japan modernized its army in late 19th century and built a strong military power. In early 20th century Japan invaded Korea and northern China. In its effort to eradicate Korean culture and identity, Japan in 1938 banned the use of the Korean language in schools, forced Koreans to abandon Korean names and change them to Japanese names. While many made such changes, however reluctantly, others, like the poet, Buddhist monk and resistance leader Han Yong-un (1879-1945). Korean resistance movement groups fought the Japanese in Korea and northern China. Koreans in Shanghai, the US and elsewhere in exile sought to gain support to free Korea from Japanese rule, but in vain.
Surrender of Japan to the Allied Forces in August 1945 ended the Japanese occupation of Korea. Korean peninsula was divided at 38th parallel by Allied Forces (US, USSR and UK). Two competing provisional governments were formed: Republic of Korea (ROK, South Korea, also known as, Korea) in the south, backed by US, while the Democratic Peoples Republic Korea (DPRK, also known as North Korea) was established in the north under the supervision of the USSR with support also from communist China.
Korean War

- North Korea invaded south by launching surprise attack on 6/25/50.
- United Nations forces led by US defended South.
- Many Korcans lost or separated from family members in both south and north.

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<td>Established Republic of Korea in South</td>
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<td>1950-1953</td>
<td>Korean war</td>
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<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>Military coup</td>
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<td>1988</td>
<td>Seoul Olympics</td>
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Armistice agreement was signed by UN, North Korea, and China in 1953 dividing Korea North and South at the 38th parallel. This was one of the bloodiest wars in human history. Total estimated military casualties were about 1.5 million (including 37,000 US soldiers); civilian casualties were about 2.5 million. Korean literature and music at this time reflect feelings of deep sorrow and hopelessness.
Korea (South Korea) is a developed country and it has one of the world's fastest growing economies from the early 1960s to the late 1990s. Korean GDP ranked No. 12 in the world. Koreans call this rapid transformation the “Miracle on the Han River.” The growth surge was achieved by concentrating on labor-intensive manufactured exports. As of 2009, South Korea is the world's eighth largest exporter.
Hangul is the only alphabet in the whole world invented by one person. It is a purely phonetic alphabet with 10 vowels and 14 constants. Koreans used Chinese characters before the invention of Korean alphabet. The majority of Koreans were effectively illiterate before the invention of Hangul.

In explaining the need for the new script, King Sejong explained that the Korean language was different from Chinese; using Chinese characters to write was so difficult for the common people that only privileged aristocrats, usually male, could read and write. Hangul was designed so that even a commoner could learn to read and write.

"Hunmin Jeong-eum Explanation and Examples“ explains the design of the consonant letters according to “articulatory phonetics” and the vowel letters according to the principles of “yin and yang” and “vowel harmony”.

From http://library.thinkquest.org/20746/non/info/index.html
Hangul (Korean Alphabet)

- Purely phonetic alphabet
- 14 consonants
  - 가, 금, 누, 디
- 10 vowels
  - 아, 야, 여, 오, 우, 유, 음, 이
- Hangul is a scientific system, invented following the shapes of vocal organs as they make sounds.

From http://library.thinkquest.org/20746/non/info/index.html

Hangul writing system reflects the characteristic of the sounds... each letter of Hangul was made with the shapes of the vocal organs in mind.

From http://library.thinkquest.org/20746/non/info/index.html
Most paintings’ background is left blank, allowing space for the viewer’s imagination. Signature of painter and seal in red ink are part of the painting. Often painters use multiple seals and seal engraving is an art itself. Calligraphy is an important part of the Korean painting.
Elegant jade-green celadon became a signature pottery of Goryeo dynasty perfecting the technique in mid 12th century. The inlaying technique of incising patterns on the surface of the vessel was an unique invention of Goryeo craftsman. In the entire world at the time, only China and Korea possessed the technology necessary to produce the celadon ceramic ware.
Korean Dance and Music

- Court dance and music

- Folk dance and music

Click the title “Korean Dance and Music” to watch collage of Korean Dance.

Please click the pictures to watch video clips of Korean dance performances.

Court dancers often accompanied by an ensemble of Korean instruments. Some are slow and elegant (upper left), while others may start slow but tempo accelerates toward ending. Upper right is Korean fan dance.

Folk dance and music are frequently played by farmers, after harvest or at the field to cheer up the farmers at work. Percussion instruments are important parts of folk music. Farmers dance (bottom left) shows performers wearing hats with long tapes spinning. The performers spin the tapes by rotating their heads while playing small hand-drums and gongs. Gang-gang-suwal-rae (bottom right) was performed by young women under the bright full-moon festival at the first harvest known as Chu-seok (equivalent to Thanksgiving day in US). Click this picture and watch “Three-drum dance”.

Sejong Cultural Society
(www.SejongCulturalSociety.org)
Click Upper left Queen’s picture and watch a clip of Korean TV drama. Watch a variety of Korean dress worn by different class of people.
Click upper right “Woman’s picture and watch Korean dress fashion show at the 2009 Miss Korea pageant.
Frequently commoners wore white color, while the nobles and royalties wore colorful silk. Ancient Chinese called Koreans as “people who love to wear white clothes”.
Upper right: elegant Korean dress for upper class woman
Bottom right: young boy of upper class
Bottom middle: commoner man wearing horse tail hat speaking to noble woman in her study
Bottom left: wedding couple at wedding ceremony.
Upper left: dress of the Queen
More side dishes were served for more affluent people, while less were served for poor people.
Kimchi is fermented vegetables. Typical kimchi is made of Korean cabbage with hot pepper. Numerous variations of kimchi exist such as kimchi made with cucumber, radish, turnip, or green onions. Some kimchi is prepared without hot-pepper.
Pictures on left shows many side dishes; picture on right is Bi-bim-bap, rice with several vegetable and beef toppings served with hot-pepper paste and sesame oil.
Korea is one of few countries where Buddhism and Christianity coexist with almost equal strength.

Worldwide distribution of religion: Christianity (catholics + protestants + others) 33%, Buddhism 6%, Islam 21%, Hinduism 14%, no religion 16% (in 2005 from www.adherents.com)
Three elements are seen as essential to a “goot” (Korean shamanistic ritual): the spirits as the object of folk beliefs, the believers praying to those spirits, and the shaman mediating between the spirits and the believers.
Buddhism is a philosophy and religion, brought to Korea almost 1800 years ago. The principles of Buddhist teaching are deeply rooted in the way of life among Koreans regardless of their religion. Many national treasures in art and architecture are Buddhism related, such as, Buddhist temple buildings or statues of Buddha.
Korean Confucianism

- Joseon dynasty promoted Confucian philosophies as national philosophy
- Complex system, selectively imported from China, of moral, social, political, philosophical, and quasi-religious thought.
- Became an indispensable component of the Korean moral system, way of life, and laws

Joseon dynasty adopted Confucianism as its ruling ideology. Important Korean Confucian ceremonies are “coming of age at age 15 years”, marriage, death, and the anniversary of an ancestor’s death. Among these, funerals had the greatest effect on people’s lives. The funeral was a way of expressing one’s innermost feelings, and its conduct and atmosphere depended on the degree of intimacy or formality in the relationship between the living and the deceased. The Joseon promoted a revised form of Confucianism, called Neo-Confucianism, that had also been developed in China. In the 18th and 19th centuries, scholars developed and promoted the emergence of Silhak, or Practical Learning, which some see as an early step toward modern social and scientific practices.
Korean Christianity

- Catholicism was imported into Korea by a Korean scholar, Yi Seung-hun, who was baptized while visiting China.
  - Thousands of Catholics were executed during government persecution in the late Joseon dynasty.
  - 103 martyrs were canonized in 1984.
- Protestant missionaries came to Korea during Japanese rule in the early 20th century.
  - Dedicated to higher education and health care
- Catholics and Protestant Christians are more populous in urban areas and often have higher education levels.

Korea is the only country where Catholicism was brought in by a native missionary, Kim Dae-Gun, who went to a seminary in Macao. Rev. Kim returned to Korea as an ordained priest and was executed during persecution along with thousands of other fellow Catholics. The monument for martyrs is at the site of execution, Jul-Doo-San (meaning “mountain of beheading”).

Protestant evangelists came to Korean during the Japanese colonial occupation. They operated high schools, colleges, and hospitals and gained strong influence among better educated young people.

Currently, Korean missionaries, the world’s second largest group after Americans, are working in more than 150 countries.
Recognized as a breakthrough in military technology, Geobukseon replicas are on exhibit in a number of national museums, including the War Memorial of Korea, the War Memorial Museum in the U.S., the National Maritime Museum in England and historical museums in China, Germany and other countries.
Six historic sites in Korea have been accepted in the UNESCO’s World Cultural Heritage listing.

To be included on the World Heritage List, sites must possess outstanding universal value and meet at least one out of ten selection criteria.

**Selection criteria:**
1. to represent a masterpiece of human creative genius;
2. to exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design;
3. to bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or a civilization which is living or which has disappeared;
4. to be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history;
5. to be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change;
6. to be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance. (The Committee considers that this criterion should preferably be used in conjunction with other criteria);
7. to contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance;
8. to be outstanding examples representing major stages of earth’s history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features;
9. to be outstanding examples representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals;
10. to contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation.

The protection, management, authenticity and integrity of properties are also important considerations.
UNESCO’s Memory of the World:
Movable Metal Type for Printing

- Invented in 13th century (before 1232) during Goryeo dynasty
- The world oldest extant movable metal print book is the Jikji (Korean Buddhist document), printed in Korea in 1377.
- 78 years prior to Gutenberg’s metal type printing

_Baegun hwasang chorok buljo jikji simche yojeol_ (Jikji) contains the essentials of Zen Buddhism compiled by priest Baegun in late Goryeo period. The book was printed in two volumes. The first volume is still missing and the second volume is kept in the Bibliothèque Nationale of France.

UNESCO’s Memory of the World: Printing Woodblocks of the Tripitaka Koreana

- Woodblocks for printing Tripitaka (Buddhist scriptures)
- 81,258 pieces of woodblocks
- Took 16 years to complete the project (1236-1251)
- Woodblocks were treated by a special process for long-term preservation

The Temple of Haeinsa, on Mount Kaya, is home to the Tripitaka Koreana, the most complete collection of Buddhist texts, engraved on 80,000 woodblocks between 1237 and 1248. The buildings of Janggyeong Pangeon, which date from the 15th century, were constructed to house the woodblocks, which are also revered as exceptional works of art. As the oldest depository of the Tripitaka, they reveal an astonishing mastery of the invention and implementation of the conservation techniques used to preserve these woodblocks. This project was an expression of pious devotion of king and its people to Buddha.

-Left: woodblock
-Center: aerial view of Hae-in-sa Temple
-Right: inside of depositories

UNESCO World Heritage (http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/737)
UNESCO’s Memory of the World: Bulguksa and Seok-gu-ram

- **Bulguksa**,  
  - Constructed in 751 AD during Shilla kingdom  
  - Main temple, gates, stone pagodas, bridges are all architectural masterpieces

- **Seokguram Grotto**  
  - Granite sanctuary for stone Buddha  
  - Wearing a serene smile of benevolence

Established in the 8th century on the slopes of Mount T’oham, the Seokguram Grotto contains a monumental statue of the Buddha looking at the sea in the *bhumisparsha mudra* position. With the surrounding portrayals of gods, Bodhisattvas and disciples, all realistically and delicately sculpted in high and low relief, it is considered a masterpiece of Buddhist art in the Far East. The Temple of Bulguksa (built in 774) and the Seokguram Grotto form a religious architectural complex of exceptional significance.  
UNESCO’s Memory of the World

- Hunmin-jeongum Manuscript: *Korean Alphabet*
- Joseon Wangjo Sillok: The Annals of the Joseon Dynasty
- Uigwe: *The Royal Protocols of the Joseon Dynasty*
- Donguibogam: *Principles and Practice of Eastern Medicine*
- Printing Woodblocks of the Tripitaka Koreana and Miscellaneous Buddhist Scriptures: World oldest printing woodblocks
- Seugjeongwon Ilgi: *The Diaries of the Royal Secretariat*

Seven treasurers from Republic of Korea have been registered in UNESCO’s Memory of the World registry program is aiming at preservation and dissemination of valuable archive holdings and library collections worldwide.