

4 The Korean Peninsula

South Korea (Republic of Korea) and North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea)

Introduction

For the last 80 years, the Korean Peninsula has been at the front lines of international conflict, starting with the Japanese expansion into the area and extending through to the present. The actions of North Korea, one of the world's most isolated and rogue states, raise grave concerns in South Korea and Japan and create additional pressure on China's role in East Asia.

The Korean Peninsula extends southward from continental Asia 1,100 km (680 miles) into the Pacific Ocean. The north borders China, with a small portion in the northeast bordering Russia. The East Sea (Sea of Japan) is to the east, the Yellow Sea to the west. The whole peninsula is very mountainous with the highest mountains in the north. There are small arable plains between the mountain ranges. For centuries, the peninsula was one political entity, ending only with the intrusion of global geopolitics at the end of World War II.

Early Korean history

At least 30,000 years ago, the first inhabitants arrived on the Korean Peninsula. While the first Korean pottery dates from about 8,000 years ago, Chinese records date the founding of Korea as a political unit at 1122 B.C. See Textbox 4.1 for a breakdown of the different periods in Korean history. The first era about which historians are confident in their knowledge is the Three Kingdoms period (37 B.C.–A.D. 668). These kingdoms consisted of Goguryeo in the north, Baekje in the southwest and Silla in the southeast. An additional fourth state, the Kaya, lay at the southern end of the peninsula. Developed from local tribes that eventually settled in communities, the kingdoms had evolved into political entities by the 2nd or 3rd century. They had similar but unique languages, with culture and shamanistic religion in common, but relations among them were tenuous, alternating between alliances and periods of conflict. Although they fought with China and Japan, mutually beneficial arrangements emerged with time. Over the years, trade and cultural exchange between the states and China, in particular, grew: the Koreans traded iron, gold and horses for silk and tea from China. They adopted the Chinese writing system, Confucianism and later Daoism and Buddhism. Of the four states, Kaya had the strongest relations with Japan.

Textbox 4.1 Different periods in Korean history

- Neolithic and Bronze Age (7000–1st century B.C.)
- Three Kingdoms period (57 B.C.–A.D. 668)
- Unified Silla (668–936)
- Goryeo dynasty (918–1392)
- Under the Mongol-ruled Yuan dynasty in China (1270–1356)
- Joseon dynasty (1392–1910)

Each state was ruled by a monarch with administrators from the local aristocracy. The primarily peasant population was obliged to pay taxes to the state, to fight in the army or to work on government public works' projects when required. Slaves and criminals were at the bottom of society.

The kingdoms coexisted with one another until A.D. 668, when the Silla kingdom, with help from China, conquered Goguryeo (after having conquered Kaya in 562 and Baekje in 660) and unified the Korean Peninsula. Silla promised not to join in an alliance with China's enemies if, in return, Korea would be allowed to rule itself. The Unified Silla period was a time of great prosperity and cultural development. Gyeongju, the capital, had a population of over 1 million people, making it the fourth largest city in the world at that time. Buddhism (see Chapter 8) became the major religion; Korean monks travelled to China to study, and many great Buddhist temples were built. Confucianism (see Chapter 8) also increased in importance. As in China, the study of Confucian texts became a big part of the education of government civil servants. Art and music flourished during the Silla period. Ancient records indicate that Silla artists were skilled in painting, calligraphy and architecture. Silla items created out of stone and metal, including Buddhist religious art, stone pagodas and temple bells, are still extant. Silla's apex of prosperity was the middle of the 8th century after which it steadily declined, weakened by political instability and corruption. Goryeo (established by a leader of Goguryeo descent) annexed Silla peacefully in 935 and conquered Baekje in 936, ushering in a period of unity again.

The Goryeo period lasted for four centuries. Buddhism was the main religion and helped define society. Major festivals had Buddhist origins and Buddhist temples were built throughout the peninsula. "Buddhism was the dominant religion among the officials, many of whom, including members of the royal clan, became monks. There thus grew up a monkish aristocracy parallel to that which dominated secular life. Since Buddhism was felt to be not only the refuge and salvation of the individual but also the protector of the state, the leaders of the monks became men of great influence and power. All this, plus the monks' immunity from taxation and military duty, made a religious career attractive not only to the pious but also to the ambitious" (Han, 1970, 146). In the 13th century, the *Tripitaka Koreana*, the complete Buddhist canon (a collection of over 6,500 sacred texts), was carved on to wood blocks. The carving took 60 years to finish and stimulated the development of the art of printing. Confucianism also permeated Korean society, influencing government and education. C'oe Chung (984–1068), sometimes referred to as the Korean Confucius, created a private school that trained students to pass the intense civil service exams required to secure a position in government. The success of his school led other scholars to follow his example and establish their own schools whose graduates were more successful than the graduates of the

government schools. In response, the government schools reorganized their curriculums and built schools throughout the country. During the late 11th and early 12th centuries, the government schools produced many scholars and government civil servants.

In the latter part of the 12th century, the Goryeo government was controlled by a series of strong warrior families in an organized military dictatorship similar to the Japanese shogunate. Between 1231 and 1270, the militaristic and expansive Mongols invaded the Korean Peninsula seven times, destroying many temples and works of art. In 1232, the Mongols burned the *Tripitaka Koreana*, a devastating loss. The Goryeo dynasty decided to have the *Tripitaka* recarved. But the task was time-consuming and onerous, prompting the dynasty to invent another way of copying: moveable metal type. In 1250, the 50-volume Buddhist text was printed using moveable type, 200 years before the printing of Gutenberg's Bible in Europe. The Koreans were unable to repel the Mongol invasion in 1270, and the Goryeo fell under the Mongol-ruled Yuan dynasty of China until it ended in 1356.

General Yi Seong-gye seized power in 1392, beginning the Joseon dynasty, one of the world's longest and most dominant governments. (Joseon has been loosely translated as "morning calm"—the literal translation is closer to morning brightness or morning freshness—from which Korea was given the epithet "Land of the Morning Calm.") The Imperial Family of Korea, the ruling family of the Joseon dynasty, was founded by King Taejo (Yi Seong-gye's name once crowned), and his descendants ruled Korea until 1910. Twenty-seven monarchs ruled over the Korean Peninsula for the more than 500 years of the Joseon dynasty. There are 40 Joseon royal tombs at 18 locations in South Korea. They were recognized as a UNESCO world heritage site in 2009.

King Taejo made Hanyang, present day Seoul, the capital city, and over the following 250 years, Chinese Confucian ideals became "Koreanized" and entrenched in Korean society. Buddhism, in contrast, was blamed as the source of corruption, and an intensely anti-Buddhist intellectual climate gradually developed. Confucian principles became the centre piece of the Joseon administrative code. Life's celebrations and rituals (e.g. weddings, funerals, coming-of-age ceremonies) were now conducted according to Confucians principles. On the cultural and intellectual front, the first century of the Joseon dynasty was a particularly exciting time as Korean artists excelled in painting, calligraphy, ceramics, poetry and other arts.

A Korean social hierarchy emerged with distinct and hereditary social classes: the *yangban* class (scholars, military officers and civil servants); professionals (doctors, lawyers, middle-ranked military); artisans, fishermen, merchants; and "unclean" professions like butchers, shoemakers, entertainers, prostitutes, and jail-keepers. The nobi, the lowest rank, were the slave class, including slaves, serfs and indentured servants. Society was highly structured with clear rules of conduct around duty and seniority. Class was hereditary and "any attempt to change one's social status was not only a crime against society but also a sin against heaven" (Han, 1970, 246).

The yangban class focussed their time on education and book-learning. Only the yangban were allowed to take the civil service exam, which would allow them to work in government. Education was therefore the key to political power. The government put a large bureaucracy in place, constructed palaces and government offices, carried out land surveys, promulgated laws, issued currency and constructed a maritime grain transportation system.

The fourth and most famous of the Yi kings was King Sejong, who ruled from 1418 to 1450 (see Figure 4.1). A progressive ruler, he promoted people outside the highest class to positions in the civil service and invested heavily in science. During King Sejong's reign, significant technological advancements like the sundial and the lunar calendar were made as were improvements in fields as diverse as firearms, musical instruments and astronomical instruments.

The king also paid particular attention to agriculture, key to the country's economic and social development, improving irrigation and experimenting with different farming techniques. Other advancements under King Sejong included the creation of Hangul, the Korean alphabet, which allowed commoners and women to read and write, skills which had before been the preserve of only the well-educated who had mastered literary Chinese. Strongly opposed to the introduction of Hangul, many Confucian scholars continued to write most official documents and literature in classical Chinese until the 20th century. Nonetheless, even today Koreans value Hangul, so much so that there is an annual national holiday in its honour.

During the late Koryo and early Joseon (Yi) periods, Korea expanded its contact with other countries, especially China, Japan and the Ryukyu chain of islands, which were somewhat independent at that time. Korea sent tributary missions to China on a regular basis. As Korean historian Han Woo-keun stated,

The Yi dynasty shared with the Chinese government the Confucian distaste for commerce, and attempted to limit it. ... The Yi rulers not only tried to prevent private trade, but disliked their subjects going abroad for any reason, fearing that they might become corrupted or betray the nation."

(Han, 1970, 224 and 227)

The dynasty's policy of seclusion restricted interactions with the world to ceremonial contacts with Japan on Tsushima Island (a Japanese island about halfway between Kyushu and the southern part of the Korean Peninsula) and tributary missions with China. Contact with foreigners and outside travel was forbidden. During this period of isolation, the Korean



Figure 4.1 Statue of King Sejong.

Peninsula experienced over 200 years of peace, and Korean culture developed on its own away from outside influences.

In 1592, and again in 1597, the southern coast of Korea was invaded by Japanese forces under Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who had unified much of Japan and planned on conquering Korea and then China. In both invasions, the Japanese were initially successful, capturing numerous cities and leaving great damage in their wake. But both times, the Koreans, with help from Chinese forces, stopped the Japanese and forced them back to the coast. The first invasion lasted five years until 1596, at which point there was a brief truce and failed peace negotiations. The second invasion ended in 1598 with the withdrawal of the Japanese. A few decades later, in 1627, and again in 1636, the Manchus, a Tungusic nomadic people from Siberia and Northeast Asia, invaded. The Manchus established the Qing dynasty in China that same year and ruled China from 1644 until 1912. The Manchu army overwhelmed the Koreans, who were eventually forced to agree to become a tributary of the Qing.

In the early 1700s, American and European merchants arrived in East Asia, but the Joseon government continued its isolationist policies, rejecting overtures to trade or form alliances. This isolationism earned Korea the nickname of the "Hermit Kingdom." By the mid-1800s, the European powers were pressuring East and Southeast Asia to open up to trade and diplomatic relations. As the Chinese empire declined, Western powers competed for influence in the region. Western ships plied the waters near the Korean Peninsula, surveying and trying to get Korea to engage in trade and diplomacy. However, it was Japan (ironically given that a few years earlier Japan had been forced open by the Americans) that forced Korea open. In 1876, and under duress, Joseon signed the Treaty of Ganghwa (Japan-Korea Treaty of 1876), which opened three ports to Japanese ships, allowed the Japanese to survey and map in the area, granted the Japanese extraterritoriality and set out the terms of the commercial and political relationship between the two countries. Korea's signing of the Treaty of Ganghwa with Japan spurred the United States, and soon after the United Kingdom, Germany and France to initiate negotiations for their own treaties with Korea. While some of the Korean leadership believed that Korea could prosper by trading with Japan and the West and learning about Western technologies, many others were opposed to opening up the country. The opponents feared the spread of Catholicism, an inundation of the country with Japanese products and the outflow of Korean rice in return, all of which happened. Nonetheless, the government began to slowly modernize the country. In 1881, it sent a study mission to Japan to learn about Japanese government and business practices. (It is striking that the Koreans found much to learn from the Japanese early on in Japan's process of modernization.)

The Japanese occupation of Korea

Korea's entrée into diplomatic and trade relations with the West and Japan also put the country into the middle of conflicts between the various powers. Over the years following the signing of the treaty, Japan, China and Russia, all competed for political and economic control of the Korean Peninsula. Japan supported those forces within the Korean government that wanted to modernize (but Japan pushed for a modernization program that would allow it to participate and benefit economically from Korea's modernization), while China backed the more conservative officials. In 1884, a Korean independence faction supported by the Japanese attempted a coup to establish a pro-Japanese government. This was quickly thwarted by Chinese troops who were called in by conservative Korean officials. Although war was avoided and both China and Japan agreed to withdraw their forces from Korea, a decade later the first Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) broke out. Japan won the war.

The resulting Treaty of Shimonoseki obliged the Qing government in China to pay reparations in silver to Japan and to surrender the island of Taiwan, the Liaodong Peninsula (which Japan was forced to give back within the week by Russia, France and Germany) and the Pescadores Islands (near Taiwan) to Japan.

In 1904–1905, Japan and Russia went to war over rival interests in Manchuria and Korea. To the surprise of international observers who did not believe that an Asian nation could defeat a European country, Japan won this war as well. At the Portsmouth Peace Conference, where negotiations were brokered by U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt, Japan's claims to Korea were recognized, and Russia agreed to leave Manchuria and give up its rights to the southern part of Sakhalin Island. Russia would not, however, pay Japan reparations. Believing that, as the victor, it was due reparations, Japan was not content with the outcome, which remained a source of irritation for years to come.

Even less content with the outcome were the Koreans, who were unhappy with the promise made by the United States not to interfere with Japan's ambitions on the Korean Peninsula if Japan did not interfere with U.S. rule in the Philippines. In 1905, despite Korean protestations, Japan imposed the Japan-Korea Protectorate Treaty on Korea, making Korea a Japanese protectorate. Five years later, on August 29, 1910, Japan annexed Korea completely, a day Koreans still refer to as "National Humiliation Day." The Japanese annexation of Korea lasted until 1945 and Japan's surrender at the end of World War II.

The Japanese occupation of Korea was profoundly harsh. For the first 10 years especially, Korean dissent was not tolerated, with all aspects of Korean life controlled. In the lead up to and during the Pacific War, the Japanese authorities tried to force Koreans to assimilate. Koreans were forced to take Japanese names, use the Japanese language, believe in Shinto (see Chapter 3) and pledge allegiance to the Japanese emperor. Under direct control of the emperor, the head of occupied Korea was a Japanese general who gave orders to burn books on Korean history and culture and insisted that Korean children use the same textbooks as their Japanese counterparts. Over 5.4 million Koreans were conscripted to work in factories and mines on the peninsula, in Manchuria and in Japan itself. Conditions in these workplaces were appalling and dangerous: tens of thousands of these forced labourers died. Starting in 1938, Korean volunteers were accepted into the Japanese army. Six years later in 1944, conscription began, and over the next year approximately 200,000 Koreans became soldiers for the Japanese empire.

Far from acquiescing to the occupation, many Koreans resisted and fought for an independent Korea. In 1919, early on in Japanese rule, resistance leaders read out the "Declaration of Korean Independence," but the Japanese police cracked down hard on the resistance, killing, torturing and arresting thousands of demonstrators and sympathizers. Throughout the 35-year occupation, a large Japanese police force kept the resistance under control, but the independence movement was supported by the Korean Provisional Government, a quasi-official government-in-exile in Shanghai and later in Chungking. Tens of thousands of Korean women (and women from other countries Japan occupied during the war) were forced to become sex slaves, euphemistically called "comfort women," and service Japanese soldiers both before and during World War II. Apology and compensation for these women has remained a source of ongoing tension between South Korea and Japan (see Chapter 9 for more information).

Despite the many hardships, the occupation brought some benefits. During the 35 years of colonial rule, Korea's economy grew rapidly, with agriculture, fishery and forestry sectors expanding significantly. In 1910, Korea had been primarily an agrarian society. The Japanese oversaw significant industrial development in such sectors as steel, chemicals and hydroelectric power, and they built roads, railways, port facilities and electrical facilities across the country.

But the effort was not altruistic: the Japanese developed Korea to benefit Japan and help the country fight its wars in China and elsewhere. Nonetheless, by the time of Japan's surrender in 1945, Korea was second only to Japan in Asia in its level of industrialization.

When Japan surrendered at the end of World War II, Korea was treated as a former Japanese asset that needed to be dealt with externally. With characteristic Western arrogance and arguing that the Korean people were not ready to govern themselves, the Allied powers divided the peninsula into two temporary occupation zones while overseeing the dismantling of the Japanese administration and preparing for the eventual establishment of an independent Korean government. Land north of the 38th parallel was to be temporarily administered by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The area south of the 38th parallel of latitude (it crosses the peninsula east to west, a short distance north of Seoul) would be temporarily administered by the United States. The Soviets had only entered the war against Japan eight days before its surrender. This and the uncertainty of the USSR's commitment to the Allied Power's democratic ideals made the United States nervous. Nonetheless, the USSR occupied the north.

Civil war and the division of Korea

Soon after the division, Cold War tensions set in. The Korean population was not ideologically unified: many of the North's peasants agreed with Soviet policies, while most of the Korean middle class had fled to the South but were not strongly anti-communist. The peninsula was politically divided, and there were numerous clashes between left-wing and right-wing groups. It is not clear that an independent Korea would have been easy to establish, particularly because negotiations between the United States and the USSR on the steps needed to establish an independent unified Korea did not go well. In 1948, two separate governments were established: the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the north and the Republic of Korea in the south. Although the United Nations tried to oversee democratic elections for the whole country, it was not allowed into the North, so United Nations-sponsored elections were held only in the south. Syngman Rhee was elected president of South Korea, while Kim Il-sung was appointed president of North Korea. The United States supported South Korea; the Soviet Union supported North Korea. Both North and South claimed sovereignty over the whole country, adding to an already tense situation.

The newly created United Nations, formed in an attempt to prevent the world from returning to armed conflict, tried to find a way to reunite the North and the South. However, no plan would satisfy both the Americans, who wanted a democratic capitalist country, and the Soviets, who wanted a communist one. Neither was willing to give way to the other. In June 1950, the North decided to reunify the country by force, invading the South and initiating the Korean War. With Soviet backing, weapons and air support, Seoul was taken in three days. Within a few weeks, North Korea controlled most of South Korea. In July, a United Nations army, led by an American general and dominated by U.S. troops, came to South Korea's aid. [The United Nations Security Council Resolution authorizing the military force had passed when the Soviet representative was absent from the UNSCR meeting, boycotting in protest of the UN's recognition of the Republic of China (Taiwan) instead of the People's Republic of China.] North Korea's army was pushed back, Seoul was retaken in September, and the war was carried over the 38th parallel into North Korea the next month. China intervened on North Korea's side, sending hundreds of thousands of soldiers into battle. The Southern forces were eventually driven back across the border. By May 1951, the war settled into a stalemate. Although ground and air fighting continued for the next two years, neither side gained any real ground.

Peace talks began in June 1951, and the Korean Armistice Agreement was signed on July 27, 1953. After more than 3 million deaths, half of them civilians, and terrible damage to the entire peninsula, the war had ended with North and South Korea divided approximately where they had been when the war started. The armistice called for the return of prisoners and created the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), a buffer zone separating the North and the South—a 160-km long, 4-km wide strip of land that runs across the peninsula along the 38th parallel. Armed troops remain stationed on each side of the DMZ, the most heavily militarized border in the world, guarding against aggression from the other. The armistice was not a peace treaty but a suspension of hostilities, so technically North and South Korea are still at war. Although the armistice was only supposed to be temporary, attempts to create a more permanent settlement have failed. The death toll from the war was enormous: millions of people died—South Korea (217,000 military; 1,000,000 civilian), North Korea (406,000 military; 600,000 civilian), China (600,000 military) and the United States (36,500 military). Millions more were wounded. The Korean War left both North and South Korea in ruins. Agriculture and industry were destroyed, and family members who were separated at the beginning of the war were never reunited.

The Korean Peninsula was one of the first battlegrounds of the Cold War. More than a civil war, the Korean War attracted the support of the United States and the United Nations because it was widely believed in the West that if the North Korean forces took over the South, the next step would be the Communization of all of Asia. Only a few years earlier (1949), the Chinese Communist Party had founded the People's Republic of China, and Americans were worried that communism would spread further. The U.S. government and military focussed on a policy of containment, preventing Communist governments from expanding their influence. The Korean Peninsula was now fully transformed from a single culture and nation into two divided and antagonistic countries, both linked to diametrically opposed super powers.

Political heritage

Korea's political foundation is rooted in authoritarian rule rather than democracy. For centuries the Korean Peninsula was ruled by kings, and power was held in the hands of a few. Korean culture was permeated with Confucian thought, with its emphasis on hierarchy, people having a pre-determined place in the social order, and all citizens owing respect and obedience to their ruler. When North and South Korea began their separate political journeys, the leaders of both maintained an authoritarian approach. Each of them "would suppress democracy in the name of national security" ("The Fight for Democracy," 1992).

Introduction to South Korea

The Republic of Korea (ROK), better known as South Korea, occupies the southern half of the Korean Peninsula. Its capital, Seoul, is about 60 km south of the Demilitarized Zone dividing North and South Korea. To the east of the Korean Peninsula is Japan across the Sea of Japan; to the west is China across the Yellow Sea. About 70 percent of South Korea is mountainous; only 20 percent of the land is arable. There are nine provinces in South Korea: North Chungcheong (Chungcheongbuk), South Chungcheong (Chungcheongnam), Gangwon, Gyeonggi, North Gyeongsang (Gyeongsangbuk), South Gyeongsang (Gyeongsangnam), North Jeolla (Jeollabuk), South Jeolla (Jeollanam) and Jeju Island. The country's main cities are Busan, Daegu, Daejeon, Gwangju, Incheon, Sejong, Seoul and Ulsan. See Figure 4.2 for a map of provinces and cities.



Figure 4.2 Korean provinces and main cities.

With a population of 51.3 million (2020), South Korea is both one of the world's most densely populated countries and one of the most ethnically homogenous. Over 80 percent of the population is urban, with half living in one of the six largest cities. In the past decade, new dynamics have taken hold. With the world's lowest birth rate in 2018 and an ageing population, South Korea has an urgent need for labour, particularly in certain sectors. The government has therefore begun accepting workers from overseas. As of 2016, the number of foreign migrants had reached 2 million, with over 1 million from China, half of whom are ethnic Koreans. The next largest source of migrants is Vietnam. As Koreans feel an intense pride in their Korean identity, language, culture and history, integration can be challenging for new immigrants.

South Korea is now the 11th largest economy in the world, its per capita income surpassing \$31,000 in 2018. Accounting for 40 percent of the country's GDP, Korean manufacturing is among the world's most competitive and innovative, particularly in the sectors of electronics, automobiles, shipbuilding, telecommunications, steel and chemicals.

South Korea's post-World War II political evolution

U.S. Army military government

The first stage of South Korea's post-war political evolution, as with Japan's, began with the U.S. Army. From September 8, 1945, to August 15, 1948, the U.S. Army military government ran the southern half of the Korean Peninsula. A provisional government, the People's Republic of Korea (PRK), based on people's committees throughout the nation, had been organized when Japan surrendered. However, shortly after occupying the South, the U.S. military government disbanded the PRK. (North of the border, the Soviet Union merged its PRK into the new North Korean government.) During this post-war period, the South Korean economy struggled. Most of the industrial base developed under the Japanese was in the north, and the U.S. military was not well-prepared for the Occupation. Officials knew little about Korean society, and few spoke Korean. Although the Koreans strongly opposed the idea, the Americans maintained the colonial system and some of the former Japanese governors as advisors. Unsurprisingly, these decisions harmed American-Korean relations, and strong resentments developed between the Americans and Koreans. Expecting liberation, the Koreans instead found themselves with another foreign ruler and a divided country.

The First Republic

South Korea's first president was Syngman Rhee (1875–1965), who served from 1948 to 1960. Although he was from a relatively poor family, he had received a classical Chinese education and converted to Christianity while still at school. Involved politically from a young age, he was jailed for his anti-Japanese activism in 1899. After his release in 1904, he moved to the United States, where he earned a PhD in theology from Princeton University. When he returned to Japanese-occupied Korea, he became active in the independence movement and so was arrested; he fled to the United States, where he remained for decades, all the time actively supporting the fight for Korean independence. Korean nationalists who had fled to Shanghai created a government-in-exile, the Korean Provisional Government. Rhee served as president from 1919 until 1925. Upon Japan's defeat at the end of World War II, Rhee returned to Korea. Because he had lived abroad during the factionalism that had riven the Korean independence movement, Rhee was seen as a generally acceptable

compromise candidate for the presidency. Another point in Rhee's favour was his standing among the Americans, who approved of him because he spoke English and was strongly anti-Communist.

In 1948, Rhee was elected president of the Republic of Korea by members of the National Assembly, as per the country's new Constitution. There were two main parties on the ballot: the Nationalist Party (Rhee's party) and the Korea Democratic Party, which became the Democratic Nationalist Party and, in 1955, was renamed the Democratic Party (the opposition). Rhee's government was a strongly right wing, pro-capitalist government. Land and assets that had been owned by Japanese were returned to private Korean hands, South Koreans with large land holdings were obliged to divest some of their land and small family businesses emerged. Although educational opportunities improved and people learned about democracy, the economy was poorly managed, and corruption was widespread. Rhee and his government suppressed any left-wing opposition, including the strong Communist labour movement, passed laws curtailing political dissent and arrested opponents, some of whom were killed.

Members of the National Assembly were unhappy with Rhee's authoritarianism and corruption. As it looked unlikely that he would be re-elected in the 1952 election, Rhee forced through an amendment to the Constitution, requiring direct election of the president. To do so, he arrested Members of Parliament he thought might vote against the amendment. Subsequently, Rhee was directly elected. In 1954, he used similar means to force another amendment, allowing an incumbent to run for more than two terms in office, a common practice of strongman politicians. Opposition to Rhee's autocratic rule and corruption grew through the late 1950s. The belief that the next election would be rigged sparked student and labour protests that spread throughout the country beginning on April 11, 1960. Known as the April Revolution, the protests continued, eventually bringing down Rhee's government. He resigned and fled to the United States.

The Second Republic

In July 1960, elections brought the Democratic Party to power. The government tried to hold to account the members of the military and the police who had been involved in suppressing opponents of the Rhee regime. Under the new government, political activity by leftists, trade unions and student groups, suppressed under the Rhee regime, was now allowed. Despite the new freedoms, economic and social difficulties escalated, with soaring inflation and unemployment rates. Factional fighting escalated within the Democratic Party, weakening it. In May 1961, the army led by Park Chung-hee led a coup d'état and assumed control of the government. A military man, Park Chung-hee had served in the Japanese army during World War II and then as an officer in the Korean army during the Korean War. After the coup, Park Chung-hee became head of the military junta, the Supreme Council for National Reconstruction of the Republic of Korea. Under U.S. pressure to restore a civilian government, a presidential election was held in 1963. Park was elected president for his Democratic Republican Party.

The Third Republic

The Third Republic under Park Chung-hee emphasized economic development. With the help of aid from the United States and Japan, the government provided interest-free loans to export businesses and made major infrastructure investments. The *chaebol*, large industrial conglomerates, began to expand during this time, and per capita GDP increased.

Using Japan's highly successful export-led developmental state model, Park and his government rapidly expanded the South Korean economy. The government produced five-year plans with a focus on rapid industrialization. South Korean nurses and miners were recruited to work in West Germany. The money they sent home also contributed to South Korea's rapid economic growth.

For a time, although his government was authoritarian and suppressed resistance, the country's economic growth made Park Chung-hee popular. He was re-elected in 1967 and after a constitutional amendment allowing a third term, again in 1971. However, his 1971 victory against the New Democratic Party's Kim Dae-jung was much narrower despite the unevenness of the playing field. In 1972, facing growing opposition to his authoritarian rule, Park declared martial law and created the Yusin Constitution, which eliminated presidential term limits, implemented an indirect voting system for presidential elections and gave the president the power to appoint one-third of the legislature, thus to all intents and purposes granting himself a majority government. The Constitution also allowed the president to pass laws without ratification by the National Assembly in emergency situations, essentially granting Park dictatorial powers.

The Fourth Republic

South Korea's Fourth Republic government ran from November 1972, after the approval of the Yusin Constitution. The Yusin Constitution formalized increased presidential powers at the same time that public disappointment with Park's rule escalated. As political unrest grew, any opposition was quickly quashed. The media was heavily censored, and Park controlled the military.

Although Park Chung-hee used his new powers to crack down on dissent, protests against his authoritarianism grew in scale, intensity and violence. By 1979, massive demonstrations against his regime erupted across South Korea. After surviving several earlier attempts on his life, on October 26, 1979, Park Chung-hee, four of his bodyguards and his driver were assassinated by the head of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency inside the Presidential Blue House. The reasons for the assassination are still unclear. Park Chung-hee's legacy divided the country for years to come. Some South Koreans praised Park Chung-hee for the economic miracle he oversaw, while others abhorred his brutal authoritarianism.

By the time of his assassination, Park had ruled with absolute power for almost 18 years. His death left a political vacuum and considerable turmoil. Although the public supported free and fair elections, in May 1980, Major General Chun Doo-hwan seized power, established a military dictatorship, dissolved the National Assembly and declared martial law. In reaction, massive public protests erupted, especially in the southern part of the country. On May 18, in the city of Kwangju (formerly the capital of South Jeolla province), students and the general public demonstrated against the government and against martial law. The people from South Jeolla province were dissatisfied because their province was one of the poorest in the country, their poverty the result of a deliberate government strategy. Unhappy with the people's support of Kim Dae-jung, the most prominent opposition figure, Park had directed little of the industry or infrastructure to Jeolla. To control the demonstration, Chun's government sent in Special Forces, who clubbed, kicked and bayoneted the protestors. Rather than stopping the protests, the brutal response brought more protestors to the streets.

Over a 10-day period from May 18 to 27, 1980, the Kwangju protests grew. Many of the protestors believed that the United States, the beacon of democracy, would step in and support them. But concerned about keeping good relations with the South Korean government

and worried about the potential impacts of the instability, the U.S. government chose not to intervene. As the United States actually had operational control over the South Korean forces, Chun's military response implicitly came with American approval, but the Americans may not have anticipated the brutality of the crackdown. The protests and the violence continued for over a week, with protestors arming themselves with whatever weapons they could find. Gun fights, tear gas and the clubbing and bayoneting of protestors continued. Early on May 27, the military escalated the violence, sending helicopters, tanks and armoured personnel carriers to attack the protestors. Within two hours the army had crushed the uprising. The number of people killed in the Kwangju uprising has been disputed. The official government statement is about 200, but the people of Kwangju believe the number is probably 10 times higher. Although the Kwangju uprising was ultimately unsuccessful, it galvanized national support for democracy and was the precursor to the June Democracy Movement.

The Fifth Republic

Chun Doo-hwan established the Fifth Republic in March 1981. Chun and the Democratic Justice Party ran the country as a dictatorship and opposition grew. The June Democracy Movement refers to mass protests for democracy that took place across South Korea in June 1987. On June 10, President Chun announced Roh Tae-woo would be the candidate for the Democratic Justice Party and Chun's choice of successor for the presidency. This decision angered the public, who had been pressuring for the return of direct presidential elections (they had disappeared with the Yusin Constitution). Although student, labour and church groups had been protesting against the government for some time, Chun's announcement triggered massive mobilization by the opposition. On June 26, over a million people in 34 cities participated in a great national march for peace.

The Chun government was keen to suppress unrest in the lead up to the 1988 Olympic Games to be held in Seoul, Seoul's "coming out party." The government considered its options, figuring that with a fragmented opposition, Roh could win if democratic elections were held. With this in mind and to placate the country, the government agreed to the return of civil liberties and to amend the Constitution to allow for the direct election of the president. In the December 1987 elections, Roh Tae-woo ran as the government candidate against two opposition candidates, Kim Young-sam and Kim Dae-jung. The two opposition candidates agreed on almost everything except which one of them should be the president. As a result, although the opposition received a majority, the votes were split between the two candidates. Thus, the government candidate Roh won and became the democratically elected president. This was the beginning of the Sixth Republic, the current system of government in South Korea today.

Beginning of the Sixth Republic

In 1993, Kim Young Sam became the first civilian president in 30 years. All that time, Kim had been a leader of the South Korean opposition fighting against the authoritarian governments of Park Chung-hee and Chun Doo-hwan. During his one five-year term as president, Kim focussed on reforming the government and economy by combatting corruption, giving amnesty to political prisoners and challenging the power of the *chaebol*. Kim Young-sam was succeeded by Kim Dae-jung, a former political prisoner who had spent 13 years in prison or under house arrest. Kim Dae-jung promoted a policy seeking engagement and cooperation with North Korea. Known as the Sunshine Policy, the idea was to try to engage cooperatively and constructively with North Korea. Kim Dae-jung won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2000 for his efforts towards reconciliation with North Korea.

In 1996, Roh and Chun were put on trial for their role in the 1979 coup and the 1980 Kwangju massacre. They were both convicted of mutiny, treason and corruption (for receiving bribes while in office). Chun was sentenced to death, and Roh was given 22 and a half years in prison. Other military officers were also sentenced to jail for their role in the massacre. Upon taking office in 1997, in an effort to promote national reconciliation, President Kim Dae-jung pardoned both Roh and Chun.

Post-war economic development

South Korea's economic growth after the end of the Korean War has been called the *Miracle on the Han River*. (The Han River is a major South Korean river that flows through Seoul.) In the 1950s, the economy remained primarily agricultural-based. Most Korean factories and industrial facilities had been destroyed during the war, and GNP per capita was low. Beginning under the Park regime in 1960, South Korea's economy strengthened, and the country gradually transformed from a developing country into a developed one. Tremendous effort went into South Korea's economic development strategies. Because of the country's small domestic market and limited natural resources, the leaders decided to pursue export-oriented industrialization and to begin with labour-intensive light industry, specifically the textile, lumber and footwear sectors. Between 1962 and 1971, annual growth averaged 8.8 percent. By the end of the 1960s, South Korea had created a stable economic foundation for itself and was able to move away from reliance on foreign aid.

During the 1960s, South Korea developed its own version of the capitalist development state model. The South Korean government focussed on national prosperity, particularly on rapid economic growth, industrialization, support for large business and the development of national infrastructure. The Park government worked closely with South Korean companies, using persuasion and coercion to encourage them to move in the government's preferred direction, resulting in close relationships between government and business. The government implemented five-year plans that focused, like Japan before it, on export-led industrialization. Initially, South Korea focussed on expanding its agricultural production, embarking on a program of energy diversification and developing basic industries like iron and steel and chemical fertilizers. In the 1970s, the country expanded into new industries, including clothing, cars and car parts and electronics. The country's exports grew from 4 percent of GDP in 1961 to over 40 percent in 2016; average per capita income grew from \$120 to \$27,000 over the half century. In 2018, South Korea had the 33rd highest GDP per capita in the world, according to the World Bank—\$39,600, less than \$2,000 a year behind Japan.

The chaebol and the South Korean economy

Chaebol are privately owned South Korean industrial groups controlled, in most cases, by the founding family. The member companies are connected through a system of interlocking share holdings. With firms across a range of sectors, chaebol are similar in structure to the Japanese pre-war zaibatsu. In fact, chaebol and zaibatsu are the Korean and Japanese readings of the same Chinese characters, which translate into English as "financial clique." Some of the largest chaebol include Samsung, Daewoo (which went bankrupt in 1999), LG, SK Group, Hyundai and Lotte.

During the Japanese Occupation, few Koreans owned any large companies. When the Japanese withdrew, Korean entrepreneurs obtained the assets of their firms, several of which grew into the chaebol. As part of rebuilding the economy, the government used some of

the international aid provided to South Korea after the war to give loans and other forms of financial assistance to the chaebol. These actions proved crucial in highly capitalized sectors like shipbuilding, construction and steel. In the late 1960s and the 1970s, efforts to move the economy towards heavier industries and export-led growth needed the cooperation of the chaebol. Over the decades, the chaebol moved into other industrial sectors and expanded into more foreign markets. In fact, the chaebol led South Korea into the global marketplace.

Although chaebol-led industrialization was a success, it resulted in the concentration of capital and economic activities in a small number of hands. The chaebol became enormous commercial empires that spanned a large range of industries and sectors and crossed all stages of production. Sales of the top 10 chaebol are equal to three-quarters of South Korea's GDP. Engaged in more than two-thirds of the business categories in South Korea, the chaebol are responsible for 12 percent of South Korean employment and 77 percent of the market capitalization of South Korean firms (Albert, 2018).

The most profitable and successful chaebol is Samsung, which alone has been responsible for as high as 20 percent of the country's GDP. Sometimes called "The Republic of Samsung," the company began by exporting foodstuffs and now has more than 80 subsidiaries in sectors as diverse as insurance, shipping and luxury hotels. The largest and most famous subsidiary is Samsung Electronics, one of the world's main manufacturers of consumer electronics (televisions, mobile phones, tablet computers, flash memory devices), lithium-ion batteries and semiconductors. Although Samsung is the most successful chaebol, Lotte may be the most ubiquitous, with firms in retail, tourism, petrochemicals, construction and finance. As Daniel Tudor, author of *Korea: The Impossible Country*, writes, South Koreans "can buy Lotte chocolate bars, enjoy a film at a Lotte cinema, shop at a Lotte Mart, pay with one of the group's credit cards and return home to a Lotte flat protected by Lotte insurance. Even outside its amusement parks, South Koreans can live in a Lotte world" ("Corporate Armistice," 2013).

Unsurprisingly, this level of corporate dominance has negative consequences. Dominance allows firms to stifle competition, squeezing small- and medium-sized companies out of the market. Chaebol have been accused of waiting for an innovative new firm to prove itself, then offering to buy it out for a low price. If the firm refuses, the chaebol drives it out of business. This kind of chaebol behaviour has a chilling effect on budding entrepreneurs. As the preponderance of power rests with the chaebol, it is difficult to be a chaebol investor (unless you are one of the insiders), supplier or competitor. The chaebol also dominate the market for top talent as most young South Koreans want to work for one. In 2010, representatives of the chaebol and numerous small firms formed a National Commission for Corporate Partnership. The Commission reached an agreement to limit the presence of the chaebol in approximately 100 sectors of the economy, including restaurants and bicycles.

Traditionally, the relationship between the chaebol and the government has been close, but critics point out that this close-knit relationship has created a culture of corruption. Incidents of price-fixing, collusion, embezzlement, bribery and tax evasion are commonplace, and the public is becoming increasingly angry about the advantages given to the chaebol by government, often in return for money. As the chaebol began to move more of their manufacturing overseas and as South Korea's economy has slowed, the anger has grown. Over the past 10 years, senior executives from Samsung, Hyundai, Lotte and SK have been found guilty of corruption, fraud or tax evasion. Three chaebol chairmen have received presidential pardons following their convictions; others paid fines or received suspended sentences. Former President Lee Myung-bak was arrested on charges of bribery (one charge was for accepting \$5.4 million in return for pardoning Samsung executives, including the chairman), embezzlement and tax evasion in March 2018 and was sentenced to 15 years in prison. His successor,

Park Geun-hye, was impeached, fined \$17 million for taking bribes from the chaebol and sentenced to 24 years in prison.

South Koreans regularly discuss reforming the chaebol. Some changes to corporate management and ownership structures have been made, and President Moon Jae-in has promised to break the close ties between government and the chaebol. His ability to usher reforms through the National Assembly, however, depends on support from members of other parties, some of whom have personal chaebol connections. Changing the chaebol system will not be easy unless the culture that ties the chaebol and their stakeholders together changes first.

Beginning in the 1980s, South Korea developed a successful heavy industry export economy. The country became a major producer of cars, steel, semiconductors and electronics. South Korean companies like Hyundai Heavy Industries, Samsung Heavy Industries and Daewoo Shipbuilding and Marine Engineering became some of the leading producers of ships, including supertankers, container ships and oil drilling platforms. In 2008, Korea had a full 50 percent share of the shipbuilding market. However, 10 years later, it had lost much of that market share to Chinese firms. In 2018, President Moon committed to supporting the industry by ordering icebreakers and patrol vessels. South Korean manufacturers have also moved into high technology in fields like new materials, aerospace and industrial robots. South Korea has also been successful in the digital content field, particularly in video games, building on the international fascination with Korean popular culture (see Chapter 8 for more details).

Republic of Korea Armed Forces

In 1953, shortly after the signing of the Korean Armistice Agreement, South Korea and the United States signed a Mutual Defense Treaty. The two countries agreed to come to each other's aid if either were attacked. The treaty also stipulated that the United States has permission for stationing military forces in South Korea, subject to South Korea's agreement. In 1978, the United States and South Korea Combined Forces Command was created. The CFC was headed by a U.S. military officer who answered to the United States, as well as to South Korean national authorities. All South Korean forces did not come under the control of the South Korean government until 1994.

Since the signing of the treaty in 1953, the United States has had a sizeable military presence in South Korea. In 2019, approximately 28,500 American ground, air, naval, marine and special operations forces were based in South Korea at 15 bases around the country, much lower numbers both of personnel and bases than in the past. Arrangements for the bases have been renegotiated frequently. In 2019, South Korea paid \$923 million of the approximately \$1.5 billion cost of hosting the U.S. troops. However, in late 2019, President Trump demanded that Seoul quintuple its contribution to \$4.7 billion in 2020. This increase could have serious repercussions, as some in South Korea have suggested that, in exchange for increased defence funding, it be permitted to develop its own nuclear weapons. This would have negative implications for the attempts to denuclearize North Korea and could encourage Japan to develop its own nuclear weapons. The Americans decreased their demand after South Korea agreed to purchase more U.S. weapons and expand its efforts to protect oil shipments in the Strait of Hormuz.

The South Korean government and general public have an ambivalent view of the United States' presence in their country. Some Koreans derive comfort from the presence of the American military, believing they are a deterrent to North Korea. However, the Americans are not universally embraced: the role of the United States in supporting the Chun government during the Kwangju massacre disturbed many South Koreans. Led

by university students, thousands of South Koreans have taken to the streets on multiple occasions to protest the U.S. military presence. They argue that in its fight against communism, the United States has suppressed democracy in many places around the world. Despite this ambivalence, a January 2019 Asian Institute for Policy Studies and Council on Foreign Relations survey of South Korean attitudes towards U.S. Forces in Korea showed that the majority in every age cohort believe that U.S. Forces is a good partner that helps ensure South Korean security ("South Korean Attitudes," 2019). Most analysts agree and believe that the U.S.-South Korean alliance is of benefit beyond the peninsula, ensuring peace throughout Northeast Asia.

South Korea lives a precarious existence. North Korea, a rogue and hostile state, lies on its northern border. South Korea's next closest neighbour is China with its military strength and commercial aggressiveness. Buttressed by the United States, which uses the country as a key East Asia base, South Korea has the world's seventh largest army, with 599,000 active military personnel and 3.1 million reservists. South Korea spends 2.6 percent of its GDP on its military and has the 10th largest military budget (\$43 billion in 2019) in the world. Although South Korean troops participate in peacekeeping and humanitarian missions, concerns over North Korea understandably contribute to this intense military commitment.

Starting in 1957, South Korea implemented conscription for men over 18. Conscripts must perform approximately two years (depending on the branch of the military) of military service, although the Moon government has promised to decrease this to 18 months, still one of the world's longest periods of military conscription. Conscription is rigorously enforced and military training is tough. Although women may enlist voluntarily, they are not required to do so. Few South Korean men want to enter the army. Over the past decades, there has been increased debate about mandatory military service, the rights of conscientious objectors and exemptions granted to star athletes. Those who support conscription argue that mandatory military service protects the country, particularly in the context of North Korea. They also claim that it supports national identity by building connections and national pride, that military service changes boys into men, preparing them for South Korea's intense work culture. Critics argue that compulsory military service is outdated and ineffective and that it hinders change in national attitudes towards diversity, inclusion and gender equality. They also have serious reservations about the intense training methods and the nature of exemptions. Other countries with conscription allow exemptions for conscientious objectors, but, to date, South Korea has not done so. The granting of exemptions seems unfair: star athletes and classical musicians and artists have been granted exemptions, whereas K-pop musicians have not.

Political structure, parties and behaviour

South Korea is, in international terms, an ancient civilization and a young country, created out of what was, confusingly, a post-World War II civil war fomented by superpowers looking for strategic advantage in East Asia. The country's political system reflects this complicated origin story, the ideological tensions of East Asia and the interventions of external powers, particularly the United States. But in its flexibility, competitiveness and aggressiveness, it is a made-in-South Korea political system.

The government

South Korea is a unitary state. Administratively, it is divided into nine provinces and eight first-level cities, the latter with powers equal to those of a province. Each of these provinces

and cities has a local assembly, but they have limited policy-making ability. The chief executive of each district is elected locally, but his or her deputy is appointed by the national government.

Head of state and head of government

In the Republic of Korea, the president is the head of state and head of government. The president resides in the Blue House, the official residence, which also houses the executive offices (see Figure 4.3). The current president is Moon Jae-in, who was elected in 2017 in a special election called after Park Geun-hye, his predecessor, was impeached and removed from office on charges of abuse of power, bribery and coercion. The daughter of former authoritarian President Park Chung-hee, Park Geun-hye was the first female South Korean president. In 2018, she was sentenced to 24 years in prison.

Representing the centre-left Democratic Party, Moon Jae-in ran as its candidate (then called the Democratic United Party) for president against Park Geun-hye in 2012 and served in the National Assembly from 2012 to 2016. He was a student activist and was arrested and imprisoned in the 1970s after protesting the Yusin Constitution. Moon became a human rights lawyer and later from 2003 to 2008 served as chief of staff to the former president Roh Moo-hyun. Moon promised a transparent government, reform of the chaebol, a hike in the minimum wage and a move away from coal and nuclear energy. He also strongly supported more peaceful interactions with North Korea.

Constitution

South Korea's first Constitution was promulgated in July 1948. Since then the Constitution has been revised five times, an extraordinarily high number for a modern democracy. Each revision signalled the beginning of a new republic. In October 1987, after the pro-democracy protests that occurred in June of that year, South Korea's Constitution was amended to take effect on February 25, 1988. The Constitution has 130 articles, which define the rights and



Figure 4.3 Reception Center at Cheongwadae or "Blue House", the South Korean presidential residence in Seoul South Korea.

duties of citizens, followed by sections on the national assembly, the executive, the courts, election management, local government and the economy. The first article declares South Korea to be a democratic republic.

Legislature

South Korea's National Assembly, the *Gukhwe*, is a unicameral (one level of government) 300-member assembly. Members are elected for four-year terms.

Electoral system

The National Assembly is elected through a mixed electoral system. A large majority, 246 members, are elected through a first-past-the-post system in single member districts, while 54 members are elected through proportional representation. The South Korean president is directly elected and serves one five-year term. Each voter (over 19 years old) in a national election votes for a presidential candidate, a political party (represented as a list of preferred party candidates) and a local candidate.

Election campaigns

South Korean election campaigns are, like those in Japan, comparatively short: 14 days for National Assembly elections and 23 days for presidential elections. Making the campaign time frames short was an attempt to lower campaign spending and prevent over excitement, but the short time frame makes it difficult for new candidates to become known. Television advertising is permitted but with tight limits on how much a party can spend. The voting age in South Korea is 18.

Political parties

Over the past decades, South Korean political parties have been changing names and merging, making politics hard to follow. Between 2016 and 2019, for example, all the main parties changed their names. The names change so rapidly that it is not worthwhile including a description of the values and program priorities of each party.

In the 2020 legislative elections, President Moon Jae-in's Democratic Party witnessed a major victory securing 163 seats, 180 seats when the seats of its satellite party, the Platform Party, are included, of the 300 seats. The United Futures Party won 103 seats.

Mass mobilization—popular protest

Popular protests have been a major part of South Korean politics since before democracy. In fact, enormous pro-democracy protests were a significant feature of South Korean life in the 1980s. Mobilization—in which hundreds to hundreds of thousands of people gather—is a common way South Koreans engage politically. A 2009 study of popular protests by Sunhyuk Kim reported that Korea recorded an average of 372 protests a year and that most of these targeted the government. According to Jennifer Oh of Ewha Women's University in Seoul, "During the candlelight vigils that occurred during the 2000s, hundreds of thousands,

even a million protestors gathered to protest government action and policies. The candlelight vigils were a powerful demonstration of public opposition and dissatisfaction with government decisions and policies" (Oh, 2012).

South Korean society

South Korean society is based on Confucian values. As in other societies rooted in Confucianism, good behaviour is that which benefits the group, not the individual. For Koreans, good behaviour means following the rules, working or studying hard and living modestly. Also important in Korean society is harmony, as is the concept of *kibun*, meaning face. To maintain harmony, Koreans make an effort to avoid conflict and, as in other Confucian societies, order and hierarchy are valued as means of maintaining harmonious relations. In Korea, it is important to know where a person ranks on the hierarchy—in other words, the person's status, which is typically based on age, occupation, level of education and gender. Those who are younger are expected to respect and obey their seniors. In return, seniors must guide, protect and look after their subordinates. The importance of status is evident in the workplace, where employees are expected to treat their supervisor and senior employees with the utmost respect.

Gender roles and work

The Confucian positioning of men above women has created a sexist and gender-bound society. Even though South Korean women are well educated, they face rampant discrimination in hiring and at work. Most men assume that women will leave the workplace when they marry and that, if they do keep working, their wives' commitment to their work will be less than their own. These views are shared by employers, most of whom are unwilling to hire or continue to employ a woman with a child, doubting that she would make a full commitment to her job. As a result, women are poorly treated at work with few opportunities for advancement. Additionally, working hours are extremely long (approximately 18 percent above the OECD average) at South Korean companies (Ock, 2015; "A pram too far," 2013), so a working mother would find it very challenging to fulfil a company's expectations and be able to look after her child.¹ At home, South Korean women do almost all of the housework and childcare. South Korea ranks lowest among OECD countries for the amount of time their men spend caring for children (Hong, 2020; Brunhuber, 2018).

In a self-fulfilling prophecy, many women do leave the workforce in their 30s, marry and raise children, although they sometimes return in their mid-40s to less corporate jobs. Recently, however, more women have been forgoing marriage and concentrating on their careers. According to Statistics Korea, in 2017 only 47.5 percent of women surveyed agreed with the statement "marriage is a must." This view may be largely due to the attitudes of Korean men, many of whom are still very traditional, particularly if their mothers were. In other words, there may "not [be] enough modern men for newly educated women to marry" ("Women in South Korea," 2013). As single women almost never have children in South Korea, a declining marriage rate guarantees a declining birth rate. In 2018, South Korea's fertility rate fell to 0.98, the lowest in the developed world. South Korean women have been speaking out and arguing for change on issues ranging from beauty standards to changing

South Korea's national assembly, which many would like to see 50 percent female. South Korea's #MeToo movement has exploded. Thousands of Koreans have marched in protest, and numerous prominent men have been forced to apologize for sexual misconduct. Some have been prosecuted.

Textbox 4.2 Korean names

Most Koreans have three characters in their names: two in their given names and one in their surname. When written in Chinese or Korean, the surname always comes first. There are about 285 family names in use in South Korea, but most Koreans use only half a dozen surnames. About 22 percent of the population uses the last name Kim, about 15 percent uses Lee or Yi and about 9 percent Park or Pak. In other words, 45 percent of the population has one of three last names. This is the case because for centuries, surnames were only granted to royalty and a few members of the aristocratic (*yangban*) class. Kim and Lee were among the names used by the royalty. Since it was not until 1894 that those at the very bottom of society were allowed to adopt a surname, many took a popular name or the name of their master.

Concerns about North Korea

Anxiety about North Korea has been a continual part of South Korean life, occupying the minds of both public officials and private citizens. The division of the peninsula left families unable to visit or communicate with other family members (see Family Reunions on p. x). The threat of a military invasion from the north has been a constant background worry, leading South Korea to spend large sums of money on its military, and there are understandably particular concerns about Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program.

Education and career prospects

"The fundamental problem of child-rearing in South Korea is too few children, too much rearing" ("Women in South Korea," 2013).

South Koreans have a passion for education. Linked to socio-economic success, status and the desire for social mobility, societal emphasis on education dates back more than 1,000 years when the South Korean civil service exam began in 958. Only legitimate members of the *yangban* class (those who could prove their lineage on both their paternal and maternal sides) were permitted to write the exam. Becoming a civil servant guaranteed a good life, a stable income and respect from all, and to reach this goal, education was the key. A thousand years later, education is still revered as the means to a prestigious, well-paid career in the government, bank or chaebol companies. To this end, South Korean children are expected to study extremely hard and for long hours, with the goal of doing well on the national College Scholastic Ability Test and gaining entry to one of South Korea's three most prestigious universities: Seoul National University, Korea University and Yonsei University. To boost their children's test scores, families spend about 20 percent of

their income on tutoring at cram schools called *hagwon*, and mothers devote their lives to navigating the educational journey of their children. The huge amounts of time and money devoted to a child's education are daunting for prospective parents, so many young couples will not even think about having children until or unless they have sufficient income to help them become successful. Under these conditions, it is little wonder that South Korea has an extremely low birth rate. As a result, South Korea suffers "from a shortage of happy mediocrities, countercultural rebels, slackers, dropouts and eccentrics. These people, in effect, remain unborn" ("Snake Heads," 2013).

The focus on education boomed in the post-Korean War period. Competition escalated to such an extent that the government began to take steps to curb it. In 1971, middle school entrance exams were cancelled, but that shifted the focus to high school entrance exams. The government later replaced the high school exams with a lottery, leaving all the competition for the university entrance exams. More recently, Seoul placed a 10 p.m. curfew on the *hakwon*, but students have circumvented this by continuing to study online. A key element of the university entrance exams is English, which therefore plays an important role in exam preparation. The emphasis on learning English is so strong that some families move their children, with or without their mothers, to English speaking countries in an effort to improve their English abilities.

This complete commitment to education bears results. South Korea is one of the most educated countries in the world, with 70 percent of 24- to 35-year-olds having finished post-secondary education. In a key international test (Trends in International Math and Science Study) conducted every four years, South Korean students finish near the top. In 2016, South Korea placed third after Singapore and Hong Kong and slightly above Taiwan and Japan. However, there is a cost to this ultracompetitive education system. OECD studies show South Korean children and adolescents to be among the least happy in the developed world. They rank at or near the bottom of the 22 surveyed countries for life satisfaction. Students cite academic stress, a lack of leisure time, sleep deprivation and long hours spent studying as reasons for their dissatisfaction with their lives.

South Korean children and adolescents spend 14 hours a day studying. Young South Koreans are very concerned about their futures as there is intense competition for good jobs, especially those with the government or a chaebol. This competition and anxiety about the future has placed enormous pressure on this generation, sometimes referred to as the three-renunciation generation because its members do not have the time or money for dating, marriage or children. The renunciations are sometimes increased to five, to include housing and skill building, or seven, adding hobbies and hope. The goal of all this hard work is a good job (better paying and more prestigious) in the government, a bank or one of the chaebol companies.

Religion

Buddhism had an early influence on Korean culture and remains the most significant religion in South Korea. About half of South Koreans practise a religion, and almost half of those practising are Buddhists. Korea also has a sizeable Christian population—11 percent of the population is Catholic, and 18 percent is Protestant. Confucianism, with its emphasis on the harmony of the group, the importance of education and respect for ancestors, continues to have a big impact on Korean society (see Figure 4.4).



Figure 4.4 Jogyesa Buddhist temple, Seoul.

Textbox 4.3 Asian financial crisis

Between June 1997 and January 1998, a financial crisis swept through Asia. While in retrospect signs of looming problems were evident, at the time it came as a big shock. There were some differences in the causes, responses and impact of the Asian financial crisis on the main countries it affected: Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and South Korea. All, however, had been economic powerhouses in the previous decade (South Korea's growth rate averaged about 12 percent between 1990 and 1996), fuelled by inexpensive and educated workforces producing increasingly higher-value exports. These conditions sparked an investment boom, both foreign and domestic, in commercial and residential property, and in industry and infrastructure, leading eventually to a significant amount of excess capacity. In addition, some of the investments were quite dubious. Excess capacity led to falling prices and companies suddenly had huge debts they could not service.

The roots of the 1997–1998 financial crisis in South Korea were the macroeconomic conditions that had deteriorated in 1995–1996, as well as the accumulation of short-term foreign debt. Demand for semiconductors, a major South Korean export at the time, had fallen. Export growth had declined, causing a decrease in industrial production. Because Korean banks had borrowed extensively from overseas and had funded questionable loans to the chaebol for a number of years, many of the biggest South

Korean companies were heavily overextended. When the economy slowed, companies were unable to pay their debts and/or obtain new loans. Eight major chaebol companies, including Hanbo Steel and Kia Motors, suddenly went bankrupt. In November 1977, the value of the Korean won fell, worsening the situation for banks as much of the short-term borrowing had been in U.S. dollars.

To ameliorate the situation, the South Korean government applied for a financial bailout from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which provided a \$57 billion bailout. But difficult conditions were attached: Korea was required to increase taxes, cut public spending, raise interest rates, admit foreign banks and privatize some state-owned businesses. South Koreans resented the IMF's terms and were embarrassed about asking the IMF for help, so much so that the day the agreement was signed with the IMF (December 3, 1997) was named National Humiliation Day. (The same name had been given to the first day of the Japanese occupation of the peninsula in 1910.) In the wake of the agreement, unemployment tripled as corporate restructuring led to large-scale layoffs. South Koreans remained angry at the IMF both because of its imperious attitude and a sense of injustice that irresponsible international lenders who had made the risky loans were not forced to bear any responsibility.

The country's response to the humiliation was quite remarkable. In January 1998, the Korean Broadcasting System (the country's national broadcaster) in conjunction with a number of banks launched a gold gathering campaign that ran for four months. Citizens were encouraged to collect any gold they might have in their homes and donate it to collection centres. The gold would be exchanged for money to pay off the IMF loan. Millions of South Koreans donated 227 tons of gold valued at over \$2 billion.

Challenges facing South Korea

Like all East Asian countries, South Korea is facing a series of significant social and economic challenges, many shared with neighbouring nations.

Demographics

South Korean society is rapidly ageing. While 10 percent of the population was over the age of 65 in 2008 and 15.5 percent in 2019, predictions are that this will reach more than 20 percent in 2026 and to 30 percent in 2041 ("Aging Population," 2020). Caring for the elderly is likely to be a significant challenge as only one-third of the older population currently receives a pension. At present, only about 25 percent of people over 70 live with their children. South Korea has the lowest birth rate in the developed world, falling to 0.98 in 2018. (To put how low this is in perspective, Japan, also concerned about its low birth rate, had a rate of 1.42.) Because it is so expensive to raise a child, many women have intentionally decided not to have a child until economic and social conditions are more favourable. Their actions are often referred to as a "baby strike."

Since 2005, the South Korean government has spent \$120 billion on campaigns to encourage couples to have more children, but the continuing low birth rate indicates that these initiatives have not been successful. Critics argue that the reason these campaigns fail is that

they reward couples with more than one child rather than making it easier for women to have their first child. In 2018, benefits were added, including monthly child subsidies and the right to work an hour less a day for parents with children under eight. Additionally, optional paternity leave has now been increased to 10 days from 3. Undermining this increase, however, is the lack of consequences for employers who choose not to offer their workers the benefits. Until South Korean societal attitudes and realities change, it is unlikely that these state policies will affect the birth rate.

A rapidly ageing population and an extremely low birth rate mean that South Korea's population is projected to flatten around 2023 at approximately 52.6 million people and then begin to decline. As a result of this projection, South Korea has begun to look more closely at immigration. Traditionally, nearly all Koreans prided themselves on their pure blood and saw themselves as part of a distinct culture with a shared bloodline. Textbooks and national imagery have reinforced this belief. The obsession with *minjok*, meaning race nation or ethnic group, grew in response to the years of attempted assimilation under the Japanese occupation. At the end of Japanese rule, academics and activists continued to write about *minjok* and to build national pride by emphasizing the unique racial and cultural heritage of Koreans.

As a result of these beliefs, immigration to South Korea has been limited. Some foreign women have been sent to South Korea through international marriage brokers to become wives for farmers. Over the past few decades, most of the foreign workers from China and South and Southeast Asia have come to South Korea primarily to do the dirty or dangerous jobs South Koreans avoid. In the mid-2000s, South Korea signed agreements with some Southeast and Central Asian countries to allow their citizens to apply for time-limited work visas for low-skilled jobs. As a result, the number of foreigners living in South Korea doubled from 1.2 million in 2009 to 2.4 million in 2018. Also gradually increasing is the number of naturalized South Koreans. Since 2013, over 10,000 people annually have become naturalized South Koreans. (To put this number in perspective, since 1948, only 190,000 people have become naturalized South Koreans.) The first foreign-born South Korean to win a seat in the National Assembly was Jasmine Lee, in office from 2012 to 2016. Originally from the Philippines, Ms. Lee married a South Korean man she met at university in Davao City and became a popular actress and television personality in South Korea. However, when she won her seat in the National Assembly (she was on the Saenuri Party's proportional representation list so was not voted for directly), she received a strongly negative reaction because she was not ethnically Korean. Jasmine Lee was excluded from the Saenuri's Party list in the 2016 election.

Most of the recent naturalizations have come through marriage. Over 10 percent of all marriages are now international, with the majority of mixed marriages between a South Korean man and a foreign woman. Those marrying foreign brides tend to be poorer South Korean men from rural areas. Having been brokered by a third party, many of these marriages are between two people who have not met before the wedding. The largest number of foreign wives comes from China (including women from the 5 million ethnically Korean Chinese). Others come from Vietnam, the Philippines, Japan, Taiwan, Mongolia, Uzbekistan and a number of other countries. These non-Korean wives are often poorly treated; the victims of prejudice, discrimination and abuse; and their mixed-race children bullied. Although the government was unprepared for the big increase in mixed families, it is now offering support to these mixed couples and encouraging public acceptance of

multicultural families through poster campaigns and children's books featuring mixed-race families.

Frustration with the elite

Immediately prior to the impeachment of former President Park Geun-hye, hundreds of thousands of South Koreans took to the streets to protest against her continued occupancy of the presidency. As many as a million people attended one of these marches in Seoul. The scandal revolved around the accusation (later proved in court) that Park had shared government secrets with her friend and spiritual advisor Choi Soon-sil. With Choi, Park was accused and later convicted of bribery, extortion and abuse of power for collecting millions of dollars in bribes from big companies. Park is not the only South Korean president to be jailed. Park's predecessor Lee Myung-bak was sentenced to 15 years for bribery, embezzlement and abuse of power. Two former presidents were imprisoned for the Kwangju massacre, although they were later pardoned, and another previous president was investigated for corruption.

The Park scandal, however, hit a particular nerve with the South Korean public. Park had seemed to govern from on high, remaining distant from voters. As in other parts of the world, South Korean frustration had been mounting, centred on the belief that the system is designed to benefit the elite—those with connections and money—while the average South Korean struggles. Choi is said to have used some of the funds extorted from the companies to pay for horseback riding lessons for her daughter. She then convinced the prestigious Ewha Womans University to add dressage to the special criteria for admission in order to help her daughter get a place. Merit-based university admission is important to South Koreans, as it is a route through which people from less-privileged backgrounds can advance and families make enormous sacrifices to give their children a chance for success. This scandal therefore infuriated South Koreans.

Growing inequality

Inequality is becoming an increasingly significant issue in South Korea. The top 10 percent of South Koreans hold about two-thirds of the country's wealth, while the bottom half of the population holds only 2 percent of the wealth. Lack of social mobility—of a chance for the poor to better themselves economically—entrenches inequality. As they have been for years, career opportunities are often still tied to a person's family background and/or connections. In the last decade, people have grown bitter and frustration has exploded, seen in the new slang phrases referring to those who have made it as “gold spoons” and those who have not as “dirt spoons.” This theme of the haves versus the have-nots has been embraced in recent Korean films. The 2019 film *Parasite* follows the destitute Kim family as it tries to improve its lot in life by taking advantage of the wealthy Park family. *Parasite* won four awards at the 92nd Academy Awards, including the Best Picture award.

Conclusion

In a few decades, South Korea rose from being one of the poorest countries in the world to the 11th largest economy. Through the “miracle on the Han River,” GDP growth continues

at approximately 3 percent annually. Unemployment is low, although, as in much of the world, part-time and more precarious employment has increased, and there is stiff competition for well-paid careers. South Korea remains a manufacturing powerhouse, producing cars, chemicals, ships and steel, and spends 4.6 percent of its GDP on research and development, the highest percentage in the world. This investment has clearly produced dividends, as over one-third of South Korea's manufacturing exports are high-technology products, especially in electronics and telecommunications. Trade also continues to increase. In recent years, South Korea has signed 15 free trade agreements, including with the United States, China and the European Union. These agreements will loosen the chaebol's grip on the South Korean economy.

Since the 1990s, South Korean culture has become popular internationally, particularly within Asia. Dubbed Hallyu or the Korean wave, first South Korean television dramas and then Korean pop music (K-pop), movies and fashion inundated Asia and spread globally. Recording artist Psy's 2012 hit *Gangnam Style*, which parodies the lifestyles of the wealthy people who live in the Gangnam neighbourhood in Seoul, was a global sensation. The South Korean government has committed to supporting its cultural industries and has begun to use the Korean Wave as a form of soft power.

South Korea's strengths were revealed in the country's response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The size and efficiency of South Korea's testing, tracing and quarantine system—it was the first country to launch drive-through testing facilities—earned the country international praise and was credited with rapidly limiting the number of new cases appearing each day. All this was done without shutting down the South Korean economy or creating mass buying of staples like toilet paper, as was seen in other countries. Despite fractious politics (in the middle of the pandemic the Korean Medical Association was demanding that the government dismiss the health and welfare minister and the presidential advisory panel), the South Korean leadership was quick to act and to act competently, inspiring trust from the general public.

Introduction to North Korea

North Korea occupies the northern part of the Korean Peninsula, bordering China and Russia to the north. As the country is mountainous, the majority of the population of 25 million lives in the southern coastal plains. Over 3 million people live in the capital city Pyongyang, which is situated on the Taedong river just over 100 km from the river's mouth on the Yellow Sea (the name for the northern part of the East China Sea). North Korea's government is based in Pyongyang; the city is also the industrial centre of North Korea.

At the end of World War II and the Japanese occupation of the Korean Peninsula, Korea was divided into two zones. The north was occupied by the Soviet Union under the Soviet Civil Administration from October 3, 1945, until the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) was established in 1948. The Soviet Union had entered the war only eight days before Japan surrendered, but this last-minute engagement left them in the position to be one of the occupying armies. Highly suspicious of the West's intentions, the Soviet Union intended to create a buffer zone between itself and the West, so it embraced the opportunity to make the region north of the 38th parallel a separate political entity. When in 1948 United Nations representatives arrived on the peninsula to oversee democratic elections, the Soviet Union did not admit them and selected Kim Il-sung to be the leader of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (see Textbox 4.4).

Textbox 4.4 The Supreme Leaders of North Korea

Kim Il-sung (1912–1994)

Many of the details of Kim Il-sung's life remain unclear as the truth has been embellished by the personality cult that developed around him (see Figure 4.5). It is known that he was born near Pyongyang under the birth name of Kim Song-ju and moved to Manchuria, perhaps because his parents were active in the anti-Japanese resistance. In China, he became a member of the Communist youth league and later of the Communist Party itself. Active in the Korean guerrilla resistance against the Japanese occupation, he took the name of a famous guerrilla fighter. In World War II, Kim crossed from Manchuria into Russia and joined the Soviet Red Army, fighting as the commander of one of two Korean units. According to mythology, Kim is said to have fought from secret bases around Mount Paektu, a revered mountain believed to be the birthplace of the Korean people. However, although he was a guerrilla fighter, Kim actually fought in Manchuria not on Mount Paektu. When Japan was defeated, Kim was with an army unit in the Russian Far East and did not take part in the liberation of the Korean Peninsula in 1945. Although Kim did not enter Korea until a month after the Japanese were defeated, North Korean books praise his role in the defeat, giving only some of the credit for the defeat of the Japanese to the Soviets. On July 8, 1994, Kim Il-sung died suddenly of a heart attack.



Figure 4.5 Official North Korean portrait of Kim Il-sung (posthumous).

Kim Jong-il

Kim Jong-il succeeded his father as Supreme Leader of North Korea (see Figure 4.6). Records show that he was born in a Russian military camp in the Russian Far East. His official biography, however, has him born on sacred Mount Paektu and maintains that a shining star allegedly appeared in the sky on the night of his birth. In 1980, he had been named the successor to his father and began being groomed for the role. Upon his father's death, he was given the title Dear Leader, and the government began to build a personality cult around him. Kim Jong-il had a special passion for film, theatre and art. To improve the North Korean film industry, he kidnapped a South Korean actress and her film producer/ex-husband in 1978. After making many films, the two escaped in 1986. Kim Jong-il ruled North Korea until his death in 2011.



Figure 4.6 Official North Korean portrait of Kim Jong-il (posthumous).

Kim Jong-un

The third son of Kim Jong-il and the grandson of Kim Il-sung, Kim Jong-un became the Supreme Leader of North Korea in 2011 and Chairman of the Workers' Party of Korea the following year. In his youth, he attended a private school in Switzerland. One of his early acts as Supreme Leader was to have his uncle Jang Song-thaek arrested and executed for treachery. He is also suspected of having arranged the murder of his older half-brother Kim Jong-nam in Malaysia in 2017.

In 2019, as negotiators for the United States failed to reach an agreement with North Korea over its nuclear program, Kim Jong-un began preparing the North Korean citizenry for potential hard times ahead. To do so, his underlings circulated images of Kim Jong-un astride a white horse on Mount Paektu, a reminder of his sacred roots. The commentary that accompanies the image emphasizes how Kim Jong-un's grandfather conquered enemies on the battlefield, just as his grandson will do in battle against the Americans and their sanctions.

The Post-war transformation of North Korea

Once the Soviets had chosen Kim Il-sung as leader, they helped create his credentials and build the base for the mythology that now surrounds him, his son and grandson. On September 9, 1948, with the backing of the Soviets, Kim Il-sung was declared premier of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. In 1950, with the goal of unifying the Korean Peninsula and with the reluctant backing of the Soviet Union and China, Kim led an invasion into the South. The Kim regime, however, tells its citizens that North Korea was attacked by the United States and its South Korean "puppet" government.

After the conclusion of the Korean War, Kim transformed North Korea into a highly controlled totalitarian state. Kim introduced the Juche ideology of self-reliance, focussing domestic policies on militarization and industrialization. His exploits as a guerrilla fighter against the Japanese were extolled and formed the basis of the cult of personality that surrounded him. As early as 1949, statues were being built of him, and Kim Il-sung had started referring to himself as the *Great Leader*. There are now over 500 statues of Kim Il-sung in North Korea, and his birthday is still celebrated as a national holiday, known as the Day of the Sun. Portraits of him and of his son and grandson hang in every home, and all citizens are expected to wear patriotic pins on their chests. During his rule, children were taught that it was because of Kim Il-sung that they had food and were clothed. The preamble of the North Korean Constitution concludes by stating that Kim Il-sung and his son and successor Kim Jong-il are eternal leaders of North Korea and the Constitution would now be the Kim Il-sung Kim Jong-il Constitution as it is based on their ideas and achievements.

After the Korean War (see pp. 106–7), the North Korean leaders established a Communist single-party state with a planned economy. Industries were nationalized and farms collectivized. At the time of the division, the North had a significant economic head start over the South as the majority of industrial development under the Japanese had been in the North. As it began to rebuild its economy, North Korea focussed on heavy industry. With financial and technical aid from the Soviet Union and China, North Korea invested in iron and steel, cement and machine tools.

North Korea became a political dictatorship run by an extremely repressive government, with a unicameral legislature known as the Supreme People's Assembly (SPA). One person from each of the country's 687 constituencies is "elected" to a five-year term. According to its Constitution, North Korea is a democratic republic: the SPA's representatives are directly elected by all North Koreans aged 17 and over. However, in reality, the elections are in name only, as one candidate runs in each riding. To be elected, the candidate must be a member of the Democratic Front for the Reunification of the Fatherland, in which there are three political parties: Workers' Party of North Korea, the Korean Social Democratic Party and the Chondoist Chongu Party. The Workers' Party of North Korea is led by a member of the ruling family and is recognized by the Constitution as the main state party. The Workers' Party of North Korea is the ruling political party of North Korea, and the other two parties are minor and subservient to it. Seven mass organizations (e.g. the Korean Children's Union, the Kimilsungist-Kimjongilist Youth League, the General Federation of Trade Unions of Korea, the Union of Agricultural Workers of Korea and the Socialist Women's Union of Korea) also form part of the Democratic Front for the Reunification of the Fatherland, which holds mass meetings at which candidates are selected to run in the elections. The name of the selected candidate for the district appears on the ballot. While a voter could cross off a candidate's name in front of election officials, this would be considered a treasonous act with serious personal consequences.

Although the SPA is the country's main legislative body, it only sits a few days a year. Authority is delegated to the much smaller Presidium, which is elected from the SPA and

has about 15 members, including the president, two vice presidents and a secretary general. North Korea is, however, actually a one-man dictatorship, with power firmly in the hands of the national leader. The founder and first president was Kim Il-sung, who governed from 1945 to 1994 and was given the title Eternal President. He was followed by his son, Kim Jong-il (1994–2011), and his grandson, Kim Jong-un (2011 to present) (see Textbox 4.4). Complete loyalty and obedience to the leader is expected, and leader-focused propaganda is intense and commonplace. The citizenry truly believe that their leader is embedded with special powers.

North Korea's economy

North Korea is governed according to Juche, an ideology of self-reliance, which was first presented in the mid-1950s by Kim Il-sung and enshrined in the country's Constitution in 1972. The official state policy, Juche, advocates that true socialism can only be achieved through economic self-sufficiency, military independence and political independence. On the economic front, this means that the state controls the economy. Capital goods are all owned by state-owned enterprises and agriculture is collectivized. Following the Soviet model, North Korea's initial focus was on heavy industry, and industrial input therefore increased in the 1960s. However, in the 1970s, the economy suffered from problems with centralized planning, including supply shortages, poor infrastructure and ageing equipment. North Korea had taken on foreign loans to buy machinery and other industrial equipment and then had difficulty servicing its debt payments. The oil shocks of 1973 and 1979 followed, leading to a dramatic increase in the price of oil, a major import.

By the 1990s, the North Korean economy had edged towards collapse. The break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991 cost North Korea its main source of foreign aid, trade and technology transfer. Between 1990 and 1993, the value of trade between North Korea and the Soviet Union plummeted from \$2.4 billion to \$222 million, and the transfer of military technology also evaporated. A series of natural disasters, beginning with hailstorms in 1994, ravaged the country. Catastrophic floods destroyed crop lands, harvests, emergency grain reserves and infrastructure across almost a third of the country. Further flooding occurred in 1996, followed by a serious drought the following year. As a result, North Korea suffered a major famine between 1994 and 1998, which killed 600,000 to 1 million people (access to information in North Korea is unreliable, so estimates vary widely) ("How Did the North Korean Famine Happen?," 2002). These hardships are continuing: every year, thousands of people are at risk of starvation or malnutrition. In 2019, for example, the United Nations World Food Program estimated that over 10 million North Koreans out of a population of 25.5 million were food insecure.

Since Kim Jong-un took power in 2011, there has been some economic liberalization. However, North Korea still ranked last in the 2019 Heritage Foundation's Economic Freedom Rankings. GDP per capita is approximately \$1700, and poverty and hardship are widespread. Reliable North Korean economic statistics are hard to obtain, but in the last decade there appears to have been some economic growth. Pyongyang, in particular, appears to have prospered, evidenced by an increase in high-rise buildings, vehicles and a better dressed and well-fed population. The city even boasts a dolphinarium and a water park. The growth may be attributable to a shift towards a more market-based economic system in which households are now responsible for their own farming. After giving the state about one-third of their production, they are able to keep the remainder. For industry also, centralized planning appears to have been relaxed and a more free market system embraced. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, China has been North Korea's main ally and trading partner.

According to the *CIA World Factbook*, in 2017, China was the source of 92 percent of North Korean imports and the recipient of 86 percent of its exports.

North Korea follows a military-first policy called *Songun*. Absolute priority is placed on the development of a strong military, and major investments are made in the military despite the country's poverty. Estimates are that about one-quarter of the national budget is devoted to military expenditures, with a significant amount spent on the country's nuclear program. North Korea has the fourth largest active duty army in the world with 1.2 million active military members and a total of close to 7.5 million military, reserve and paramilitary personnel out of a population of 25 million (Albert, 2019). This represents 30 percent of the total population of the country.

One of the world's most repressive states, North Korea ranks at the bottom of Freedom House's *Freedom in The World Index*. North Korean citizens have very few civil or political rights and freedoms. Freedom of expression, speech, assembly, association and religion are restricted, and political opposition, independent media and labour unions are prohibited. The government is brutal in its suppression of dissent. In 2014, a United Nations special commission of inquiry published a 400-page report of atrocities occurring in the DPRK and stated that "crimes against humanity have been committed and continue to take place in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea" ("North Korea: UN Commission," 2014). Arbitrary arrest, torture and execution instil fear in the population. Amnesty International's 2017–2018 report on North Korea cites "systematic, widespread and gross human rights violations" (Amnesty International, 2018). An estimated 200,000 people are incarcerated in North Korean prison camps, and over the years, hundreds of thousands have died in them (The Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, n.d.; Rendler, n.d.). Prisoners are subjected to forced labour, on infrastructure projects for example, and other forms of physical abuse. Capital punishment is still practised in North Korea. Amnesty International estimates that 105 people were executed between 2007 and 2012. (Numbers for more recent years are not available.)

Many North Koreans have attempted to defect, so the government tightly restricts contact with the outside world and prohibits almost all crossings of the border into China or South Korea. However, thousands have defected successfully, some through safe houses in China. The Chinese government considers North Korean defectors as illegal economic migrants and refuses to grant them refugee status. If they are caught trying to cross the border or in China, they are captured and returned to North Korea, where they face years of harsh punishment. According to South Korea's Ministry of Unification, over 31,000 North Koreans, three-quarters of them women, have defected to South Korea. Despite the shared cultural heritage, North Korean defectors have not found it easy to settle in South Korea. They report experiencing discrimination and poor treatment, and many struggle with mental health issues.

North Korean society

North Korean society is based on traditional Korean culture and emphasizes nationalism and equality. Since the vast majority of North Koreans have practically no contact with the outside world, they have extremely limited exposure to foreign influences. Although North Korea was established as a classless society, a privileged elite consisting of the highest echelon of the military and the Korean Workers' Party has emerged. As the government has devoted a significant part of its budget to the military, the provision of health care, housing and social services have been limited. In the large cities, most North Koreans live in

small apartments in high-rise buildings. The ideology of Juche (now often referred to as Kimilsungism-Kimjungilism) emphasizes self-reliance and Korea's cultural distinctiveness.

North Korea-South Korea relations

The border between North and South Korea is one of the most tense and potentially volatile places in the world. Large numbers of troops guard both sides of the line, and there have been numerous shootings and other incidents in the demilitarized zone (DMZ) over the decades. Between 1953 and 2004, both sides broadcast propaganda over loudspeakers towards the other. Both have also sent propaganda leaflets in balloons to the other side. In 1974, the South Koreans discovered the first of four tunnels the North Koreans had dug across the DMZ, most likely to facilitate a military invasion.

In 1971, the first reunification talks between North and South Korea began and continued intermittently over the next decades. During the 1970s and 1980s, relations between North and South Korea were extremely changeable. A positive step was the first reunion of families separated by the war, which took place over three days in September 1985 (see Textbox 4.5). Another was discussions about co-hosting the Seoul 1988 Olympics and about various forms of economic cooperation. However, these rapprochements were far from smooth, tending to start, stop and then start again. In 1991, both North and South Korea were granted seats in the United Nations, and the two countries signed the Agreement on Reconciliation, Non-Aggression, Exchanges and Cooperation. This agreement was to be a step towards an eventual peace treaty, which, however, has still not materialized. Officially, North and South Korea remain at war.

Textbox 4.5 Family reunions

The Korean Red Cross estimates that approximately 10 million families were affected by the division of the peninsula at the end of the Korean War (Foley, 2001). Family members who found themselves on opposite sides of the border have lived for decades unable to have any contact with one another. Reuniting divided families has been a longstanding humanitarian issue. The first Korean family reunion took place in 1985 when approximately 150 Koreans were able to meet family members they had not seen in 30 years. Sadly, it was to be 15 years before another reunion was held. After the historic Kim-Kim summit in 2000, a commitment was made to hold more reunions. This was especially urgent as many of the affected family members were ageing and could die before seeing their family members again. Approximately 21,000 people have participated in over 20 rounds of reunions since 2000. To put this in perspective, however, 57,000 South Koreans who applied for the most recent reunion in 2018 were not chosen. Many of them were over 80 years old. Thousands of others have died without ever being selected.

The nuclear issue

Early in 1992, South and North Korea signed the Joint Declaration of the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, in which they agreed to the following: (1) not to test, manufacture, possess or use nuclear weapons, (2) to use nuclear energy only for peaceful purposes, (3) not to have either uranium enrichment or nuclear reprocessing facilities, and (4) to allow inspections to verify the denuclearization. However, the words did not translate into verifiable action. North Korea had been pursuing a nuclear weapons program since the 1980s, operating

uranium processing facilities and conducting high explosive tests. Although it acceded to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (the NPT, an agreement to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons) in 1985, North Korea was never in compliance. Within a year of signing the Joint Declaration, North Korea refused to allow International Atomic Energy inspectors to visit its nuclear sites and threatened to withdraw from the NPT. Tensions rose as the rest of the world, particularly South Korea, the United States and Japan, remained convinced that North Korea was developing a nuclear bomb. After diplomatic talks, North Korea backed down and allowed inspectors to visit in March 1994. In June of the same year, U.S. President Jimmy Carter made a goodwill visit to Pyongyang and met with Kim Il-sung, which paved the way for the Agreed Framework between North Korea and the United States. In the Agreed Framework, North Korea agreed to dismantle its nuclear reactors and remain party to the NPT. In return, the United States would provide oil and two light-water reactors. At the Carter-Kim meeting, North also promised to hold the first summit meeting with South. However, a few weeks later, Kim Il-sung died of a heart attack; the summit was cancelled as the country plunged into a period of mourning.

In 1998, North Korea launched its first ballistic missile, the Taepodong-1 missile, over Japan (see Figure 4.7). Tensions increased until the following year when North Korea declared a moratorium on missile testing in exchange for the easing of American sanctions. (The United States first imposed sanctions on North Korea in 1950 and has tightened them numerous times since then.) Suddenly, the North agreed to a summit with the South. In June 2000, North Korea's President Kim Jong-il and South Korea's President Kim Dae-jung met in Pyongyang. The summit was a success, and the two leaders agreed to reunions for separated families and various economic development projects.



Figure 4.7 North Korean ballistic missile.

In 2001, American President George W. Bush took a hard-line position on North Korea, calling it part of an “axis of evil” (along with Iran and Iraq) and putting new sanctions in place. In October 2002, the U.S. confronted North Korea with evidence it had been running a clandestine uranium-enrichment program in clear violation of the Agreed Framework, the Joint Declaration and the Non-Proliferation Treaty. North Korea admitted to the program, prompting the United States to halt its energy assistance. In retaliation, Pyongyang expelled the IAEA inspectors, withdrew from the NPT and restarted the Yongbyon nuclear plant.

In August 2003, North Korea agreed to participate in multilateral talks with the United States, Russia, Japan, China and South Korea. These Six-Party Talks proceeded in a series of rounds that lasted until 2009. The first round of talks took place later in August 2003 in Beijing, ending with a few points of consensus but no breakthroughs. The second and third rounds of talks were in 2004, but it was not until September 2005 in the fourth round that the first breakthrough in resolving the North Korean nuclear crisis was achieved. The six parties issued a joint statement outlining the agreed upon steps, with North Korea committing itself to abandoning nuclear weapons, allowing inspections and returning to the NPT. The other five countries would supply North Korea with energy, including a light-water reactor at some point. The United States and South Korea promised they also would not use nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula.

The breakthrough did not last long. The fifth round of negotiations in November 2005 was only three days. Although there were discussions on how the details of the joint statement would be implemented, no major steps were achieved. In the following months, tensions rose over U.S. sanctions on the Banco Delta Asia of Macao, which froze \$25 million in North Korean funds. North Korea boycotted the next proposed talks and, in July 2006, conducted seven short-medium and long-range ballistic missile tests. On October 9, 2006, the North Koreans conducted an underground nuclear test. In response, the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution unanimously condemning the tests and requiring North Korea to stop further testing and join the Six-Party Talks. The \$25 million was released and North Korea committed to stopping its nuclear operations at Yongbyon. Talks resumed in September 2007, and in exchange for 900,000 tons of oil and an American commitment to remove North Korea from its state sponsors of terror list, North Korea agreed to disable its facilities. Talks continued in June 2008 after North Korea delayed implementing its commitment to end its nuclear facilities. Reaching an agreement on a verification system proved difficult. On April 5, 2009, Pyongyang tested a Taepodong missile, arguing it was part of the country’s space program. In response, the UN Security Council expanded sanctions on North Korea, prompting North Korea on April 14 to indicate that it would no longer participate in the Six-Party Talks, nor be bound by any of the former agreements. On May 25th, Pyongyang conducted a second nuclear test.

North Korea’s missile and nuclear tests are designed to test the capabilities and range of its weaponry and prove its ability to inflict damage on South Korea, Japan and the United States. Over the years, it appears to have often used these tests as a way to increase tension and force the United States and/or South Korea to engage with it and offer assistance. South Korean leaders have tried different approaches to improving relations with the North, particularly over the nuclear issue. Kim Dae-jung’s famous Sunshine Policy was an attempt to engage with the North and improve relations and understanding between the two countries. Although the policy resulted in increased contact through summits and joint economic development projects, despite its promises, the North’s nuclear program has continued. Subsequent South Korean presidents have adopted a more hard-line approach (waiting to engage until North Korea makes some kind of concession). President Park Geun-hye even

tried a middle approach that she called *Trustpolitik*, which used both carrots and sticks in interactions with the North. However, North Korea’s steps towards building a nuclear arsenal continued unabated. Some analysts argue that the legitimacy of the North Korean regime with its citizens rests upon it being in a continual state of confrontation with the United States and South Korea. The North Korean public is aware that South Koreans are better off economically but believes they are unhappy because they are subjugated to the Americans. According to one journalist, “Giving up nuclear weapons would spell the end. So he negotiates with America not to end tensions, but to manage them: neither all-out war nor all-out peace” (“The mother of all,” 2010).

Over the decades, differences between the North and South have widened as South Korea has modernized and its economy expanded. One way in which the two countries differ is in the health of their populations. Men in North Korea on average measure 8 cm less and die 12 years sooner than their counterparts in South Korea. Another example is technology: the North is using technologies the South has not used in decades. Since trade between the two Koreas has been limited to basic goods, usually carried through China, it has not extended to technology and consumer goods. Even the language spoken in the two countries differs, likely because they have been apart so long. In fact, scholars say that almost one-third of the commonplace words used are different. In the South, this is partly due to the influence of English and American culture, while the North, under the self-reliance ideology, bans words with foreign origins. Language differences could be seen in the experience of the unified hockey team that South Korea and North Korea fielded at the 2018 Winter Olympics. The Canadian/American coach noted on television that overcoming the language difference between the two groups of players had been challenging as they use very different ice hockey terminology.

While still a topic of discussion and debate and even a long-term dream for many, the possibility of reunification—of uniting North and South Korea into a single sovereign state—remains unlikely. The financial cost of reuniting the two countries, as happened between East and West Germany, would be enormous. The economic gap between the two is staggering: South Korea’s GDP per capita was \$39,500 in 2017, while the most recently available GDP per capita figure for North Korea was \$1,700 (2015). Southern young people feel little connection to the people in the north. They are not consumed with hatred nor do they romanticize the simple lifestyle, as some older leftists used to do. A December 2017 Korea Institute for National Unification survey showed that 71 percent of South Koreans in their 20s and 42 percent of all South Koreans saw reunification as unnecessary (Park and Rhee, 2017).

Two economic initiatives to bring North Korea and South Korea together were developed over the past quarter century: the Kaesong Industrial Park and the Mount Kumgang tourism project. In September 2018, the Inter-Korean Liaison Office was established to facilitate direct communication between the two Koreas and function as a de facto embassy. In June 2020, however, North Korea blew up the building, ending what had been a two-year period of improved relations.

Kaesong Industrial Park

Kaesong Industrial Park was set up in 2002 as an economic development project between North and South Korea. Kaesong is about 10 km north of the Korean demilitarized zone with road and rail access into South Korea. The purpose of the park is to attract South Korean companies to set up there and employ inexpensive North Korean labour. For South Korean companies, this would reduce costs while giving them access to an educated Korean-speaking workforce. The North in return received valuable foreign currency.

At its height in 2013, about 125 companies with 55,000 North Korean workers and 800 South Korean staff were based at Kaesong Industrial Park. The South Korean companies were making clothing, textiles, electronics, chemical products and metals and machinery. Approximately \$120 million in annual wages was paid directly to the North Korean government, which took about 30 percent in taxes and then paid the workers the remainder in food and coupons for government stores.

However, when tensions between North and South escalated, North Korea restricted access to the industrial park for periods of time. The longest closure began in April 2013 when North Korea recalled all its workers from Kaesong and lasted until mid-September, when the two countries reached an agreement to reopen it. In February 2016, in retaliation for a North Korean nuclear test and rocket launch, the South Koreans unilaterally closed the park. The South Korean government argued that it did not want the money the North Koreans earned from Kaesong used to fund the North's weapons program. The Kaesong Industrial Park remains shut although when relations between the two countries warm, the possibility of reopening Kaesong goes back on the table.

Mount Kumgang (Diamond Mountain) tourism project

On the eastern coast of North Korea north of the border with South Korea lies Mount Kumgang. With its steep cliffs, sharp ravines and lovely waterfalls, the mountain and surrounding area has been renowned for its beauty for centuries. Mount Kumgang has been the subject of many poems and works of art and is considered a sacred site by Korean Buddhists. When the peninsula was divided, South Koreans no longer had access to this important and scenic spot. In 1989, the CEO of Hyundai, originally from the North, proposed a joint tourism project to Kim Il-sung. Nine years later, during the time of improved relations between the North and South under Kim Dae-jung's Sunshine Policy, the Kumgang area was opened to South Korean and other foreign visitors. The tourism project gave North Korea access to much needed foreign currency, and the proximity to the border meant South Koreans could reach the area without meeting many North Koreans, a goal of the North Korean government, which did not want its citizens to see how much better off the South Koreans were. The North Korean government made sure that few North Koreans were allowed in the area, and only ethnic Koreans from China were hired as staff.

The area was organized as a special tourist region. A Hyundai subsidiary built hotels, restaurants, a golf course, a spa and hospital and organized tours. Foreign visitors, mainly South Koreans, visited Mount Kumgang on tours by cruise ship and later by bus through the Demilitarized Zone. However, in 2008, a North Korean soldier shot and killed a South Korean tourist when, according to the North Korean government, she walked into a military area and did not respond to warnings. The incident and resulting tensions brought tours to a halt. North Korea took over the resort. In the 10 years Mount Kumgang was open, just under 2 million South Koreans visited the region. Both governments indicate that they would like the area to reopen, but as of 2020, it remains closed.

Relations between North Korea, South Korea and the United States

Testing missiles, conducting nuclear tests, building a uranium-enrichment facility and other provocations—all have continued since 2009. In March 2010, a South Korean warship, the *Cheonan*, was hit by a torpedo, resulting in the death of 46 seamen. An international investigation into the accident led by South Korea concluded that a North Korean

torpedo sank the *Cheonan*. North Korea vehemently denied involvement. Later that same year, as South Korean troops were beginning their annual military drills, North Korea fired artillery and rockets at Yeonpyeong Island, killing four, injuring 19, and causing widespread damage. North Korea claimed that it was responding to South Korea firing into North Korean waters.

In 2012, North Korea committed again to suspend its missile and nuclear testing and stop the uranium-enrichment program in exchange for American food aid. But this deal also collapsed after another North Korean rocket launch. More North Korean nuclear tests took place in February 2013 and in January and September 2016, and more short-, medium- and long-range missile tests were also carried out in 2015 and 2016. The motivation for the missiles was multi-level: to show North Korea's military capabilities, increase the pride and confidence of the people of North Korea, to push for greater concessions from the United States and to demonstrate and exercise Kim Jong-un's power as a military leader. In 2015, responding to North Korea's missile and nuclear tests after months of China-U.S. negotiations, the United Nations agreed to the strongest sanctions yet imposed on North Korea. These included an arms sales embargo, an export ban on coal, iron and other minerals (North Korea's main exports) and an inspection of goods entering and leaving the country. The effectiveness of the sanctions depended on China's commitment to enforcing them, an uncertainty given that it had not strictly enforced previous sanctions.

U.S. President Donald Trump took office in January 2017. In July, North Korea successfully tested its first intercontinental ballistic missile and, later that year, held its sixth nuclear test, announcing that it had tested a thermonuclear weapon (hydrogen bomb). Since thermonuclear weapons are even more destructive than first-generation atomic bombs, this test greatly concerned the international community. In November, North Korea tested a missile, which it claimed could carry a nuclear warhead and reach anywhere in the United States. Following this test, relations between the United States and North Korea plummeted, as their leaders exchanged insults and threats. Trump called Kim Jong-un "Little Rocket Man" and threatened North Korea with "fire and fury like the world has never seen" (Stevens, 2018). In return, Pyongyang referred to Trump as a "mentally deranged U.S. dotard" (Stevens, 2018). As tensions escalated between the two leaders in early January of 2018, Trump tweeted "North Korean Leader Kim Jong-un just stated that the 'Nuclear Button is on his desk at all times.' Will someone from his depleted and food starved regime please inform him that I too have a Nuclear Button, but it is a much bigger & more powerful one than his and my Button works" (Trump, 2018). Fortunately, relations between the United States and North Korea improved subsequently.

In 2018, South Korean and American relations with North Korea started to improve. South Korea and North Korea agreed that their athletes would march in the opening ceremony for the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics together and compete in women's ice hockey as a joint team. For South Korea's President Moon, this was a step towards reconciliation and potentially a more peaceful future for the Korean Peninsula. Kim Jong-un saw the Olympics as a chance to raise the profile and improve the image of North Korea internationally, while shoring up his image and legitimacy as a leader with his domestic audience. This rapprochement led to an inter-Korean summit between South Korea's President Moon Jae-in and North Korea's President Kim Jong-un on April 27, 2018. (This was the third inter-Korean summit; the first had been in 2000 between Kim Dae-jung and Kim Jong-il and the second was in 2007 between Roh Moo-hyun and Kim Jong-il.) The meeting was held on the South Korean side of Panmunjom, but President Moon stepped over the demarcation line into North Korea. The two leaders discussed the improvement of relations between their two countries, including potentially formally ending the Korean War.

Surprisingly, President Trump and Chairman Kim also agreed to a summit, which took place in Singapore on June 12, 2018. The summit almost did not take place as President Trump withdrew in late May due to anger and hostility over North Korean statements. The summit emerged from President Trump's desire to distinguish himself from President Obama and the Democrats' approach to North Korea and to demonstrate his abilities as a negotiator and a dealmaker. For President Kim, the opportunity for a summit was too good to squander. He hoped to capitalize on Trump's newness as president to create new options for North Korea. Both leaders hoped for a breakthrough in a relationship that had festered for decades. After the summit, the leaders signed a joint statement in which they committed to work towards denuclearization of the peninsula and lasting peace and prosperity. The statement pledged a commitment to recovering the remains of American prisoners of war and those missing in action from the Korean War. Separate from the joint statement, President Trump announced that the United States would suspend the joint military exercises it annually undertakes with South Korea (apparently without consulting South Korea or the U.S. forces in South Korea). But he did not follow through with his commitment, and five months later, limited joint military exercises resumed.

A second Moon-Kim summit—a two-hour meeting in the Joint Security Area of the Demilitarized Zone—took place on May 26, 2018. A more substantial third summit between President Moon and Chairman Kim took place in Pyongyang from September 18 to 20, 2018. At the end of the third summit, the leaders signed a joint declaration that outlined plans for reducing tensions and expanding cooperation on the peninsula. President Trump and Chairman Kim met again, this time in Vietnam in February 2019 (see Figure 4.8), but this summit ended early without a deal as the leaders disagreed over denuclearization and



Figure 4.8 Kim-Trump summit in Hanoi, February 2019.

sanctions relief (the United States wanted North Korea to disarm before America would lift sanctions, while North Korea claimed it has already made significant steps towards denuclearization and would not do any more without sanctions relief). However, President Trump stated that relations remain friendly. At the end of June 2019, Trump and Kim met at the DMZ and agreed to restart negotiations over denuclearization. Trump stepped across the border into North Korea, and both leaders talked to the press about their "great" relationship. But North Korea soon indicated it was no longer interested in future talks and, worryingly, undertook a series of short-range missile tests.

Conclusion

The Korean Peninsula has emerged as one of the most important places on the planet. Situated between Japan and China, two of the world's economic superpowers, its position is highly strategic. Unlike other places where relations between countries formerly divided by the Cold War have improved, the division between North and South Korea remains extremely sensitive. As they have for decades, negotiations over denuclearization continue. But the normalization of relationships founders as the belligerence of Chairman Kim and President Trump's non-conformist approach to regional relations lowers the prospects for a quick resolution. Although relations between the two Koreas warmed in 2018 with their joint participation in the parade of athletes at the Winter Olympics and a series of meetings between Chairman Kim and President Moon, since then little progress has been made on North Korean denuclearization. Indeed, North Korea has resumed short-range missile testing, leaving the possibility of improved relations on the peninsula in doubt.

Note

- 1 In July 2018, the government implemented a 52-hour maximum work week, which has improved people's work-life balance.

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