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CHAPTER 1: GEOGRAPHY

Introduction

After World War II, the Korean Peninsula was divided between the North and the South at the 38th parallel. Since the end of Korean War hostilities in 1953, the boundary has been the military line of demarcation running down the center of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), a buffer of land between the two Koreas that is often described as the world’s most militarized national boundary.1, 2

To the north of the DMZ lies the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea). In an era of global interrelated economies and worldwide communications via the internet, North Korea remains one of the world’s most isolated societies. The philosophical underpinning of this insularity is the national creed of *juche*, a politically flexible ideology (sometimes given the shorthand description “self-reliance”) first outlined by former North Korean President Kim Il Sung. But to the extent that *juche* translates as “self-reliance,” it is strictly at the macro or state level, not at the individual level.3 In the *juche* model of the North Korean state, the supreme leader (*suryong*) is the most important part of the social-political body. The supreme leader, much like a brain guiding a body, directs the masses via the Korean Workers’ Party (KWP).4

In practice, North Korea’s weak economy has forced the Kim regime (Kim Il Sung’s grandson, Kim Jong Un, became the nation’s ruler in 2012) to become highly dependent on its neighbors, most notably South Korea and China, for aid and limited investment. As the country’s command economy has made halting moves toward capitalist enterprises, the *juche* message has been reinterpreted to place greater emphasis on *songun* (“military first”), expanding the economic and political roles of the Korean People’s Army (KPA) at the expense of the more ideological KWP.5

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Geographic Regions and Topographic Features

North Korea occupies the northern 55% of the Korean Peninsula. Slightly smaller than Mississippi, North Korea is bordered by China to the north, the Republic of Korea (South Korea) to the south, and Russia on the extreme northeastern tip. The nation’s maritime borders are the Sea of Japan (East Sea) to the east and the Yellow Sea (West Sea) to the west.6, 7

Roughly 80% of North Korea consists of a complex mosaic of mountains and upland areas, dissected by narrow river valleys.8 The tallest peaks lie in the north. In the far northeast are the Hamgyong Mountains, whose highest point is Mount Kwanmo at 2,540 m (8,333 ft). West of Mount Kwanmo, on the Chinese border, lies volcanic Mount Paektu, North Korea’s highest point at 2,744 m (9,003 ft).9 Chon-ji (Heaven Lake) lies near the top of Mount Paektu, within the central crater. According to official North Korean accounts (contradicted by historical evidence), Kim Jong Il, the second ruler of the Kim dynasty, was born in a log cabin on this famous peak, celebrated as the site of the ancestral origin of the Korean people.10, 11

In central North Korea, the Kangnam Mountains parallel the Amnok (Yalu) River, whose shallow waters form much of the regional boundary with China. East of the Kangnam Range are the Nangnim Mountains, forming a natural divide between the streams of the northeast and those of the northwest.12 The Taebaek Mountains to the southeast parallel the Sea of Japan coastline and extend across the border into South Korea.13 Within the Taebaek Mountains, near the South Korean border, is Mount Kumgang (Diamond Mountain), one of North Korea’s few foreign tourist attractions.14, 15

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The lowest areas in North Korea are in the western part of the country, where many of the larger mountain rivers drain into the Yellow Sea. The most extensive of these areas are the Pyongyang and Chaeryong plains, which lie to the northeast and southwest, respectively, of the mouth of the Taedong River. Coastal plains on North Korea’s eastern coast along the Sea of Japan are extremely narrow because of the steep mountain drop-off along the coast.\(^\text{16}\)

**Climate**

North Korea’s continental climate is characterized by cold dry winters that last from December through March; short, hot, wet summers that are distinctly cooler in the northeast, and transitional spring and fall seasons marked by mild temperatures and moderate rainfall. In North Korea’s far northern regions, more than half of the year (200 days) is marked by freezing temperatures. Even during the summer, the temperatures are not high enough to grow rice, the nation’s staple grain.\(^\text{17}\)

Seasonal wind patterns determine climate during the winter and summer months. During winter, cold dry air sweeps into the Korean Peninsula from Siberia and Manchuria to the north.\(^\text{18}\) In summer, moist air from the Pacific Ocean arrives via monsoonal winds coming from the south and southeast. Typhoons, although rare, occur on average at least once per summer.\(^\text{19}\) In addition to causing loss of life and producing massive flooding, these storms can be disastrous to North Korean agricultural harvests, thereby producing or intensifying famine conditions in the country.\(^\text{20, 21}\)

The average annual precipitation in North Korea is 100 cm (39.4 in), although significant variations occur among regions.\(^\text{22}\) For example, the cities of Wonsan and Pyongyang are situated at essentially the same latitude and elevation, but Wonsan receives more average


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precipitation per year than Pyongyang.\textsuperscript{23, 24} Both cities receive roughly 60\% of their yearly precipitation in the 3-month period from July through September.

Average temperatures in North Korea generally decrease the farther north one goes, although elevation and proximity to the coast are modifying influences to this trend. Higher elevation locations experience greater extremes between daily highs and lows. Because of ocean currents and the mountain ranges that hug North Korea’s eastern coast, winter temperatures there tend to be about 3\(^\circ\)–4\(^\circ\)C (5\(^\circ\)–7\(^\circ\)F) higher than temperatures on North Korea’s western coast.\textsuperscript{25, 26}

**Rivers**

North Korea’s two longest rivers form most of its northern boundary with China and Russia. The longest is the Amnok River (Yalu River), which flows for 800 km (497 mi) from headwaters on Mount Paektu to its mouth in Korea Bay, an arm of the Yellow Sea. Several hydroelectric dams are situated on the river; the largest is located at Supungnodongjagu, 56 km (35 mi) upstream from Sinuiju, the most populous North Korean city on the river. This dam provides a large portion of the electricity for the northern part of North Korea.\textsuperscript{27}

The Tumen River also originates on the slopes of Mount Paektu. It flows east-northeast, then north, before making a turn to the southeast at its northernmost point. At the end of its 521-km (324-mi) journey, it forms the 19-km-long (12-mi-long) border with Russia before emptying into the Sea of Japan.\textsuperscript{28} Much of the Tumen River flows through mountainous terrain; only 81 km (50 mi) are navigable. Because the Tumen is narrower and shallower than the Amnok, it is the most commonly chosen border crossing for North Koreans trying to illegally enter China.\textsuperscript{29, 30}

\textsuperscript{23} World Weather and Climate Information, “Average Rainfall in Wonsan, North Korea,” 2009, \url{http://www.weather-and-climate.com/average-monthly-precipitation-Rainfall,Wonsan,North-Korea}
\textsuperscript{24} World Weather and Climate Information, “Average Rainfall in Pyongyang, North Korea,” 2009, \url{http://www.weather-and-climate.com/average-monthly-precipitation-Rainfall,Pyong-Yang,North-Korea}
\textsuperscript{25} *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “North Korea: The Land: Climate,” 2012, \url{http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/322222/North-Korea}
\textsuperscript{26} World Weather and Climate Information, “Average Weather and Climate in North Korea,” 2012, \url{http://www.weather-and-climate.com/average-monthly-Rainfall-Temperature-Sunshine-in-North-Korea}
\textsuperscript{27} *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Yalu River,” 2012, \url{http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/651445/Yalu-River}
\textsuperscript{28} *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Tumen River,” 2012, \url{http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/608794/Tumen-River}
\textsuperscript{29} Tom O’Neill, “Escape From North Korea,” *National Geographic*, February 2009, \url{http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2009/02/north-korea/oneill-text/1}
\textsuperscript{30} *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Tumen River,” 2012, \url{http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/608794/Tumen-River}
North Korea’s third-longest river is the Taedong, which flows 397 km (247 mi) on a southwestward path to Korea Bay. Important port facilities at the cities of Nampo and Songnim are located along the river’s lower reaches. Upstream from Songnim lies Pyongyang, the nation’s capital and largest city.\(^{31, 32, 33}\)

Although it is not one of North Korea’s most economically important rivers, the Imjin River remains well known as the site of one of the most critical battles of the Korean War.\(^{34}\) The river forms in the Taebaek Mountains and flows southward until shortly after it crosses the DMZ. For the remainder of its route, the Imjin follows a southwestward path through South Korea that broadly parallels the DMZ, until it flows into the Han River near its mouth. This point of confluence marks the western end of the DMZ.\(^{35}\)

### Major Cities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pyongyang</td>
<td>2,581,076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamhung-Hungnam</td>
<td>703,610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chongjin</td>
<td>614,892</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinuiju</td>
<td>334,041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wonsan</td>
<td>328,467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nampo</td>
<td>310,531</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Pyongyang**

North Korea’s capital, Pyongyang, is one of the Korean Peninsula’s ancient sites of continuous human habitation. According to historical record, villages or cities have existed on or near the city’s present-day site since 108 B.C.E., although legend places Pyongyang’s founding as early as 1122 B.C.E. From 427 to 668 C.E., Pyongyang was the capital of the Goguryo Kingdom, the northernmost of the Three Kingdoms that ruled the


\(^{36}\) Thomas Brinkhoff, “North Korea,” City Population, 13 January 2010, [http://www.citypopulation.de/KoreaNorth.html](http://www.citypopulation.de/KoreaNorth.html)
North Korea in Perspective

Korean Peninsula during this era. Pyongyang later served as a secondary capital during the Koryo dynasty (918–1392). A low point for Pyongyang came in 1895, when the city suffered a plague after being devastated during the Sino-Japanese War.³⁷

During Japan’s occupation of Korea (1910–45), Pyongyang became an industrial center. The city suffered tremendous damage from air raids during the Korean War, when the U.S. Air Force dropped a reported 250,000 bombs.³⁸ Pyongyang was rebuilt with Soviet and Chinese help after the armistice was signed in 1953.³⁹

Today, Pyongyang is not only North Korea’s governmental center, but it is also the nation’s transportation hub. Roads and railways spoke out in all directions toward the nation’s other regions and cities. In addition, Pyongyang’s Sunan International Airport is the nation’s only port of entry for foreign visitors.⁴⁰ The city’s underground metro system, which features several ornately decorated stations as well as patriotic murals, transports citizens in aging Chinese and German railcars.⁴¹, ⁴²

Pyongyang is also the nation’s cultural and educational center. Numerous monuments, statues, and murals throughout the city not only celebrate the lives of North Korea’s Great Leader (Kim Il Sung) and Dear Leader (Kim Jong Il), but they also promote the ongoing North Korean Revolution. Among the displays is the 170-m (558-ft) Tower of the Juche Idea, commemorating the national philosophy as originally articulated by Kim Il Sung and later reinterpreted by Kim Jong Il.⁴³

Hamhung-Hungnam

Hamhung, North Korea’s second-largest city, lies on the left bank of the Songchon River, just upstream from the Sea of Japan port of Hungnam, which has been a part of Hamhung since 1960. The city is an industrial center, with textiles making up a key component of the economy. Since 1961, a sprawling factory complex along the Songchon River has been producing vinalon, a synthetic fiber that is durable—but also stiff, prone to

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shrinkage, and resistant to dye. It has also been called “juche fiber” because the primary raw materials needed for vinalon production—limestone and anthracite coal—are locally available in North Korea.44 Other industries include chemicals, metals, machinery manufacturing, oil refining, and food processing.45 Much of Hamhung’s industrial infrastructure was damaged or destroyed during the Korean War; it was rebuilt after the war with East German assistance.46

During the 1990s, Hamhung suffered tremendously under the famine conditions that gripped all of North Korea.47 Conditions became so severe that the leaders of a local army unit plotted a coup against Kim Jong Il; in the end, the unit was disbanded and its officers were purged.48

Chongjin

Chongjin, a northern ice-free port on the Sea of Japan, was little more than a small fishing village until its development as a trading port and later, during the Japanese occupation of Korea, as an industrial center. The economy continues to focus on heavy industries, including iron and steel mills, chemical fibers, and coal-machinery manufacturing. But reports suggest that many of these factories are in serious decline or are no longer operating, a situation caused by shortages of fuel and raw materials as well as by the difficulty of repairing outdated factory equipment that no longer works.49, 50

Sinuiju

The industrial city of Sinuiju is the capital of North Pyongan province. Situated directly across from the Chinese city of Dandong, Sinuiju is a major transportation hub and one of only two rail-crossing points from North Korea into China. Unlike most North Korean cities, Sinuiju is less isolated and has relatively more exposure to the outside world.51

Originally founded as an administrative center early in the 20th century, Sinuiju’s main function was to facilitate rail shipments destined for China. After the Korean War, the city was the site of a major uprising against the Korean Communist Party. Today, it is home to several important factories including the Rakwon Machine Complex, which provides most of the industrial equipment for the nation. Several defense and munitions factories are located in Sinuiju, whose importance was underscored by the frequent visits of former leader Kim Jong Il.52

Wonsan

This northeastern port city on the Sea of Japan is the capital of Kangwon province. The city houses a number of important industries, including marine products, textiles, and shipbuilding. During the Japanese occupation (1910–45), the city was a major center for trade between Korea and Japan. Wonsan is also an important rail center, providing the country’s only rail link to Russia. Although less than 20% of the land around the city is arable, Wonsan has the only cooperative farm in the nation that can be visited by foreigners. Beautiful beaches make the city a popular tourist center. Kim Jong Il, a frequent visitor, owned a seaside villa in Wonsan.53

Nampo

Nampo, North Korea’s largest port on the Yellow Sea, is located in the estuary of the Taedong River. Because Nampo lies only 50 km (31 mi) southwest of Pyongyang, its port receives much of the ocean-borne cargo that arrives on ships too large to proceed farther up the river to the capital. The city’s industrial base is centered on gold and copper refining, glass-making, shipbuilding, and electrode manufacturing. Salt-evaporation ponds and nearby apple groves contribute to the area’s industry.54

One of the largest projects in North Korean history was the construction of the West Sea Barrage (“the longest dam in the world”) just west of Nampo, which separates the saltwater Yellow Sea from the freshwater Taedong River. Ships traveling to and from Nampo pass through a lock system. A primary goal of the project was to expand the

amount of water available for irrigating existing farmland and reclaimed tideland acreage.\textsuperscript{55, 56}

**Environmental Concerns**

North Korea has numerous environmental concerns, although the current scope of the problems is difficult to gauge because of a lack of recent data. In a 2003 report prepared by a North Korean environmental council in conjunction with the United Nations Development and Environment Programs, several key problem areas were identified.

*Deforestation*

Although the report noted that 74\% of North Korea remains forested, most of these forests are on remote, steep slopes. More accessible forestlands have suffered significant degradation because of overharvesting for lumber and firewood, conversion to farmland, wildfires, and destruction by insects related to drought conditions.\textsuperscript{57, 58}

*Water Quality*

Most major rivers in North Korea are significantly polluted, with the Taedong River (which flows through Pyongyang) being perhaps the most seriously affected. The construction of the West Sea Barrage, which effectively turned the mouth of the Taedong into a lake, has had a particularly negative effect on river water quality, causing industrial pollutants from the Nampo area to be transported upstream rather than flushed out into the ocean.\textsuperscript{59, 60}

Current sewage and industrial wastewater treatment facilities are inadequate (in terms of both number and operating quality) to handle the contaminants that are dumped into North Korean rivers. Even the North Korean government, generally disinclined to publicize any of its failings, has acknowledged the scope of the problem. In the 2003 national environmental report, government representatives pledged “to introduce state-of-

n=&pagewanted=all  
\textsuperscript{59} Soon-jick Hong, “Environmental Pollution in North Korea: Another South Korean Burden?” *East Asian Review* 11, no. 2 (Summer 1999), http://www.ieas.or.kr/vol11_2/hongsoonjik.htm#a15  

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the-art science and technology in wastewater and sewage treatment plants to improve purification processes.\textsuperscript{61, 62}

\textit{Air Quality}

Coal is the primary fuel used in North Korea’s power plants, factories, and households, resulting in high amounts of sulfur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide emissions as well as acid rain. Projections show that North Korean coal consumption will expand rapidly over the next decade, which will increase the country’s air pollution problems unless remediating steps are taken.\textsuperscript{63, 64, 65}

\textit{Soil Quality}

Soil erosion resulting from deforestation-generated flooding is an ongoing problem in North Korea. Also problematic is an increasing level of acidification of soil, produced by overuse of chemical fertilizers. Losses of productive agricultural land continue to undercut the country’s stated goal of reaching self-sufficiency in food production.\textsuperscript{66}

\textit{Natural Hazards}

Volcanic eruptions and earthquakes do not pose major threats in North Korea. The country’s most devastating natural disasters involve extremes in precipitation: North Korea receives too much rain or not enough. During 1997, for example, food shortages reached famine proportions when summer rains materialized too late for most field crops.\textsuperscript{67} The drought conditions that year were preceded by two years of heavy flooding generated by torrential rainfall; floods destroyed hundreds of thousands of


\textsuperscript{63} Bailey Culp, “Environmental Insecurity in North Korea,” \textit{Korea Times}, 10 November 2010, \url{http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/opinon/2012/04/198_76091.html}


crop acreage immediately prior to harvest.\textsuperscript{68} As a result, from 1995 to 1998, an estimated 2.5 to 3 million people are thought to have died of starvation.\textsuperscript{69, 70, 71} More recently, massive floods in August 2007 once again intensified North Korea’s chronic food shortages, raising the concern of a new wave of famine deaths.\textsuperscript{72, 73, 74} In 2011, North Korea’s worst winter in 60 years, coupled with severe flooding, prompted the North Korean government to solicit food aid from the West.

Floods and landslides can be triggered when Pacific Ocean typhoons strike North Korea. Most recently, in July 2006, the powerful super typhoon Bilis struck mainland China, bringing an associated storm that generated near-record rainfall totals in parts of North Korea. The official North Korean death toll from the resulting floods and landslides was 549, but an independent estimate based on satellite images of landslide damage near the town of Yangdok placed the number of deaths at “probably well over 10,000.”\textsuperscript{75, 76}

\textsuperscript{68} Timothy J. Min, II, “Food Shortage in North Korea: Humanitarian Aid Versus Policy Objectives,” Human Rights Brief, Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law at Washington College of Law, American University, 1996, \url{http://www1.american.edu/ted/hpages/human/NKorea41.htm}

\textsuperscript{69} Andrew Natsios, “The Politics of Famine in North Korea” (report, United States Institute of Peace, 2 August 1999), 6, \url{http://www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr990802.pdf}

\textsuperscript{70} BBC News, “Millions Dead from Starvation Says North Korean Defector,” 18 February 1998, \url{http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/57740.stm}

\textsuperscript{71} BBC News, “North Korea 'Loses 3 Million to Famine,'” 17 February 1999, \url{http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/281132.stm}


\textsuperscript{73} BBC News, “Flood-Hit N. Korea 'Faces Famine,'” 18 October 2007, \url{http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7051479.stm}

\textsuperscript{74} Michael Schuman, “The Real Crisis in North Korea? Food,” \textit{Time World}, 6 October 2008, \url{http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1847428,00.html?imw=Y&loomia_si=t0:a16:g2;r1:c0.376027:b18547319&xid=Loomia}


\textsuperscript{76} David Adam, “Death Toll in North Korea Typhoon Questioned,” \textit{Guardian}, 22 November 2006, \url{http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2006/nov/23/naturaldisasters.northkorea}
Chapter 1 Assessment

1. North Korea’s climate is characterized by long, cold, dry winters and short, hot, wet summers.
   **True**
   North Korea’s continental climate is characterized by cold dry winters that last from December through March. Short, hot, wet summers are distinctly cooler in the country’s northeastern section.

2. North Korea’s longest river is the Amnok.
   **True**
   The country’s longest river is the Amnok, which flows for 800 km (497 mi) from its headwaters on Mount Paektu to its mouth in Korea Bay, an arm of the Yellow Sea (West Sea).

3. North Korea’s capital, Pyongyang, is a relatively recent location of human habitation.
   **False**
   Pyongyang is one of the most ancient sites of continuous human habitation on the Korean Peninsula. Since 108 B.C.E., there has been a historical record of villages or cities on or near the city’s present-day site. Legend places Pyongyang’s founding as early as 1122 B.C.E.

4. Volcanic eruptions and earthquakes pose major threats in North Korea.
   **False**
   Volcanic eruptions and earthquakes do not pose major threats in North Korea. The country’s most devastating natural disasters involve extremes in precipitation: too much rain or not enough rain.

5. The tallest mountains are in the southern parts of the country.
   **False**
   The tallest peaks lie in the north. These mountains include Mount Paektu, North Korea’s highest point at 2,744 m (9,003 ft).
CHAPTER 2: HISTORY

Overview

During most of the 10 centuries prior to the division of the Korean Peninsula in 1945, much of Korea was unified under single successive dynasties. Modern-day North Korean cities such as Kaesong and Pyongyang played important governmental roles in the early periods of this era; as did the present-day South Korean capital of Seoul. Because of North Korea’s proximity to Manchuria (Northeast China), its cities have at times been within border regions between the Korean states of the South and the Manchurian tribal states of the North.

Origins

Scholars know little about the first humans who inhabited the Korean Peninsula. The earliest artifacts from the Neolithic Era (c. 7000 B.C.E.) demonstrate the existence of small settlements along rivers and coastal areas.77, 78, 79 Korean legend dates the founding of its civilization to the third millennium B.C.E. According to the legend, Tangun, the offspring of a god and a bear-woman, was born on Mount Paektu. In 2333 B.C.E. Tangun became the first king of Kochosun (Old Chosun). Another legend suggests that the Chinese sage Kija came to Korea in the 10th or 11th century B.C.E. and founded the Kija Chosun dynasty.80, 81

By the fourth century B.C.E., a number of walled-town states had developed along the Taedong River in northwestern Korea (modern-day North Korea) and the Liao River in southern Manchuria. This federation of states lost all its Manchurian territory to the Chinese state of Yan in the third century B.C.E. Between 194 and 180 B.C.E., General Wiman gained control of Kochosun, beginning a brief period of territorial expansion during an era known as the Wiman Chosun. By 108 B.C.E., Chinese Han Dynasty forces swept down from the north, taking control of the Korean Peninsula as far south as the Han River Valley in modern-day South Korea. The Han Chinese subsequently divided Wiman Chosun into four commanderies (local administrative units), the most important

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77 Alison Behnke, South Korea in Pictures (Minneapolis, MN: Lerner Publications Company, 2005), 18.
of which was Lelang (Nangnang), whose capital was located near present-day Pyongyang.\(^82\)

**Paekjae, Kaya, and Silla**

South of the Han River, several villages formed three loose federations known as the Samhan. They consisted of Pyonhan in the south central region, Mahan in the southwest, and Chinhan in the southeast. The Samhan paid tribute to the Lelang commandery and traded iron with Chinese neighboring states.\(^83\) For three or four centuries, three more centralized states (Paekjae, Kaya, and Silla) dominated and eventually absorbed the Samhan states.

The Paekjae Kingdom conquered the Mahan, eventually expanding northward into the area near Seoul in present-day South Korea. The Kaya Federation evolved from the Pyonhan confederacy and thrived because of its advanced iron industry and sea trade. In the sixth century, Paekjae and Silla conquered and divided Kaya.\(^84\) The Silla Kingdom unified later than either Paekjae or Kaya, consolidating and expanding the earlier Chinhan federation within a hereditary monarchy established in the fourth century.\(^85\)

**Goguryo and the Three Kingdoms**

North of the Korean Peninsula, the powerful Goguryo Kingdom emerged around the second century C.E.\(^86\) By 313, Goguryo forces had conquered a large portion of Manchuria and taken control of Lelang to the south, placing them adjacent to the Paekjae Kingdom. For 350 years, Goguryo, Paekjae, and Silla battled for supremacy on the Korean Peninsula, an era known as the Period of the Three Kingdoms. Silla and Paekjae formed several temporary alliances against stronger Goguryo, interrupted by periods in which they fought against each other.\(^87\)

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Chinese forces of the Sui and Tang dynasties took part in these ongoing battles, waging attacks against both the Goguryo and Paekjae kingdoms. Goguryo won several spectacular victories against the Chinese forces but found itself weakened by the fighting. Silla forces routed them in 668, eight years after Paekjae had fallen in a combined attack by the Silla and Tang armies. After defeating Goguryo, Silla turned its military attention toward the Tang Dynasty. By 676, Silla’s armies had driven Tang forces north of the Taedong River, which flows through Pyongyang, marking the first time a single dynasty unified the Korean Peninsula.88

Impact of the Three Kingdoms Era

The Period of the Three Kingdoms was one of remarkable political and societal changes on the Korean Peninsula. Powerful aristocracies developed around tribal chiefs who established themselves in the capitals of the kingdoms. The aristocrats were divided into classes of varying power and privilege based on societal position. In Silla, for example, the kolpum (bone rank) system based political power on bloodlines. Only those paternally descended from the Kim and Pak clans could enter the ruling elite.89

Prior to the Period of the Three Kingdoms, shamanism was the native religion practiced on the Korean Peninsula. In 372, a Chinese monk introduced Buddhism to Goguryo royalty, who quickly embraced it as the state religion, blending it easily with shamanistic traditions and beliefs. Buddhism also became the state religion of Paekjae, and although leaders of Silla were more resistant, by 527 that kingdom’s aristocratic hierarchy had embraced Buddhism.90

The Unified Silla Dynasty and Parhae

While the Silla Dynasty unified the southern two-thirds of Korea for more than 250 years, Parhae dominated the area north of the Taedong River. Originally known as the Chin Kingdom, Parhae was founded in 698 by Tae Cho-yong, a former Goguryo general.91 Most of this kingdom lay in Manchuria and was populated by the local Malgal people (ancestors of the Manchu) and exiled Goguryo aristocrats. By 720, Parhae forces

89 Djun Kil Kim, The History of Korea (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2005), 46.
had moved southward, conquering the tribes of modern-day northwest North Korea.\footnote{Bill Caraway, “Chapter 3: Paekche and Silla: Unified Silla,” Korean History Project, 2012, http://www.koreanhistoryproject.org/Ket/C03/E0304.htm} These actions led Silla to build a line of fortifications in 721 to guard against further advances of Parhae forces. This northern boundary followed a path stretching along the Taedong River in the west to Wonsan Bay in the east—making Pyongyang a border outpost.\footnote{Michael J. Seth, “Chapter 3: United Silla,” in \textit{A Concise History of Korea: From the Neolithic Period Through the Nineteenth Century} (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 66.}


**Period of the Later Three Kingdoms**

Silla’s central governmental authority began to decline in the last half of the eighth century as local warlords emerged and banditry spread across the countryside. By the beginning of the 10th century, two warlords, Kyonhwon and Kungye, controlled most of Silla except for the far southeastern region near the capital of Kyongju. Kyonhwon and Kungye declared themselves kings of the regions they controlled, using the historic names Paekjae and Goguryo, respectively, for their kingdoms. Historians refer to this time as the Period of the Later Three Kingdoms to distinguish it from the period of the earlier incarnations of the Parhae and Goguryo kingdoms. During the warlords’ rule, the Korean Peninsula was subjected to more than three decades of open warfare among the three powers.

In 918, Kungye was removed by one of his generals, Wang Kon, who shortened the name of the kingdom from Goguryo to Koryo, which is the origin of the English word \textit{Korea}.\footnote{Djun Kil Kim, \textit{The History of Korea} (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2005), 53.} Wang Kon’s forces were ultimately joined by the troops of Kyonhwon, who himself had been removed as the leader of

\footnotetext[93]{Michael J. Seth, “Chapter 3: United Silla,” in \textit{A Concise History of Korea: From the Neolithic Period Through the Nineteenth Century} (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 66.}
\footnotetext[97]{Michael J. Seth, \textit{A Concise History of Korea: From the Neolithic Period Through the Nineteenth Century} (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 64–65.}
\footnotetext[98]{Djun Kil Kim, \textit{The History of Korea} (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2005), 53.}
Parhae by his oldest son. With further military assistance from Parhae refugees from the north (whose kingdom had been conquered by the Mongol Khitan tribes in 926), Wang Kon’s army defeated Paekjae in 936, after having earlier obtained Silla’s surrender. With this victory, the Korean Peninsula once again came under unified rule, this time as the Koryo Kingdom under the Wang Dynasty.

**Koryo**

Wang Kon carefully cultivated the allegiance of Parhae, Silla, and Paekjae leaders.\(^{100,101}\) To further establish the authenticity of his leadership, Wang married a Silla princess and bestowed on himself the title Chonsu (Mandate of Heaven), a philosophy of heaven-granted rule that the Chinese had long used to legitimate their rulers.\(^{102}\)

Under Wang, the Koryo capital was moved to Songak (modern-day Kaesong), much nearer to the center of the kingdom. Pyongyang, which had declined during the unified Silla era, became a secondary capital, named Sogyong (Western Capital). From there, Koryo extended its authority northward to the Amnok (Yalu) River, the modern-day border between China and North Korea.\(^{103}\)

Koryo was unable to fend off Mongol threats from the north. In 1231, Mongol forces carried out the first of numerous invasions of Koryo.\(^{104}\) Koryo’s military rulers were overthrown in 1258. The peace agreement with the Mongols required Koryo kings to intermarry with Yuan princesses, effectively making Koryo a vassal state of the Mongol Yuan Dynasty. Koryo military leaders revolted against the Mongol-supported monarchy in 1269, inviting further Mongol military intervention.\(^{105}\) By 1273, the Mongols had overcome the last vestiges of Koryo military resistance.\(^{106,107}\)

In the 1350s, violent uprisings in central and southern China forced the Mongol Yuan Dynasty to flee northward in 1368. The

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100 Djun Kil Kim, *The History of Korea* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2005), 54.
successor Ming Dynasty continued to battle Yuan forces to the north, contributing to a series of political and military events that within a few decades ushered in Korea’s longest-lasting dynasty.\textsuperscript{108}

In 1388, Koryo military leader General Choe Yong attacked Ming forces in Manchuria. One of his deputies, Yi Song-gye, commanded some of the expeditionary forces. After reaching the Amnok River, Yi returned to Kaegyong, where he killed Choe Yong and deposed King U. Four years later, Yi proclaimed himself king, establishing the Yi Dynasty. Yi changed the name of the Koryo state to Chosun, and Hanyang (modern-day Seoul) became the new capital.\textsuperscript{109}

**Early Chosun**

During the early years of the Chosun Kingdom, several substantive transformations were carried out in Korean society. Neo-Confucianism, a rationalist philosophy that expounded rules for governance and societal behavior based on the “moral principles that governed the universe,” became dominant in academic study.\textsuperscript{110} Buddhism, on the other hand, fell into official disfavor, in part because of the close association of its priests with the hereditary aristocracy of the Koryo period.\textsuperscript{111} As part of overall land reform, the state confiscated the large holdings of the Buddhist temples. A government-enacted Rank Land Law bolstered its financial status by ensuring that a greater percentage of land use taxes were deposited in state coffers.\textsuperscript{112} But Chosun land reform policies did not result in the abolition or even reduction of private land ownership. Rather, the reform policies further consolidated land resources vis-à-vis the *yangban*, a class of civil and military officials who were required to pass civil service examinations demonstrating their knowledge of the Confucian texts and their neo-Confucian interpretations.\textsuperscript{113} Under the Rank Land Law, the *yangban* came to possess much of the privately held land in the region around the capital.\textsuperscript{114} The *yangban*
also accumulated wealth through slave ownership, a practice that was a significant part of Korean society until its abolition in 1894.115

A high point of the early Chosun period was the reign of King Sejong (1418–1450). This was a time of political stability and economic prosperity, highlighted by numerous cultural and scientific achievements. During this time the first Korean alphabet, *Hangul*, was developed; prior to its introduction, the Korean language could be written only by using Chinese characters (*Hanja*), a difficult process for most people. In addition, during Sejong’s time on the throne, the state’s northern border, largely defined by the Amnok and Tumen rivers, became fixed. Borderlands were colonized and militarily reinforced to ensure that they would be respected. This border is still the boundary between North Korea and its neighbors, China and Russia.116

**The Imjin War**

In 1592, Japanese military leader Toyotomi Hideyoshi, having recently unified Japan, launched an invasion of Korea as part of a larger goal of conquering China. Japanese forces quickly overran the kingdom as the Chosun royal court fled the capital and traveled to the Chinese border near the mouth of the Amnok River. While peasant armies led by *yangban* leaders fought a guerrilla war against the Japanese, the Japanese Navy suffered significant defeats by Admiral Yi Sun-sin, who commanded a fleet of the world’s first armor-plated ships, known as *kobukson* (turtle ships).117 The war came to a stalemate after Yi’s naval forces and the Chinese Ming Dynasty Army forced the Japanese Army into the southeastern tip of the Korean Peninsula. A second unsuccessful Japanese military invasion in 1597, again thwarted by Yi’s heavily outnumbered fleet, eventually led to the Japanese withdrawal from the peninsula.118

The Imjin War, as this conflict came to be known, left much of Korea devastated by Japanese scorched-earth tactics. It also created a lingering resentment and fear of the Japanese that Japanese colonization of the Korean Peninsula refueled more than 300 years later.119

The Manchus

As Korea recovered from the Imjin War, the Manchus, a Jurchen tribal group from the north, began their assaults on Ming China, which ultimately resulted in the rise of the Manchu’s Qing as the next Chinese dynasty. The pro-Ming Chosun royal court found itself on the losing side of this struggle for control of China; as a result, Manchu forces invaded Korea in 1627 and 1636. In the second invasion, the Chosun king was captured at his refuge on Kanghwa Island and the Chosun Kingdom was made a tributary state of Qing China. Like the Japanese, the Koreans viewed the Manchus as barbarians. The Koreans outwardly maintained loyalty to the Qing Dynasty over the succeeding centuries, but their resentment of Qing rule was never far beneath the surface.

Isolation

Following the Manchu invasions, Korea increasingly isolated itself from the world (as did many of its neighbors in East Asia during this time). But Korea, having suffered through invasions by Manchus, Mongols, and the Japanese, probably took the most extreme measures to keep itself apart from the outside world. For this reason, some Westerners during the 19th century referred to the Chosun Dynasty as the “hermit kingdom.” In reality, outside influences seeped into the peninsula; Christianity, for example, was introduced via Korean envoys returning from tributary and diplomatic missions to the Chinese capital of Beijing, where Jesuit scholars were in residence. In 1785, the Chosun royal court declared Catholicism heretical to Confucian doctrine, an action that led to the execution of 300 converts in 1801.

In 1864, Yi Ha-ung, father of 11-year-old King Kojong, took control of Chosun as Taewongun (Grand Prince) until his son came of age. During the next 10 years, he continued the fight to suppress outside influences. In 1866, nine French Jesuit priests who had smuggled themselves onto the peninsula were executed, as were thousands of Korean converts to Catholicism, prompting a fleet of French warships to briefly invade Kanghwa Island.

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That same year, the merchant ship USS General Sherman, seeking trade and armed with cannons, sailed up the Taedong River to Pyongyang, defying the Chosun ban on foreign vessels. The ship found itself beached after the river’s abnormally high waters receded; thereafter, accounts differ about what happened and who bore responsibility for the events. In the end, the ship was burned and the entire crew killed. Five years later, five U.S. warships launched a punitive attack on Kanghwa Island, but—like the earlier French expedition—the forces left after encountering strong resistance.

### Foreign Influence

France and the United States were not the only nations seeking access to, and influence over, Korea. Soon after young King Kojong took control of the throne in 1874, the Japanese initiated their own attack on Kanghwa Island after their trade entreaties were denied. This military intimidation led to a treaty in 1876, giving the Japanese commercial access to Korean ports. There soon followed a number of similar treaties between Korea and the United States, Britain, Russia, and other countries. These pacts were encouraged by the Chinese, who saw the Western powers as an effective deterrent against the Japanese gaining too much influence in Korea. Importantly, the treaties with the Western nations explicitly acknowledged Korea’s tributary status with China.

But the Western treaties did not put an end to the Japanese-Chinese rivalry over Korea. In 1894, a rebellion by members of the Donghak religious movement (a group that rejected the Neo-Confucian doctrine that had long characterized Korean societal organization) led to the incursion of Japanese and Chinese troops into Korea. The resulting Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895 ended quickly in a Japanese victory. After the war, Japan forced China to accept Korea’s independence, although in practice this meant that Korea was now within Japan’s sphere of influence, rather than China’s. Numerous internal reforms were passed under Japanese pressure, including the abolition of slavery, the end of the yangban civil service system, and the introduction of a modern judicial system.

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129 Michael J. Seth, A Concise History of Korea: From the Neolithic Period Through the Nineteenth Century (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 222.
The Decline of Choson

Near the end of the 19th century, King Kojong tried to reassert his royal authority and put a halt to the reform efforts. Fearing Japanese plots against him, he aligned himself with Russia, and even ruled Korea for a year while in refuge at the Russian legation in the capital. He later reemerged as self-proclaimed Emperor of Taehan (Great Han), but the colonial maneuvers of Japan and Russia dominated the last years of his rule. War broke out between the two powers in 1904, and Japan’s decisive victory over the Russian Baltic fleet at the Battle of Tsushima Strait in May 1905 led Russia to accept a peace negotiation.\(^{133}\) In the Treaty of Portsmouth, which concluded the Russo-Japanese War, Russia conceded Japan’s territorial rights in Korea. With China and Russia now out of the picture—and the United States having negotiated a secret agreement to leave Japan alone in Korea in return for Japanese noninterference in the Philippines—Korea’s future status as a Japanese colony became inevitable.\(^{134, 135}\)

Japanese Colonization

Japan annexed Korea in 1910, which ended the Chosun Dynasty. Shortly after, a Korean resistance fighter assassinated Ito Hirobumi (the former Japanese Prime Minister who had only recently resigned as Resident-General of Korea) in Manchuria.\(^{136}\) The next 35 years hardened Korean feelings toward their colonial overlords, and remnants of this bitterness exist in Korea to this day.\(^{137}\) Japanese rule was brutally oppressive during the early years after Korean annexation, but Western powers such as the United States, Britain, and France, preoccupied with World War I after 1914, were not inclined to reproach their Asian ally.\(^{138, 139}\)

After World War I ended, nationwide demonstrations swept across Korea, initiated by a rally in Seoul in which a Korean Declaration of Independence, signed by 33 religious leaders, was recited.\(^{140}\) Although the protests failed to produce Korean independence, they helped bring about nominally less

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\(^{133}\) History.com, “This Day in History: The Battle of Tsushima Strait,” 2012, [http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history.do?action=Article&id=5039](http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history.do?action=Article&id=5039)


\(^{139}\) Djun Kil Kim, *The History of Korea* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2005), 130.

militaristic rule in Korea and some reforms. Tight censorship controls were loosened, and educational opportunities for Koreans were increased.141

**World War II**

In the early 1930s, Japan’s military increasingly dominated its government. In 1931, Japanese forces seized Manchuria and created a puppet state. Korea became a logistical base for the Manchurian operation, which in 1937 evolved into the second Sino-Japanese War. During this period of Japanese occupation, colonial forces instituted repressive measures to assimilate Koreans into Japanese culture. Koreans were required to adopt Japanese surnames, and all schools were directed to use Japanese for instruction.142 Worship at Japanese-built Shinto shrines became mandatory.143

After Japan joined the Axis Powers and brought the United States into World War II with its surprise attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, many Koreans were mobilized into forced military conscription or compulsory labor in mines and factories. Korean resistance fighters fled the Korean Peninsula and neighboring Manchuria. One of their young military commanders was Kim Song Ju, a Communist who took the name Kim Il Sung before retreating to a training camp near the Soviet city of Khabarovsk in January 1941. According to a Soviet military official who groomed Kim for a future leadership position, Kim’s new name was the name of a legendary anti-Japanese Korean guerrilla fighter.144

**Formation of North Korea**

After the second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki on 9 August 1945, followed a few days later by Japanese surrender, the Soviet Union agreed to the United States’ proposal that the Korean Peninsula be divided along the 38th parallel and that each nation temporarily occupy a section.145 In the North, the Soviet Union named Kim Il Sung leader of the new interim government; he quickly became head of the North Korean Bureau branch of the Korean Communist Party, which was independent from the Korean Communist Party branch south of the 38th parallel.146

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By 1948, the realities of Cold War geopolitics had pushed aside most thoughts about reunifying Korea. In South Korea, longtime anti-Japanese resistance figure and ardent anti-Communist, Syngman Rhee, was elected president. The election took place only after a May 1948 parliamentary election that was boycotted by several key political figures because of its ramifications for the permanent separation of North and South. Following the South Korean elections, Kim Il Sung was nominated after one-party elections to be premier of the newly formed Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea). In addition, Pak Honyong, former head of the Communist Party in the South, took two positions: vice premier and foreign minister.

The 1948 elections were followed by a leftist-led guerrilla war in South Korea that the Rhee government, using Japanese colonial collaborators as police officers, eventually suppressed. By the spring of 1950, the rebellion in the South had quieted. But only months later, North Korean forces crossed the 38th parallel, starting the Korean War, in which hostilities lasted for three years.

**The War and Its Immediate Aftermath**

Between the invasion in June 1950 and the signing of the armistice in July 1953, millions of North and South Koreans were killed in fighting that spread to nearly every corner of the peninsula. In addition, more than 33,000 U.S. forces, fighting alongside the South Koreans, were killed, representing about 90% of the total deaths of UN forces. China, which supported the North Korean forces, lost hundreds of thousands of soldiers.

The war witnessed several retreats and advances by both sides, but by the conclusion of hostilities, the two Koreas remained divided by a border that followed roughly the prewar 38th parallel division. The border zone became known as the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), and continues to be one of the most heavily guarded and defended borders in the

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world.\(^{152}\) It should be noted that the 1953 armistice put a halt only to active combat; technically, North and South Korea are still at war.\(^{153, 154}\)

After the war, North Korea was left in tatters. About two-fifths of its industrial facilities, largely built during the Japanese occupation, were destroyed, and one-third of all homes were left in ruins.\(^{155}\) Kim instituted a 3-year plan, followed by a 5-year plan that focused on rebuilding the heavy industrial infrastructure of the country.\(^{156}\) The Soviet Union and China were important contributors of economic aid that helped carry out the rebuilding of the country.

## Cult of Personality

The postwar period also saw Kim consolidate his position as unchallenged leader through a series of purges. Pak Honyong and several others associated with the Communist Party in the southern part of Korea were charged in show trials. They were convicted of being American spies and put to death. Leaders of two factions of the North Korean Communist Party (renamed the Korean Workers’ Party) were either expelled from power or driven into exile because of connections to Soviet and Chinese communism.\(^{157}\)

With North Korea economically dependent on, and geographically lodged between the world’s two largest communist states—the Soviet Union and China—Kim Il Sung was careful to maintain cordial relations with both nations. But maintaining neutrality in relations with the two powers became more difficult as a Sino-Soviet political rift began to develop in the late 1950s.\(^{158}\) During this period, the tenets of Kim Il Sung’s philosophy of *juche*, or self-reliance, began to be stressed, most likely stemming in part from his concern over Chinese or Soviet influences on North Korean internal politics.\(^{159}\)

North Korea during the late 1950s and 1960s began to rewrite its history, idealizing Kim Il Sung’s role in the formation of the state and placing great emphasis on his extensive

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\(^{152}\) Philip Walker, “The World’s Most Dangerous Borders,” Foreign Policy, 24 June 2011, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/06/24/the_worlds_most_dangerousBorders?page=0.8](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/06/24/the_worlds_most_dangerousBorders?page=0.8)


\(^{159}\) Djun Kil Kim, *The History of Korea* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2005), 159.
wisdom and the heroic achievements of his family. As this cult of personality developed, North Koreans began to call Kim Il Sung *suryong* (Great Leader), a title previously reserved for the Soviet leaders Lenin and Stalin.\(^{160}\)

**Military Buildup, Economic Decline, and Succession**

Kim Il Sung increasingly felt threatened by South Korea’s modernized military and security alliance with the United States and Japan. More money was allocated to defense spending, and by 1971 defense spending accounted for 30% of the national budget.\(^{161, 162}\) North Korean attempts at subversion and infiltration across the DMZ, including a 1968 failed assassination attempt of South Korean President Park Chung Hee, increased during this period. In 1968, North Korea also seized the U.S. intelligence ship, USS *Pueblo*, off its Sea of Japan coast, holding its crew for 11 months.\(^{163, 164}\)

During the 1970s and into the 1980s, North Korea’s economy began to decline significantly as foreign aid began to decrease, technological obsolescence hindered industrial development, and oil and energy shortages became chronic.\(^{165}\) In 1976, North Korea defaulted on its debts to Japan and West European countries; it defaulted again in 1980 after its foreign loans were restructured.\(^{166, 167}\) The situation worsened in 1991, when the Soviet Union, North Korea’s biggest supplier of aid, ceased to exist.

Kim Il Sung died in 1994, shortly after agreeing to freeze North Korea’s nuclear weapons program in exchange for a U.S. promise to assist in building light water nuclear power reactors designed to increase energy production.\(^{168, 169}\) His son, Kim Jong Il, became the nation’s new leader. He did not inherit his father’s position of president, a title that was retired upon Kim Il Sung’s death. Instead, Kim Jong Il retained his position as chairman

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\(^{164}\) History.com, “This Day in History: USS Pueblo Captured,” 2012, [http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/uss-pueblo-captured](http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/uss-pueblo-captured)


of the National Defense Commission, expanding the position’s powers to make it the highest in the state.

During Kim Jong Il’s period of rule, some observers noted that the North Korean system seemingly changed from a party dictatorship to a military dictatorship. Since the late 1990s, the guiding tenet of songun (military first) has become a prominent aspect of the juche ideology. The strongly militaristic message has manifested itself most dangerously in North Korea’s continued pursuit of nuclear weapons. In February 2005, the North Korean Foreign Ministry announced that the country now had nuclear weapons.

**North Korea Today**

After taking power, Kim Jong Il faced serious problems trying to revive the nonproductive North Korean economy. Famine conditions from 1995 to 1997 drew attention to the country’s inability to provide basic necessities. Since 2002, modest economic reforms have been implemented. But the nation still suffers from a lack of outside investment and limited ability to carry out foreign trade to meet its needs. Despite its juche message of self-reliance, North Korea has found itself increasingly dependent on foreign aid, primarily in the form of food shipments and fuel oil from the United States, South Korea, Japan, and China.

North Korea’s nuclear weapons program, including the development of rocket-based delivery systems, continues to dominate the country’s relations with its immediate neighbors and Western nations. An ongoing series of disarmament discussions, the Six-Party Talks (consisting of North Korea, South Korea, Russia, Japan, China, and the United States), have been carried out since North Korea withdrew from the Non-Proliferation Treaty in 2003. Over the course of these talks, North Korea agreed to disable its nuclear development facilities at Yongbyon, although the negotiation of terms for verification inspections developed into a stalemate. In October 2008, the United States removed North Korea from its State Sponsors of Terrorism list after North Korea agreed to give inspectors access to declared nuclear sites.

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172 Daniel A. Pinkston, “North Korea’s Foreign Policy Towards the United States,” *Strategic Insights* 5, no. 7 (September 2006), [http://www.nps.edu/Academics/centers/ccc/publications/OnlineJournal/2006/Sep/pinkstonSep06.html](http://www.nps.edu/Academics/centers/ccc/publications/OnlineJournal/2006/Sep/pinkstonSep06.html)


In late 2008, after Kim Jong Il had disappeared from public view for several months, it was widely reported that he had suffered a stroke. Speculation immediately arose concerning his potential successor. In February 2009, reports surfaced from both North and South Korea that the youngest of Kim Jong Il’s three sons, Kim Jong Un, had been selected to succeed his father.\footnote{Richard Lloyd, “Kim Jong Il Anoints Next Leader of North Korea—His Youngest Son,” \textit{Times}, 20 February 2009, \url{http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/asia/article2609742.ece}}

**Transitioning to New Leadership: Kim Jong Un**

In 2010, the North continued its confrontational policies with the South, seriously escalating tensions. In March, the North Korean Navy allegedly sank a South Korean warship, and, in November, fired on the South Korean island of Yeonpyeong, killing two marines and two civilians and wounding others. Satellite images showed renewed nuclear efforts. Later that year, Kim promoted his youngest son, Kim Jong Un, to the rank of four-star general and appointed him to a senior government position, increasing speculation that he was the heir apparent. Serious inflation gripped the nation and the food situation worsened. Although the political situation remained stable, defectors continued to find their way out of the country.\footnote{Encyclopædia Britannica Online, “North Korea: Year in Review 2010,” 2012, \url{http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1741292/North-Korea-Year-In-Review-2010}}

Kim Jong Il died in December 2011. Kim Jong Un, named “supreme leader” by the People’s National Assembly on 29 December, succeeded him. On 31 December, he was named commander of the Korean People’s Army.\footnote{Encyclopædia Britannica Online, “North Korea: Year in Review 2011,” 2012, \url{http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1804208/North-Korea-Year-In-Review-2011}} In April 2012, the Korean Workers’ Party declared Kim “supreme leader” and First Secretary of the party. One of Kim Jong Un’s first political acts was to agree to suspend the testing of nuclear weapons. He agreed to suspend the country’s uranium enrichment program and allow international inspectors to examine North Korean facilities. All this was part of a deal designed to get desperately needed food aid. Two months later, in April 2012, North Korea launched what it claimed was a satellite rocket. International condemnation was swift, and many believed this was simply a way to test the nation’s long-range missile capacity. The launch failed shortly after takeoff.\footnote{New York Times, “Kim Jong-un,” 12 April 2012, \url{http://topics.nytimes.com/topics/reference/timestopics/people/k/kim_jongun/index.html}}

Changes in top leadership under Kim Jong Un are taking place. He is replacing older military leaders with younger party members believed to be loyal to him. Kim appears to be following previous policy toward South Korea, accusing its government of engaging
Longstanding threats to attack the South have become more specific in recent months. Analysts speculate that Kim Jong Un may initiate military provocations with the South in order to secure his position. It remains to be seen whether the young Kim can firmly cement his authority. Meanwhile, there is increased uncertainty about the nation’s future.

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Chapter 2 Assessment

1. The Period of the Three Kingdoms was an era of remarkable political and societal changes on the Korean Peninsula.
   True
   Powerful aristocracies developed around tribal chiefs who settled in the capitals of the kingdoms. The aristocrats occupied classes of differing power and privilege based on their societal position. Buddhism replaced traditional shamanism.

2. The name of the kingdom of Goguryo was shortened to Koryo, which is the origin of the English word Korea.
   True
   In the early 10th century, Wang Kon shortened the name of the kingdom of Goguryo to Koryo, which is the origin of the modern word Korea.

3. During the early years of the Chosun Kingdom, Korean society remained essentially static.
   False
   Several major transformations were carried out in Korean society. Neo-Confucianism, a philosophy that expounded rules for governance and societal behavior, became dominant in academic study. Buddhism fell into official disfavor. Land reform policies brought wealth and power to the yangban, a class of civil and military officials.

4. In the Treaty of Portsmouth, Japan conceded Russia’s territorial rights in Korea.
   False
   In the treaty, which concluded the 1904–05 Russo-Japanese War, Russia conceded Japan’s territorial rights in Korea.

5. At the conclusion of hostilities in the Korean War, the two Koreas were separated by a border that followed roughly the prewar 38th parallel division.
   True
   This border zone is the Demilitarized Zone, or DMZ, which continues to be one of the most heavily guarded borders in the world. North and South Korea are still technically at war.
CHAPTER 3: ECONOMY

Introduction

North Korea’s state-run, centrally planned economy remains significantly isolated from the rest of the world’s economy. Because North Korea’s economy has sputtered over the last few decades, partly because of the loss of aid from neighboring Russia and China, the government has begun to initiate modest economic reforms, including the development of joint business ventures with foreign corporations. By most accounts, these economic ties have led to some improvements in North Korea’s overall economy in recent years, although progress has been less evident in some parts of the country. Whether Pyongyang, the capital of North Korea, will continue to pursue reforms and outside investment or pull back—fearing the political repercussions of North Koreans’ increasing awareness of, and interaction with, the outside world—remains to be seen. One early sign that the Kim regime was worried about losing its political grip because of the reforms was the government’s decision in October 2005 to reinstitute governmental food rationing, reversing the trend of several years in which the barter and selling of food in private markets had increasingly become the norm.183

The new government, under the leadership of Kim Jong Un, has sought more foreign investment to prop up the nation’s economy. In June 2011, before Kim Jong Un assumed leadership of North Korea, the nation had announced its intention to create a free trade zone on Hwanggumpyong and Wihwa islands near its border with China. (An economic zone near Rason already exists.) North Korea hopes that investment from China will fuel the growth of these projects, especially in infrastructure and transportation. Each of these sites is relatively isolated, ensuring that activities will not disrupt or “contaminate” other policies by the government. The new laws establishing the operations in these zones have the potential to further open investment to South Korea and Japan.184, 185

Industry and Manufacturing and Services

Prior to the partition of the Korean Peninsula in 1945, northern Korea was the site of most of Korea’s heavy industry, whereas warmer, less mountainous southern Korea was the center of agricultural production and light industries such as textiles. Northern industries were oriented toward processing raw materials and creating semifinished goods, which were shipped to Japan for final processing. After the Korean War, during which a large percentage of North Korea’s industries had been heavily damaged, North Korea funneled much of its redevelopment effort into reconstructing and expanding its heavy industries, especially metals and chemicals.

Today, industry accounts for about 44% of GDP (gross domestic product), and the industrial sector remains heavily dependent on mineral resources. The mining industry is one of the largest contributors to the economy despite unrealized potential because of a lack of infrastructure and materials. North Korea produces iron and steel, machinery, chemicals, and textiles. Other manufactured products include armaments, vehicles, glass, ceramics, and some consumer goods (such as processed food and clothes). The development of the Kaesong Industrial Complex (KIC) just north of the South Korean border, where cheap North Korean labor is used to produce consumer goods such as watches and shoes for South Korean companies, has broadened the light manufacturing base of North Korea. These products are produced for export, mostly to South Korea.

Even though the service industry is the country’s most undeveloped economic sector, services account for about 33% of GDP. Most activity in this sector comes from financial services and the small tourism industry.

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Agriculture

Over the last two decades, North Korea has struggled to produce enough food to feed its people. In most years, imports and aid shipments of basic grains have been necessary to avoid famine conditions. A relatively good harvest in 2008 eliminated fears of a massive shortfall, but the country continues to remain only one bad harvest away from another food crisis. Geography is certainly a significant part of the problem, as North Korea’s northern climate shortens growing seasons and the mountainous terrain in the center of the country is generally not suitable for growing crops. Grains are the principal crops grown in agricultural areas: rice is grown primarily in the southwestern part of the country and corn is grown in the coastal plains of the northeast.

Cooperatives organize farm production, with management committees overseeing all aspects of farm activity, from seeding to harvesting. The cooperatives deliver farm harvests to the government, which handles the distribution of food. When production dropped dramatically in the mid-1990s after years of floods, the government implemented several reforms to help stimulate agricultural productivity. These included streamlining farm work teams, loosening price restrictions to help spur increased production of cash crops, and decreasing usage of nitrogen-based fertilizers, which were overused and depleting soil fertility. Potatoes were encouraged as a substitute crop for rice and corn crops because they are better suited to North Korea’s climate and have higher nutritional value. In recent years, the government has begun to allow some “private farmers” to sell more products at prices close to market prices.

recent statements by Kim Jong Un suggest that there will be no significant or new efforts to revitalize the agricultural sector.\textsuperscript{203}

\textit{Fishing}

Fish is the most important source of protein in North Korean diets. Fishing fleets operate out of ports on both of North Korea’s coasts; pollack, sardines, mackerel, herring, pike, and shellfish are some of the fish species that are caught.\textsuperscript{204} In March 2012, Kim Jong Un stopped exporting North Korean marine products to China, demanding that China send corn to aid in the food crisis.\textsuperscript{205}

\textit{Forestry}

Large areas of forest still exist in North Korea’s northern interior, but its near-coastal areas have been essentially deforested. Most forest cutting currently carried out is for firewood.\textsuperscript{206} However, a limited amount of raw timber is exported to China.\textsuperscript{207, 208}

\textbf{Banking and Currency}

Accurate, up-to-date information about North Korea’s banking sector is difficult to obtain. By at least one estimate, as many as 20 banks of various types and sizes may exist in the country.\textsuperscript{209} Foremost among these is the Central Bank of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, which is responsible for issuing and regulating the won, the nation’s currency, and for carrying out most governmental banking transactions. The Central Bank also audits all usage of state funds, including commercial transactions.\textsuperscript{210, 211}

\textsuperscript{203} Randall Ireson, “Developing the DPRK Through Agriculture,” 38 North, U.S.-Korea Institute at SAIS, 8 February 2012, \url{http://38north.org/2012/02/rireson020812/}

\textsuperscript{204} \textit{Encyclopædia Britannica Online}, “North Korea: The Economy: Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing,” 2012, \url{http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/322222/North-Korea}

\textsuperscript{205} Koichiro Ishida, “N. Korea Stops Seafood Exports to China, Asks for Corn,” Asahi Shimbun, 12 March 2012, \url{http://ajw.asahi.com/article/asia/korean_peninsula/AJ201203120041}

\textsuperscript{206} \textit{Encyclopædia Britannica Online}, “North Korea: The Economy: Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing,” 2012, \url{http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/322222/North-Korea}


\textsuperscript{208} Gong Keyu, “Current China-DPRK Relations,” \textit{Global Review} (Spring 2012): 78, \url{http://www.siis.org.cn/Sh_Yj_Cms/Mgz/201201/201246153155AT98.DOC}


The Foreign Trade Bank is the other major governmental bank, and its responsibilities focus on handling all foreign exchange transactions and on monitoring the nation’s foreign exchange reserves. It also sets foreign exchange rates.  

Over the last two decades, several banks that are partly or wholly funded through foreign investment have opened, providing foreign currency banking operations for companies, organizations, and individuals doing business in North Korea.  

One state-owned bank that has drawn negative attention is the Danchon Commercial Bank (also known as the Korea Changgwang Credit Bank). According to charges made by the U.S. Treasury Department, Danchon is the primary financial conduit through which North Korea handles its sales of arms and ballistic missiles to other countries. For this reason, the Treasury Department placed the bank on its blacklist, resulting in the freezing of its assets in U.S. banks and a ban on any future transactions between Danchon and U.S. citizens or banks.  

**Trade**  

North Korea is not a member of the World Trade Organization or the International Monetary Fund, the principal world bodies responsible for developing trade guidelines and compiling trade statistics. North Korea had a negative trade balance in 2011. Major imports include petroleum, coking coal, machinery and equipment, textiles, and grains. Exports include minerals, metallurgical products, textiles, and agricultural and fishery products.

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China is North Korea’s most significant trading partner, accounting for as much as 70% of its foreign trade. Much of North Korea’s trade with China is based on energy imports and exports. China is North Korea’s largest provider of crude oil and other oil products, while North Korea is a net exporter of coal and electricity to China. North Korea also imports meat, machinery, plastics, and grains from China, while being a net exporter to China of seafood, ores (primarily iron ore), iron and steel, and woven clothing. In recent years, more of China’s manufactured consumer goods have been flowing across the border and reaching North Korea’s informal markets.

Two-way trade between North and South Korea was legalized in 1988. South Korea was for years one of North Korea’s most significant trading partners. In 2010, nearly 37% of North Korean exports were bound for South Korea and about 20% of all imports were from South Korea. The KIC, where North Koreans employed by South Korean companies assemble products primarily for sale in South Korea, was responsible for a significant portion of this trade. Noncommercial trade, usually in the form of goods supplied by South Korea for humanitarian purposes or for use in inter-Korean cooperation projects, also accounted for a high percentage of the total bilateral trade between the two Koreas. Following the sinking of a South Korean warship by the North in 2011, all trade between the Koreas was suspended except for the KIC. But in January 2012, South Korea offered to restart economic cooperation with the North.

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pending the suspension of North Korea’s nuclear program. North Korean officials rejected the offer.231

North Korea’s negative trade balance is offset by both foreign aid and unreported sources of trade revenue, such as arms and missiles sales, illegal drug trafficking, and counterfeit currency.232, 233 Estimates vary widely about how much foreign currency these unreported sources bring in, but a detailed 2009 report concluded that North Korea’s revenues from both arms/missiles and illicit exports were declining in the 2000s.234

Investment

There is little foreign direct investment in North Korea, mostly because of international sanctions. The North Korean government prohibits foreigners from establishing any enterprise, including publishing, broadcasting, and telecommunications, that it regards as a threat to its national economy. It also prohibits any business that fails to conform to national security policy. Infrastructural development, hotel construction, and telecommunications are attracting the most attention, largely from South Korea, China, and Japan.235

South Korean Investment

Most recent foreign direct investment in Korea has been through South Korean companies, many of which have built manufacturing facilities at the KIC. The South Korean government has provided significant financial support for the Kaesong project by way of subsidies, guarantees, and low-interest-rate loans provided to companies that open operations in the KIC.236 The largest private investor in Kaesong is Hyundai Asan Corporation, a South Korean company that also made a large investment in North Korean


tourism through its construction of a resort near Mount Kumgang. North Korea seized all Hyundai Asan assets in Mount Kumgang late in 2011 and is trying to launch its own tourism efforts in the resort area.

**Chinese Investment**

Additional foreign investment in North Korea comes from China. By one estimate, about 200 Chinese companies have invested in North Korea, including joint venture projects that are now manufacturing items such as bicycles, running shoes, clothing, beverages, television sets, and personal computers. About 70% of China’s direct investment is in mining. Unlike the South Korean investments, which are part of the overall government policy of economic engagement with the North as a means of normalizing political relations, Chinese investments are strictly business decisions, pursued by companies that conclude that economic opportunities in North Korea outweigh the political risks involved.

Taepung International Investment Group announced that it had partnered with North Korea on transportation infrastructure projects and the construction of electric power plants. China is a major investor in the group, contributing nearly USD 10 billion.

**Other Investment**

One of the more active recent investors in North Korea is the Egyptian-based telecommunications company Orascom Telecom, which in 2008 launched Koryolink, North Korea’s first mobile phone system. The company also opened a bank in North Korea to handle payments from subscribers to the system. An unusual aspect of the deal involved the company acquiring the exclusive license to North Korea’s mobile phone service by committing, through its affiliate Orascom Construction, to complete the 105-story Ryugyong Hotel in Pyongyang by 15 April 2012 (the 100th anniversary of the birth of former North Korean leader Kim Il Sung). In January 2012, the hotel remained

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239 Ting-I Tsai, “Filling North Korea’s Bare Shelves,” Asia Times, 10 January 2007, [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Korea/IA10Dg01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Korea/IA10Dg01.html)


vacant. The pyramid-shaped hotel, the most striking landmark on Pyongyang’s skyline, sat vacant and unfinished for 16 years until Orascom resumed work on it in 2008. Estimates in the South Korean media have suggested that it may take as much as USD 2 billion to complete the hotel and make it safe for use.245, 246

Energy and Mineral Resources

Energy

North Korea does not currently produce any crude oil or natural gas, although numerous efforts have been made to discover economically viable offshore deposits.247, 248 Thus, most of the country’s current oil needs are met via imports from China. In addition, the United States, China, Russia, and South Korea have been shipping heavy fuel oil to North Korea since 2007. These shipments are part of the continuing Six-Party Talks on nuclear disarmament, although they were suspended in December 2008 because of a lack of progress on verification protocols.249

North Korea has a moderately large amount of coal deposits.250 Still, the nation’s coal production has dropped dramatically since its peak in the mid-1980s.251, 252 Coal produces as much as 70% of the nation’s primary energy, with the remaining percentage generated via numerous hydroelectric facilities or oil-burning facilities.253, 254

Minerals

Iron ore, magnesite, and zinc are some of the most economically important minerals mined in North Korea and have the most extensive reserves. Other mineral products that contribute to North Korea’s economy include copper, graphite, limestone, lead, salt, gold, and tungsten. In recent years, during the rule of Kim Jong Il, North Korea started issuing leases or forming joint ventures with foreign partners to develop mining operations for some of these rich deposits. Chinese and South Korean companies, in particular, have been active in securing mineral development deals.

Most of North Korea’s iron ore production occurs in the far northeast near the city of Musan, just across the border in China. In 2006–2007, there were conflicting reports that the rights to these deposits, which are extracted in Asia’s largest open-air iron mine, had been sold to Chinese interests.

Magnesite, which is used in the production of various heat-resistant materials, is mined in areas around the northeastern city of Danchon, where it is also processed into the derivative product magnesia clinker (magnesium powder molded into highly heat-resistant, solid form). Overall, North Korea is the world’s third-largest producer of magnesite.

The region around Danchon is also the location of North Korea’s largest zinc mine. In recent years, North Korea’s zinc exports to China and South Korea have jumped significantly. Zinc exports to South Korea alone doubled between 2006 and 2007. Gold production has increased in recent years. Mines in Hamgyeongnam and Hwanghaebuk provinces are currently operating.

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Standard of Living

While foreign organizations or governments conduct all estimates of North Korea’s gross domestic product per capita (PPP), which thus are based on unofficial data, these estimates generally show that North Korea has the lowest GDP per capita in East Asia and one of the lowest in Asia.265 According to estimates, the per capita income in North Korea is approximately USD 1,800.266 There is some evidence that economic reforms introduced in the early 2000s helped raise some of the qualitative indicators, such as more goods on store shelves and fewer power outages, that suggest a general improvement in the standard of living. But food, electricity, clean water, and access to adequate healthcare remain in short supply in some parts of the country, as indicated by reports of North Korean refugees and the few foreigners who have visited these regions.267, 268 Unsanctioned street markets have helped bring needed food and goods to some cities, although the prices are often out of reach for many residents.269, 270 The reinstitution of food rationing has decreased the role of the markets in feeding the population.

In 2009, the government devalued the national currency, the won, in an effort to halt inflation and spur economic growth. Instead, the reforms—which resulted in worthless money—led to an increase in homelessness and suicides.271, 272 The failed devaluation worsened both the small market economy and food shortages. The government executed

the official who led the reform plan.\textsuperscript{273} The country faces serious food shortages again in 2012, although they will not reach the disastrous levels of the famines of the 1990s.\textsuperscript{274}

Human rights, as measured by freedoms of speech, religion, press, and assembly, are severely restricted in North Korea. The Ministry of Public Security (MPS) and the State Security Department (SSD) carry out internal policing. North Koreans arrested by the state security forces on charges of political crimes are sent directly to detention camps without trial.\textsuperscript{275, 276} Torture in the camps is common, although North Korea’s UN representative denies such claims.\textsuperscript{277, 278}

**Tourism**

Tourism has never been a significant component of the North Korean economy. Although the government allows visitors into the country, the application process can be daunting. The government highly restricts travel by visitors, who must be accompanied by an official guide at all times.\textsuperscript{279}

In 1989, during a brief thaw in relations between North and South Korea, the Hyundai Asan Corporation signed a joint venture agreement with the North Korean government to develop a tourist resort centered at Mount Kumgang, located near the eastern end of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ).\textsuperscript{280} Nearly a decade later the resort opened. By 2007, it was attracting 350,000 visitors a year, mostly from South Korea, and had recorded several years of profitability.\textsuperscript{281} Unfortunately, as is often the case in commerce between North and South Korea, politics took precedence over economics. A South Korean tourist was...


shot and killed in July 2008 after wandering into a restricted military area adjacent to a Kumgang resort beach, and immediately the two governments became embroiled in a war of words over the event.\textsuperscript{282} Hyundai Asan, who also operated day tours to the historical city of Kaesong for nearly a year until North Korean officials suspended such trips in December 2008, announced in February 2009 that it was nearing bankruptcy, in part because of revenue losses at the Kumgang resort.\textsuperscript{283, 284} In 2011, North Korea announced that it was ending its contract with Hyundai Asan for operating Mount Kumgang tours and seized South Korean properties, announcing that the North would redevelop the facilities.\textsuperscript{285, 286} North Korea has recently reopened the site for international tourism.\textsuperscript{287, 288, 289}

Transportation

Most North Koreans walk or use bicycles for personal transportation because cars are an unaffordable luxury for the average citizen. Those traveling between cities mostly do so via public transport, either train or bus. Travel permits are officially required for North Koreans who wish to travel between counties or provinces, although in practice many North Koreans simply move about the country illegally.\textsuperscript{290}

North Korea’s mountainous geography limits transportation connections between the eastern and western sides of the country. A single east-west main rail line links Pyongyang to the country’s eastern coast at Wonsan, from which a separate railway runs northward along the coast to the Russian border. Other north-south rail lines connect the North Korean capital with major cities on the western side of the country, and some separate branch lines splinter off to mining centers.\textsuperscript{291}

\textsuperscript{282} North Korea Economy Watch, “(Updated) South Korean Tourist Fatally Shot at Kumgang,” 13 August 2008, \url{http://www.nkeconwatch.com/2008/07/21/south-korean-tourist-fatally-shot-at-kumgang/}
\textsuperscript{285} Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: North Korea,” 4 April 2012, \url{http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2792.htm}
\textsuperscript{286} Yonhap News Agency, “North Korea Newsletter No. 174,” 8 September 2011, \url{http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2011/09/07/18/0401000000AEN20110907008600325F.HTML}
\textsuperscript{287} Zhang Yan and Liu Mingtai, “DPRK Tourist Site Soon Opens to Chinese Visitors,” China Daily.com.cn, 21 March 2012, \url{http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012-03/21/content_14876174.htm}
\textsuperscript{288} Lu Hui, “DPRK to Open Mt. Kumgang to Int’l Tourists,” Xinhua News, 1 April 2012, \url{http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2012-04/01/c_131503242.htm}
\textsuperscript{289} Financial Info, “Korea Will Open to Visitors in April, the Mount Kumgang Tourism [sic],” 2 April 2012, \url{http://www.financialinfo.co/korea-will-open-to-visitors-in-april-the-mount-kumgang-tourism.html}
\textsuperscript{290} Encyclopædia Britannica Online, “North Korea: Economy: Transportation,” 2012, \url{http://search.eb.com/eb/article-34935}
\textsuperscript{291} Encyclopædia Britannica Online, “North Korea: Economy: Transportation,” 2012, \url{http://search.eb.com/eb/article-34935}
International air travel to and from North Korea is via Pyongyang’s Sunan International Airport. Air Koryo is the national air carrier. It schedules flights to several international destinations.292, 293 Air Koryo also handles domestic air transportation on a charter basis to various military-civilian joint-use airfields. The only other commercial airline serving North Korea is Air China, which schedules a few weekly flights between Beijing and Pyongyang.294

North Korea’s road system, because of the shortage of fuels and automobiles, is less important in transporting goods and people than is rail transit. Less than 10% of the country’s roads are paved; the exceptions are the express highways that connect Pyongyang with Nampo, Wonsan, and Kaesong, as well as a few other segments (such as the recently constructed road connecting South Korea with the KIC).295, 296

The Amnok (Yalu) and Taedong rivers, both of which empty into the Yellow Sea, and the Chaeryong River, a tributary of the Taedong, are the most important North Korean rivers for transporting agricultural and mining products. Major coastal ports are located at Nampo, Haeju, and Tasa on the Yellow Sea, and Wonsan, Hungnam, Chongjin, and Najin on the Sea of Japan.297

Business Outlook

Kim Jong Il’s autocratic regime long proclaimed the message of self-reliance, or juche. But the North Korean need for outside developmental assistance to repair its crumbling industrial and mining infrastructure, and for hard currency to finance its import needs, made the 2000s the “era of the joint ventures” in Korea. The results to date have been mixed.298 Given the government’s disinclination to allow foreign influence, some of these new ventures have resulted in a clash of cultures and business failure. Even the most successful joint ventures, such as the KIC, are vulnerable to the ever-shifting political winds between North and South Korea. This trend has been especially evident since the 2007 election of

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South Korean President Lee Myung-bak, who has taken a relatively tough stance with the Kim government.\(^{299}\), \(^{300}\)

North Korea’s continued “rogue nation” reputation interferes with its ability to bring in needed investment. Negative publicity over the country’s human rights practices, illicit drug sales, and counterfeiting activities inhibit some outside investors, as does the periodic confrontational behavior exhibited by North Korea toward its neighbors and some Western nations.\(^{301}\) Although the North Korean economy appears to be in its best shape in years, the death of Kim Jong Il has created a climate of uncertainty. The country continues to try to build its economic relations with China. Additionally, it has invited Russia to partner in some development plans. Current plans emphasize a restructuring of light industry and agriculture, although North Korea is not seeking international aid to assist in these efforts. Relations with South Korea are still strained and are not expected to improve because North Korea appears reluctant to revive economic relations with its southern neighbor.\(^{302}\)

Analysts expect conflicts between the government and the growing private commercial sector to continue. Private market merchants expect that restrictive regulations will ease on private commerce, but it is unclear whether the new government will follow that path.\(^{303}\)


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Chapter 3 Assessment

1. Before the partition of the Korean Peninsula in 1945, northern Korea was the site of most of Korea’s heavy industry.
   True
   Prior to 1945, northern Korea was the site of most of Korea’s heavy industry, whereas warmer, less mountainous southern Korea was the center of agricultural production and light industries such as textiles.

2. Over the last two decades, North Korea has struggled to produce enough food to feed its people.
   True
   In most years, imports and aid shipments of basic grains have been necessary to avoid famine conditions. A relatively good harvest in 2008 eliminated fears of a massive shortfall, but the country continues to remain one bad harvest away from a food crisis.

3. China is North Korea’s most significant trading partner.
   True
   Trade with China accounts for about 70% of North Korea’s foreign trade. Much of this trade is based on energy imports and exports.

4. The government of the DPRK does not permit foreign direct investment in North Korea.
   False
   The new government, under the leadership of Kim Jong Un, has shown an inclination to seek more foreign investment to prop up the nation’s economy. But there is little foreign direct investment in North Korea, mostly because of international sanctions.

5. North Korea currently produces its own supplies of crude oil and natural gas.
   False
   North Korea presently does not produce any crude oil or natural gas, although numerous efforts have been made to discover economically viable offshore deposits. Most of the country’s current oil needs are met via imports from China.
CHAPTER 4: SOCIETY

Introduction

Because North Korea has been generally isolated from the West for many decades, our understanding of its culture is mostly limited to what can be gleaned from those who have recently defected from the country. Foreign visitors to North Korea often comment that they have virtually no opportunity to interact freely with the general populace.

Despite these limitations, several areas of certainty illuminate our knowledge of North Korea’s people and their culture. For example, despite nearly 70 years of separation from their ethnic kin in the South, North Koreans continue to share many cultural touchstones with South Koreans, such as language, food, and artistic and historical traditions. Although North Koreans have moved away from the cultural traditions of their pre-communist past in various respects, their society still reflects them in many ways. As several North Korean observers have noted, even the uniquely North Korean philosophy of juche, or self-reliance, echoes the ancient Neo-Confucian values and isolationist policies that took root on the Korean Peninsula during centuries of Chosun Dynasty rule (1392–1910).304, 305

Ethnic Groups and Language

North Korea is one of the least ethnically diverse nations in the world. Virtually everyone is ethnic Korean and speaks the Korean language.306 But since 1948, when the two Koreas came into being, North Koreans have spoken a form of the language that has taken a somewhat different path from the Korean spoken in the South.307 North Koreans have introduced few new words into their vocabulary, and some words of foreign origin (mostly English and Japanese) have been purged. New words that have entered the Korean spoken in the North have primarily originated from Chinese or Russian.308

In contrast, South Koreans have been exposed to many new words of Western origin, which have become standard parts of their vocabulary. Results of a survey conducted in 2000 showed that North Koreans were unable to understand more than 8,000 words that are now in the South Korean lexicon. The government in the South provides instruction in the new vocabulary to defectors from North Korea to prepare them for immersion into South Korean society. Both North and South Korea use the Hangul alphabet (known as Chosun muntcha in North Korea) for written Korean. South Koreans still occasionally use Chinese characters for some words of Chinese origin, but the North Korean regime has banned the practice.

**Religion**

Even though the Constitution of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) provides for religious freedom, in reality the right to practice the religion of one’s choice does not exist. Religious activity that takes place in North Korea is carried out within narrow confines allowed by the government. Some reports suggest that the North Korean regime has organized many of the country’s sanctioned religious groups solely for propaganda purposes or for use in contacts with foreign religious organizations or nongovernmental aid agencies.

Official North Korean estimates place the number of practicing Protestant Christians at 12,000 and Roman Catholics at 800. There are four known state-controlled churches operating in North Korea, all in Pyongyang: two Protestant, one Orthodox, and one Roman Catholic. The North Korean government also estimates that 10,000 of its citizens are practicing Buddhists. Although there are about 300 Buddhist temples in North Korea, the government classifies the vast majority of them as cultural artifacts rather than active places of worship.

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The Donghak (Eastern Learning) religious movement—whose name was later changed to Chondogyo (Religion of the Heavenly Way)—first emerged in Korea in the 1860s. This indigenous, egalitarian-based religion is estimated by the government to have 40,000 practitioners.\footnote{Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, “Korea, Democratic People’s Republic of” in \textit{July–December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report}, 13 September 2011, \url{http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2010_5/168360.htm}}\footnote{Djun Kil Kim, \textit{The History of Korea} (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2005), 110.} Chondogyo, a monotheistic belief system, blends elements of Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and Catholicism. In North Korea, its membership is supposedly represented by the political party Chondogyo Chongudang (Party of the Young Friends of the Heavenly Way), but in reality the religion is firmly under the direction of the ruling Korean Workers’ Party.\footnote{Central Intelligence Agency, “Korea, North,” in \textit{The World Factbook}, 12 April 2012, \url{https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kn.html}}

\section*{Cuisine}

Rice is North Korea’s staple food, served at most meals either alone or with other grains. \textit{Panchan} (side dishes) may accompany the rice. The most ubiquitous \textit{panchan} is kimchi, a dish Koreans usually make with pickled cabbage. Southern varieties of kimchi are known for their spiciness, but in North Korea, kimchi is not as heavily flavored with salt or red pepper.\footnote{Life in Korea, “Korean Food: Kimchi,” \url{http://www.lifeinkorea.com/Food/food.cfm?Subject=kimchi}} It is more likely to include fish.\footnote{Janet Fletcher, “Cooking in Common: Korea’s Kimchi Addiction Catches On in the West,” \textit{San Francisco Chronicle}, 30 January 2008, \url{http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2008/01/30/FDMGUH4OJ.DTL}} Other spices and vegetables such as radishes, mushrooms, turnips, and cucumbers are added as available. Because kimchi is fermented, it may be safely stored for months. In the late fall, households make large pots of it for storage over the winter in an event known as \textit{kimjang}. As the kimchi sours over time, cooks use it as an ingredient in stews and other dishes rather than as a side dish.\footnote{Janet Fletcher, “Cooking in Common: Korea’s Kimchi Addiction Catches On in the West,” \textit{San Francisco Chronicle}, 30 January 2008, \url{http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2008/01/30/FDMGUH4OJ.DTL}}

There are several North Korean specialty dishes, although food shortages make the preparation of some of these dishes less common outside the capital. \textit{Pyongyang naengmyeon} consists of cold buckwheat noodles served in a chilled beef broth and decorated with pear slices, cucumbers, white radishes, kimchi, hard-boiled eggs, and other food items. Another favorite dish is \textit{Pyongyang onban}, in which boiled or steamed rice is served in warm chicken broth, covered with a mung-bean pancake, and garnished with green onions, chicken slices, and mushrooms or other items. Beef is relatively rare in North Korea, but when it is available, a popular dish to make is \textit{bulgogi}. It is made by charcoal-grilling thin strips of meat that have been soaked in a marinade of soy sauce,
pepper, sugar, onions, sesame seeds, sesame oil, and garlic.\(^{321}\) Outside Korea, this dish is often called Korean barbecue.

**Traditional Dress**

In North Korea, traditional Korean dress is referred to as *chosun-ot* (*hanbok* in South Korea). In ancient times, the wealthy wore brightly colored silken *chosun-ot*, whereas peasants wore cotton or hemp *chosun-ot* that was subdued in coloring.\(^{322}\) Today, one generally sees brightly colored clothing worn only by performers in traditional presentations or by public figures, such as tour guides, hosts, and servers at some restaurants.\(^{323}\)

The traditional *chosun-ot* worn by women features two pieces. The *jogori* is a full-sleeved short jacket that is tied together in front by long ribbons. The *cheema* is a high-waisted, gathered wraparound skirt, usually worn long and full. Over the centuries, the woman’s *jogori* has alternately shortened and lengthened, with the modern version typically falling midway between the chest and the waist.\(^{324}\) The collar of the *jogori* is a detachable white strip known as a *dongjong*. The *chosun-ot* for men also features a *jogori* jacket, although it is longer than the women’s version, extending to the waist or even lower. It is paired with *paji*, or loose-legged trousers.\(^{325}\) In winter, both men and women wear the *durumagee*, a long overcoat.

**Gender Issues**

Several commentators have noted that the years of famine in North Korea during the mid-1990s seemingly had a profound effect on the role of women in society.\(^{326, 327, 328}\) Most communist countries have traditionally had a high percentage of women working outside the home, but North Korea in the 1980s and early 1990s was an exception, having a much

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322 Alison Behnke, *North Korea in Pictures* (Minneapolis, MN: Lerner Publications, 2005), 53.
323 Alison Behnke, *North Korea in Pictures* (Minneapolis, MN: Lerner Publications, 2005), 53.
higher percentage of housewives (70% by one estimate) than other socialist nations. As the North Korean economy faltered and food rations that were provided at factory jobs became insufficient to feed families, women increasingly became vendors—selling homemade foods or unneeded goods from the home—at unsanctioned markets that sprang up in towns and cities. In some cases, they became involved in small-scale service businesses, such as shops and restaurants. Many women spent increasing amounts of time far from home as they traded and even smuggled goods.

Initially, this bottom-up market economy primarily involved women from the hardest hit sectors of the North Korean economy. But eventually some housewives in more elite North Korean families, in which rations had not been as severely cut, began to resell goods purchased at cheap official prices at their husbands’ factories. Meanwhile, many North Korean men remained in jobs at factories that were part of the official economy but were no longer operating. They showed up at their workplaces only to remain qualified for the meager monthly wages and food rations; if these were no longer available, they stayed in their jobs anyway, hoping that the situation would improve. Thus, in a short period of time, women became the most important provider in many North Korean families.

The effects of these economic changes are seemingly profound, based on commentaries by recent defectors from North Korea. Many men have taken on a more domestic role in the family, carrying out housekeeping and childcare responsibilities—behavior that would have been unthinkable a few decades ago. This change in traditional roles is difficult for some men to accept; some observers identify it as the likely underlying cause of increased domestic violence.

Arts

Although Korea as a whole has a rich history of artwork, artistic expression has been greatly stifled in the 60-plus years since North Korea became a nation. Obligated to produce work in the service of the state’s philosophy and propaganda, North Korean artists, musicians, writers, and filmmakers are limited in their ability to experiment in their media or to invest subtlety and nuance in their work.337

Literature

North Korean literature remains largely unknown outside the country’s heavily guarded borders. Only a handful of stories have been translated into English. A few more have been published in their original language in South Korea. The most famous of these is probably Hong Sok Chung’s *Hwang Chin-i*, a historical novel set in the 16th century during the Chosun Dynasty. Published in South Korea in 2002, the novel was successful in terms of both sales and critical reception. It was also the first North Korean work to receive a South Korean literary prize. Because of its historical setting, the book was largely able to avoid the ideological constraints placed on North Korean fiction set in a more contemporary time.338

Visual Arts

North Korean artists paint in various government-run studios. Each artist has a ranking, with most artists ranked from the lowest level of C to the highest level of A. Above these rankings, the most accomplished painters are designated as “Merited Artist” or “People’s Artist.” Most painting is done in the traditional Korean brush-and-ink style known as Chosunhwa; these works include some of the large public murals that typically would be painted using oils.339, 340 In the 1970s, landscapes of natural settings were approved as appropriate subject matter, although each North Korean artist is still expected to produce at least one painting each year that celebrates revolutionary themes.341

One can view public art throughout North Korea. Artists generally render posters and murals in a naturalistic style commonly known as socialist realism, but referred to as

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“juche realism” in North Korea; abstraction is strictly forbidden. Posters often visually illustrate exhortation or slogans, and are more likely than public murals to exhibit bright colors and bold thematic elements. In some posters, artists use colors and perspective in less naturalistic ways to heighten the dramatic or visual effect.

Public murals and large-scale paintings, which often show one of the Kims in a group tableau, are usually painted in muted colors, using more detail. In many of these large works, artists use ink rather than oils and employ a style similar to that seen in some medieval Christian paintings: the arrangement of characters leads the eye to the central element (e.g., the Christ child). The scenes in North Korean murals generally focus the eye toward the Great (or Dear) Leader. The use of shading and the softening of background details often heighten this effect.

Folk Culture and Folklore

Most of the ancient Korean myths and legends come from sources that can be traced to the Koryo Dynasty (918–1392) and the Chosun Dynasty (1392–1910), although many of these stories recount tales from earlier times in Korean history. The Buddhist monk Iryon compiled one of the most important Koryo era sources of legends and folktales, the Samguk Yusa, in the 13th century. Among the stories recounted in the Samguk Yusa is the oldest known version of the Tangun legend, which tells about the founding of the first Korean kingdom in 2333 B.C.E. In addition to historical legends, the Samguk Yusa includes several folktales about ogres, animals, goblins, and other fanciful creatures and beings.

Koreans have passed down myths and legends from the Chosun Dynasty era in pansori, traditional tales that a sorrikun (singer) alternately sings and narrates to rhythmic accompaniment provided by a kosu (drummer). Originally, there were 12 pansori stories (madang), but Koreans perform only five of them today. They are Simchongga, a tale in which a blind man’s sight is restored through the sacrifice of his devoted daughter; Chunhyangga, a story in which love conquers class differences; Hungbuga, a morality fable involving a virtuous younger brother and an evil older brother; Sugungga, a fable in which a dutiful turtle sent to secure the liver of a rabbit for his sick king is tricked by the

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North Korea in Perspective

Sports and Leisure

North Koreans take sports and athletic activity very seriously, and children are encouraged to participate actively in team and individual sports. The yearly Mass Games in Pyongyang features thousands of children and teenagers who practice for months to perform various synchronized athletic and gymnastic routines.

Despite the nation’s reputation for isolating itself from the rest of the world and trying to avoid foreign influences, North Koreans compete in numerous sports, some of Western origin, in international competition. Foremost among these is soccer. In 1966, in probably the greatest sporting moment in North Korean history, the national soccer team, in its first appearance in the World Cup, stunningly upset the Italian national team. The men’s team qualified for its second World Cup appearance in 2010 but lost all three of its games. Recently, the North Korean women’s soccer team has been successful in international competitions.

In Summer Olympics competition, North Korea has won 41 medals, including 10 gold medals, since it first competed in 1972. Most of these medals have come in weightlifting (9 medals, 1 gold), wrestling (9 medals, 3 golds), boxing (8 medals, 2 golds), and judo (7 medals, 1 gold). North Korea has also periodically competed in the Winter Olympics, earning bronze medals in speed skating in both 1964 and 1992.

Yet none of these sports qualifies as the North Korean national sport. That distinction is reserved for the Korean martial art known as taekwondo. Unarmed martial arts in Korea date back to at least the Goguryo Kingdom in the fourth century C.E. Taekwondo has

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349 Alison Behnke, North Korea in Pictures (Minneapolis, MN: Lerner Publications Company, 2005), 56.
been in existence since the 1940s, when a major general in South Korea, Choi Hong Hi, developed a hybrid martial art employing techniques from the Korean martial art *taekkyo* and the Japanese martial art *karate*. Soon thereafter, the new martial art was taught throughout the South Korean military. In 1980, eight years after he had left South Korea, Choi introduced taekwondo to North Korea, in part to express his hope for reunification.357, 358, 359 Choi died in 2002. He is buried in Pyongyang, where the Taekwondo Palace has for many years been considered the unofficial training center for Choi’s International Taekwondo Federation.360

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Chapter 4 Assessment

1. Virtually all of North Korea’s citizens are ethnic Koreans and speak the Korean language.
   True
   North Korea is one of the least ethnically diverse nations in the world. Except for a small Chinese community and a few ethnic Japanese, the entire population is ethnic Korean.

2. A dish called kimchi, still popular in South Korea, has been gradually phased out of the North Korean cuisine.
   False
   Kimchi is a staple of the North Korean diet. Southern varieties of kimchi are spicier than northern versions. In North Korea, kimchi is more likely to include fish.

3. North Korea does not participate in international sporting events.
   False
   North Korea participates in numerous international sporting events, including the World Cup, the Asian Games, and the Olympics.

4. One of the most important sources of Korean legends and folktales is the Samguk Yusa.
   True
   The Buddhist monk Iryon compiled one of the most important Koryo era sources of legends and folktales, the Samguk Yusa, in the 13th century. Among the stories recounted in the Samguk Yusa is the oldest known version of the Tangun legend.

5. In the 1980s and early 1990s, North Korea had a much higher percentage of women working as housewives than other socialist nations.
   True
   Traditionally, most communist countries have had a high percentage of women working outside the home, but about 70% of women were housewives in North Korea in the 1980s and early 1990s. Recent conditions are forcing women out of this traditional role.
CHAPTER 5: SECURITY

Introduction

North Korea’s official state philosophy is juche (self-reliance), an ideology whose purpose is to impel citizens to work together to forge a uniquely Korean revolution. The idea behind the belief is that the remarkable economic achievements of North Koreans will inspire the rest of the world. According to this ideology, outside assistance is not needed. Yet the nation’s economy has imploded during the last two decades, and self-reliance—which in reality has never been achieved because the Soviet Union and China have provided support for decades—represents an empty slogan more than a reflection of the country’s economic state.361

North Korea is more accurately characterized by the more recent principle of songun chongchi (military first). This tenet was introduced by Kim Jong Il in 1995, during the period of famine known in the country as the Arduous March. Because of the songun policy, the military has become North Korea’s most powerful institution, stretching its reach into nearly all areas of economic and political decision-making.362 According to some interpretations, history has shown that a military-dominated governmental structure such as North Korea’s, driven more by pragmatism than economic ideology, can potentially be a positive force in generating needed economic reforms. But others note that the North Korean military’s position of favor can only be sustained by the continued existence of external and internal tensions.363, 364 Analyzed from this point of view, security threats against North Korea, real or imagined, are beneficial to the military. Or, as one North Korean analyst has put it, “Those bemedalled old generals have much to lose from any outbreak of peace.”365

Following Russia’s and China’s opening of closer relations with South Korea in the early 1990s, North Korea expanded its own foreign relations. The country now maintains


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diplomatic relations with 150 countries and has embassies in 27 of those nations. It does not have any diplomatic ties with the United States.\(^{366}\)

**United States-North Korean Relations**

The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the United States have never had formal diplomatic relations. Between 1950 and 2008, the United States banned most commercial trade and financial transactions with the DPRK under the Trading with the Enemy Act.\(^{367}\) In 1988, after two North Korean terrorists planted a bomb that blew up a Korean Airlines flight, the United States placed North Korea on the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism, where it remained until 2008.\(^{368}\)

Since the early 1990s, the United States and North Korea have carried out negotiations concerning the DPRK’s nuclear and ballistic missiles programs. In 1994, an Agreed Framework was negotiated, providing a road map for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. The United States agreed to provide North Korea with annual fuel oil shipments and to work with an international consortium to develop two light-water reactors. In exchange, North Korea agreed to freeze its nuclear program and work with the United States to safely store its existing spent nuclear fuel. In 1999, the DPRK announced a voluntary end to its long-range missile-testing program.\(^{369}\)

A crisis in these negotiations occurred in late 2002 and early 2003, when North Korea announced its withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and began reprocessing spent nuclear fuel to obtain weapons-grade plutonium. The United States proposed bringing international parties into the talks. By August 2003, China, Japan, South Korea, and Russia began the first of an ongoing series of Six-Party Talks on North Korean denuclearization. After North Korea announced its first successful test of a nuclear device in October 2006, subsequent Six-Party Talks led to agreements by North

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North Korea to dismantle its nuclear facilities.\textsuperscript{370} A 2008 agreement on verification measures led to North Korea’s removal from the State Sponsors of Terrorism list.\textsuperscript{371}

The Obama administration’s approach was one of “strategic patience,” which involved maintaining pressure on North Korea’s administration while waiting for verifiable changes in behavior. The United States continues to apply diplomatic and economic pressure. In 2011, the policy shifted when U.S. representatives and North Korean leaders met in New York and in Switzerland, although the death of Kim Jong Il later that year derailed any perceived progress. The United States has also pressured South Korea to normalize its relations with the North.\textsuperscript{372}

\textbf{Relations with Neighboring Countries}

\textit{Russia}

Although North Korea and Russia share only 17.5 km (10.9 mi) of border, the two countries have an extensive, interwoven history, marked by periods of both comradeship and of escalating tensions.\textsuperscript{373, 374} After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, relations worsened, culminating in 1992 with Russia severing all ties with North Korea. Tensions thawed in the mid-1990s, and since that time relations have gradually become more cordial.\textsuperscript{375}

Beginning in the latter part of the Yeltsin presidency in the 1990s, Moscow’s relations with North Korea have steadily normalized as both nations recognize the pragmatic advantages of closer ties. In spite of friction surrounding North Korean debt to Russia, Moscow assisted in the renovation of the Najin port facility only 30 km (18.6 mi) from the Russian border. Russia regards the warm water port as essential because it can provide year-round access to the Pacific.\textsuperscript{376} Russia has long-range goals of developing energy infrastructure and rail corridors on the Korean Peninsula, which would connect


with their existing networks in Siberia. Russia recently provided North Korea with food aid, and the two sides agreed to explore the possibility of a natural gas pipeline through North Korea. The two countries plan to conduct joint naval exercises in 2012, focusing on search and rescue operations.

**China**

China, which regards North Korea as the key to maintaining stability on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia, is a cautious ally. North Korea’s insistence on continuing its rocket and nuclear research has placed the Chinese in an awkward position with the international community, but historical and economic ties make it unlikely that there will be any major changes in relations between the two countries.

China, as North Korea’s most important trading partner, provides more food, fuel, and other supplies to North Korea than any other nation. Chinese companies are among the few outside investors in North Korean industrial enterprises. China also provides significant aid to North Korea. China is widely viewed as the nation with the most significant influence on the DPRK.

China shares a long border with North Korea. Thus, for the Chinese leadership, a real concern in bilateral relations is that an internal shock in North Korea (e.g., extreme famine conditions, regime-change instability, another war between the two Koreas) could result in hundreds of thousands of North Korean refugees spilling across its border. Even now, thousands of North Koreans cross into China each year, although China has a repatriation treaty with North Korea.

Another important consideration in Beijing is the potential effect of North Korean actions—and of China’s response to those actions—on China’s relations with South

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Korea, Japan, Russia, and the United States. Think tanks around the world employ numerous China analysts who try to discern and analyze the political calculus that guides China’s relations with its somewhat unpredictable neighbor.384, 385

Although recently reaffirming its commitment to North Korea, China is concerned about its relations with the international community. China’s support of the UN Security Council resolution condemning North Korea’s recent satellite launch suggests that China is trying to maintain international legitimacy while continuing its support for North Korea.386 Tensions mounted between the two nations when North Korea seized 3 Chinese fishing vessels in May 2012, taking 29 crew members hostage. Some speculate that Kim Jong Un, who was declared the leader of North Korea after his father’s death in late 2011, is sending China a message to stop pressuring North Korea over its rocket and nuclear tests.387

South Korea

Although the armistice agreement signed in 1953 ended combat operations on the Korean Peninsula, it did not officially end the conflict. Technically, North and South Korea remain in a state of war.388 Tensions between the two nations have risen and fallen over the decades. South Korea’s 1998 “sunshine policy” of engagement with the North temporarily eased tensions. In a 2007 summit in Pyongyang, Kim Jong Il and South Korean President Roh Moo-Hyun signed a declaration pledging further joint economic projects to help develop the North’s economy and infrastructure. The North Korean leadership agreed to work with South Korea in negotiating a formal peace treaty to the Korean War.389

Lee Myung-Bak, who defeated Roh in the 2007 South Korean presidential election, took a much harder stance toward North Korea.390 In April 2008, Pyongyang cut off all official dialog with South Korea, forced all South Koreans to leave Kaesong, and demanded that the 2007 summit agreements be honored.391 Relations further declined in

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July 2008 when the North Korean military shot and killed a South Korean tourist at the Mount Kumgang tourist resort. In January 2009, North Korea pulled out of earlier agreements with South Korea intended to lessen political and military tensions.\(^{392}\) In May 2010, North Korea announced that it was ending its nonaggression agreement with South Korea and cut all ties.\(^{393}\) Tensions escalated further in 2010 when North Korea sank a South Korean warship, killing 46 sailors, and fired artillery shells on South Korea’s Yeonpyeong Island, killing and wounding military personnel and civilians.\(^{394}\) South Korea’s support for the more than 20,000 North Korean defectors heightens tensions between the Koreas.\(^{395, 396}\) In January 2012, Kim Jong Un declared that he would not deal with Lee’s government.\(^{397}\)

South Korea is scheduled to hold presidential elections in December 2012, and the two leading candidates have different positions on relations with North Korea. Park Geun-Hye is likely to moderate the hard-line position of current President Lee, while the leading opposition candidate, Moon Jae-In, favors a return to the sunshine diplomacy of former President Roh.\(^{398}\) Polls show the candidates running neck-and-neck.\(^{399, 400}\)


Military and Internal Security

Military

North Korea’s military, officially known as the Korean People’s Army (KPA), is one of the world’s largest. According to recent estimates, the North Korean military has 1.2 million active duty members, a number surpassed only by military personnel numbers in China, the United States, and India. Additionally, analysts believe the country can call up another 7.7 million reservists. North Korea’s overall military spending may consume as much as a quarter of the nation’s GDP.

Most of the KPA consists of ground forces, a large percentage of which are deployed in forward positions near the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). Of these, a relatively large number (87,000 by one recent estimate) are special operations forces, trained for combat behind enemy lines. The North Korean Navy, with an estimated 60,000 personnel, is primarily restricted to coastal defense and largely consists of aged surface vessels and submarines. But North Korea has one of the largest submarine fleets in the world. Many of these vessels are small midget submarines, which present a significant threat to South Korean coastal defense operations. Since 2011, North Korea has reinforced coastal defense artillery units, and 20 new artillery positions have been placed in Hwanghae Province. The North Korean Air Force has an estimated troop strength of 110,000, divided among 8 air divisions operating out of 21 air bases, many of which are located close to the DMZ.

North Korean men serve at least 10 years of active duty in the KPA, with conscription beginning at age 17. After they are discharged from active duty, North Korean men are

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required to carry out part-time service, up to age 60, in the Workers and Peasants Red Guards (WPRG), a paramilitary civil defense force. Some North Korean women also serve in the military, although their service is not mandatory.409

**Police and Internal Security Forces**

The Ministry of People’s Security (MPS) and the State Security Department (SSD) carry out internal security in North Korea. The 130,000 MPS employees are responsible for basic policing, border control, providing security for transportation infrastructure, and air-traffic control.410, 411 The SSD functions like the old Soviet KGB, conducting investigations of suspected political dissidents and managing the government’s political prisons.412, 413 A subdivision of the SSD, the Security Command, is directly responsible for exposing corrupt or disloyal party members and regularly reports to the country’s leader.414

The People’s Guard, with personnel estimated at 420,000, is responsible for controlling illegal movements across North Korea’s border. The increase in this organization’s numbers, believed necessary to combat the growing number of refugees attempting to flee North Korea, has created occasional tensions with China.415

Roughly 7–8 million North Koreans serve in one of 3 paramilitary forces: The Worker-Peasant Red Guards (WPRG), the Red Youth Guard (RYG), and Paramilitary Training Units (PTU). The lightly armed WPRG is responsible for providing the population with basic military training, rear area defense, and guerilla warfare. The RYG is similarly charged and organized under the command of Korean Workers’ Party (KWP) officials. The PTU, under the command of the KWP Civil Defense Bureau, is the ready reserve of the KPA and is responsible for rear area defense and security.416

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Terrorism

The North Korean government is not known to have participated in or sponsored any acts of terrorism since the 1987 bombing of a Korean Airlines jet en route to Baghdad. In late 2008, North Korea was taken off the U.S. government’s list of State Sponsors of Terrorism, on which it had been included since 1988.

Prior to the 1990s, North Korea kidnapped citizens from neighboring countries. South Korea estimates that nearly 500 of its citizens have been abducted by DPRK agents since the end of the Korean War. North Korean abductions have also victimized Japan. Between 1977 and 1982, North Korean agents kidnapped at least 13 Japanese citizens, taking them as captives to North Korea. (The Japanese government claims that 17 individuals were abducted.) In 2002 the North Korean government admitted to 13 abductions, and later that year it allowed 5 abductees, whom it claimed were the only ones still alive, to return to Japan. Two years later, family members of the five abductees, who had also been taken in the kidnappings, were returned to Japan as well. Questions remain about whether any abductees are still alive. The fate of these Japanese kidnap victims is an issue that continues to cloud Japanese-DPRK relations.

North Korea is not known to harbor any members of international terrorist groups, other than four members of the Japanese Communist League-Red Army Faction, who surrendered themselves to North Korean officials after hijacking a Japanese Airlines flight and flying it to Pyongyang in 1970.

An ongoing concern has been North Korea’s willingness to sell weapons, missiles, and possibly nuclear technology to other states, some of which help arm groups that the United States and other countries consider terrorist organizations. Both Iran and Syria have purchased missiles from North Korea, and U.S. intelligence officials believe North

Korea was helping Syria build a nuclear reactor before it was destroyed by Israeli warplanes in 2007.424, 425

**Issues Affecting Security**

**Food Supply**

Arguably, the food emergency between 1995 and 1998 brought more wrenching changes to the nation than any other event in North Korea’s history. This period of famine brought the public system of food distribution to a standstill.426 As a result, private farmers’ markets sprang up in urban areas, where nonsubsidized food was either purchased with cash or obtained through barter. With little to lose, many North Koreans also began to ignore tight governmental travel restrictions. An unprecedented wave of North Koreans migrated across the Chinese border, some for only temporary periods before coming back with goods or income from China.427 In response, the DPRK government set up a number of detention facilities designed to hold those caught traveling without a permit.428, 429

Several factors contributed to the severity of the famine in the 1990s, beginning early in the decade when shipments of subsidized food, oil, and equipment from the Soviet Union and China declined. Two years of floods, followed by a severe drought in 1997, were the culminating events. Because North Korea’s diminished economy has little to offer other nations in terms of exports, other than military hardware, the economy cannot rely on its trade capacity or hard currency reserves to make up for shortfalls in grain production during periods of excessive or insufficient rainfall. Food aid from agencies and donor countries—most notably, South Korea, China, the European Union, the United States, and the United Nations—and improved grain harvests in the 2000s have helped fend off another devastating famine in the intervening years.430 But North Korea continues to walk a thin line between food sufficiency and food deficit, with a summer of too much or too little rainfall capable of tipping the balance.

Succession and Political Reform

Kim Jong Il died unexpectedly in December 2011. He was succeeded by his third son, Kim Jong Un. The younger Kim’s first few months in office have gone relatively smoothly, but the extent of his power remains unknown. So far, Kim Jong Un appears to be continuing the policies of his father, but many speculate that the superficial calm is concealing underlying tensions within the leadership. There are several rivalries that could threaten Kim Jong Un’s legitimacy or lead to purges.  

A related issue is whether North Korea can sustain the isolationism and repression of previous years. Some suggest that North Korea will follow the Chinese development model as it struggles to reform its stagnating economy. But following the Chinese model could potentially cause the regime’s downfall. The North Korean leadership considers it essential to block knowledge of the outside world from its citizens. If North Koreans become aware of the degree of prosperity in other nations, particularly in South Korea, the legitimacy of the government could be brought into question. Therefore, isolating the population remains central to government stability, although it is not clear how long such a policy can be sustained. As citizens gain increasing access to outside media via cell phones, radio, and DVDs, it may become increasingly difficult for the government to keep its people isolated. One study found that nearly half of all North Koreans have watched a foreign DVD, a quarter have listened to a foreign radio broadcast or watched foreign news, and nearly a third have modified their televisions to receive nongovernment stations. Increased exposure to the outside world may not be enough to bring down the government, but it could create pressure on national leaders.

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Chapter 5 Assessment

1. North Korea’s military is one of the world’s smallest.
   **False**
   North Korea’s military, officially known as the Korean People’s Army (KPA), is one of the world’s largest. According to recent estimates, there are approximately 1.2 million active duty members and between 7–8 million reservists in the North Korean military.

2. The United States has agreed to provide North Korea annual fuel oil shipments and to work with an international consortium to develop two light-water reactors in North Korea.
   **True**
   In exchange, North Korea has agreed to freeze the development of its nuclear program and work with the United States to store its existing spent nuclear fuel safely. In 1999, the DPRK announced a voluntary end to its long-range missile-testing program.

3. China is North Korea’s most important trading partner.
   **True**
   Imports from China provide more food, fuel, and other supplies to North Korea than any other nation. Chinese companies are among the few outside investors in North Korean industrial enterprises. China is also a significant provider of aid to North Korea.

4. In April 2008, Pyongyang cut off all official dialog with South Korea.
   **True**
   North Korea cut off dialog with South Korea in April 2008 in response to South Korean President Lee Myung-Bak’s hard stance toward North Korea. North-South relations further deteriorated in July 2008 when the North Korean military shot and killed a South Korean tourist at the Mount Kumgang resort.

5. The period of famine in the 1990s brought North Korea’s public food distribution system to a standstill.
   **True**
   As a result of the breakdown of the food distribution system, private farmers’ markets sprang up in urban areas. Nonsubsidized food was purchased with cash or obtained through barter.
FINAL ASSESSMENT

1. North Korea’s climate is primarily determined by ocean currents.
   True or False

2. The Tumen River originates on the slopes of Mount Paektu.
   True or False

3. During the Japanese occupation, Pyongyang was revitalized as an industrial center.
   True or False

4. Nearly three-quarters of North Korea is covered with forests.
   True or False

5. Wonsan is North Korea’s largest port city on the Yellow Sea.
   True or False

6. The first time the Korean Peninsula was unified under a single dynasty was when Silla’s armies drove Tang forces north of the Taedong River.
   True or False

7. To further establish the authenticity of his leadership, Wang Kon bestowed on himself the title Chonsu (Mandate of Heaven).
   True or False

8. A high point of the early Chosun period was the reign of King Sejong.
   True or False

9. Japanese rule was remarkably tolerant during the early years of Korean annexation.
   True or False

10. After the Korean War, Kim Il Sung was able to consolidate his position by incorporating associates connected with the Communist Party in the South.
    True or False

11. The Kaesong Industrial Complex (KIC), just north of the South Korean border, produces consumer goods such as watches and shoes for South Korean companies.
    True or False

12. Farm harvests are distributed to small private markets.
    True or False
13. South Korean investments in North Korea are part of an overall government policy of economic engagement with the North.
   True or False

14. In recent years, Chinese manufactured consumer goods have flowed increasingly across the border into North Korea.
   True or False

15. North Korea does not have extensive reserves of any economically significant minerals.
   True or False

16. North Korea has developed its own form of *Hangul*, the Korean alphabet.
   True or False

17. Because of food shortages, North Korean specialty dishes are no longer prepared in the country.
   True or False

18. The national sport of North Korea is taekwondo.
   True or False

19. Koreans have passed down their myths and legends in *pansori*, traditional tales that a *sorrikun* (singer) alternately sings and narrates.
   True or False

20. In many North Korean families, women have become the primary provider.
   True or False

   True or False

22. After North Korea announced its first successful test of a nuclear device in October 2006, subsequent Six-Party Talks led to agreements by North Korea to dismantle its nuclear facilities.
   True or False

23. Thousands of North Koreans cross into China each year, even though China has a repatriation treaty with North Korea.
   True or False

24. To ease regional tensions, South Korea refuses to support North Korean defectors.
   True or False
25. North Korea continues to walk a thin line between food sufficiency and food deficit.
   
   True or False
FURTHER READING

Books


**Papers and Articles**


**Films**

