

CULTURAL OVERVIEW

The people of the DPRK (a population of over 22,000,000) are mostly ethnic Korean, speak the Korean language, and use the Korean phonetic alphabet. The Koreans take pride in both their antiquity and in the continuity of their society, which dates back to pre-Christian times. They descended from migratory groups that entered the region from Siberia, Manchuria, and inner Asia several thousands of years ago. The society is a clearly defined ethnic, cultural, and linguistic unit distinct from the neighboring populations of the Asian mainland and Japan. The North Korean society is a mixture of ancient/indigenous traditions with a system of totalitarian ideology/institutions imposed by the Soviet Union at the end of World War II. This ethnic solidarity has deep geographic, historical, and political roots. Until the imposition of communism, the people lived for centuries in an exceptionally homogeneous society and culture. With the partition of the peninsula, sharp political/economic differences

developed, with some cultural variations between both North and South Korea.

Traditionally, Koreans have never conceived of society as merely an aggregate of individuals, each pursuing private ends, but as a harmonious and collective whole more important than the individuals composing it. This emphasis on harmony has justified the DPRK government's paternalistic intervention in the lives of the people. In the DPRK today, the dominant ideology is Marxist-Leninist, strongly influenced by traditional Confucian values and Kim Il-song's "chuche" (self-reliance) ideology. By Western standards, life in the DPRK is regimented and grim. The centralized party state maintains tight control over all aspects of daily life, and citizens must dedicate their lives to state-defined goals rather than personal interests. Proper attitudes and correct human relations are stressed. It would be a mistake to assume that North Koreans see their lives as harsh and colorless, because the majority have spent their entire life under a totalitarian regime. The average person is unaware of conditions abroad, and is subject to a constant barrage of propaganda extolling the virtues of Kim Il-song's rule. The stability of the present regime is largely based on Kim Il-song's personal charisma and the

eneration in which he is held by the common people. His apparent successor (Kim Chong-il) may find it difficult to maintain the same deep loyalties, especially with the rapidly deteriorating economic situation.

Korean is a Uralic language, remotely related to Japanese, Mongolian, Hungarian, and Finnish. Although there are dialects, the Korean spoken throughout the peninsula is comprehensible to nearly all the populace. Chinese characters were used before the invention of the Korean Hangul alphabet in the 15th century. A number of specialized terms have been introduced in the north, especially in written usage.

Korea's traditional religions are Buddhism, Shamanism, and Chongbogyo. Christian missionaries arrived in the 19th century and founded schools, hospitals, and other modern institutions throughout Korea. Major centers of missionary activity included Seoul and Pyongyang. Although religious groups nominally exist in the DPRK, most available evidence suggests that the government severely restricts religious activity, allowing these groups to exist only for the sake of its international image.

KOREAN PENINSULA GEOGRAPHIC POSITION

The Korean Peninsula protrudes southward from the Asian mainland separating the Yellow Sea (West Sea) to the west from the Sea of Japan (East Sea) to the east. The Peninsula is roughly 346 km (215 mi) wide at its broadest point (approximately 38°10'N), roughly 169 km (105 mi) at its narrowest point (approximately 39°20'N), and approximately 965 km (600 mi) long. The northernmost point of the peninsula is located on the Chinese border at approximately 43°N (about the same latitude as Buffalo, New York), the southernmost point on the peninsula is located at approximately 34°20'N (about the same latitude as Wilmington, North Carolina) on the East China Sea. The westernmost point on the peninsula is located at 124°40'E on the Yellow Sea (West Sea), and the easternmost point on the peninsula is located at 129°35'E on the Sea of Japan (East Sea)/Korea Strait (Straights of Tsushima).

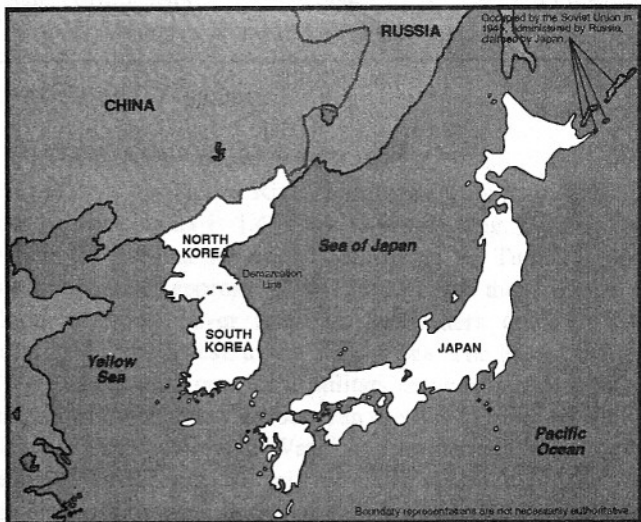
The total land area for North Korea is 120,410 km (46,490 mi) or slightly smaller than Mississippi. The total land area for South Korea is 98,190 km (84,401 mi) or slightly larger

than Indiana. North Korea's coastline is 2,495 km (1,551 mi) and South Korea's is 2,413 km (1,550 mi).

Borders and Neighbors

The northern border with Russia is 19 km (12 mi) long, and follows the Tumen River, northwest, from its mouth. The border with China is 1,416 km (880 mi) long. Starting from where the Russian border ends, it follows the Tumen River to its headwaters (approx. 42°N 128°05'E); it then follows the Yalu (Amnok) River from its headwaters (approx. 42°N 128°05'E), southwest, to the Yellow Sea. The border between North and South Korea is the military demarcation line (MDL), that marks the separation between the two belligerent sides at the close of the Korean War. A demilitarized zone (DMZ) extends for 2 km (1.24 mi) on either side of the MDL and extends out to sea. Both the DPRK and ROK Governments hold that the MDL is only a temporary administrative line, not a permanent border. Korea's remaining borders are coastlines, generally following the peninsula, but in places the border leaves the peninsula to encompass islands and archipelagoes.

Korea's closest sea-neighbors are Japan and China. The Japanese island of Tsushima is approximately 50 km (31 mi) off Korea's southeast coast (34°42'N 129°20'E), while the main island of Honshu is approximately 180 km (112 mi). The Shandong Peninsula of China is approximately 190 km (118 mi) to the west and bisects the Korean bay to the north and the Yellow Sea to the south.



General Information

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KOREAN PENINSULA GEOGRAPHY

Korea's geographic position serves as a natural bridge between the Asian continent and the Japanese islands. The coastline is highly indented with approximately 3,500 islands, mostly located off the south and west coasts. Korea, though comparatively small in size, is noted for the extraordinary variety/contrast of its geography. The country is punctuated with rough mountains, large streams, and rugged narrow passes with only about 20% of the peninsula suitable for cultivation. Another factor is the shallowness of the Yellow Sea, contributing to the extreme tidal range (9.7 m (32 ft), the second largest in the world) on the west coast.

Mountains

The Korean Peninsula is primarily a region of mountains (approximately 70%) and they are the defining characteristics

of the terrain. The mountains are generally of medium height, about 1,500 m (4,921 ft), with lower mountains 200-500 m (656-1,640 ft) high (all elevations of 2,000 m (6,600 ft) or more are found in North Korea). Relief differentials (as measured from valley floor to peak or ridge tops) for even the lowest mountains, are generally 300-400 m (980-1,300 ft). The elevated places are heavily bisected by river valleys, which frequently have deep narrow passes and canyons, with steep slopes or near vertical or vertical walls. Paektu-san, at 2,744 m (9,003 ft), is the highest mountain in the Koreas, rising out of the Kaema Plateau, in the far northeast, which is the headwater for the Yalu and Tumen Rivers.

Mountain ranges/chains generally parallel the coastlines, but nearly all emit a number of mountain chains that trend in various directions and intersect one another, making the country's relief system complex and tangled. Korea's mountain system may be broken into three segments:

North Korean Mountain Regions: These are divided into the Tumen and the Yalu (Amnok) River Mountain regions. The Tumen Region (the area between the Tumen River and the

Sea of Japan) is in the northeast corner of North Korea. These mountains are relatively low and passable in the northeast, but gradually increase in elevation toward the southwest, becoming less and less accessible. Their high region reaches 2,500 m (8,202 ft). Their southwest direction is interrupted by the Materyong mountains, which trend southeast from the Manchurian border to the Sea of Japan.

The Yalu (Amnok) Mountain Region is between the Yalu River and the Yellow Sea). The region forms the mountain roof of the Korean peninsula. These ranges are noted for their complicated structure, severity, inaccessibility, and lack of settlers. The western portion of this region becomes gradually lower, rarely exceeding 1,000 m (3,281 ft), but the ranges have steep slopes, are highly dissected, and contain dense forests. Communication is usually only practical via the deep river valleys.

East Korean Mountain Region: These mountains extend along the shore of the Sea of Japan tending south, in three parallel lines, to the southern extreme of the peninsula. These mountains reach 1,500 m (4,921 ft) and are characterized by

narrow, jagged crests and steep slopes that are cut by deep gorges. The relief difference between the flat littoral valleys and the abrupt elevation change of the mountains handicap cross country movement.

South Korean Mountain Region: This region consists of a series of short ranges that extend in parallel rows to the southern shore of the peninsula. These mountains reach 1,500 m (4,921 ft) and most of the region is easily accessible, except for the central region which is characterized by sharp jagged crests with high passes and steep rugged slopes.

Lowlands

The largest and most important tracks of lowland lie near the shorelines (coastal alluvial plains). Besides these coastal alluvial plains, erosional basins were formed in the mountains at the junctions of rivers/streams and are usually found in central and southern Korea (mostly expanded river valleys or nearly closed inter-mountain valleys). Between the mountains lie lowlands that were formed by river valleys and sea terraces. Most lowlands are settled/cultivated.