



The Korean Wave:

Is South Korea Creating a
Model for the 21st Century?

A Global Lesson Plan

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Lesson Plan: The Korean Wave: Is South Korea Creating a Model for the 21st Century?

1. Goal of the lesson: Overview

The purpose of this lesson plan is to introduce students to modern South Korea (Republic of Korea) a highly-developed country that many students may not be familiar with. The lesson introduces Korea's vibrant economy, pop culture, religious traditions, world-class educational system, and tasty cuisine.

2. Objectives – Outcomes

- a. Evaluate the outcomes of two different styles of education. Describe the strengths and weaknesses of each.
- b. Compare and contrast capitalism in Korea and capitalism in the USA.
- c. Demonstrate understanding of the factors that have allowed Korea to develop so quickly and efficiently since the Korean War.

3. General Information

One – two hour lesson plan for grades 7-12.

4. Hook

Show a video of a pop music group (suggested link) Girls Generation "Catch Me if You Can" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-z0xjKdXhzU>

Question:

- a. Who's the star in the group performance?

5. Presentation of New Material (see below)

6. Application

- a. Create a slide presentation showcasing South Korean made products and services.
- b. Find a recipe and cook a Korean dish to share with the class. Describe the ingredients and methods of preparation.
- c. Think about the classes you are taking right now and how they are taught. Choose one that emphasizes creative and critical thinking. Define for the class what creative and critical thinking are and give examples from the class of how this is done. Lead a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of this kind of teaching vs. rote memorization.
- d. Research Confucianism and evaluate the influence of Confucianism on at least 3 aspects of Korean contemporary culture.
- e. Interview 5 people who have Korean-made products in their homes or garages. Determine their level of satisfaction with these products and present your findings to the class. Evaluate factors such as quality of workmanship, durability, price and service related to the product.
- f. Provide the class with an example of a Korean pop song. Point out the differences between one of your favorite American pop songs and this song. Evaluate why Korean pop music has become so popular in many parts of the world and lead a class discussion.

7. Evaluation

- a. What differences do you think there would be in a curriculum that emphasized rote memorization from one that emphasized creativity and critical thinking?
- b. Why do you think the US values individualism so much? What are the consequences of valuing individualism over the community?
- c. Do you think your country is religiously tolerant? Why or why not? How can religious tolerance be encouraged?
- d. How does the history of an ancient culture such as Korea influence its modern development? How is it different from a comparatively young country like the US?

8. Bibliography

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Lesson Plan: The Korean Wave: Is South Korea Creating a Model for the 21st Century?

South Korea is asserting itself as a major force in the world! If you don't know much about Korea, please take notice; in more ways than one, it is a rising star on the world stage.



Map of South Korea

end of World War II, a brutal civil war broke out in 1950 between North Korea, loyal to communist Soviet Union and China, and South Korea, who sided with the United States and its allies. At the end of the war in 1953, the country lay in ruins with the 38th parallel line dividing the north and south, a division that continues today. The U.S. was instrumental in helping to rebuild its ally in the south, establishing the Republic of Korea, commonly known as South Korea, but much of the credit should be attributed to the future-looking and hard-working people of Korea.

Korea's rise has remained somewhat of a secret, at least in the US. Its achievements have been overshadowed by its much larger and more familiar neighbors — China and Japan — or its communist neighbor to the north and the bizarre escapades of its dictator, Kim Jong-un. In fact, I told a knowledgeable friend about my trip to

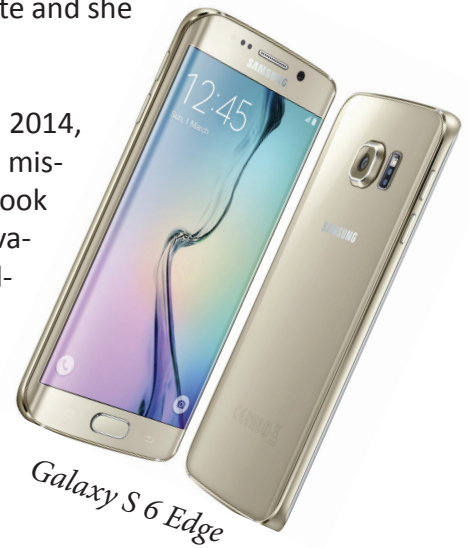
Koreans have often thought of themselves as victims, and indeed, the 20th century has not been kind to the Republic of South Korea, a small country on a peninsula near China and Japan. In 1910 it was invaded by Japan, which continued to occupy and exploit Korea until its defeat by the US and its allies at the end of World War II in 1945, when the Japanese were permanently expelled from the peninsula. Soon after the



Japanese Empire pre-World War II

Korea and mentioned the global reach of the Korean Samsung Conglomerate and she responded: “Oh, I thought Samsung was from China.”

I visited the country of South Korea for a 10 day study tour in November 2014, sponsored by the Academy of Korean Studies located south of Seoul. The mission of the tour was to expose educators, curriculum writers, and textbook publishers from around the world to modern Korea. From my brief observations during the tour, it didn’t appear that Korea is a victim anymore. It is riding high on its “economic miracle” that has transformed the country from a per capita income of just \$100 (US) in the 1960s to a per capita income of \$40,000 (US) today. Indeed, it ranks as the 12th largest economy in the world, an astonishing accomplishment considering its historic situation. How could this small country (it is about the size of the US state of Indiana) have transformed itself from a country mired in poverty and misery to a prosperous nation in just a short 60 year time span?



I pondered this transformation question as I toured South Korea. The more I saw of the country and met its people, the more I felt that its story needed to be told to an American and global audience. I thought Korea’s story is important because it seems to be offering a different development model from what the West, especially the US, is familiar with. I am not suggesting that Americans exactly incorporate this model, but I think it is important that we are familiar with a model that other countries find very appealing. Since the fall of communism in 1990 and onwards, the American model – a neoliberal, market economy, a democratic/representative political system, and individualism extolled over the community – has been the top model for other nations to emulate. But other nations, such as South Korea, have forged their own developmental model that makes sense for them. This lesson plan highlights a few of the ways in which the developmental model known as the “Korean Wave” is making a big splash on the world scene.

I plan to use a big picture, holistic approach in studying this country. This means I will look at how major economic, social, political, religious, cultural, and business factors interact to produce what has been called the “Korean Wave.” Since this is a short lesson, I will not be able to cover all topics; instead, I selected topics that Americans might be surprised to learn about but are having an important impact on both Korea and world society. For example, I will not cover the tension between North and South Korea, relations with the West, including the U.S., or the fascinating politics of Korea. It seems there is ample information available about these topics.

In this lesson plan, I will first look at the Korean educational system. The country’s students are ranked as the best academically in the world, but this has come at a price; Korea also ranks at the top of youth suicides. Second, I will explore Korean religions and their influence on Korean society. How have they been able to peacefully integrate diverse religious traditions



The Korean Wave, photo Denise Ames

Lesson Plan Topics

1. Education
2. Religion
3. Korean Wave
4. Economy
5. Food

into their homogenous society? Third, I will explore the Korean Wave, the phenomenal growth and appeal of popular Korean cultural products since the late 1990s, which include K-pop music, cinema, and television dramas. How do Koreans create and export their wildly popular Korean bands – K-pop – to the rest of the world? (The Wave is enhanced by the popularity of sophisticated Korean technological products and automobiles.) Fourth, I will examine their economic system, known as the Miracle on the Han River (a river flowing through Seoul), where the country has experienced rapid economic growth. How have they catapulted their economy from manufacturing “junk” to highly sophisticated consumer products ranging from cars to electronics? And finally, a perfect way to round out this lesson is to get a taste of Korean food, a treat that I hope you will experience on your own.

1. Education

South Korea is known for its high educational achievements. It would not be an overstatement to say that South Korea is an education-obsessed country. Children must get into the right kindergarten, so that they can attend the right elementary school, then be accepted into the right middle school and high school, and finally into the right college, which gives them a springboard in landing the right job and marrying the right spouse. I am not exaggerating!

Since its students consistently score the highest in the world on standardized tests, we assume that they must be doing something right. Or is that a wrong assumption? Let’s take a brief look at education in South Korea and see what you think.



A Girl Studying



Confucius Overlooking a School, photo Denise Ames

This fervor for studying is reflected in helping South Korea consistently rank at the top of the developed world in reading, math and science scores, but studies also show that Korean students come in last in a survey of student happiness at school. They also have the highest suicide rate in the developed world. The high-stress focus on education seems to have a downside. The pressure to succeed in an increasingly competitive world takes its toll among the students in Korea who suffer from such brutal competition.

South Korea’s unhealthy preoccupation with exam results has deep roots – in particular, Confucian roots. A legacy of the 5th century BCE Chinese philosopher, Confucius, was to improve oneself through education, and the purpose of study was to pass the civil service examination, which has existed for over a thousand years. During this long history, the only means by which a male (no females took the exam) could socially advance was to pass the exam. In reality, the odds of exam-success favored those high-status families who had the means to lavish money on instructors for the intense

preparation needed to pass the difficult exams. But there still remained a very slight possibility that a brilliant boy from a poor family could be mentored by teachers and pass the exam. High status and glory awaited the privileged few who scored well on the exam.

After the end of the Korean War in 1953, the country faced desperate conditions – a bombed-out infrastructure, few natural resources, and one of the lowest GDP's in the world. Once again, drawing on its Confucian heritage, the way to get ahead in these dire circumstances was via education. Koreans realized that the only true resources they had were the intellectual resources of its citizenry, and these resources had to be cultivated through education.

Today students are living out the legacy of the Confucian emphasis on education. Not only do students put a full day in attending normal classes, but the vast majority of teenagers do a double shift: they go to hagwons for after-hours study. A hagwon is a for-profit private institute, academy or “cram school” to help students improve scores on the standardized exams, for a fee, sometimes a very hefty fee.

Increasingly, online hagwons are replacing traditional brick-and-mortar cram schools. One instructor at a hagwon, now has about 300,000 students who take his online class at any given time, paying \$39 for a 20-hour course (traditional cram schools charge as much as \$600 for a course). He teaches them tricks for taking the timed exams, including shortcuts that students can memorize to solve a problem faster. Many of the instructors at hagwons are making more money than teachers, and some even crack the million dollar range! The hagwons have become a \$20 billion industry.

There are critics of the Korean approach to education. Former minister of education, Lee Ju-ho states, “All this late-night study could lead to problems in enhancing their other skills, like character, creativity and critical thinking. Hagwon is all about rote learning and memorization.” Lee and others cite problems with the college admissions procedures, which have been slow in looking beyond test scores to other criteria such as extracurricular activities and personal essays, as is common in many Western countries. But I think it goes deeper than merely college admission procedures.



Hagwon Students in Korea

From my observations, the Korean educational system is a reflection of the society at large. It is a relatively small country competing in a world of highly developed economies. Koreans have to cultivate and draw on their strengths in a global economy and these include a diligent and hard-working work

force, preciseness, and taking an already existing product like the Apple i-phone, and copying and/or improving upon it, such as in their wildly successful smart phone creation: Samsung Galaxy. They have achieved on the world stage because they have carved out a “success niche” in which they emphasize memorization skills, sheer endurance, and obedience to a prescribed path.

As the current President Park Geun-hye promotes a “creative economy” as the key to taking South Korea to the next level in its development, many analysts say the country would do well to take a more creative approach to education. Perhaps there will be a change in the educational focus from rote memorization to creativity and critical thinking, but it will also mean that the standardized tests, as they currently exist, would need serious revamping. I wonder what Confucius would say about that!

2. Religion in South Korea

“Koreans never met a religion they didn’t like.” Our tour guide made this pronouncement during my tour of South Korea. I thought that was an interesting remark! It certainly was better in my estimation than hating all religions except your own. I was a convert to our tour guide’s impression when I began to notice that public spaces were filled with Christian crosses, Daoist symbols, shamanistic stone settings, Buddhist temples, Confucian historic sites, and even a mosque that had recently been built in Seoul. Religion was and is a very important part of Korean society, and I thought that it necessitated mentioning in this lesson plan.

First, I will define the term religion using the abbreviated version in my book *Waves of Global Change: A Holistic World History*. Religion is a system through which people interpret the nonhuman realm as if it were human and seek to influence it through symbolic communication. It often contains a moral code governing the conduct of human affairs. I will interpret religion broadly and include the belief systems found in Korea such as Buddhism, Christianity (both Protestant and Catholic), and even Confucianism and shamanism. This should give us a broad representation.

Let’s start our conversation about religion with shamanism since it is the oldest tradition and people probably know the least about it. Even though there are practicing Buddhists, Christians, and atheists, about 80% of Koreans adhere to the ancient beliefs of shamanism in some form. Koreans don’t seem to see a contradiction in holding dissimilar religious beliefs. Shamanism is the basic belief that all happiness stems from harmony with nature. It is linked to animism, the belief that everything has a spirit rather than the idea of a transcendent, personal God. Koreans revere the mountain spirit, since the country is blanketed with mountains. Shamanism can take the form of simple rituals, such as a ceremony to cleanse the evil spirits from a new residence or initiate a new car to more elaborate ceremonies that take weeks or months to complete. Some Koreans, especially women, visit their favorite shaman on a regular basis and ask for guidance in everyday life or have their future told.



Shaman Wood Carvings, photo Denise Ames



Korean Christian Church

There are now 55,000 practicing shamans in Korea, more than the clergy of all the other religions put together. Shamanism is not carefully organized; there are no written texts, no established leaders, and most of the followers and practitioners are women. Now that is a recipe for officials to belittle it! But it is alive and well and continues in Korea today.

In recent decades, Christianity has exploded, with about 5.4 million of Korea’s 50 million people becoming Roman Catholic and about 9 million more Protestants of many stripes. There are two divisions in Christianity: the elite and Evangelical. Elite Koreans find the Presbyterian style most appealing but lately charismatic Evangelical churches are growing at a full clip. The Yoido

Full Gospel Church's 1 million members form the largest Pentecostal congregation on Earth! The noisy, emotional form of worship at the church has led some observers to remark that it is the "shamanization" of Christianity.

Why the sudden popularity of Christianity? Although many reasons are cited, I find the recent explosive economic growth accompanies the rise of Christianity. Sociologist Max Weber's interpretation states that the Protestant ethic means God blesses the successful with material riches. The popularity of the Prosperity Gospel, widespread in the U.S. as well, seems to attest to the economic connection.



Gate to the Haeinsa Buddhist Temple, photo Denise Ames

Buddhism has deep historical roots in Korea, arriving around 372 CE (common era) from China. Buddhism was/is like a great sponge, absorbing native shamanistic religions and blending them into Buddhist beliefs, a practice that continues today. Thus, the mountains that were believed to be the residence of spirits in pre-Buddhist times became the sites for Buddhist temples. As evidenced by the number of Koreans trekking to remote Buddhist mountain top temples, such as the beautiful Haeinsa Temple, the intermingling of mountain spirits and Buddhism continues today. Unfortunately, fundamentalist Protestant antagonism towards Korean Buddhists, who make up about 23% of the

population, has increased in recent years. Acts of vandalism against Buddhist temples and prayers for the destruction of the temples have amplified tension between Buddhists and Korean Protestants.

I would like to include Confucianism as an influential tradition that has shaped Korea today, although many do not consider Confucianism a religion per se. Neo-Confucianism, in which the older teachings of Confucius were blended with Daoism (harmonious living) and Buddhism, became the official religion of the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910), offering an alternative to the influence of Buddhism. The legacy of Confucianism remains a fundamental part of Korean society, shaping the moral system, the everyday life, and social relations between old and young, and it is the basis for much of the legal system. As mentioned above, the traditional Confucian respect for education remains a vital part of Korean culture. Our female Korean tour guide mentioned that some of the Confucian family traditions were beginning to ebb. One of the reasons she stated is that women do most of the work, such as preparing food, and do not get to participate in the ceremonies. That type of gender inequality is not appealing to most modern Korean women.



Aside from the occasional fundamentalist Protestant attacks against Buddhism, South Koreans seem to respect

Confucian Ceremony, photo Denise Ames

and accept the diversity of religious beliefs and practices. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the Korean ethnic group accounts for approximately 96% of the total population of the country. It may be easier to accept your neighbors' different religious beliefs if they are practiced by members of your own ethnic group. The increase of foreign laborers, often practicing Muslims, from different ethnic groups and countries may tell a different and less tolerant story. But, hopefully, the Republic of Korea can provide an inspirational ideal for the rest of the world to follow – a nation whose citizenry accepts or tolerates a variety of religious beliefs and practices.

3. Pop Culture

“Let me entertain you!” Gypsy Rose Lee, a burlesque singer and dancer, cooed these memorable words in the final song in the 1962 movie of the same name. The South Korean government has taken this refrain to heart and is focused on developing, from the top down, an unsurpassed and profitable pop culture: K-culture. They are bent on becoming the Gypsy Rose Lee of the entertainment world!

If you are from the U.S., you are probably surprised to read that the government has a hand in developing South Korea's pop culture. I know I was as I learned this fact. The U.S. entertainment scene prides itself on organically producing stars that rely on their innate talent to rise to the top, without government help. I imagine a few of your favorite stars climbed to the pinnacle of stardom from very humble beginnings. But South Korea is pursuing a different model and has poured billions of dollars into its “entertainment investments.” So far, the investment in K-culture appears to be paying off.

The Korean government is not betting on just one form of contemporary culture but is producing a variety of forms: films, television dramas, video games, and K-pop music. All have close government and industry co-operation, but let's focus on K-pop in this lesson plan.



Girls' Generation

Critics (mostly from the West) have said that the Koreans are not good at creativity, and pop music is all about creativity and producing something new. There is a reason for the lack of an original Korean sound: the Korean pop scene got off to a very late start because of censorship that stifled musical talent and creativity. For a critical period during the 1970s, rock music was banned in Korea. But that has changed. Korea is taking a different tack: drawing on Korean strengths of hard work and organizational skills, the close collaboration of government and private industry, and the government's deep pockets.

Culture is such a high priority for current President Park that, shortly after taking office in early 2013, she upgraded the pop culture division with a \$1 billion investment fund. Korea also has the financial resources and organizational skills to turn the stars into world exports. The K-pop model requires music companies to invest a lot of money upfront for a very distant return. K-pop is a 5 to 7 year plan, and the US model, which requires profits quickly from impatient investors, can't do that.

K-pop is extremely popular among Korean youth, and there is no shortage of aspiring stars. For example, a staggering 4% of the population of South Korea auditioned in 2012 for Superstar K, Korea's televised singing competition. Talented young people are carefully culled and undergo grueling training for the distant hope of future stardom. Young people in very few other countries would put up with such a punishing, star-making process, but Korean youth are accustomed to intense academic pressure, extreme discipline, constant criticism, and zero sleep.



The Boy Band Look

and keep away from drunk-driving, drugs, or sex scandals. Companies want to project a “clean” image, and steer away from what they consider the raunchy behavior of stars in the West. K-pop labels love stars, but not superstars: they don’t want to get into a situation in which one band member becomes indispensable.

K-pop is a manufactured process; there is no other way to describe it. For example, some K-pop bands follow a specific color theme. Each band has its own color coordinated outfits, such as dramatic blue, dynamic black, mystic white, and dazzling red. The bands are prefabricated and treated like a consumer product right from the beginning.

Can K-pop conquer the United States? In my opinion, the cookie-cutter style of K-pop does not seem an ideological fit for US consumers, who prefer the bawdy antics and individualistic behavior of their favorite stars. Others don’t see why breaking into the US market is even a goal. With an adoring Asian market in their backyard, why worry about the U.S. market? After all, South Korea has been wildly successful in developing its own economic model, and now its brand of culture as well.

4. Economy

How could they do it? That is what I and others wondered as our group of educators toured the POSCO Steel Plant in Gwangyang, South Korea. We were experiencing firsthand what the world has called the Korean Economic Miracle. It was an enormous plant, dredged from the swampy lowlands next to the East Asia Sea and forged into a first-rate facility, shipping enough steel to world-wide customers to make it the 4th largest steel company in the world. In promotional videos we viewed at the Visitors’ Center, they announced that they had “reclaimed the promised land” and



POSCO Headquarters, photo Denise Ames

South Korean music producers have found that fans love large groups acting and dancing in unison. The strong collaborative values of South Koreans lend itself to this collective entertainment form, which is not as popular in the individualistic West. K-pop band members must dance in perfect sync, like clockwork, and have split-second precision. The bands are assembled while the members are still young and hold off their debut until they’ve learned to act as one. The powerful inner drive to succeed and not let others down pushes them to perfection. They’ll do it if it kills them.

K-pop training is an education of the whole person. Band members are taught etiquette

“POSCO is creating the tomorrow of the world.” After viewing the facilities, I agreed they had reason to be proud.

POSCO is a recent project, especially compared to U.S. steel companies dating back to the 1800s. POSCO was born in 1968, and its father was the visionary, but autocratic, President Park-Chung-hee (father of the current president). He concluded that self-sufficiency in steel was essential to economic development. It was a government-run project, for which his administration arranged financing from Japan and the U.S.

POSCO CEO Park Tae-joon was quoted as saying, “You can import coal and machines, but you cannot import talent.” He realized that Korea needed a pool of well-educated youth who were proficient in science and technology to ensure that Korea would be a leader in high technology. In response, Park founded, with government support, the Pohang University of Science and Technology (POSTECH) in 1986, and it remains a top university in its field today.

U.S. and global institutions, such as the World Bank, pressured South Korea to privatize POSCO, and gradually full privatization was realized in 2000. The company has since expanded its operations to countries such as India, China, Indonesia, Cameroon (Africa), Mexico, and Vietnam. With 30,000 employees earning good wages, POSCO symbolizes South Korea’s economic success and long-term planning.

In many different instances, POSCO represents what has economically happened in Korea, whether it is Hyundai, Samsung, or many other lesser known companies. For example, China and Korea dominate shipbuilding today. There has been remarkable economic growth as a result of a close connection between government and industry and careful strategic planning to achieve impressive results.

South Koreans refer to this economic growth as the Miracle on the Han River, after the river running through Seoul. It has a market economy, even though there is government involvement, which ranks 15th in the world according to GDP (gross domestic product) and 12th according to purchasing power. It is a developed country with a high-income economy.

The Korean War, which ended in 1953, shattered an already fragile South Korean economy. However, after the end of the war the United States aided its development by locating supply bastions for American troops stationed on the Korean peninsula. Having almost no natural resources and always suffering from overpopulation in its small territory,



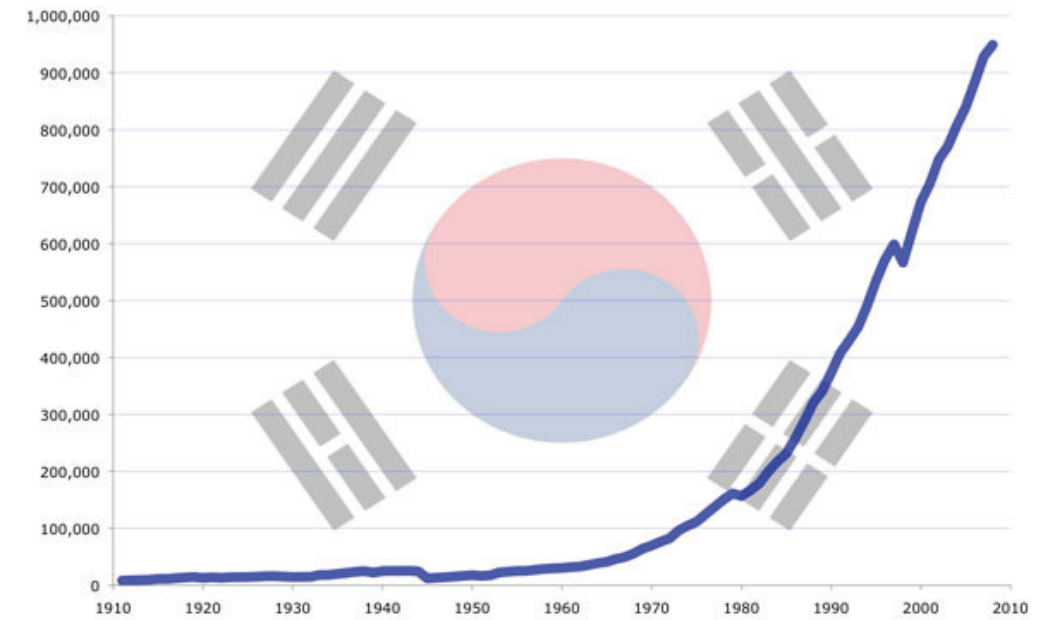
Miracle on the Han River, photo Denise Ames

South Korea adopted an export-oriented economic strategy. Once again, the U.S., not wanting South Korea to go the communist route, was a major consumer of Korea’s exports, and mostly eliminated import tariffs. But credit is mostly due to the hard-working people of Korea, who were dedicated to achieving economic success and a better standard of living.

A rigorous educational system and the establishment of a highly motivated and educated population have spurred the country’s high technology boom and rapid economic development. In 2012, South Korea was the 7th largest exporter and 7th largest importer in the world. In 1980, the South Korean GDP per capita was \$2,300, about one-third of nearby developed Asian economies such as Singapore, Hong Kong, and Japan. Since then, South Korea has attained a GDP per capita of \$30,000 in 2010, almost thirteen times the figure 30 years ago. These

are remarkable achievements considering its humble beginnings just over 50 years ago.

I learned a lesson about the South Korean economy while touring and studying the country: there is very close cooperation and strategic, long-term planning between government and business. I want to emphasize this cooperation and planning because it is in stark contrast to the philosophy of anti-government business among many people and politicians in the U.S. today. On my short tour



Korean GDP Growth

of Korea, I recognized that the rest of the world is moving toward more government/business cooperation and it behooves the U.S. to realize the benefits of this arrangement and not be left economically adrift in an increasingly complex and competitive world.

5. Food

As I sat down to eat my first meal in Korea, I couldn't help but wonder about its food. Perhaps because I spent many years living in Illinois, one of the agricultural heartlands of the world, I always like to know where a country gets its food. I was in for a shock when I found out that South Korea is mostly self-sufficient! I was amazed that this small country with 50 million people could produce all the food its citizens could eat. Once I saw rows and rows of endless greenhouses splattered across the landscape and small gardens dotting urban centers I came to appreciate the effort the Koreans have taken to raise healthy, plentiful food. South Korea supports its agricultural sector in order to have plentiful food. This includes price supports for crops and tariffs that protect domestic producers from foreign competition, which results in high prices for consumers.



Banchan

Korean cuisine has its roots in ancient agricultural and nomadic traditions in the Korean peninsula and southern Manchuria; hence, beef is a prized and expensive foundation to Korea's culinary delights. The sheer number of Korean barbecue eateries around the country and the ubiquitous individual grill situated at the end of the table in many restaurants show this love of beef. Even though beef is a prized food, rice and vegetables form the bulk of food eaten. Since Korea is a peninsula, some form of seafood, no matter how exotic, is a mainstay at every meal.



*Gardens Growing Cabbage for Kimchi,
photo Denise Ames*



Communal Eating, photo Denise Ames

Korean meals are noted for their lavish number of side dishes (banchan) that are crowded onto tables leaving no visible space in between the dishes. One of the most popular side dishes is kimchi, which is served at almost every meal. Kimchi is a traditional fermented Korean side dish made of vegetables with a variety of seasonings, most noticeably spicy red chili. I would describe it as both spicy and sour. Early kimchi was made of cabbage and beef stock; red chili was not available until Europeans brought it back from the Western hemisphere. Japan introduced red chili to Korea during one of its invasions (1592–1598), and it became a staple ingredient in kimchi. In traditional preparation, kimchi ferments in jars for months at a time. From the number of gardens I saw growing cabbage in Korea, I would venture to say that cabbage is the most commonly used ingredient in kimchi.

One of the most interesting observations I made in Korea was their communal way of eating. It was customary for all those at a table to dip their spoons into a big bowl of soup and slurp away until it was gone. Once again, the collective nature of Korean society was on display – one big communal bowl. I will have to say that as my cultural conditioning set in, I was reluctant to eat this way with others, but once I shook off the idea of germs and started to partake, I enjoyed it. It made for more sharing conversation and the feeling that we are all one despite cultural differences. After all, in my mind, that was the intended purpose of the trip!

6. Wrap Up

This brief glimpse into Korea will, I hope, spark you to learn more about the country. For example, we didn't even discuss what Koreans think about their erratic communist neighbors to the north. Do they live in constant fear of a nuclear attack by the unstable regime or do they merely dismiss the saber-rattling threats as highly improbable? From my observations, South Koreans seem to be dismissive of the North Koreans and regard their leader, Kim Jung Un, as desperate for attention and money. He will do and does whatever it takes to gain both.

I want to include a brief note about the politics of South Korea. It emerged as a dictatorship after the Korean War. Although the dictators repressed political dissent, they did have the foresight to build an economic infrastructure and political institutions for a future democracy and vibrant economy. Now Koreans have a well-established democracy and in 2013 elected their first female, President Geun-hye Park, daughter of former Korean President (and dictator) Park Chung-hee. They are active in foreign relations but in more of a behind-the-scenes role. Perhaps they will step-up to a greater leadership role in world affairs that reflects their wealth and strategic location in the Pacific arena.

The Korean model that I explained at the beginning of the lesson plan has emphasized several important developments that distinguish it from the US model. South Korea freely encourages a close government/business relationship. Although it prides itself in claiming to be a market economy, it has more of a planning aspect to its economy than the US. This has benefitted them in developing high wage technical jobs, building high-tech, sophisticated manufacturing and industry, providing ample food for its people, and now creating cultural exports with the potential for lucrative returns.

I found in my travels to the country that South Korea is a fascinating country with a long and fascinating history. I hope you have been able to gain at least a cursory look at the country today and I hope you will feel inspired to continue your study of the country.



President Park and President Obama