



Why Study Korea?

JSISA/ANTH 448A

Professor Sorensen 9/30/2021



Importance of Korea

- Is Korea big or little?
 - Look at political map
 - Size of Laos, 1/43rd of /China, 3/5th of Japan
 - Look at strategic map
 - “dagger pointed at the heart of Japan”
 - Look at population map
 - 20th rank (1/18th of China, 3/5th of Japan)
 - Look at GDP size
 - 11th (South Korea alone)
 - Internet languages
 - Korean 15th most content (similar to Arabic)

Notable Korean Achievements

- Japanese writing derived from examples of Korean writing introduced to Japan in 4-5th century AD
- Korean monks contributed to the development of East Asian Buddhism writing books in 7th-11th centuries still read throughout Buddhist world
- *Jikji* was the world's first extant book printed with moveable metal type (1377) (Gutenberg 1439)
- Korean alphabet is the world's most scientific alphabet and only one in general use that was just invented (rather than adapted from an existing alphabet) in 1443
- Korean scholarship and painting contributed to the development of Japanese scholarship and painting 12th-18th centuries
- Now Korean Wave of television dramas, films, and K-pop has spread Korean culture world-wide

Recent Korea-related Ethnographies

2022

- *Making Peace with Nature: Ecological Encounters along the Korean DMZ*, by Eleana Kim, UC Irvine (Duke University Press)
- *Tending to the “Flower of Capitalism:” Consuming, Producing and Censoring Advertising in South Korea of the ‘00s*, by Olga Federenko, Seoul National University (U Hawaii Press)
- *Supercorporate: Distinction and Participation in Post-Hierarchy South Korea*, by Michael M. Prentice, Sheffield U (Stanford Press)
- *Outsiders: Memories of Migration to and from North Korea*, by Markus Bell, La Trobe (Australia) (Berghahn)



2021

- *Stitching the 24-hour City: Life, Labor, and the Problem of Speed in Seoul*, by Seo Young Park, Scripps College (Cornell U Press)
- *From Sweatshop to Fashion Shop: Korean Immigrant Entrepreneurship in the Argentine Garment Industry*, by Jihye Kim, University of Central Lancashire (Lexington).

2020

- *The Cost of Belonging: An Ethnography on Solidarity and Mobility in Beijing's Koreatown*, by Sharon Yoon, Notre Dame (Oxford U Press)
- *After the Korean War: An Intimate History*, by Heonik Kwon, Cambridge U (Cambridge U Press)

Korea Ethnographies (2)

2019

- *The Shaman's Wages: Trading in Ritual on Cheju Island*, by Kyoim Yun, U Kansas (UW Press)

2018

- *Elusive Belonging: Marriage Immigrants and "Multiculturalism" in Rural South Korea*, Minjeong Kim, San Diego State (U Hawaii Press)
- *From Miracle to Mirage: The Making and Unmaking of the Korean Middle Class, 1960-2015*, by Myungji Yang, Hawaii Manoa (Cornell Press)

2016

- *Decentering Citizenship: Gender, Labor, and Migrant Rights in South Korea*, by Hae Yeon Choo, U Toronto (Stanford Press)
- *Birth Mothers and Transnational Adoption Practice in South Korea: Virtual Mothering*, by Hosu Kim, College of Staten Island (Palgrave MacMillan)
- *Base Encounters: The US Armed Forces in South Korea*, by Elisabeth Schober, Oslo (Pluto Press)

2015

- *Trafficking Women in Korea: Filipina migrant entertainers*, by Sallie Yea, La Trobe (Australia) (Routledge)

Korean Geography

Peninsula surrounded by water

Yellow Sea, East Sea, East China
Sea/Tsushima Strait

Yellow Sea shallow warm, East Sea
deep cold

“from Paektusan to Hallasan”

T’aebaek Mountain Spine

Highest point close to East Sea Coast—
Rivers east to west

Paektusan, Nangnimsan, Hamgyŏng
Range in North with Kaema plateau

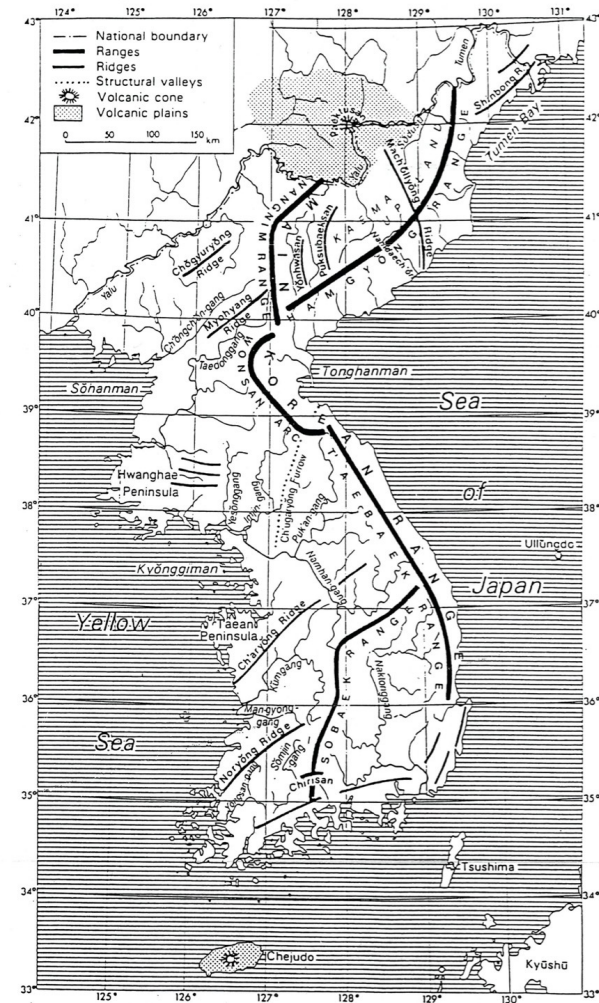


Fig. 1. Generalized orographical map

Korean Climate

Monsoon Climate

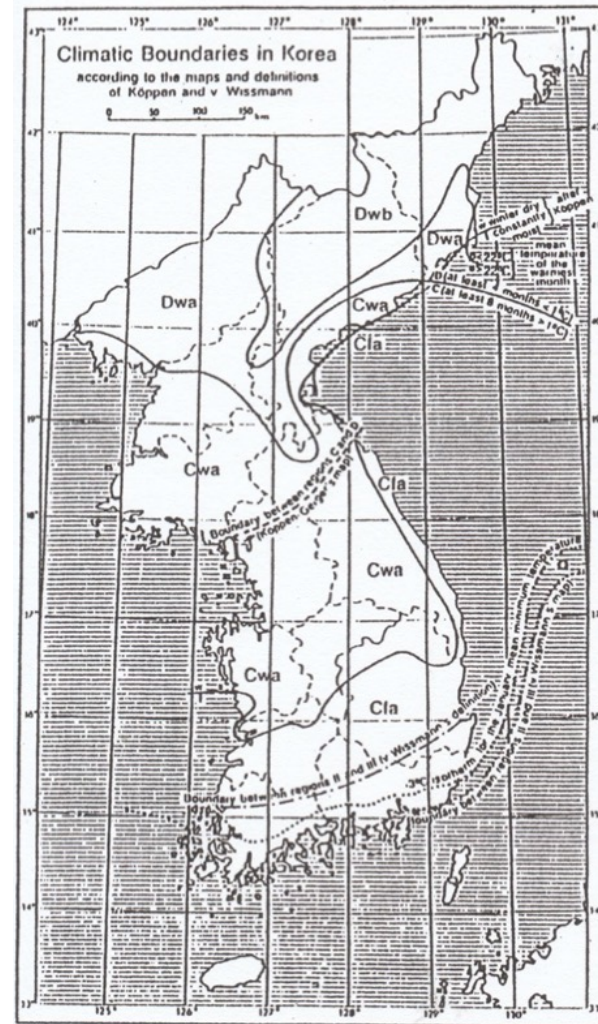
Cold, dry winters with winds off Siberia

Wet summers with monsoons coming early to the south and later to the north

Southern third precipitation all year—rice bowl, winter cropping

middle third good summer precipitation, no winter cropping

North--monsoon is weak and late (there is much dry field farming), growing season shorter



Lines of Evidence on Korean Origins

- Linguistic evidence
 - Korean language belongs to the Altaic family—this links Koreans origin to Siberia and Mongolia
- Archaeological evidence
 - Korea inhabited a long time
 - Evidence of indigenous evolution of pottery, farming and so forth
 - Bronze and iron introduced from the north—both from China and from Siberia
- Physical anthropology
 - Koreans most resemble North Chinese and Japanese from the Inland Sea are of Japan—and this is consistent with historical and archaeological evidence of migrations
- Cultural affinity
 - Shamanism links Korea to Siberia, and Korean folk religion is closer to Japan than China
- Distinctiveness
 - Korean traditional housing quite distinct from China or Japan
 - Korean traditional costume quite distinct from China or Japan (at least in last 500 years)

Tan'gun Korean Origin Myth

- Lord of Heaven, Hwanin (Indra), had a son, Hwanung, who wanted to go to earth
- Hwanung descended on Mt. T'aebaek leading 3000 retainers and founded the city of the gods (sinsi) to broadly benefit mankind (Hongik in'gan)
- He gave a tiger and a bear mugwort and garlic and told them to stay in a cave. The tiger was too impatient, but the bear remained for 21 days and became a beautiful woman
- Hwanung married the bear-woman and gave birth to Tan'gun Wanggŏm who founded Old Chosŏn near P'yŏngyang in 2,333 B.C.
 - "Wanggŏm" (王儉) is evidently a calque for "imgŭm" the native Korean word for king since the Chinese characters mean "king frugal" (which doesn't make sense in Chinese)

Subjectivity of Social Change

- “The social or cultural changes that the 20th century Korean *minjung* endured were much wider than the change in Chinese customs that Confucius saw in the Warring States Period, and much deeper and more violent than the European social changes of the revolutionary age observed by Spenser and Marx. Even though smack in the center of world history our ancestors and neighbors of the near past were everywhere people without history. As a result of reliance on imported concepts, theories and materials, we could not elaborate our knowledge and scholarship through looking at our neighbors with our own eyes. And so, the humanities were declared to be on the verge of death, and the commodity value of the liberal arts has come to be viewed as plausible. Would the salvation of the liberal arts humanities be possible without the democratization of history? If it is possible, what would these liberal arts be for, and where would this salvation be written?”
- Pak Hyönsu, Leader of the 20th Century Minjung Life History Study Team, Introduction to the series, “The Korean Village Yesterday and Today” (2011)

Han Sangbok author
Fifty Years of Remote
P'yŏngch'ang Hollows:
A Revisit of Pongsalli and
Yongsalli 1960-2000

(Picture: Pongsalli Ch'oe Kiyŏng Family 1960)

