



# **THE ENGLISH TEACHER'S GUIDE TO KOREA**

**Living, Working, and Thriving in Korea Sparkling**

**By**  
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**Tom Rainey-Smith**  
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**Chapter 1**

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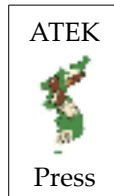
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# CHAPTER 1: KOREA, PAST AND PRESENT

## REPUBLIC OF KOREA COUNTRY PROFILE

- **Capital City:** Seoul (10.1 million).
- **Population:** 48.46 million (2007).
- **Language:** Korean (Written form: Hangul).
- **Currency:** Won (notes issued in denominations of 1,000, 5,000, and 10,000 (with a 50,000 won note to be issued in 2009).
- **Foreign residents:** 1.1 million.
- **Tourism:** 6,155,000 visitors (2005).
- **National flag:** Taegukgi (the circle symbolizes the harmony of yin (blue) and yang (red) and the four trigrams represent heaven, earth, fire and water).
- **National flower:** Mugunghwa (Rose of Sharon, blooms July through October).
- **Territory:** 99,678km<sup>2</sup> (South Korea only, which takes up 45% of the Korean peninsula and is roughly the same size as Portugal, Hungary or Iceland). 75% of the territory of Korea is mountainous and 17,000km is formed by coastline.
- **Highest mountain:** Halla Mountain (1950m).
- **Longest rivers:** Nakdong River (521.5km), Han River (481.7km).
- **Major cities:** Seoul (10.1 million), Busan (3.5 million), Incheon (2.6 million), Daegu (2.5 million), Daejeon (1.5 million), Gwangju (1.4 million), Ulsan (1.1 million).
- **Climate:** Temperate with four distinct seasons. Spring and fall are typically short and dry due to a migratory anticyclone weather pattern, summer is hot and humid (50-60% of the total rainfall happens during summer), and winter is cold and dry with snowfall. Average temperature of hottest month

(August): 23 – 26 degrees centigrade. Temperature during coldest month (January): -6 – -7 degrees centigrade.

- **Religion:** According to a 2005 census, half the population actively engages in religious practices. Buddhism (43.0%), Protestantism (34.5%) and Catholicism (20.6%) are the three most popular religions.
- **Political System:** Representative democracy with president elected to a single 5-year term by direct popular vote. Division of power among the executive, legislature (unicameral National Assembly) and judiciary.
- **President:** Lee Myung-bak (2008).
- **Suffrage:** Universal at 19 years of age.
- **Elections**  
**Presidential:** every 5 years.  
**National Assembly:** every 4 years.  
**Local Councils:** every 4 years.

## SOURCES

Facts and Figures, **Koreanet: The official website of the Republic of Korea**, <http://www.korea.net/> (Retrieved 2/12/08)

Explore Korea Through Statistics 2007, **Korea National Statistical Office**,  
[http://www.nso.go.kr/eng2006/emain/2007\\_explorekorea\\_e/content/print.pdf](http://www.nso.go.kr/eng2006/emain/2007_explorekorea_e/content/print.pdf) (Retrieved 2/12/08)

## DEMOGRAPHICS

The World Health Organization, Regional Office for the Western Pacific (2006) reports:

The population of the Republic of Korea as of 2006 was 48 297 184, with a density of 485 persons per square kilometer. Fast population growth was once a serious social problem in the Republic, as in most other developing nations. Due to successful family planning campaigns and changing attitudes, however, population growth has been curbed remarkably in re-

cent years. The country saw its population grow by an annual rate of 3% during the 1960s, but growth slowed to 2% over the next decade. In 2006, the rate stood at 0.33% and is expected to further decline to 0.01% by 2020.

A notable trend in the population structure is that it is getting increasingly older. The 2006 population estimate revealed that 9.5% of the total population was 65 years old or over, while the number of people in the 15-64 age group accounted for 71.9%. In the 1960s, population distribution formed a pyramid shape, with a high birth rate and relatively short life expectancy. However, age-group distribution is now shaped more like a bell because of the low birth rate and extended life expectancy. Youths (15 and younger) will make up a decreasing portion of the total, while senior citizens (65 and older) will account for some 15.7% of the total by 2020.

## ***SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION***

The Republic of Korea was once of the world's poorest agrarian societies. In less than forty years, it has dramatically transformed the economy. An outward-oriented economic development strategy, which used exports as the engine of growth, contributed greatly to the radical economic transformation. This is shown through the per capita Gross National Income (GNI): in 1962 the average worker made US\$ 87 a year, while in 2005 the average worker made about US\$ 16,291. This amount of success is impressive, considering many other countries with per capita GNI's similar to South Korea's in 1962 have been unable to make these kinds of gains.

The World Health Organization, Regional Office for the Western Pacific (2006) notes that:

The Republic of Korea has developed rapidly since the 1960s, fueled by high savings and investment rates and a strong emphasis on education. The nation became the 29th member country of the Organization

for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 1996. With a history as one of the fastest growing economies in the world, the Republic of Korea is working to become the focal point of a powerful Asian economic bloc during the 21st century. The Northeast Asian region commands a superior pool of essential resources that are the necessary ingredients for economic development. These include a population of 1.5 billion people, abundant natural resources and large-scale consumer markets.

## KOREAN HISTORY AT A GLANCE

Archaeological findings indicate that the Korean Peninsula was occupied by humans as early in the Lower Paleolithic period.

Korea began with the founding of Joseon (The name *Gojoseon* is almost always used for this kingdom to prevent confusion with the Joseon dynasty founded in 14th century; the prefix Go- means 'old' or 'ancient') in 2333 BC by Dangun, the mythical first King. Gojoseon expanded until it controlled much of the northern Korean peninsula and parts of Manchuria. After numerous wars with the Chinese Han Dynasty, Gojoseon disintegrated, leading to the Proto-Three Kingdoms of Korea period.

In the early centuries of the Common Era, Buyeo, Okjeo, Dongye, and the Samhan confederacy occupied the peninsula and southern Manchuria. Of the various small states, Goguryeo, Baekje, and Silla grew to control the peninsula as the Three Kingdoms.

The unification of the Three Kingdoms by Silla in 676 led to the North-South States period, in which the much of the Korean peninsula was controlled by Unified Silla, while Balhae succeeded the northern parts of Goguryeo. In Unified Silla, poetry and art was encouraged, and Buddhist culture flourished. Relationships between Korea and China remained relatively peaceful during this time. However, Unified Silla weakened under internal strife, and surrendered to Goryeo in 935. Balhae, Silla's neighbor to the north, was formed as a successor state to Goguryeo. During its height, Balhae controlled most of Manchuria and parts of Russia. It fell to the Khitan Empire in 926.



After the North-South Period, successor states fought for control during the Later Three Kingdoms period. The peninsula was soon united by Wang Geon of Goryeo. Like Silla, Goryeo was a highly cultural state and created the *Jikji* in 1377, a book made using the world's oldest movable metal type.

The Mongol invasions in the 13th century greatly weakened Goryeo. However, Goryeo continued to rule Korea as a tributary ally to the Mongols. After the fall of the Mongolian Empire (Yuan Dynasty), Goryeo continued its rule independently. After severe political strife and continued invasions, Goryeo was replaced by the Joseon Dynasty in 1388 following a rebellion by General Yi Seong-gye.

General Yi declared the new name of Korea as Joseon in reference to Gojoseon, and moved the capital to Seoul. The first 200 years of the Joseon Dynasty was marked by relative peace and saw the creation of Hangul by King Sejong the Great in the 14 century and the rise and influence of Confucianism.

In the latter of the 16th century, Joseon was invaded by a newly unified Japan. During the Japanese invasions of Korea (1592–1598), centuries of peace had left the dynasty unprepared, and the lack of technology and poor leadership from the Joseon government and generals led to the destruction of much of the Korean peninsula. However, continued Korean dominance at sea led by Admiral Yi Sun-sin, the rise of local militias, and the intervention of Ming China put Japan under great pressure to retreat in 1598. Today, Admiral Yi is celebrated as one of Korea's foremost heroes and his turtle ships, used with great success against the Japanese, are considered the world's first ironclad warships, although lack of hard evidence of iron plating sparks much debate.

During the last years of the Joseon Dynasty, Korea's isolationist policy earned it the name the "Hermit Kingdom," primarily for protection against Western imperialism. In 1897, King Gojong proclaimed Korea an empire, to reflect that it was no longer under the protection of the Chinese Qing Dynasty. He oversaw the partially successful modernization of the military, economy, real property laws, education system, and various industries, until the Empire of Korea was annexed by Japan in 1910, beginning a 35-year period of Japanese rule.

After Japan's defeat in World War II the United States and the Soviet Union agreed to temporarily occupy the country, with the Soviet Union in the North, and the United States in the South. The purpose of this occupation was to establish a Korean provisional government which would eventually become independent. Though elections were scheduled, the two superpowers backed different leaders and two states were effectively established, each of which claimed sovereignty over the whole Korean peninsula.

The Korean War (1950-1953) left the two Koreas separated by the DMZ, remaining technically at war through the Cold War to the present day. North Korea is a communist state, often described as Stalinist and isolationist. Its economy collapsed in the 1990s. South Korea went through a succession of dictators (until 1988) and eventually became a capitalist liberal democracy. It is now one of the largest economies in the world.

## KOREAN CULTURE

Korea has a very diverse and distinct culture. It is important to familiarize yourself with the customs, belief systems, and values so that you can better understand the culture and find your own place within it.

Korea has a long history of isolation and defending itself from would-be foreign occupiers and is a relatively homogeneous society, both ethnically and culturally. It is also important to remember that democracy, which was fought long and hard for through the years of Japanese occupation and subsequent military dictatorships, is relatively new (Korea's first democratic election was in 1988) and highly cherished. Multiculturalism is a relatively new concept, but the growing number of foreign spouses and foreign workers is having a large impact.

While Korea holds on to the many aspects of its traditional culture, younger generations have grown up in a very different society and are more receptive to social change. While Korea has undergone huge progress since the days of military dictatorship, there are many taboos that can prove exclusionary to different subsets of the population. Gay men and lesbians are not well-accepted, but there is a strong community that is gaining acceptance. The role of women

has also markedly improved, but there is still much room for improvement.

Korean culture places much importance on formality and hierarchy and this is reflected in the language with the careful use of register when addressing people of different social status or age and in body language; older people and those of higher social status are more respected and spoken to in honorific language reflective of their comparative rank.

Because of the importance of formality, it is important to identify where a person fits in the social spectrum and what age they are in order to address them correctly. Therefore it is usual for people to inquire about your age and background when first getting to know you.

Taking the time to understand Korean culture will help your time spent here be much more enjoyable and rewarding. For a deeper understanding of communicative differences between Koreans and Westerners, see the sub chapter entitled *Communicating with Students, Coworkers, and Others* on page Error: Reference source not found of this book.

## DIET

Koreans were an agricultural people long before their modern industrious nature was brought forth, and many Korean dishes are as distinctive as is wider Korean culture. Much of the food enjoyed in Korea today has stood the test of time and can be traced back to far-off origins which were in turn informed by Korea's distinct seasons, geography and cultural practices. Dining is also an integral part of the culture as a whole, and the collective experience of sharing food is a wonderful and informative experience for those new to the country.

The Korean diet consists largely of rice, meat and pickled vegetables. There are a multitude of flavors and spices used in Korean cooking and you are sure to find a favorite dish somewhere amongst them. Red chili is an essential ingredient in many dishes and it may take some time for your palette to become accustomed to the heat. That said, there are many non-spicy dishes to whet your appetite.

## *THE EXPERIENCE OF DINING*

Experiencing modern Korean cuisine can be described in the following ways: many foods have regional differences and long histories stemming from food prepared for the common people, that reserved for nobility, or that traditionally served only to royalty; side dishes are an essential component of Korean cuisine; dining itself is a communal experience and dining etiquette is based on Confucian culture; meals are eaten sitting around a low shared table on the floor; grains such as rice are commonly included in and as an accompaniment to many dishes; vegetarian dishes are somewhat rare as meat and seafood are used as stock and key ingredients in most dishes; and spices, seasoning, strong flavors and distinctive aromas are key characteristics.

The most famous food is kimchi. The most common variety is made from pickled cabbage and red chili sauce, but many kinds of vegetables can be used to make kimchi. Most sauces are made using seafood. Other popular dishes include *bibimbap*, a rice-based dish served with vegetables, a fried egg and red chili paste (it can be made with or without meat), *bulgogi* (Korean barbecue), and galbi (ribs). One of the most popular dishes is a food adapted from the Chinese called *jajangmyeon*. Its chief ingredients are black bean sauce and noodles.

Korean food is served with a multitude of side dishes (usually including kimchi and pickled radish). These dishes are shared by all and are replenished for free at restaurants. Much food is thrown out after meals as it is often nearly impossible to finish everything available!

## **VEGETARIAN LIFE IN KOREA**

It is important to start with the basics: Korea is by no means an easy place for a vegetarian to live. The reality is that it can feel like an almost daily struggle to keep meat in some form or another out of your diet. The concept is not easily translated or understood, and it is important to learn some basic expressions to explain your dietary requirements or choices. That said, with a little knowledge and by following some basic advice, living as a vegetarian or vegan in Korea is totally achievable and, with a few adjustments, should not impact your decision on whether to come to Korea negatively. This author is

vegetarian and has many friends who successfully live as vegetarians here also. There will undoubtedly be frustrations at first, but these can easily be incorporated into the experience of cultural adjustment that everyone must go through – and that doesn't include changing your diet!

### *HOW TO ORDER VEGETARIAN FOOD*

There is a range of vegetarian dishes available in Korea (see Food in Korea for a sample), but there are also many ways that fish or meat byproducts can be added to food without your knowledge. As the concept of vegetarianism is not well understood in Korea, it is important to specify exactly what you can and cannot eat. The best way to avoid having any unwanted traces of fish or meat in your meal is to explain that you are allergic to all meats and/or other food items that you do not eat. It may feel dishonest at first, but it is simply the safest and best way to ensure that no such food enters your diet.

Some common meals that can be prepared vegetarian include *kimbap*, *bibimbap*, *jjolmyeon*, *bibimguksu*, *doenjang-jjigae*, and *sundubu-jjigae*.

### *WHERE TO EAT VEGETARIAN*

Many Korean Buddhists have adopted a vegetarian diet and therefore Buddhist restaurants often offer a good selection of vegetarian and vegan food. There are also many buffet restaurants that offer a wide variety of fresh vegetables and cooked grains. While there are many various vegetarian restaurants and food retailers around the country, the best and biggest range is in Seoul due to its size. You can visit the following websites for more information and links:

<http://www.vege.or.kr/> (Hangul only).

<http://seoulveggieclub.wordpress.com>

[http://english.visitkorea.or.kr/enu/FO/FO\\_EN\\_6\\_6.jsp](http://english.visitkorea.or.kr/enu/FO/FO_EN_6_6.jsp)

<http://animalrightskorea.org/vegetarianism/vegetarianism-in-korea.html>

### *TIPS FOR SURVIVAL*

- Cook at home more often
- Follow recipes for Korean dishes and substitute tofu for meat

- Familiarize yourself with side dishes as many of these are vegetarian
- Find a local vegetarian community and become a part of it
- Be very specific when ordering food
- Be tolerant and be prepared to explain that you need an order to be made again from scratch when dining out

The Seoul Metropolitan government has a great Seoul restaurant guide online at [http://www.visitseoul.net/jsp/english\\_new/food/food\\_main.jsp](http://www.visitseoul.net/jsp/english_new/food/food_main.jsp). See *Appendix Two: Korean Foods and their Nutritional Values* on page Error: Reference source not found for a list of many Korean foods and their descriptions.

## CLIMATE AND GEOGRAPHY

Korea becomes hot and humid in the summer and is cold and dry in the winter. The four seasons each bring their own conditions with spring and autumn (fall) typically being shorter than the longer summer and winter months. Temperatures vary around the country, and while summer brings the monsoon rains which often lead to flooding in the southern regions, winter brings snowfall down to sea level.

Yellow dust blows in from China to the north in the spring and can make breathing somewhat unpleasant. Air pollution in the northern, highly-populated cities can also be hazardous, particularly around Incheon and Seoul.

Surrounded by sea, the peninsula is bordered to the north by North Korea (itself bordered to the north by China and Russia) with the West Sea (Yellow Sea) to the west and the East Sea (Sea of Japan) to the east. Most of the country is covered with mountainous terrain, and thus hiking is a favorite pastime for people of all ages.



# CALENDAR HOLIDAYS

Date	Celebration Name	Days off*
Jan 1	New Year's Day – <i>Sinjeong</i> 신정	1
1 <sup>st</sup> day of the 1 <sup>st</sup> lunar month	Lunar New Year's Day – <i>Seollal</i> 설날	3
March 1	Independence (Declaration) Day – <i>Samiljeol</i> 3-1-절	1
8 <sup>th</sup> day of the 4 <sup>th</sup> lunar month	Buddha's Birthday – <i>Seokgatansinil</i> 석가탄신일	1
May 5	Children's Day – <i>Eorininal</i> 어린이날	1
June 6	Memorial Day – <i>Hyeonchung-il</i> 현충일	1
August 15	Liberation Day – <i>Gwangbokjeol</i> 광복절 Literally means "restoration of light"	1
15 <sup>th</sup> day of the 8 <sup>th</sup> lunar month	Korean Thanksgiving – <i>Chuseok</i> 추석	3
October 3	National Foundation Day – <i>Gaecheonjeol</i> 개천절	1
December 25	Christmas – <i>Gidoktansinil</i> 기독탄신일	1

\* Some holidays may fall on the weekend, in which case the number of actual working days off will be reduced. For example, if *Seollal* falls on a Sunday, the three days of festivities will be Saturday, Sunday and Monday, so you will only have one day off work.



*OTHER CALENDAR CELEBRATIONS (NOT HOLIDAYS)*

Date	Celebration Name
July 17	Constitution Day – <i>Jeheonjeol</i> 제헌절
October 1	Armed Forces Day – <i>Gukgunuinal</i> 국군의 날
October 9	Hangul Day – <i>Hangeullal</i> 한글날

**A FEW NOTES ON THE KOREAN LANGUAGE**

While some scholars have tried to identify a connection between Korean and Japanese, the Korean language is more often placed in the Altaic language family alongside Turkic, Mongolic and Tungus-Manchu languages. Chinese characters (hanja) were used to represent the language up until the mid-15th century when a native system was introduced by the monarch King Sejong.

While Korean is perhaps limited in its use as it is not widely spoken outside of the country, <sup>1</sup> it is very useful to learn some basic expressions and survival language during your time spent here. It is also an important part of getting to know and understand the culture. There are many academies, universities, and community and government programs set up to teach the language to foreigners inside Korea. See *Appendix One: Survival Phrases for Living and Working in Korea* for phrases one may find useful.

**ROMANIZATION OF KOREAN**

George M. McCune was a doctoral student at the University of California-Berkeley who was born in Korea and was a lifelong Korea scholar. In 1937, Edwin O. Reischauer was on his way to China to collect information for a paper he was writing in Japan. He stopped in Korea and was then forced by political events in China to stay in Korea for a couple of months. During this period McCune and Reischauer began development of a Romanization system with Korean linguists. Development continued after Reischauer left, until

1 At least 71 million people (roughly the population of North and South Korea when combined) speak the Korean language, including in Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Japan, the United States of America, the Philippines, and Russia (including those states formerly part of the Soviet Union). In China, Korean is widely spoken in Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture and is also widely spoken inside the large Korean communities throughout the United States and Canada. It is currently the 16<sup>th</sup> most commonly spoken language in the world.

the McCune-Reischauer system was published in 1939, in that year's *Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society*.

The McCune-Reischauer system, as it was called, became the most common system in use outside Korea. In Korea, however, debates raged and various systems were adopted by the government at different times, some similar to the McCune-Reischauer system, and others not, thereby causing much confusion. In 2000, the government adopted Revised Romanization, which is the system in use in this book. It is incrementally replacing the McCune-Reischauer system over time.

The reason one sometimes see cities like Daegu and Busan written as Taegu and Pusan, is because the latter is their correct spelling in the McCune-Reischauer system. If you see Romanized Korean with apostrophes or diacritic marks over the vowels, chances are good it is McCune-Reischauer. At the time of printing of this book, almost all major traffic signs are written in the government's Revised Romanization, as well as all materials printed by the government after 2000. As the McCune-Reischauer system is becoming increasingly obsolete over time, we don't recommend you learn it, unless you specifically wish to read a book written in it.

## ORIGINS OF *HANGUL*

The indigenous Korean alphabet Hangul<sup>2</sup> was commissioned in 1443 by King Sejong the Great and developed in order to increase literacy in the Joseon kingdom. Promulgated in 1446, Hangul is based on phonological and metaphysical representations (Yin/Yang and heaven, earth and man).<sup>3</sup> Its symbols represent the position of the mouth and tongue when they produce the corresponding sounds that make up the language. It was originally made up of 28 graphemes (17 consonants and 11 vowels), or letters, but in its modern form consists of 10 vowels and 14 consonants which are combined to form syllabic sets. Originally called *Hunminjeongeum*, meaning "proper sounds to instruct the people," the modern word Hangul, literally meaning "Korean language," was first used in the 1910s.

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2 Under Revised Romanization, Hangul is properly spelled *Hangeul*. However, it is considered a word in the English language and in English the conventional spelling is as it appears in this book.

3 Baxter, David, "The Korean Language," *Korean Through English*, Ed. Lee Sang-Oak et al., Seoul: Hollym, 1993, pp. 113-27.

As the Korean language developed, so did discrepancies between the spoken and written forms of the language; some words could not be fully expressed using the writing system adopted from Chinese characters (*hanja*) (this problem is known as *eommunichi*).<sup>4</sup> Thus the need for a new writing system arose and was identified by King Sejong.

According to the introduction of the *Hunmin-Jeongeum* (*A Book on Explanations and Illustrations of the Korean Alphabet*), in his own words, Sejong developed Hangul for the following reasons: 1) to develop national<sup>5</sup> identity through an indigenous writing system; 2) create a written language that would be accessible to all; and 3) to make the learning of foreign languages easier.<sup>6</sup>

Despite these honorable intentions, *hanja* remained the preferred script of scholars and the upper classes, while Hangul remained the preserve of women and the uneducated. In fact, its development and dissemination faced strong opposition from the elite and it was the subject of protest by Confucian scholars from as early as 1444. Its use was banned outright in 1504, but revived again in 1527.<sup>7</sup>

It was not until the early 20th century that it achieved predominance in all spheres of written Korean. While many scholars believe that King Sejong developed Hangul single-handedly, there is a lack of evidence to either confirm or deny this claim fully.<sup>8</sup> Either way, his legacy is a source of much pride to Koreans and will likely remain so for many years to come.

## KOREAN LANGUAGE TODAY

While the Japanese added a further barrier to its continuation by attempting to entirely replace Korean with Japanese in the late 1930s, Hangul has survived with its reputation intact. While its importance

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4 Lee, Ki-Moon, "Hangul in the Perspective of Modern Times," *National Institute of the Korean Language*, Jan 2008, retrieved 19 Feb 2009, <[http://www.korean.go.kr/eng\\_hangeul/short/003.html](http://www.korean.go.kr/eng_hangeul/short/003.html)>

5 "Nation" is perhaps too modern a term to be used here and more likely refers to an identity for the Joseon Kingdom and its inhabitants linking back to their recorded history.

6 National Institute of the Korean Language, "Short Writings on Hangeul," *National Institute of the Korean Language website*, Dec 1996, retrieved 19 Feb 2009, <[http://www.korean.go.kr/eng\\_hangeul/short/001.html](http://www.korean.go.kr/eng_hangeul/short/001.html)>

7 National Institute of the Korean Language, "Chronology of Hangul," *National Institute of the Korean Language website*, retrieved 19 Feb 2009, <[http://www.korean.go.kr/eng\\_hangeul/supply/pop04.html](http://www.korean.go.kr/eng_hangeul/supply/pop04.html)>

8 King Sejong carried out much of his work in secret and employed his princes to work on this problem of trying to develop the Hangul alphabet (*Hunmin-Jeongeum*), but it was only his second daughter, Princess Chongoi, who was able to come up with a satisfactory solution. According to Lee (see above reference), he rewarded her with hundreds of slave families.

as a written language had been understood by scholars in China and Japan for hundreds of years, the earliest Western grammars and dictionaries were not written until the late 19th Century, corresponding to lack of contact with outside nations prior to this period. In fact it was not really until the 1960s that the international community began to recognize the ingenuity of the written Korean language and accord it praise.<sup>9</sup> More recently, UNESCO developed the King Sejong Prize for Literacy in cooperation with the South Korean government in 1989. This prize is awarded to governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations that fight illiteracy, especially through the promotion of indigenous languages in developing countries.<sup>10</sup>

Modern Korean has continued to evolve, with the adoption of many foreign language words, most noticeably those borrowed from English. This is likely to increase as the role of English becomes more important inside Korea. *Hanja* still persists in academic writing and in newspapers and is also likely to remain a feature of the language for many years.<sup>11</sup>

Korea celebrates its indigenous language every year on October 9, known as Hangul Day.

## ***MAJOR DIFFERENCES BETWEEN KOREAN AND ENGLISH***

### **SPEECH LEVELS**

The Korean language has a more developed system of register or speech levels than any other language in the world. This means that it is considered extremely important to take into account the age, gender and social position of the person you are speaking to and to vary your speech accordingly. There are up to 7 different speech levels used in the language, and these are formed using different final verb endings. While these can be understood in two main categories, 1) Formal Speech and 2) Informal Speech, the range of levels means that these can also be broken down into the subcategories of 1) Formal-High,

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9 Kang, Chang-Seok, "Making Principals of Hangul and its Graphic Shapes," *National Institute of the Korean Language website*, Dec 1996, retrieved 19 Feb 2009, <[http://www.korean.go.kr/eng\\_hangeul/short/004.html](http://www.korean.go.kr/eng_hangeul/short/004.html)>

10 United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, "UNESCO King Sejong Literacy Prizes - Supporting Literacy in Multilingual Contexts," *UNESCO website*, retrieved 23 Nov 2008 <[http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=53673&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=53673&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)>

11 Hanja is a compulsory subject at secondary school level and students of all ages work hard to prepare themselves for the yearly *Hanja* examination, which can help them to enter better schools.

Neutral and Low, and 2) Informal-High and Informal-Low. Some forms persist only in writing. It is common to mix forms of speech in everyday conversation, but when in a formal situation or unsure of one's place, it is advisable to use the higher forms.<sup>12</sup>

## PERSPECTIVE

As with many different languages, there are words and expressions used in Korean that cannot be translated directly into English (and vice versa). Baxter claims that while English can be viewed as a language of the head, Korean should be viewed as a language of the heart. He illustrates this point by explaining that by utilizing all of the added components that the Korean language has on offer one can describe colors by how they make the viewer feel rather than just as they appear, something absent in English.<sup>13</sup>

The Korean language might also be viewed as less ego-centric than English, not simply in the fact that from a grammatical perspective the subject is frequently omitted without detriment to meaning, but also in the way certain expressions are framed. An example of this is when you visit someone's home and it is referred to as "our house" rather than "my house," or when you are introduced to someone's wife and she is referred to as "our wife"<sup>14</sup> (not to be taken literally).

Cultural perspective informs much of the language. It is interesting to note that when a Korean gestures to indicate their mind, they will usually point to where their heart is located.

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12 Chang, Suk In, Hong Kyung Pyo and Ihm Ho Bin, *Korean Grammar for International Learners, New Edition*, Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 2001, p. 199 – 212.

13 Baxter, David, *The Korean Language*, p. 126. This is an interesting observation given that *Hangul* is often praised for being such a highly rational system.

14 Baxter, p. 127.