

# ASIA 337

The History of the Korean People in Modern Times

# Scope of this course

- The history of Korea and Koreans since 1600--why do we call that “modern history”?
- Political history--from kings and Confucian scholars to democracy and capitalists
- Social history--from a rigid hierarchy to social mobility, with a rise in the status of women
- economic history--from agriculture to industry
- cultural history--from Confucianism and folk religion to Christianity and religious pluralism

# Required texts

**Kyung Moon Hwang, A History of Korea**

**for basic information.**

- **Sources of Korean Tradition-for class discussion. Koreans from the past in their own words**

**Charles Armstrong, The Koreas**

- **for a look at Koreans in South Korea, North Korea, and overseas since 1945.**

# Evaluations

Discussion Questions: 4 of them, worth 5 pts each 20%

Mid-term examination 20%

- Term paper 25%

Final Exam 25%

Attendance and participation 10%

# Romanization

- There are a two widely-used romanization schemes for writing Korean in the English alphabet.
- Our textbooks, and most material written in North American and Europe about Korea, used the McCune-Reischauer.
- Recent material produced in Korea and sometimes overseas as well uses a system promulgated by the South Korean government a little over a decade ago.

# Romanization Differences

- |                     |              |
|---------------------|--------------|
| • McCune-Reischauer | ROK system   |
| • Chosŏn            | Joseon       |
| • Ch'oe Cheu        | Choe Jeu     |
| • Taewŏn'gun        | Daewon'gun   |
| • Kojong            | Gojong       |
| • Chŏlla            | Jeolla       |
| • Yi Sŭngman        | Yi Seungman. |

# Geography and Destiny

- A “small” country, only because of the neighbourhood it is in.
- No major internal geographic divisions
- Far enough from China and Japan for independence, but close enough to be influenced.
- a temperate climate, allowing intensive rice agriculture.

# Approaches to Korean History

- Nationalistic history--stretches Korean history way back into the past, and way up north. Is state-centered.
- Positivistic history--relies heavily on government documents
- Social Darwinist history--focuses on the struggles of the minjok 民族 (the Korean race/people) for survival
- materialist history-traces Korean history from slave times through “feudalism” to capitalism
- history of the masses--minjung 民衆 history, the story of the oppressed and their resistance to their oppressors.
- comparative history--places Korea in the context of its neighbourhood.
- Political history has dominated. However, we now see more social, economic, and cultural history joining state-centered history.

# Before 1600

- 2,333 BCE or earlier--the mythical kingdom of Tan'gun
- the three “Korean” kingdoms of Koguryō, Paekche, and Silla 1st century BCE (?) to 7th century
- “Unified” Silla 668-935 (and Parhae, 699-926)
- Koryō 918-1392.
- Chosŏn 1392-1910

# The Political Structure

- A king on top (the Yi family), though sometimes a queen dowager or a Taewŏn'gun governed.
- Beneath the king, there was a bureaucracy staffed by men who had two qualifications for public office:
  - a) they had passed the Confucian civil service exam, and
  - b) they had the right family background

# The structure of the government

- State Council (later much of its work was done by the Border Defence Council)
- Six ministries (Personnel, Taxation, Rites, Military Affairs, Punishments, Public Works)
- Three censoring organs, plus secret inspectors
- provincial governors and county magistrates.
- A military under central government control.

# weak king and strong bureaucracy

- the ruling elite (yangban) and the king depended on each other
- Confucian rhetoric dominated political discussion
- Officials were generalists, not specialists
- there was no separation of powers into separate executive, judicial, and administrative organs.

# The Social structure

- The Yangban 兩班 were at the top: they were an hereditary class of land-owning, exam-passing Confucian scholars. Civilians ranked above the military
- Below them were their sons by non-yangban mothers (“secondary sons”), and the sons of remarried yangban widows.

# Below the yangban

- Chungin 中人, the technical specialists. Another hereditary class. Mathematicians, painters, translators, physicians, etc.
- peasants and fisherfolk
- artisans, including licensed artisans in Seoul
- merchants, including licensed merchants in Seoul and peddlers

# The lower-classes

- the low status people, including slaves, kisaeng 妓生 (women entertainers, sometimes called “courtesans”), shamans, and monks.
- Slaves may have been 30% of the population until 1700, though the slave population declined after 1750 or so.
- Below them were the Paekchǒng 白丁: an hereditary group of butchers, etc.
- Women, like men, inherited their status from their fathers and mothers. The lower status took precedence.

# Questions to keep in mind

- 1) What was the most significant thing you learned in the previous lecture?
- 2) What was the most surprising thing you learned in the previous lecture?
- 3) What question was raised but unanswered in the previous lecture?