**Chapter Four**

**A Brief Survey of Korean History**

Historically, Korea was strongly influenced by Chinese culture and acted as a conduit of culture from China to Japan. Koreans adapted many Chinese art forms with innovation and skill, creating distinctively Korean forms. For many centuries, metalwork, sculpture, painting, and ceramics flourished throughout the Korea Peninsula. Buddhism provided one of the most significant sources for artistic expression. Confucianism, also prominent, emphasized the importance of literature and calligraphy, as well as portrait and landscape painting.

Koreans began to incorporate Western forms after Korea opened itself to the Western world in the late 1800s. During the period of Japanese colonial rule (1910-1945), indigenous traditions were strongly discouraged. Since then, however, Koreans have made a concerted effort to keep their cultural traditions alive. Koreans possess a deep appreciation for their cultural heritage. The government encourages the traditional arts, as well as modern forms, through funding and education programs as well as sponsorship of a national competitive exhibition each year.

**EARLY CHINESE INFULENCE**

Korean cultural development is generally divided into periods coinciding with political development: the Three Kingdoms period (57 bc-ad 668), the Unified Silla period (668-935), the Koryŏ (Goryeo) period (918-1392), the Chosŏn (Joseon) period (1392-1910), and the modern period (1910-present).

Chinese cultural impact is vivid in the korean literature that can be classified chronologically into classical and modern periods. Korean classical literature combined indigenous folk traditions with the religious and philosophical principles of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism (Taoism). Male-dominated educated elite developed the classical body of literature from earliest times to the end of the Chosŏn dynasty in 1910. They wrote in the Chinese script. The Korean script, Hangeul, was introduced in 1446 but did not gain widespread acceptance as a literary language until the 20th century. The accessibility of Hangeul to all classes expanded the social base of Korean literature during the modern period.

The earliest surviving examples of literature appearing in Korean sources are the *hyangga* (native songs), which arose out of an ancient oral literary tradition and have both religious and folk overtones. Only 25 hyangga, some originally composed as early as the 6th century, are known to survive; 14 are preserved in an early historical text, *Samguk-yusa* (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms,1285).

Buddhism became the dominant system of thought during the Unified Silla period and exercised great influence over literature and art. At the same time, the rise of Confucianism stimulated the use of Chinese as a literary language and promoted study of the Chinese classics. *Hanshi*—poetry composed in classical Chinese and following Chinese principles of poetry, but written by Koreans—became widespread among the literary elite of the Unified Silla.

Buddhism remained a major influence in the literary development of the Koryŏ period. In 1236 King Kojong of the Koryŏ dynasty ordered Buddhist monks to record the entire Mahayana Buddhist canon (a collection of sutras, treatises, and commentaries known as the Tripitaka) to provide divine protection against Mongol invasions from the north. Utilizing traditional block-printing methods, monks carved the text in the Chinese script in relief on more than 81,000 wood blocks, totaling 6,791 volumes. Today the original collection, considered to be the most complete rendering of the Mahayana Tripitaka in the world, is preserved at the Haeinsa Buddhist temple in southern South Korea, and the wood blocks continue to be used for printing the sacred texts.

Literature assumed increasing importance during the Koryŏ and Chosŏn periods, when educated civil servants called *yangban* replaced the hereditary ruling elite. In the tradition of Confucianism, the yangban were selected by a national examination that required mastery of literature, among other subjects. Their works constitute the majority of recorded Korean literature from the Koryŏ and Chosŏn periods.

The *sijo,*a lyrical poem with simple yet sophisticated three-stanza construction, emerged in the early 13th century, during the Koryŏ period, and subsequently flourished in the Chosŏn period. Early sijo expressed Confucian ideals using themes from nature, while later examples incorporated elements of satire and humor. Renowned sijo poets include Hwang Chin-i, an educated courtesan of the 16th century who is considered the foremost female Korean poet, and Yun Sŏn-do, a master of the form who lived from 1587 to 1671. The writing of sijo has endured into the 21st century and, much like Japanese haiku, has gained international popularity.

Korean art was produced primarily for religious purposes during the Three Kingdoms period (57 bc to ad 668). Gilt bronze statues depicting the Buddha and other deities demonstrated Korean skill in metallurgy. Royal burial tombs contained ornately crafted gold crowns, jewelry, and other ornaments with crescent-shaped jade pendants. The design of these pieces suggests that ancient shamanistic influences remained strong in Korean culture after the introduction of Buddhism in the 4th century.

Koreans produced a rich variety of metal, stone, and ceramic works during the Unified Silla period, which ended in 935. A bronze bell made in 771 for King Sŏngdŏk of the Silla dynasty ranks as one of Asia’s largest cast-bronze bells. Temple building proliferated, most notably in the area of the Silla capital, Gyeongju. The Sŏkkuram cave temple, built high on a mountain ridge near Gyeongju in the 8th century, contains a remarkable example of a seated Buddha carved from granite.

Artisans of the Unified Silla period attained the technology for highly refined, glazed stoneware. This development laid the foundation for the ceramics of the following Koryŏ period, when artisans achieved an unsurpassed level of skill in the green-glaze stoneware called celadon.

The art of the Chŏson period is noted for the development of landscape painting, exemplified in the works of Chŏng Sŏn, notably *The Diamond Mountains.* Paintings also documented important historical events, such as battles and foreign diplomatic visits. Calligraphy in Chinese characters, practiced since the Three Kingdoms period, gained importance. Calligraphy and painting flourished among the educated elite until the early 16th century. During the Chosŏn period, the Neo-Confucian state ideology discouraged the practice of Buddhism, which had long been a source of artistic inspiration. Many art forms, including ceramics, became more utilitarian, with few embellishments. In the early 20th century, Western influences infused Korean art with new concepts and methods.

Korean architecture incorporates Eastern philosophical principles that emphasize harmony with nature and the universe. It is believed that architecture based in these principles can foster social and political harmony as well. Temple architecture followed forms introduced from China. One of South Korea’s renowned Buddhist temples, Pulguksa, was built in the 8th century under the royal patronage of the Silla kingdom, which formally adopted Buddhism in the 6th century.

The three surviving royal palaces in South Korea date from the Chosŏn period and are located in Seoul, the capital of the Chosŏn dynasty. Changdeok Palace, originally constructed in 1405, is the best-preserved palace and a World Heritage Site. Korean palaces largely followed Chinese models. They were built of wood, with stone foundations and tile-covered rooftops that extended beyond the main structure to form broad eaves. The undersides of the eaves were colorfully painted in intricate designs.

**JAPANESE RULE AND AFTERMATH**

The two great powers, i.e., China and Japan in the nineteenth century competed for the control of Korea. This rival interest led to the Sino-Japanese war of 1894/5. By then, Chinese influence ended because of its defeat. Likewise, Japan and Russia quarreled over the Korean Peninsula. This rivalry led to the Russo-Japanese War of 1904/5, Japan won the war. Consequently, as of 1910, Japan annexed Korea as its colony. This annexation ended the Yi Dynasty. In fact, the Japanese helped Korea to modernize its economy.

In 1919, the Koreans staged a passive resistance campaign known as Samil (March First) Independence Movement. Thousands of unarmed people were killed, wounded and imprisoned. In the same year, a government in exile was formed in Shanghai, China with Sygman Rhee as president. The struggle for independence continued. Even during the war, he exiled in the Soviet Union.

At the end of World War II in 1945, the Korea Peninsula was liberated from Japanese colonial rule, which had been in place since 1910. To fill the power vacuum, Soviet forces occupied the northern portion of the Korea Peninsula on Japan on August 8, 1945, and United States forces occupied the southern portion. When Korea was freed from the Japanese occupation, Russians occupied the northern part of Korea while American troops controlled southern Korea. By agreement, the Soviet troops controlled Korea north of 380 parallel while US force occupied south of the 380 parallel. This division was already conceived by the July Conference of Potsdam to be a temporary arrangement. However, subsequent reunification efforts failed.

The avowed allied aim was to reunite the country into an independent state under the temporary Trusteeship of the UN. To effect this, in September 1947, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution calling for election throughout Korea by setting up a commission to oversee the election. Despite such arrangement attempts for free election by the UNO failed in 1948.

In 1948 the division became official when the Republic of Korea, backed by the United States and the United Nations (UN), was established south of the 38th parallel, and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, backed by the Soviet Union and China, was established north of the same latitude. North Koreans were, thus, encouraged by the Russian army to establish pro-Soviet socialist regime. Again steps to consolidate the position of the communist party were taken by the Soviets.

In February 1948, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea was established in the north of the country with its capital Pyongyang. Elections were held without the presence of the UN Election Commission for communists refused the commission to observe the process. It was a Soviet-style state led by a young communist Kim Il Sung who had claimed as the rightful ruler of the whole of Korea. As expected, the government was guided by Soviet advisors and Soviet-trained officials. The north already contained most Korea’s industry with nine million populations. Later on, by mid- 1949 the Soviets withdrew but stationed 3,500 troops behind considering North Korea within its sphere of influence.

In the south another separate government, the Republic of Korea, commonly known as South Korea, was proclaimed on August 15, 1948. Its first president, Syngman Rhee, was elected by a legislature that had been popularly elected in May 1948. The legislative elections were sponsored and supervised by UN representatives. Left-wing groups had boycotted these elections, and virtually all the legislators were firm anti-Communists, as was their chosen president.

By doing so, Korea was divided along the 38th north parallel. Later American troops departed as of 1949 while 500 American troops remained in South Korea. Subsequently, almost million citizens moved south due to the communist policies. In the south exiled patriots were allowed to return home if they wished.

The main objective of the first South Korean government was the suppression of leftist groups, some of them independent but many supported by the Communist government of North Korea. The United States, concerned about leftist guerrilla activity and the potential of invasion from North Korea, delayed withdrawing its occupation forces in South Korea until June 1949.

However, the security situation remained extremely tenuous in the Korea Peninsula. The North Korean leader, Kim Il Sung, sought to unify the Korea Peninsula under Communist rule. In June 1950 he launched a full-scale military invasion of South Korea, thereby starting the Korean War. The United States immediately gained UN Security Council support for the defense of South Korea and committed American ground troops to the war. The Korean War was ultimately one of the most destructive and deadly wars of the 20th century. Perhaps as many as 4 million Koreans died throughout the peninsula, the majority of them civilians.

Actually, both North and South Korea were supplied with arms by their former occupiers. Particularly North Korea received substantial Soviet political, economic and military support. So far, both governments dedicated to unification to rule the whole country. In the case of South Korea, it was supported by America thereby proceeded in resisting North Korean attempts at subversion, communist-supported guerrilla activities and border raids. Practically, Rhee’s administration was corrupt and authoritarian. He was supported by the US government simply for his anti-Soviet policy. Peasants in the South demanded for land reform because the government of North Korea had carried out land reform programme. When they organized a rebellion, it was crushed with great brutality.

Stalin and Mao aided and advised Kim Il Sung to attack South Korea and then to reunite the South under communist rule. So, North Korea supported by Russian weapons and Chinese encouragement, planned to invade South Korea. It hoped to overrun the whole of Korea and to weaken the US influence in Korea as well. On June 25, 1950, the North Korean infantry supported by 150 Soviet made medium tanks; ample artillery and small air force crossed the 38th parallel and attacked on South Korea even captured Soul.

South Korea by then had no tanks or combat aircraft but it possessed inferior artillery and less trained officials. So it was no match for the heavy armed North Korean forces. South Korea then asked the UNO for help. The Soviets boycotted the meeting the UNO when the UNO called for meeting. North Korean forces were condemned as aggressors by the Security Council emergency meeting so asked for withdrawal. By its second resolution, the council recommended military support to South Korea on June 27. The UNO soon appealed for the participation of member states in assisting South Korea contributing military units to repel the aggressors. Soviet Union again opposed the action because neither she nor the People’s Republic of China was present at the Security Council session to cast a vote. Then after, the Korean War commenced in 1950 and lasted in 1953. Apparently, this war was a product of the Cold War.

The Korean War inaugurated an era of American involvement in Asia and l served as prelude to an even longer and more costly conflict. President Truman immediately, ordered US naval and air support to South Korea. In so doing, America was the first country to send troops. American soldiers and planes, mostly from nearby Japan arrived South Korea quickly. Turkish troops joined the Americans. Subsequently, other sixteen countries like the British Commonwealth, Thailand, Greek, Netherlands, Colombian, Ethiopian, Belgian and the Philippines joined as volunteers. These peacekeeping forces were headed by the USA commander General Mac Arthur. Meanwhile, the number of countries reached thirty-two. Although these countries contributed to the UN force, the bulk of its troops, weapons and material, war plan and finance were from the United States.

The prime objective of the UN force was to liberate and defend South Korea but the USA aimed to clear the communists from North Korea. After three months of hard fighting, the UN force pushed the aggressors back across the 38th parallel deep into North Korea. Mac Arthur’s successful military operation advanced northward closed to the Chinese border. In fact, he ignored warnings given from Washington and Beijing to stop movement. He blindly sensed the imminent collapse of the North Korean army but not the response of the Chinese. Truman assured that if the Chinese dared to intervene, they could get no more than 50,000 troops across the Yalu River. Now that, the Chinese who were anxious of the UN troops approached their territory were ready to block the force. The Chinese determined to fight because 1) China’s main factories and power stations were close to the border of Korea along the Yalu River, and 2) American support for the nationalists in Taiwan and its continuing effort to bar the PRC from the United Nations brought the Chinese to fight the Americans as alien intruders. To Beijing, a hostile military presence across its border from the most industrialized area was intolerable. As expected, a vast Chinese army over 300,000 as ‘Volunteers’ joined the Korean War in North Korea through infiltration as of October. They opened a massive counter offensive.

The UN forces operated on extended lines of communication. As a result, they were heavily outnumbered. Within two weeks, the Chinese troops drove the UN forces back below the 38th parallel. The Chinese southward advance nearly 250 miles below provoked a sharp dispute between Mac Arthur and Truman. Mac Arthur enraged at China’s intervention proposed to use nuclear weapons thereby destroying Chinese cities and industrial installations in Manchuria. Again, he decided to encourage the nationalists from Taiwan to attack the communists in the Mainland China. For ear of Russian aid into the struggle and the eruption of a Third World War and the commencement of a full-scale war with China, Truman refused such risk-ful idea. No doubt, political and military policies widened between the two figures. Moreover, there were protests within the USA as well as from its Allies concerning US stand in the war. In the end, America abandoned the idea of forcibly reunited the two Koreas. On April 11, 1951, Truman who understood the interest of the General dismissed Mac Arthur from his leadership and replaced by General Mathew Ridgeway.

Both groups were conscious of the damage so sought to end the war. Then in July 1951, cease-fire agreement was conceived as a result of the Russian initiative. But the armistice negotiations dragged on for two years due to deadlock over the repatriation of North Korean prisoners of war who did not wish to return home. The Chinese wanted all their men back. On the contrary, the USA would agree only to send back those who wanted to go. So that, the peace talks broke down and the fighting continued. The toll of causalities mounted as patrol action on the ground progressed, as did dogfights in the air between US jet pilots and Chinese and North Korean pilots flying Soviet jet fighters.

The war continued with great ferocity and heavy casualties on both sides. When the war dragged, the Americans were exhausted. Obviously, by the 1952 presidential election D. Eisenhower who promised to end the Korean War won the election. Truman’s successors then showed flexibility to break the impasse in Korea and to end the costly stalemated war.

Eisenhower had J.F. Dulles as Secretary of States. Dulles determined that unless China agreed on a peace formula, he stressed that America would use atomic weapons against it. Therefore, the Chinese suddenly changed their attitude to the repatriation of voluntary prisoners. At last, a cease-fire was signed at Panmunjom on July 23, 1953 between the UNO and North Korean and Chinese officials. The death of Stalin was also one factor to end the war because he had been encouraging the Chinese to fight on. As such, the fighting ended.

In July 1953 an armistice agreement signed by the UN, North Korea, and China—South Korea refused to sign—ended the fighting of the Korean War. Without a formal peace treaty, however, North Korea and South Korea technically remained at war. Their shared border, known as the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), remained heavily fortified and guarded on both sides. With the consent of South Korea, the United States continued to maintain a military presence in the country.

It was for the first time in history that an invasion by a military aggressor had been halted through the combined action of a world organization. However, the treaty ended an ignominious Americans direct intervention but Korea remained divided. By then, the Americans, the British and the French promised Sygman Ree to support South Korea if the North Korea attacked it again.

Anyway, the second great crisis of the Cold War ended by agreement. But the Chinese suspected the Americans for using dangerous weapons against their combatants. For that matter, they accused them of using napalm bombs, bacteriological and chemical weapons which have gradual harmful effect upon man.

In the Korean War, so far, America lost 34,000 soldiers and the wounded reached 100,000. The South Koreans also faced over one million casualties, dead, wounded and missed. In a similarly way, North Korea lost 52,000 and China 900,000 men in the conflict. Million Koreans were exposed for refugee life and families were separated.

By keeping their promise, the USA signed a mutual defense treaty with South Korea on which the US troops continued to be stationed in the territory of that nation. In addition, the US committed large sums for military buildup of South Korean armed forces and the economic rebuilding of the terribly devastated land.

Rhee in Southern Korea, although he led a form of corrupted and misgoverned government, was supported by the American government. Despite the fact, the students demonstrated due to his unbearable corruptive and oppressive rule in 1960 and he was toppled. Following the power vacuum the military controlled power in 1961 and then retarded the growth of healthy democracy which was aspired by the people in the modern world.

Conversely, North Korea was supported by Soviet Union and China. Actually, it had a smaller population compared to South Korea but endowed with greater natural resources and more industries. Its rulers were aspirant to reunite the two Koreas using armed force. Due to its armed provocation and clash for possible reunification of Korea into a single state, the UN command in South Korea remained and the USA continued to maintain over 40,000 military personnel, south of the Demilitarization Zone (DMZ). The DMZ had the width of a two-and a-half mile. Kim Il Sung, however, until his death in 1992 harassed South Korea time and again through assassination and other terrorist acts.

South Korea made a slow recovery from the war. Rhee was unable to produce any significant economic development despite much aid from the United States. He easily won reelection in 1956 and 1960, but blatant manipulation of the 1960 elections led to nationwide protests that culminated in Rhee’s forced resignation on April 27, 1960. The moderate government of John M. Chang that followed Rhee’s departure implemented liberalizing reforms in many areas, but economic development still lagged. Military officers in the army, as the economic development of the state was yet uncertain, fearing the growing instability and wary of student agitation for talks with North Korea, staged a coup on May 16, 1961

The ideological difference that was clearly manifested after 1945 not only led to the division of the world into two but also single countries were divided into two. A case in point, we can mention Germany and Korea. North Korea opted for socialist government because it was occupied by the Russian Red Army who worked for the establishment of socialist regime. At the same time, the socialist government encouraged by the governments of Soviet Union and China ignited war against South Korea that operated from 1950 to 1953. At last, the war ended by agreement but Korea remained divided