

# **TEACHING KOREAN HISTORY AND CULTURE THROUGH LITERATURE: AN EXCERPT FROM *ONE THOUSAND CHESTNUT TREES***

**GRADE LEVEL:** Nine through ten

**AUTHOR:** Marion Makin

**SUBJECT:** World Cultures/World Literature/World History

**TIME REQUIRED:** Two weeks

## **OBJECTIVES:**

As a result of this unit, students will:

1. Apply research information to literature.
2. Understand unique aspects of Korean history and culture.
3. Understand the connection between literature and culture.

## **APPLICABLE NCSS STANDARDS:**

1. Culture
  - Explain and give examples of how language, literature, the arts, architecture, other artifacts, traditions, beliefs, values and behaviors contribute to the development and transmission of culture.
  - Construct reasoned judgments about specific cultural responses to persistent human issues.
  - Interpret patterns of behavior reflecting values and attitudes that contribute or pose obstacles to cross-cultural understanding.
2. Individuals, Groups and Institutions
  - Describe and examine belief systems basic to specific traditions and laws in contemporary and historical movements.

## **MATERIALS REQUIRED:**

- Class set of parts two and three of *One Thousand Chestnut Trees* (excerpt or text)
- Research topics (listed below)
- Chapter questions for discussion (listed below)
- Copies of "Seoul Lashes Back Over Japan Texts" (optional, attached)

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

*One Thousand Chestnut Trees*, by Mira Stout (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998) is a complex novel that blends contemporary and pre-war views of Korea. The novel focuses on the experiences of Anna, a young Korean-American woman, who eventually returns to Korea in an effort to understand her family and her own identity. Although interesting, the novel, at 300+ pages, may be too long for the schedules of many World Cultures classes. Brief references to sex and drugs in part one may also be seen as inappropriate for younger students. The most compelling parts of the novel are extended flashbacks covering the years 1919-1951. Parts two and three, narrated by Anna's mother (part two) and grandfather (part three) give a vivid account of Korea under Japanese occupation. Part four, told from the mother's point of view, reflects events of the Korean War. This unit uses parts two and three

(pages 65-118) to introduce students to aspects of Korean culture and history. Students will create an annotated version of the text to reflect their greater understanding of what they have read. Ideally, students would have a copy of the novel, but if this is not possible, class sets of the excerpt can be used. The complete book could be used later as one of a variety of titles read and discussed in small (four to six students each) book groups. The Riverhead edition includes a reader's guide with some interesting perspectives.

Characters in parts two and three

Min Gong-ju—Lord Min, Anna's great-grandfather, the last of the Min clan to have the full privileges of the *yangban* class before the Japanese occupation of 1910.

His sons:

Yong-lae—Lord Min's oldest son, whose weakness brings shame to the family

Bong-lae—narrator, Anna's grandfather, Lord Min's second son

Gong-lae—"Baby uncle," the youngest son

Min Bong-lae's family:

Myung-ja—narrator, Anna's mother

Myung-hi—her younger sister

Jin-ho—her older brother

Overview:

Part two, "Mother" (chapters 5-6; pages 65-98) is told from the point of view of Myung-ja as a young girl in 1936. She has grown up under Japanese occupation, but even as a youngster is aware of the consequences for her family, who had been the chief landowners in their province. Both chapters weave historical and family background with everyday events.

Part three, "Grandfather" (chapter 7; 97-116) starts with 19 year-old Bong-lae narrating the events of March 1, 1919, when a peaceful demonstration against Japanese occupation is met with violence. Bong-lae and his nine year-old brother, Gong-lae, are imprisoned and beaten. The description of this and later events of that year give a clear sense of the outrage of the Korean people.

## PROCEDURE:

This unit asks students to do several things.

1. Students read and respond to the excerpt from *One Thousand Chestnut Trees*. Suggested chapter questions for homework and/or discussion are included below. As part of their preparation, ask students to write questions about what they read and do not understand. These questions will be used as part of the unit assessment. It is important that students discuss the chapters in large or small groups as they read. First time readers will have trouble understanding historical and cultural references. Students will review the chapters and clarify their discussion when they have completed their research projects.

2. While students read, they are also conducting small group research on historical and cultural topics related to the reading. This list is included below. Page references indicate related references in the book. Teachers may choose to give three to five class periods for research and group discussion of information. The research days may be alternated with reading discussion periods.

3. Finally, students will bring together their reading and research by creating an annotated version of the excerpt. They can do this in writing and/or orally. The written version will require an excerpt that can be expanded (via scanning or cutting and pasting) to incorporate researched material. Using their research, student groups will write footnotes to explain references in the text. In some cases, these are quite explicit. For example, students who have researched traditional Korean food would add their explanation of *bulgoki* and kimchi to page 76, which mentions the

dishes in a traditional Korean meal. Other references are less specific. Confucian philosophy explains the position of women in the family, but it is also critical in understanding the role of the eldest son, of sibling relationship and of the respect of children to their parents. Students will recognize that many parts of the story are related to Confucian ideas. With some teacher guidance, students will decide the best places to give the information they have found. A guideline for pages related to research topics is indicated below. All students will need to review the annotated version when it is completed.

This process can be done orally instead of in writing. In this case, the class will focus on one section of a chapter at a time. Student research groups will review the chapters and decide where their research fits in. They will give the pertinent pages to a student leader, who calls on groups in the order in which their information is delivered. Some groups may go several times. Students should always tie their information to the ideas of the novel. The page references indicated in the research topics below may be used as a guideline.

### **EVALUATION:**

1. After students have heard/read the research annotations, have them review their original questions. What questions can they now understand? Share this information in small groups and with the class. What does this tell you about understanding literature from another culture?
2. (optional) Give students a copy of the attached newspaper article, "Seoul Lashes Back Over Japan Texts" (International Herald Tribune, July 13, 2001). Individually, in small groups, or in fishbowl discussion, students respond orally or in writing to the following question:

How do the events and attitudes described in *One Thousand Chestnut Trees* explain the current Korean reaction to the Japanese textbooks? Your answer should reflect your careful reading and class research.

### Suggested Questions for Reading and Group Discussion

As students read, they are to keep a list of questions about events/ideas/customs that are confusing to them. Remind students to indicate page numbers as appropriate.

Part two, chapters five and six:

1. What does the first paragraph tell you about the narrator and her view of the world? Does this seem realistic? Explain your answer.
2. Why is Myung-ja so delighted to be going to the market with her father? What does this imply about her family?
3. Re-read the description of the market place. How does this help you picture the town? List any items you don't know.
4. Re-read the description of Lord Min, paragraph two (69). What does this tell you about society during his time?
5. Re-read the passage about dreams and naming (69). What does this tell you about the beliefs of the family? What does this tell you about the status of women?
6. Re-read the section about Japanese policy towards books and education (71). Why would the Japanese government think this was important?
7. Reread the section about Aunt Pusan (83-84). What is implied about her husband? How do her sisters respond to Pusan's feelings? What is your response to this episode?
8. The last pages of chapter five create a contrast in feeling. How do they help the reader understand why Myung-ja ends chapter five with, "This, I remember, as my last day of childhood . . ." (88).
9. Yong-lae and Jin-ho are both eldest sons. What shows they have special expectations placed upon them? How do they respond to these expectations?
10. Things change for the worse in chapter six. How does the author give the reader this feeling? Be specific.

Part three, chapter seven

11. How does Bong-lae convince his tutor to let him attend the demonstration?
12. What information does the reader get about Bong-lae's life up to this time? Give examples.
13. What is implied about the death of King Kojong (100)?
14. Why do you think Bong-lae says the feeling of "family solidarity" was an "illicit luxury" (101)? What does this imply about Japanese policy in Korea?
15. Reread the paragraph beginning "In this shadowy barn" (112). What does this tell you about society at that time?
16. What impression does this chapter give of the Japanese? Do you think this is a balanced view? Explain your answer.

Research topics (for two to four students)

Confucian ideas (68, 69, 73, 100, etc.)

Japanese occupation 1910-1945 (throughout)

Hideyoshi invasion of the 16<sup>th</sup> century (70)

Hangul (68)

Yangban (groups should bring in paintings) (68, 69, 105, etc.)

Japanese policy on Korean language and literature (71, 107)

Shamanism (69)

Buddhism in Korea (73)

Christianity in Korea (82)

League of Nations and reasons for its failure (71, 116)

Map of Korea (throughout, explain connection to events, food, climate)

Traditional Korean clothing (*han-bok, jugori, paji*) (groups should bring in illustrations) (75, 81)

Traditional Korean house (illustrated) (68, 75)

Traditional foods (include *bulgoki, kimchi, mandu*, among other items mentioned) (prepare a meal) (66, 76)

Korean flag (*tae-gukki*) (explain symbolism, illustrate) (103)

Friday, July 13, 2001

## Seoul Retaliates Over Japanese Texts

New Era in Relations Halted With Cuts in Military and Cultural Ties

By Don Kirk

**SEOUL:** South Korea on Thursday abruptly broke off what had been a promising new era in its relations with Japan, canceling military exchanges and the introduction of Japanese cultural imports ranging from popular music to Nintendo and PlayStation computer games.

The decisions were the strongest action yet in retaliation for Japan's refusal to stop distributing school textbooks that contain what Korean and Chinese authorities view as a distorted account of Japanese imperial history in Northeast Asia.

President Kim Dae Jung, who had engineered a policy of reconciliation with Japan in 1998 and 1999, said that Japan should "learn from Germany," which he noted "is using Nazi's concentration camps in its history education" after having long since apologized for the horrors it inflicted in World War II.

Mr. Kim, talking to political leaders, warned of the dangers inherent in the thinking of Japanese rightists responsible for the disputed textbooks, which South Korean officials say contain 35 errors of fact or omission, including no mention of the enslavement of thousands of Koreans as "comfort women" for Japanese soldiers.

"People are concerned," said Mr. Kim, citing the rise of Japanese militarism in the 1930s and "the circumstances leading to the Pacific War" - World War II.

Dramatizing the tensions, Koreans burned Japanese flags in Pusan, the large port city in southeastern Korea that is closest geographically and commercially to Japan. In Kimje, in the southwest, demonstrators burned an effigy of the Japanese emperor, Akihito, as well as Japanese flags.

"South Korea-Japanese military exchanges," a South Korean Defense Ministry statement said, "must proceed on the basis of a correct understanding of history and mutual trust with the support of the peoples of the two countries."

After the announcement, General Cho Yung Kil, chairman of South Korea's joint chiefs of staff, canceled a visit to Japan that had been planned for this month.

The ministry also rescinded an invitation for two Japanese training vessels on a 13-country tour to stop at the Korean port of Inch'on in September.

"Basically, we are not going to see Japanese military people at all," a ministry spokesman said. "We're going to stop permanently any exchange program and senior officer meetings."

South Korea's Culture Ministry, in a separate announcement, said it had canceled the next stage in a gradual program to open the country to Japanese culture.

"We expect the Japanese government to revise its history textbooks," said the culture minister, Kim Han Gil. "That will be necessary to normalize our relationship."

Japan showed no sign of backing down on its decision to retain the textbooks, but a spokesman for Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force said the cancellation of naval visits to South Korea was "very regrettable."

The announcements reflect some of South Korea's deep ambivalence about all things Japanese, which springs from 35 years of colonialism followed - after World War II - by the blossoming of a notable commercial relationship.

A South Korean official, who asked that his name not be used, said South Korea would wait until Aug. 15, the national holiday marking the Japanese surrender at the end of World War II and the end of 35 years of Japanese rule over the Korean Peninsula.

"Then we will see if schools are adopting these textbooks for the next year," he said. "We will know better how the Japanese will react. If they don't change their attitude, we should impose a more forceful approach."

Although canceling the military exchanges had no immediate effect on either country, officials had seen these early efforts as possible signs of a long-term friendship or even an alliance.

The exchanges were particularly welcomed by the United States, which maintains alliances with both Korea and Japan and had engineered a mutual policy toward North Korea.

"This gesture will slow down all Korean-Japanese relations," said Song Hwa Sup, an expert on Japan at the Korea Institute of Defense Analysis, an adjunct of the Defense Ministry. "Eventually it could also have some negative effect on the economy. I hope Japan can correct its errors, but it will take some time."

Last spring, the Defense Ministry canceled a joint military exercise with Japan after that country's Education Ministry approved the textbooks. The exercise would have extended a relationship that began two years ago with the first joint exercise, an air-rescue drill in the Tsushima Straits at the closest point between the two countries.

The Cultural Ministry's decision touched on matters that have been just as important in Korean-Japanese relations. Until two years ago, South Korea banned all Japanese movies, music and cultural presentations.

Since then the country has gone through carefully planned introductions, first allowing Japanese classical music and children's films, then film festival winners and, finally, just about any Japanese film eligible for a festival.

It was only last year that Japanese singers and musical groups, some of which are very popular here, have been permitted to perform publicly in Korea.

But now compact disks, computer games, adult films and most comic books, another highly popular Japanese export, can no longer come into South Korea legally.

Although the ban on Japanese cultural imports was enforced rigorously under a series of dictatorial leaders, Japanese CDs and videos had found a niche in Korea's thriving black market trade. Whether Korean police now crack down on the markets, many of which flourish openly near university campuses, will be an indication of the seriousness of the Cultural Ministry's new ban.

Japan's top government spokesman, Yasuo Fukuda, said Thursday that South Korea's retaliatory measures were regrettable but that his government had no plan to change its position on the textbook issue, Reuters reported from Tokyo.

"I think it is regrettable that such decision was made," Mr. Fukuda said at a news conference. "We would like to hold talks to promote exchanges."

"The only way is to continue asking South Korea to understand our screening system," Mr. Fukuda said, in reference to the selection of textbooks. "There is nothing more we can do but to explain."

## The Korean Flag

[http://www.korea.net/korea/print\\_form.asp?code=A0401&id=20040531000](http://www.korea.net/korea/print_form.asp?code=A0401&id=20040531000)



Korea first felt the need for a national flag as it was preparing to conclude the Korean-American Treaty of Commerce, which was concluded on May 22 and signed on June 6, 1882. This was during the 19th year of the reign of King Kojong of the Choson Kingdom (1392-1910).

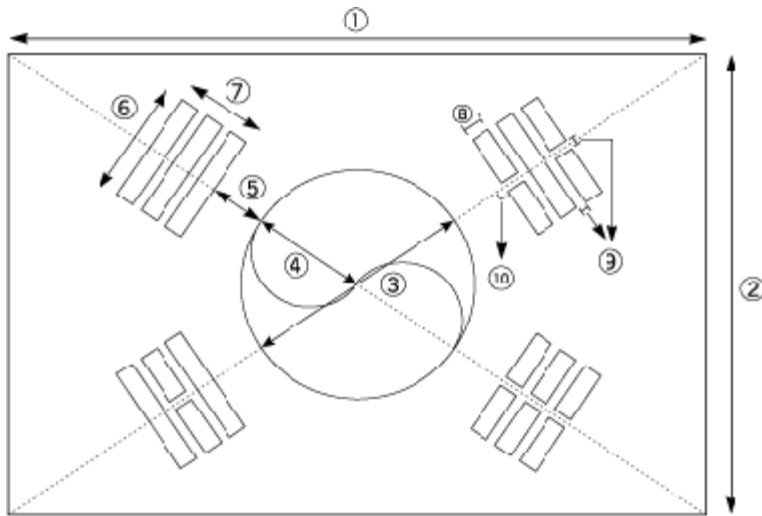
Korea adopted a blue and red yin-yang on a white field, a favorite Korean design since ancient times. Thus, the *t'aeguk* design flag became the temporary national flag. Later Korea added eight trigrams combinations of three unbroken and broken bars - around the *t'aeguk* circle and thereby creating the T'aegukki, which served as the national colors for a while.

King Kojong appointed Pak Yonghyo as his ambassador to Japan in September 1882. While aboard ship heading for Japan, Pak drew a national flag with a *t'aeguk* circle but included only four trigrams instead of eight, and started using the flag on the 25th of that month. On October 3, Pak reported this change to King Kojong who formally proclaimed the T'aegukki as the national flag on March 6, 1883. For some unknown reason, however, he did not have formal instructions published at that time on how to make the flag. In fact, it was not until June 29, 1942, that the provisional Korean government in exile enacted a law on the uniform method of making the national flag. The law was promulgated but as the government was in exile, it was not widely known to Koreans at home still under Japanese colonial rule.

Following the founding of the Republic of Korea on August 15, 1948, the government felt that it should codify the method of making the national flag. This prompted the government to form a special commission in January 1949 that issued the provision on the national flag on October 15 of that year. Since then, the Republic of Korea has been using the T'aegukki as the national flag.

Standard color shades of T'aegukki, the Korean National Flag are follows: in the CIE System, the x, y, and Y coordinates for the red are  $x=0.5640$ ,  $y=0.3194$ ,  $Y=15.3$ ; for the blue,  $x=0.1556$ ,  $y=0.1354$ ,  $Y=6.5$ . Alternatively, in the

Munsell System of Color Notation, the red corresponds to 6.0R 4.5/14, and the blue to 5.0PB 3.0/12. In the Pantone Matching System, 186C red and 294C blue are recommended.



- 1) Diameter of circle x 3
  - 2) Diameter of circle x 2
  - 3) Height of flag x 1/2
  - 4) Height of flag x 1/4
  - 5) Diameter of circle x 1/4
  - 6) Diameter of circle x 1/2
  - 7) Diameter of circle x 1/3
  - 8) Diameter of circle x 1/12
  - 9) Diameter of circle x 1/24
  - 10) Right angle(90 degrees)
- (Width:Length=3:2)

### The Meaning of the T'aegukki

T'aegukki, the national flag of the Republic of Korea, consists of a blue and red yin-yang circle in the center, one black trigram in each of the four corners, and a white background.

The white background of T'aegukki symbolizes light and purity and reflects the Korean people's traditional affinity for peace.

The yin-yang circle, divided equally into a blue portion below and a red portion above, represents the dual cosmic forces of yin (blue) and yang (red). It symbolizes universal harmony, in which the passive and the active, the feminine and the masculine, form the whole. The four trigrams of *Kon*, *Kon*, *Kam*, and *Li*, which surround the yin-yang circle, denote the process of yin and yang going through a series of changes and growth.

*Kon* (☰), with three solid bars in the upper left-hand corner, denotes "heaven." *Kon* (☷), with three evenly divided bars in the lower right-hand corner, denotes "earth." *Kam* (☲), with one evenly divided bar on each side of one solid bar in the upper right-hand corner, denotes "water". And *Li* (☵), with one solid bar on each side of one evenly divided bar in the lower left-hand corner, denotes "fire."



Collectively, the yin-yang circle and the four trigrams represent universal harmony and unity. T'aegukki embodies the ideals of all Koreans, who have pursued creativity and prosperity under universal principles and truth.

Therefore, Koreans are dedicated to working harmoniously to carry out the nation's tasks of unifying its people and contributing toward world peace and prosperity.

#### Manner to the Flag

#### Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag

"Before this proud T'aegukki, I firmly pledge my loyalty and will devote my body and soul to the eternal glory of my country and people."

#### When and How to Fly the Flag

##### Days on Which the Flag is Flown

January 1 - New Year's Day

March 1 - Independence Movement Day (Anniversary of the March 1, 1919 Independence Movement)

July 17 - Constitution Day

August 15 - Liberation Day

October 1 - Armed Forces Day

October 3 - National Foundation Day

October 9 – Han'gul Day (Anniversary of the promulgation of the Korean alphabet in 1446)

Other days the government designates as national holidays

The flag may be flown on days local autonomous governments or provincial or city councils designate as local holidays.

The flag is flown at half-mast as a sign of mourning on Memorial Day (June 6), during periods of national mourning, and for state or public funerals.

##### Places Where the Flag is Flown All Year Round

It is obligatory to fly the flag every day at national and local government offices, public organizations, schools, and military installations.

It is recommended that the flag be flown at places where international events are held such as hotels, large buildings, and parks where large crowds assemble, along the walls of government buildings and anywhere flag polls are installed.

Private homes and other places may display the national flag all year round if the residents so wish.

### Raising and Lowering the Flag

The flag may be flown 24 hours a day, but if flown at night, it must be illuminated.

Schools and military units are required to fly the flag only during daylight hours.

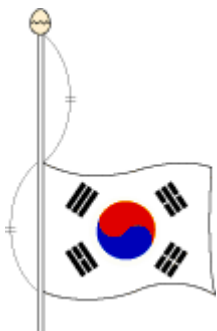
The flag should not be flown if there is any possibility that it might be torn or damaged by wind or rain.

### How to Fly the Flag

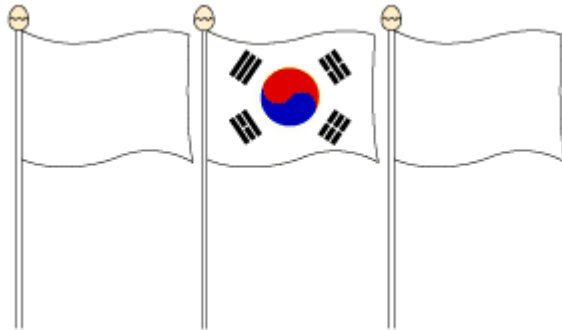
On national holidays and ordinary days,  
it should be flown at full-mast.



On days of mourning,  
it should be flown at half-mast.



When the flag is flown in a line with other flags in three or in other odd numbers, it should be placed in the center.



When the number of flags is even, the flag is flown on the left end as viewed from the front.

\* When the flag is flown in Korea together with the U.N. flag and flags of other countries, they should be flown in the following order: the U.N. flag, the Korean flag and flags of other countries in alphabetical order.

#### Order of Raising or Lowering the Flag

When the flag is raised along with other flags, it should either be raised first or simultaneously with the others.

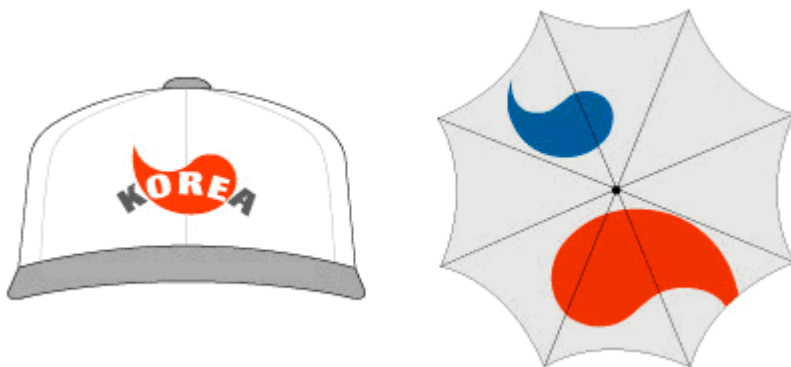
When the flag is lowered with other flags, it should either be lowered last or simultaneously with the others.

#### Safekeeping and Care of the National Flag

The flag must be folded with great care and stored in a flag box or other container for safekeeping. Additionally, the box or container must be stored in plain sight and be easily accessible.

If the flag is dirtied or wrinkled, it may be washed and ironed with care so to ensure not to distort its original form.

If the flag is damaged or worn out, it should not be discarded casually or used for other purposes; it should be burned in a discreet place.



#### Authorized Uses of the Flag

The national flag, or its design, may be used on school and office supplies, sporting goods, and other items when used in a way that shows due respect for the flag and its people.

However, the national flag, or its design, may not be used, whether in part or in whole, in any way that degrades the flag or its people.