

LESSON 11

Global Connections: Koreans Abroad

At the end of the Choson Kingdom (1392-1910), Koreans began to leave their native land to escape economic hardship, poor government and Japanese colonialization. Of 75 million Koreans in 1995, 7.2 percent, or 5,220,000, Koreans live overseas in 140 countries.

LINKAGE WITH CURRICULUM

*Immigration

*U.S. History

*Chinese, Japanese,
Russian
History

Purpose of Lesson and Overview

Students will examine the information and issues behind the following questions:

- When and why did Koreans leave Korea? Who left? Where did they go?
- What were the challenges and successes of Koreans abroad?

Students can begin to answer these questions by examining Korean immigration to China, Japan, Russia and the U.S. They can then extend their understanding to the issues that immigrants face today in leaving their homelands and settling in new countries. The issues explored in this lesson should contribute to a rich discussion about immigration all over the world.

Content Focus

Over the centuries, some Koreans fled to neighboring Manchuria. They included political exiles, renegades, outlaws and peasants. Because of a lack of economic opportunities, many lost ties to their home villages. Other Koreans settled in Russia. Mostly were peasants who provided cheap labor in rural, underdeveloped areas. In the early 1900's, many Koreans were forced to go to Japan, where they worked as laborers in mines and factories. During the Japanese colonial era, some Koreans went to the U.S for economic reasons. They included political exiles, diplomats and laborers who worked on Hawaiian sugar plantations. But as Japan gained power over Korea, many more fled from the oppressive foreign rule.

Even though Korean exiles were dispersed to foreign lands, they remained united in their active participation in the Korean independence movement. Koreans in Japan were mostly kept from actively organizing protests for independence, but Korean university students did try from time to time to organize protests against imperialism. In Manchuria, Korean exile groups, including members of the Korean army, hid in the mountains and launched guerrilla assaults on the Japanese. It was during this period of struggle against the Japanese that North Korean leader Kim Il-sung emerged as a communist leadership.

Koreans in Russia cultivated the barren land. Many Koreans joined the communist movement both as a way to fight the Japanese and to combat the traditional order of land ownership. These Soviet Koreans demonstrated their loyalty to Stalin for fear of being associated with Japan, with whom Russia had tense relations. By 1937, however, Stalin's paranoia against Japan resulted in the mass relocation of Koreans from East Asia to Central Asia. Meanwhile, leaders of the

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Korean community in the U.S. focused their energies on education, diplomacy and developing support for a democratic Korea. As overseas Koreans helped each other with immediate needs like finding employment, improving language skills, combating discrimination and maintaining their culture, the independence movement provided inspiration and meaning to their difficult lives as immigrants.

Koreans in these countries faced distinctly different issues. Although at first they were not allowed to own land, Koreans in Chinese Manchuria and in Soviet Russia made a significant impact on agricultural development and economic progress in their regions. Koreans in China fought the Japanese and so shared a common purpose with the Chinese. China gave Koreans much freedom because it supported a policy of integrating minority groups into Chinese culture. Also Chinese respected the Koreans' education and high literacy rate. In contrast, the Koreans in Japan faced discrimination. During World War II, many worked as forced laborers. Some were drafted as soldiers and comfort women. After the war, about a million Koreans returned to homeland; today about 600,000 Koreans remain in Japan where they still face discrimination and are denied citizenship. Koreans in the U.S. faced discrimination, too. Thanks to the civil rights movement and their own efforts, many Koreans have achieved great success in the U.S. Factors like church, education and their entrepreneurial spirit have contributed to their success.

Still, Korean immigrants dealt with different challenges in similar ways. They adapted to their new lands by joining churches, learning the language and undertaking jobs in a variety of fields. They valued education and recorded some of the highest literacy and graduation rates of minority groups in their new homes. Finally, they expressed pride in their own heritage and preserved their Korean traditions and language.

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The Lesson: Global Connections: Koreans Abroad

OPENING

1. Engage students in a discussion about their countries of origin or those of their ancestors. Chart family histories to determine when and why families moved over time. Help students to see the diversity of origins and family stories that they represent.

Unlike the U.S., Korea has a very homogeneous population. It took unbearable economic hardship during the late Choson Kingdom (1392-1910) and the Japanese occupation (1910-1945) to drive Koreans overseas. This lesson looks at Koreans in China, Russia, Japan and the U.S.

WRITING

2. Divide students into four groups. All students should read Handout 1. They may also choose to read firsthand accounts listed in Further Reading. Assign one of the Handout 2 to 5 each to group. After completing the readings, have each group complete one of the following writing assignments:

- a newspaper editorial encouraging Koreans to stay at home;
- a letter by a scholar to his/her family explaining why he/she is leaving Korea;
- a letter from an immigrant discussing his/her new life, including the struggles and challenges he/she faces;
- a speech by an exiled patriot discussing the Korean independence movement in exile and how the political and social climate of Koreans' adopted homes have influenced their idea and goals.

ASSESSMENT

3. Have students share their assignments, discover how different and/or similar China, the U. S., Russia and Japan were for Korean immigrants and the values and traditions that Koreans brought to their new homes.

4. Encourage students to compare and contrast the issues of immigration from other countries and time periods. Students can research their own families' stories and discuss parallels. They may also want to:

- read about immigrants from other countries and how they overcame challenges;
- read about the events leading to the Japanese annexation of Korea and Korean independence movement;
- invite recent Korean immigrants to discuss contemporary challenges they face as immigrants;

FURTHER READING

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Yun, Yong-i. "Satsuma and Arita Pottery," Koreana: Korean Cultural Heritage. Seoul: Korea Foundation, 1994. pp.126-131.

WORLD WIDE WEB

- http://www.kita.org/kita/kita_index.jsp?siteUrl=usny.html
- <http://www.seattleartmuseum.org/Exhibit/Archive/grandfathershouse/>
- <http://www.keia.org/>
- <http://www.korea.net/>
- http://www.gkn-la.net/main/projects/history/history_project.htm
- <http://home.wlu.edu/~blackmerh/anth230/diaspora.html>
- <http://oaks.hanminjok.net/sub10.htm>

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Handout I Introduction

Confucianism is deeply rooted in Korean culture. It places great importance on a person's role in and responsibilities to the family, including taking care of the elderly and showing respect for deceased ancestors. Because of the Confucian emphasis on respect for one's ancestors, Koreans were deeply rooted to their native land and village and thus never consider leaving. It took economic hardship and political oppression to drive Koreans into strange lands in search of jobs and political freedom.

Migration from the southern Korea to the north and vice versa did occur during the 16th and 17th centuries, mostly to escape invasions by the Japanese and the Manchus. While recovering from invasions and natural disasters, later Choson rulers imposed an isolationist policy on Korea. Thus Korea resisted efforts by westerners to open itself to trade. By the late 1800's, however, westerners and the newly modernized government of Japan were too strong to resist. Progressive leaders in Korea realized the need to modernize and pushed for exchange and trade with other nations. While feuding advisors struggled to influence the king, Korean peasants endured economic crises. Greedy landlords and severe droughts brought misery and famine. Korea finally agreed to trade with other countries first in the Korean-Japanese Treaty of 1876 and later the Korean-American Treaty of 1882. As a result, financial resources and foreign expertise were invested to help Korea modernize. Korea's neighbors — China, Russia and Japan — were locked into their own rivalries and imperialist ambitions for expansion. Japan and China and then Japan and Russia, fought for power in northeastern Asia. Japan emerged the victor in both wars and pushed its influence on Korea. The Korean government was divided; its royal leaders weak, enabling the Korean government, opportunistic individuals and nations to use Korea for their own ends.

At first economic hardships drove Koreans to seek work outside their homeland. Then, Korea became a colony of Japan. Japanese businesses took over Korean farmland in order to export rice to Japan. In the process, millions of Korean farmers were evicted. Cheap Japanese goods were exported to Korea so local Korean manufacturers could not compete and lost their sources of income. These changes ripped apart the rural social order and forced farmers to search elsewhere for their livelihoods. Koreans fled to Manchuria, Russia, China and the U.S. to escape the oppressive conditions at home. Other peasants were sent to Japan as slave laborers. Between 1925 and 1930, the number of Koreans living abroad increased by 41 percent; between 1935 and 1940 it increased by 72 percent.

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Handout 2

Koreans in China

Over the centuries, Koreans migrated to China in various ways. Some were taken as prisoners of war and turned into slaves. Others fled to China seeking fertile land, escape from military service, or heavy land taxes at home. Enslaved Koreans did not maintain their heritage and were eventually absorbed into the Chinese population.

Migration to China increased during the late 1800's due to population pressures. Only one fifth of Korea's land is arable — suitable for farming. As Korea's population grew, landless farmers moved northward into China, settling lands along the Tumen and Yalu rivers. Although heavily fortified and dangerous, Koreans moved into Manchuria, the border region of China. In Manchuria, they helped the local economy by clearing forests to create farmland. In 1885, the Chinese government recognized Korean contributions by granting them official access to the region. By 1897, about 37,000 Koreans had settled in the Yalu River area, while about 20,846 lived in the Tumen River area. During the 1920's, about 10,000 Koreans migrated into northeastern China each year, bringing their population to 631,000 by 1930.

Immigrants to China included peasants, scholars, outlaws, intellectuals and Korean nationalists escaping Japanese persecution. After Japan annexed Korea in 1910, its land policies forced millions of Korean farmers off the land. Many of these landless farmers crossed the border into Manchuria. In this remote border area, there was little government control partly because Russia, China and Japan had been seeking to control the region for years. As a result, villages had local autonomy, or self government.

In Manchuria, Korean exiles included former soldiers who had lost their jobs in the military under Japanese rule. These ex-soldiers and other exiles formed guerrilla groups and launched attacks on the Japanese occupying forces in Korea. Their activities encouraged villages across the border in Korea to join in the March 1, 1919 independence movement. The Japanese responded to independence demands with brutal assaults on villages. They burned homes and schools and killed more than 10,000 people.

Despite harsh conditions, Korean farmers in Manchuria became successful frontier pioneers. Undeterred by fierce cold, swampy land and other hardships, they transformed forests into farmland well-suited for wet rice agriculture. In 1921, there were 48,911 hectares of wet fields in Manchuria; by 1928, 128,194 hectares; by 1944, 326,311 hectares. As Manchuria began producing significant amounts of quality rice, foreign trade and economic development increased.

After annexing Korea in 1910, Japan looked to expand into Manchuria. In 1932, it did so, seizing the region from China and renaming it Manzhouguo. The Japanese planned to use Manchuria as a base to expand deeper into China. The Japanese forced Koreans to move into Manchuria to produce rice for Japan itself. Korean farmers, however, were not allowed to own the land they worked. In 1925, Koreans in Manchuria numbered about 589,000; as a result of forced migration, that number rose to 2 million by 1945. As in Korea, the Japanese forced Koreans in Manchuria to take Japanese last names and banned the Korean language from schools. Korean peasants, however, had a strong tradition of resistance and they fiercely maintained the traditions of their homeland.

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Even before Japan conquered Manchuria, many Korean nationalists in Manchuria had become communists. Inspired by Russia's Communist Revolution in 1917, Korean exiles had set up a Korean Communist Party. It attracted both intellectuals and farmers because communism promised to free Korea from the imperialist Japanese and end the old system of feudal landlords who exploited peasant farmers. Japan's conquest of Manchuria united Chinese and Koreans in their hatred of Japan and led Korean communists to join forces with Chinese communists. They formed the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army. Among its soldiers was Kim Il-sung, who would later lead communist North Korea.

In 1945, World war II ended, but Japan's defeat brought new hardships to Koreans in Manchuria. China's Guomintang, or Chinese Nationalist Party, took over Manchuria. They forced Koreans off the land that they had worked for the Japanese or that they had cleared and settled long before the war. The Guomintang gave the land to high-ranking Chinese officials. Korean schools were destroyed and profitable businesses confiscated. Almost a third of Koreans in Manchuria were left homeless. Many returned to Korea.

At the same time, a civil war was raging in China between the Guomintang and Mao Zedong's Chinese Communists. In 1949, the communists won power in China. Korean communists in Manchuria had helped Mao's forces. Once in power, the Chinese Communists restored the Korean language and Korean schools in Manchuria. Koreans continued to live in China under communist rule. However, during the Cultural Revolution launched by Mao in 1966, China was plunged into new turmoil. Leaders of the Cultural Revolution were suspicious of Koreans in China and their leader, Chu Tok-hae. They believed that the Koreans wanted to add China's northeastern border region to North Korea. As a result, Koreans faced brutal persecution. More than 4,000 Koreans died and tens of thousands were imprisoned. After the Cultural Revolution ended in 1976, China moderated its policies toward its non-Chinese minorities and allowed Koreans to preserve their distinct heritage. It provided better food and educational opportunities to Koreans and in areas with a large Korean population used both Chinese and Korean for official documents and speeches.

Almost 2 million Koreans live in China today, mostly in northeastern China. Although Koreans comprise only a tiny percent of China's population, they contribute significantly to its economy. In Heilongjiang Province in Manchuria, for example, they make up 1.3 percent of the population but produce almost 50 percent of the rice crop. About 40 percent of Koreans in China live in what is called the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Region. Most of the region's officials are of Korean descent. Yanbian Koreans are committed to intellectual and economic advancement and have worked to improve health care and other basic services. Because the region lies close to North Korea, there is some exchange between Yanbian Korean and North Korean scholars. Koreans in Yanbian are allowed to visit relatives in North Korea. Only recently, however, have they been able to visit relatives in South Korea.

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Handout 3

Koreans in Russia

During the 1800's, Russia expanded its territory eastward until it reached the Pacific Ocean. By 1860, it had acquired land from China known as the Russian Far East. This vast region of 350,000 square miles had only 15,000 inhabitants. It was to this area that many Koreans migrated seeking economic opportunities. In 1863, the first group of 13,000 Koreans crossed the Tumen River border into the Russian Far East, beginning a trend of immigration from northern Korea into Russia.

Russia tolerated the newcomers mostly because they provided cheap labor. Koreans worked in farming, fishing and logging. They cultivated the barren land and introduced new products such as rice and silkworms. By 1898, Koreans were allowed to become Russian citizens after five years of residence. Koreans were good citizens. Many became Christians. They built churches and schools and paid their taxes. In 1898, there were about 23,000 Koreans in the Russian Far East. That number reached 32,140 in 1902; about half were naturalized Russian citizens.

Government policies toward Korean immigrants fluctuated. On the one hand, Koreans were seen as hardworking and law-abiding. They contributed to the economy by growing rice that could be sold as an export to Japan. Unlike Chinese workers who sent their earnings home, Koreans kept their money in Russia. During World War I, Russia had a great need for workers, which attracted many more Koreans to settle there. On the other hand, Russia distrusted Koreans because Korea was a Japanese colony and Russia and Japan were rivals for power in East Asia. Many Koreans had moved illegally into the Russian Far East, especially during the early 1900's as Japan's presence in Korea increased. In response to Korean immigration, the Russian government imposed harsh regulations on newcomers, pushing them to learn Russian and assimilate into Russian society. Koreans, however, managed to form their own villages and maintain their culture and language.

Like other overseas Koreans, Koreans in Russia supported the independence movement back home. They also took part in protests against political and economic oppression in their new homeland. In 1917, the Russian Revolution broke out, which brought the Bolshevik (Communist) Party to power. Leaders of the Korean independence movement in Russia, like Aleksandra Petrovna Kim, joined the Bolsheviks. Kim was active in socialist government councils in the Russian Far East. During World War I, Koreans had been drafted into the Russian army. After the war, they returned to their homes in the Russian Far East with weapons and a strong belief in socialism. They encouraged Korean peasants to support the Bolsheviks. After the Bolsheviks won power, Koreans in Russia often chose to become Soviet citizens partly to avoid being sent back to Japanese-ruled Korea.

Under communist rule, Koreans in Soviet Russia suffered from government policy swings. At first, as Soviet citizens, Koreans were allowed to buy the land they worked. (Foreigners, however, could not buy land.) But during this time, only about one fifth of the Koreans who requested citizenship were granted that right. Many others had to work as tenant farmers and pay high rents. In 1930, a new Soviet policy prohibited landowners from hiring tenant farmers. More than 50,000 Korean tenant farmers were left without work and fled the country. Their departure was a terrible blow to rice production and coal mining. Koreans who remained in the Soviet Union formed collectivized farms but received less government support such as farm machinery, animals and other

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resources than Russians on collective farms.

Soviet policy toward Korean immigrants grew harsher during the 1920's. Because Korea was a Japanese colony and Japan was expanding its empire in Asia, the Soviet government viewed Koreans with suspicion. By 1929, it restricted the entrance of Koreans into the Far Eastern region. Koreans in the Soviet Union felt strong pressure to be as Russian as possible not only to survive economically but also to prove their detachment from Japan. Yet when Japan seized Manchuria in 1932, the Soviet government did little. In fact, it even agreed to Japanese demands to stop anti-Japanese activity along the border of the Soviet Union and Korea. As a result, Soviet Koreans faced severe persecution and a top Soviet Korean leader was imprisoned and later executed.

By the mid-1930's, Stalin had launched his terrible purges against Communist Party leaders and ordinary Soviet citizens. A growing paranoia led him to inflict a crushing blow on the Soviet Korean community. Stalin was sure that Japan was recruiting Koreans to work as spies and agents against the Soviet Union. In the winter of 1937, therefore, he ordered all Koreans to relocate from the Russian Far East to Soviet Central Asia — into the regions of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. In a two-month period, more than 180,000 Koreans were forced to move west.

Koreans forced to leave their homes could take only a few possessions. During the long, difficult journey across Siberia into Central Asia, bitter cold and harsh conditions took a toll on lives. Survivors faced the prospect of starting anew in an unfamiliar land. By 1938, few Korean communists remained in the Russian Far East. They had either been forced to move to Central Asia or had been executed by Stalin's government as Japanese spies.

Stalin's government had promised Koreans forced to move to Central Asia housing, land and farm machinery. What Korean families found instead were windowless houses and barren, uncultivated land. Despite their losses, Koreans started to work the land. They grew corn, cotton, sugar beets, vegetables and fiber crops. As in the Russian Far East, they set up collective farms and energized the local economy with successful rice production. They helped raise the region's standard of living and were instrumental in building schools, hospitals and libraries and in bringing electricity to homes. Children on the collective farms received a good education, enjoyed recreational and sports activities and participated in the arts. Still, Koreans had limited rights even as Soviet citizens and did not have a voice in the governments of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

Severe hardships brought the Soviet Korean community closer together. Under Stalin, Koreans were not allowed to leave Central Asia, even to visit relatives in Korea. So families worked hard to preserve Korean traditions and values in their Central Asian exile. Early in the Soviet period, the government had allowed non-Russians to learn their native languages. Thus Korean had been taught in primary schools in the Russian Far East. Later, the Soviet government emphasized the use of one language, Russian, hoping to unify the Soviet Union. On the collective farms of Central Asia, however, Koreans continued to learn Korean along with Russian in school. Families kept their Korean names and Koreans seldom married non-Koreans. During the Soviet period, the Korean population grew very slowly.

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Soviet Koreans faced many of the same social and cultural issues as other overseas Koreans. In time, many spoke Russian and moved to urban centers where they found better jobs but no longer had the support of a close-knit community. Eventually, many others left the Soviet Union for South Korea because of discrimination and lack of opportunity in their adopted land. For example, Koreans in the Soviet Union were barred from certain government jobs. They often could not get a higher education because of the limited number of places in Soviet universities. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, it broke up into 15 independent countries, including the Central Asian nations of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan where Stalin had forced Koreans to live. Today, there are about 500,000 people of Korean descent who make their home in these two Central Asian countries.

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Handout 4

Koreans in the United States

Korean immigration to the U.S. began in the late 1800's due largely to the work of Dr. Horace Allen, an American minister and diplomat who had business connections to Hawaii. Dr. Allen persuaded the Korean government to send Koreans to study abroad, to set up a diplomatic mission in Washington, D.C. and to allow poor peasants to earn money working overseas. Before long, many Korean diplomats, students and farmers were headed to the U.S. or its territory of Hawaii. Korean diplomats urged U.S. lawmakers to help Korea resist Japanese expansion into the peninsula, but without success. Koreans felt that U.S. reluctance to take a stand on this issue gave the Japanese greater confidence to pursue their ambitions in Korea.

By 1905, almost 7,000 Koreans had sailed to Hawaii to work on its sugar plantations. The Korean government had given Dr. Horace Allen the power to issue passports and handle other immigration issues but did not take steps to protect the rights of Koreans in the U.S. On Hawaiian sugar plantations, Koreans worked long hours for low pay, earning 67 cents for a 10-hour day. Most of the workers who went to Hawaii were men. Many were bachelors. They expected to work in Hawaii, save money and return home to marry and help their families. They soon realized that they would have to spend longer in the foreign land than planned. Those who wanted to marry turned to matchmakers at home to find brides. Men sent their photos to the matchmakers who arranged for the marriages. About 1,000 women went to Hawaii as "picture brides." The brides were often very young, much younger than their husbands. They were shocked when they reached Hawaii. Instead of the fine homes they had been promised by the matchmakers, they found dirty, crowded sleeping camps and long days of hard labor. As they raised their families in the new land, these women helped build Hawaii's Korean community. Enterprising wives encouraged their husbands to leave the plantations and set up small businesses in Honolulu.

On Hawaii's sugar plantations, immigrants from different lands lived in their own separate camps. Koreans did not speak Chinese or Japanese, the languages of other plantation workers. Nor did they yet know English, the language of the plantation owners. The practice of separate ethnic camps kept workers from organizing to demand better wages and working conditions. After Japan annexed Korea in 1910, immigration to Hawaii ended partly because Japan did not want workers to leave Korea.

In time, the Korean community in Hawaii became cohesive. Some Koreans had become Christians at home where American missionaries had been active since the late 1800's. Others converted to Christianity after they reached Hawaii, a move that helped them assimilate more easily than non-Christian immigrants from Asia. In Hawaii, Korean immigrants built schools and churches and became active supporters of the Korean independence movement.

By the early 1900's, some Koreans in Hawaii had begun looking to the U.S. mainland for work. Between 1904 and 1907, about 1,000 Koreans migrated to northern California. In the U.S., Koreans were barely recognized as a nationality. Few Americans knew that Korea existed and had no idea of the political turmoil taking place there. In addition, Korean immigrants did not see themselves as future Americans because they planned to return home in a few years. Some did, in fact, return to Korea, but many more remained in the U.S.

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Life for Koreans, as for other immigrants, was difficult. They faced discrimination, the language barrier and had to take low-paying jobs. Koreans generally settled in western states such as California, Washington, Montana, Utah and Colorado. They worked on railroads and in mines. Some found jobs in urban areas. Like Chinese and Japanese immigrants, Koreans faced racial discrimination and segregation. On both the local and national levels, laws restricted the rights of Asians in the U.S. In San Francisco, for example, children of Asian ancestry were not allowed to attend “white” public schools but were sent to segregated “Chinese” schools. In 1907, President Theodore Roosevelt gave in to anti-Asian pressure and issued an executive order prohibiting Japanese and Koreans from moving to the U.S. from Hawaii. In 1924, the Oriental Exclusion Act extended anti-Asian legislation by ending all Korean — and Japanese — immigration to the U.S. Thus, unlike immigrants from Europe, Koreans could not bring their families to join them in the U.S.

Despite these laws, Korean students were allowed to study in American universities. These students along with political exiles who found refuge in the U.S., supported independence and democracy for their homeland. Korean nationalists in the U.S. included Syngman Rhee, who received a Ph.D. at Princeton University. Rhee represented Korea at international conferences, where he spread the word about the plight of Korea. Dr. Rhee would eventually become the first president of South Korea.

Despite the efforts of Rhee and other Korean nationalists, Korea did not regain independence until Japan’s defeat in World War II. But then the peninsula was divided along the 38th parallel between the Soviet and U.S. occupying forces. That division grew into the ongoing split between communist North Korea and non-communist South Korea. In 1950, Korea became visible to many Americans for the first time when the Korean War broke out. More than 50,000 Americans died in that conflict. After the war, the U.S. spent \$3.5 billion to help South Korea rebuild and South Korea came to be seen as an important U.S. ally in the Cold War. Thousands of Korean children, orphaned by the war, were adopted by American families. Korean women who married American soldiers came to the U.S. after the war. These and other events helped to give Korean-Americans their own identity in the U.S. for the first time.

In 1965, the U.S. adopted a new immigration policy, ended its restrictive quota system and opened the door to immigrants from Asia, Latin America, Africa and the Caribbean. Immigration to the U.S. from Korea surged. In 1975, alone, over 32,000 Koreans entered the U.S. Unlike earlier immigrants who were laborers, many newcomers were well-educated professionals such as doctors and engineers. Korean immigrants mostly settled in urban areas; many set up small businesses. Korean women immigrated to the U.S. on their own and not just with their families as in the past. Today, about 1.6 million Koreans or people of Korean descent live in the U.S. and Canada. As a whole, Korean-Americans have achieved high levels of education. Korean immigrants, however, face the dilemma of all newcomers — how to preserve their unique cultural traditions while adapting to their new homeland. Like other immigrant groups, Koreans built close-knit communities and built their own churches, taught their American-born children the Korean language and observed traditional holidays and customs.

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Handout 5

Koreans in Japan

Korea has had a long and stormy relationship with its near neighbor, Japan. Because of their geographic closeness, the two nations have shared ideas and technology over the centuries. Relations with Japan soured in the late 1500's when the Japanese general and warlord, Hideyoshi, invaded Korea in a first step toward conquering China. From 1592 to 1598, Japanese forces devastated Korea. When they finally withdrew, the invaders seized whole villages of Korean potters and other skilled artisans. They took the captives home to improve the Japanese pottery industry. The captive Koreans were forced to live in isolated areas and forbidden to marry into Japanese families. In their new villages, Korean artisans created their own unique pottery and helped establish the ceramics industry for which Japan would become famous. Pottery with Japanese names such as Satsuma and Arita, prized by museums around the world today, originated with Korean potters taken to Japan in the late 16th century and their descendants.

Few Koreans lived in Japan before 1900, but as Japan expanded its influence in Korea during the age of imperialism, it began to take over farmland and evicted Korean tenant farmers from the land they worked. These landless farmers had to look elsewhere for a living. Some went to work in Japan. Immigration to Japan peaked during the early 1900's. By 1925, about 184,000 Koreans lived and worked there. Koreans migrated to urban industrial areas, taking low paying industrial jobs. Working conditions were difficult and often dangerous. Women worked in textile factories while men worked in mines or in construction, building tunnels, road and railroads. Because Korea lacked universities, young Korean men seeking higher education went to Japan to study. During the early 1920's, the climate in Japanese universities was relatively free and open. There, Korean exiles and nationalists learned about communism and organized protests against Japanese imperialism.

The story of Kim San helps to illustrate the making of a Korean nationalist. Kim was born to a poor farm family in northern Korea about the time Japan annexed Korea. As a boy, he saw villagers, including his mother, receive cruel beatings at the hands of the Japanese police. Like most peasant families during that difficult time, the Kims ate two meals a day. Instead of the usual hot tea, however, they drank only cold water. In school, Kim learned three languages – Korean, Japanese and Chinese. The Japanese encouraged villagers to report on one another, which turned neighbor against neighbor in order to win favor with the Japanese authorities. Young Kim and his friends were inspired by stories of Korean guerrilla fighters who ambushed Japanese soldiers along the Chinese border and vowed to join the resistance movement.

When Japan responded to the Korean independence movement with brutal repression, Kim decided to go abroad to study. Like many other Koreans, he went to Japan. At the time, many students in Japanese universities supported radical ideas. Korean students included the sons of wealthy Korean families as well as the sons of poor peasants. The latter group survived by taking part time jobs delivering milk or pulling rickshaws. To Kim San, Japanese students and intellectuals were different from the Japanese officials who were oppressing his people back home. Still he could see that Koreans in Japan suffered much discrimination. When Japan experienced an economic downturn, the government forced Korean farmers in Japan to donate their rice to Japanese families or sell it at low prices to Japanese distributors who then resold it at much higher prices. Japanese authorities began to persecute Koreans in the 1920's forcing many — including Kim San — to flee to China. There, Kim and other Koreans

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embraced communism. They joined forces with Chinese communists who were seeking to end western and Japanese imperialism and calling for the overthrow of the old feudal landholding system.

A new phase of Korean immigration to Japan took place during the 1930's and 1940's. As Japan prepared for war, it forced hundreds of thousands of Koreans to move to Japan. The Japanese drafted Koreans to supplement its wartime labor force. Between 200,000 and 300,000 Koreans were sent to work in mines and factories and on construction sites. After World War II began, the Japanese military demanded even more Korean laborers. Korean farmers were taken by force to Japan to work in factories producing military goods. During the war, about 692,000 Korean laborers were recruited to serve on the Japanese front lines. Conditions in the factories and on the front lines were terrible. Many Koreans were killed in action or in work-related accidents. Among railway workers there was a saying: "One wood rail, one sacrificed Korean." At the same time, thousands of Korean women were drafted or promised good jobs in Japan. Instead of getting jobs, they were sent to Japanese military outposts and forced to become prostitutes, or "comfort women" as the Japanese called them. Only recently have survivors come forward to tell horrifying stories of rape, abuse and humiliation at the hands of the Japanese.

After World War II, many Koreans who had been forced to work in Japan returned home. About 75 percent of Koreans in Japan left at that time. An estimated 350,000 or more Koreans had died in Japan during the war. Koreans who remained in Japan faced continued discrimination, but kept working as laborers and small business owners. A few accumulated enough wealth to open factories and stores. Despite discrimination, Koreans continued to migrate to Japan after World War II. Many went there illegally to escape the horrors of the Korean War. Some returned to South Korea, but others stayed on in Japan.

Today, Koreans in Japan face various difficulties. Some were born in Japan and have spent their entire lives there. Yet they experience discrimination. To avoid this, many have taken Japanese names, which they use in school and in business. Within their own homes, however, they may still use their Korean names. Obtaining citizenship in Japan is almost impossible for Koreans — or any foreigners. Thus Koreans, even those born in Japan, lack the right to citizenship. There are ethnic Korean schools in Japan, but Korean parents are reluctant to send their children to these schools, which might further marginalize and isolate them. Many Koreans in Japan are caught between two worlds and are not accepted in either. In Japan, they are seen as foreigners and face discrimination. Yet they are not completely accepted in the land of their ancestors because they have spent all their lives in Japan.