

KOREAN EDUCATION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

GRADE: 10

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SUBJECT: World History

TIME REQUIRED: One to two class periods

OBJECTIVES:

1. To understand the development of the education system in Korea.
2. To identify major turning points in the history of Korean education.
3. To identify the effects of increased education in Korean society over recent years.
4. To develop an understanding of Confucian ideals and how they influenced the educational system in Korea. To compare this to the influence of Christian ideals in Western Europe and the United States.
5. To understand the development of the Western educational system through study of Renaissance Europe and the present system in the United States.
6. To compare and contrast Korean and Western education models, past and present.

MATERIALS REQUIRED:

- Maps of Korea and Western Europe
- Handout 1: Confucius and Education (attached)
- Handout 2: Education in Renaissance Europe (attached)
- Handout 3: Education Systems in the Republic of Korea and the United States (attached)
- Handout 4: Photographs of Daeil Foreign Language High School, Haeinsa Temple and the *Tripitaka Koreana* (attached)

BACKGROUND:

Pre-Modern Education (300–1880 CE)

Beginning in the Three Kingdoms period, every Korean kingdom prepared upper class males for jobs in government. The first formal education system, the *taehak* system, began in the fourth century. In addition to schooling for nobles, there were some schools for the children of the common people, where young men learned to read the scriptures and practice martial arts.

By the end of the era of kingdoms most villages supported a public school for boys. The focus of education was to cultivate morals in the general public. These morals were based on the tenets of Confucianism and Buddhism.

Modern Education (1880–1945)

As Korea came into contact with Japan, China, Europe and the United States, Korea began to restructure its education system along Western lines. Many schools were formed across Korea by U.S. and European missionaries. These schools focused on educating a productive labor force and introducing new learning styles and new cultures.

In 1895, King Kojong created a national public school system featuring a modern curriculum of intellectual, moral and physical education. Elementary, normal and vocational schools, both public and private, were based on this curriculum.

When Korea was annexed by Japan, the education model changed again. Education became a tool the Japanese used to make Koreans more pliant and amendable to colonial rule. Japanese language and culture courses were made mandatory, and Korean students' opportunities for higher education were curtailed.

Contemporary Education (1945–present)

After Korea gained independence from Japan, revamping the educational system was a national priority. Education for the masses returned, and lessons were taught in Korean once again.

In 1945, the following educational policies were implemented:

1. Compilation and distribution of primary school textbooks
2. Training and re-education of teachers
3. Creation of a single-track system that entailed:
 - a. Six years of elementary school
 - b. Three years of middle school
 - c. Three years of high school
 - d. Four years of university
4. Compulsory education for all
5. Adult literacy initiatives
6. Expansion of educational opportunities for secondary and higher education
7. Creation of teachers' colleges (Bong, 2007)

The Korean War of the early 1950s made the post-war division of the Peninsula into North Korea and South Korea permanent. The following information, about Korean education since the end of the Korean War, refers to education in South Korea.

There has been an enormous increase in the number of students being educated across South Korea since 1945. From 1945 to 2005, the number of schools increased from 2,384 to 5,647. The total number of students educated has increased four-fold but the number of university students has increased from 7,819 to 3,580,301 (*Education in Korea*, p. 19). Educational attainment is high. As of 2002, 99% of middle school students go on to high school, and 83.9% go on to tertiary educational institutions including universities (Bong, 2007).

Since the advent of democracy in South Korea, in 1993, the country has increased funding for the education system and instituted education reforms that emphasize international competitiveness.

South Korea has a national curriculum which teachers are expected to follow. Textbooks are also adopted nationally and teachers must conduct the same curricular activities regardless whether they teach in urban Seoul or in a rural village. This strict control is more readily accepted in South Korea than it might be in the United States because of Koreans' greater ethnic homogeneity and reverence for Confucian ideals.

Competition for acceptance into top tier universities is fierce in South Korea. Almost all students attend supplemental after school tutoring sessions, which can mean that on an average day, students may study from 9:00 AM to 9:00 PM, with additional classes on Saturdays.

When I visited Daeil Foreign Language High School in Seoul, students reported going to school all day long, having a break for dinner at school, and then going to four-hour tutoring sessions. These students wanted to go to one of the top three universities in Seoul, and said that this intense studying was necessary to gain entrance. One wonders how beneficial these extra study hours are as the students also seemed to be constantly tired during regular class hours. The teachers I spoke to said it was not unusual for students to sleep during classes, preferring to be more alert during their tutoring sessions. Research from Dr. Bong corroborates this as well. In her lecture, she said students from well-to-do families were suffering from sleep deprivation and had no time to relax. Bong believes this level of educational intensity will damage the Korean education system in the long-term (Bong, 2007).

PROCEDURE:

1. Introduce the topic of education through discussion of the educational system in the U.S. Discuss the number of years students attend school, what type of schools are available and who has access to education. Additionally, ask students to think about how access to an education has changed in the U.S. over time. Ask students whether the U.S. education system provides equal access to all students and ask them to explain their answers.
2. Show a map of Korea to introduce its place in the world. Show another map, of Europe, pointing out cities and regions that were centers of the Renaissance.
3. Have students read Handouts 1 and 2.
4. Have students create a summary of education in the Confucian era in Korea and in Renaissance Europe. Then have them make a list of the similarities between the two systems.
5. Show the photographs of Daeil Foreign Language High School and the Haeinsa Temple. Look at the Web site about the *Tripitaka Koreana* listed below.
6. Discuss the education system in Korea today, using the background information provided above. Have students take notes.
7. Have students read Handout 3 for homework. More advanced students may also study the information on the Web site "Educational Systems in the Republic of Korea and the United States" listed below.
8. For homework, assign students the task of making a chart that shows the similarities and differences between the U.S. and Korean education systems.
9. Discuss the homework the next day.

EVALUATION:

Students will be assessed on their homework and on their participation in class.

ENRICHMENT:

1. Have students research the education system in Europe today and compare it to the U.S. and Korean systems.
2. Additionally, they can research the education system in the U.S. and how it has changed over time.
3. Point students to Web sites where they can find additional information about the Korean educational system.
4. Have students research the *Tripitaka Koreana* and the woodblock printing processes of Renaissance Europe.
5. Have students research the influence of Christianity on Western education systems.

RESOURCES:

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/confucius/#ConEdu>

The Walking Tour of the Seven Liberal Arts

<http://iconics.education.umn.edu/Wander/default.htm>

Handbook of the Renaissance

<http://www.renaissancehandbook.com/excerpt1.htm>

Ministry of Education & Human Resources Development, Republic of Korea. *Education in Korea 2007-2008*. Seoul: Ministry of Education & Human Resources Development, Republic of Korea, 2007, pp. 12-45.

Bong, Mimi, PhD. *Education in Korea*. Lecture: July 2, 2007, Korea University, Seoul, Republic of Korea.

Tripitaka Koreana

<http://www.lifeinkorea.com/travel/skyongsang/tripitaka.htm>

HANDOUT 1: CONFUCIUS AND EDUCATION

Confucius (551-479 BCE) was a Chinese philosopher, political figure, and educator. His teachings, preserved in the *Lunyu* (*Analects*), form the foundation of much of subsequent Chinese thought on ethics, government and society.

A hallmark of Confucius' thought is his emphasis on education and study. He disparaged those who have faith in natural understanding or intuition and argues that the only real understanding of a subject comes from long and careful study. Study, for Confucius, meant finding a good teacher and imitating his words and deeds. He considered a good teacher to be someone older, someone familiar with the ways of the past and the practices of the ancients (*Lunyu*, 7.22). While he sometimes warns against excessive reflection and meditation, Confucius' position charted a middle course between studying and reflecting on what one has learned. "He who learns but does not think is lost. He who thinks but does not learn is in great danger," he said (*Lunyu* 2.15).

Confucius himself is credited by tradition with having taught 3,000 students, though only 70 were said to have truly mastered his lessons. Confucius was willing to teach anyone, whatever their social standing, as long as they were eager and tireless. He taught his students morality, speech, government and fine arts. While he also taught the "Six Arts"—ritual, music, archery, chariot riding, calligraphy and computation—it is clear that he regarded morality the most important subject. Confucius' pedagogical methods are striking. He never discourses at length on a subject. Instead he poses questions, cites passages from the classics, or uses apt analogies, and waits for his students to arrive at the right answers. "I only instruct the eager and enlighten the fervent. If I hold up one corner and a student cannot come back to me with the other three, I do not go on with the lesson" he said (*Lunyu* 7.8).

Confucius' goal was to create gentlemen who carried themselves with grace, spoke correctly and demonstrated integrity in all things. His strong dislike of the sycophantic "petty men," whose clever talk and pretentious manner won them followers, is reflected in numerous *Lunyu* passages. Confucius believed he lived in an age in which values were out of joint. Actions and behavior no longer corresponded to the labels originally attached to them. "Rulers do not rule and subjects do not serve," he observed (*Lunyu* 12.11; cf. also 13.3). This meant that words and titles no longer meant what they once did. Moral education was important to Confucius because it was the means by which one might have rectified this situation and restored meaning to language and values to society. He believed that the most important lessons in moral education were to be found in the canonical *Book of Songs*, because many of its poems espouse virtue with eloquence. Thus Confucius places the text first in his curriculum and frequently quotes and explains its lines of verse.

Recent archaeological discoveries of previously lost ancient Chinese manuscripts reveal other aspects of Confucius's reverence for the *Book of Songs* and its importance in moral education. These manuscripts show that Confucius had found in the canonical text valuable lessons on how to cultivate moral qualities in oneself as well as how to comport oneself humanely and responsibly in public.

Source: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (SEP)
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/confucius/#ConEdu>

HANDOUT 2: EDUCATION IN RENAISSANCE EUROPE—THE SEVEN LIBERAL ARTS



Education in Europe during the Renaissance was not a universal right, it was a privilege. During the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance, most schools were located in monasteries. There, boys who could sing were taught to memorize hundreds of pieces for Church services by the time they were nine years-old. They were also taught the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic.

Since there were few textbooks, students were provided with slate boards. Most subjects were taught by rote and then memorized. After a few years boys could become apprentices to craftsmen, businessmen in the town or study further in order to become teachers or monks.

Daughters of the aristocracy were taught at home, often by the most highly regarded scholars. Merchants' daughters were sometimes sent to convents for their education. Girls from poor families were only taught to spin, sew, cook and manage a household.

For those who were fortunate enough to attend school, the schedule was demanding. Classes went all day from early morning to late evening. The great Dutch scholar Erasmus wrote:

“Unless I am there before roll is called I will get a hiding (beating). Not the slightest danger on that score. I was there at just half-past five.”

Physical punishment of poor work was expected, and meted out frequently.

Sources: <http://www.renaissancehandbook.com/excerpt1.htm>
<http://iconics.education.umn.edu/Wander/default.htm>



HANDOUT 3: EDUCATION SYSTEMS IN THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA AND THE UNITED STATES: THE ORGANIZATION OF SCHOOLS



The Korean school system has both Western and Eastern cultural influences (WENR, 2002). The Western influence was introduced through American and European missionaries that came to Korea in the nineteenth century. However, when Japan annexed Korea in 1910, Western influences were diminished and Japan imposed its own form of education, introducing vocational schools and outlawing the teaching of the Korean language (WENR, 2002). After the liberation from Japan and the Korean War, South Korea was heavily influenced by the United States. The modern Korean model is based on the American system, with the education system

centering on a framework of primary, middle and secondary schools. Control of the education system in South Korea falls to the Ministry of Education.

Each level of the Korean education system has specific goals. In primary grades (grades one through six), students are expected to acquire basic skills (KICE, 2006). Along with subjects such as social studies and mathematics, primary schools also conduct moral education and extracurricular activities. Formal education in foreign language begins in third grade, with the introduction of English. Primary school is free and compulsory in South Korea (Ministry of Education, 2006).

The goal of a middle school education (grades seven through nine) is to build upon the success of the elementary education (KICE, 2006). Concepts of secondary education are brought into the teaching of middle school, where students receive preparation for high school. Middle school is also free and compulsory. There are no entrance exams to get into middle school, and students are assigned to the middle school that is closest to their home (Ministry of Education, 2006).

High school education (grades 10 through 12) is aimed at helping students to acquire abilities that will assist them along their career paths and build upon their middle school education (KICE, 2006). High school is not officially compulsory. In addition, high schools charge tuition. High schools are divided into three categories: general high schools, vocational schools and others. General high schools provide a regular high school education and help prepare students for college. Vocational schools exist to prepare students not entering college for future careers by offering specialized courses in agriculture, industry, commerce, maritime sciences and home economics (Ministry of Education, 2006). The third category of high school encompasses institutions that specialize in teaching foreign languages, art and sciences to select groups of gifted students. Students from these special schools go on to college. In order to get into one of the special or vocational schools, students must apply for admission. In the course of their application, their grades from middle school are examined. In the past, students wishing to enter general high schools had to take a selection examination, but this is no longer the case. To make the school system more equitable, general high school entrance examinations were abolished and students were assigned randomly to general high schools near their homes.

In South Korea, students attend school for 220 days a year. There are two terms each year. The school year begins in March and runs until July, when there is a break of about a month. The term resumes in August and runs until the end of December. Students then receive a winter break in January and February.

The school system in the United States has both similarities to and differences from the Korean system. One difference is governance. The education system in the United States is administered by federal, state and local governments. School boards run the day-to-day business of public school districts, but must follow and implement the laws of their respective states. State departments of education are responsible for administering and overseeing local education systems in their state. The federal government also exercises control over state school systems through funding, and the U.S. Department of Education is responsible for overseeing education at the federal level. Due to perceived problems with the education system in the United States, the federal government has taken a more direct role in overseeing the education system in the United States. The No Child Left Behind Act, passed by Congress in 2001, attempts to make school districts more accountable to the public and the federal government by mandating increased testing and reporting. If school districts' test scores fail to improve every year, they can be put at risk for various sanctions, including the loss of federal funding. This initiative has increased the federal government's role over a system that has traditionally been the prerogative of individual states.

The United States has a primary school, middle school and secondary school framework. Public school is free from kindergarten through 12th grade. Students who do not attend a public school usually attend private schools. Unlike South Korea, American schools do not have a nationalized curriculum. However, the same basic classes are taught in almost every school in the country. During elementary school, classes are usually offered in mathematics, language arts (reading, grammar, writing and literature), penmanship, science, social studies (history, geography, citizenship and economics); and physical education (U.S. Department of State, 2006). Middle school and high schools build upon previous skills learned, teaching classes in mathematics, science, English, history and other core disciplines. In addition, secondary school students get to choose among various elective courses, including cooking and fine arts.

Unlike the Korean school system, that there are not three distinctive groups of high schools to attend in the United States. But, the quality of education is not equal throughout the country. Because public schools in the United States are funded by local property taxes rather than nationally, there is a disparity between schools in poor areas and those in rich ones. Students in richer communities usually have access to better education systems. Tracking is also used within many school districts, as higher achieving students are placed in higher level classes.

In the United States, the length of the school day varies by state, but the average length of the school year is 180 days. Traditionally, there is a summer break from June through August, although some schools have switched to a year round system.

HANDOUT 4: PHOTOGRAPHS

**Daeil Foreign Language High School,
Seoul, Korea
June 22, 2007**



F · O · Z

Foreign languages Only Zone

You are now in the Foreign languages Only Zone. As long as you are in this area, you should try to speak only in foreign languages. If you do so, your language skills will drastically improve and you'll become a student with a good command of foreign languages!

Practice makes perfect. Let's go for it!



Guest teacher at Daeil Foreign High School



**Haeinsa Temple and the
Tripitaka Koreana (woodblocks containing the entire teachings of Buddha)**



