

## History of Korea - Part Eighteen

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Well, I began this project in the spring and I've seemed to come to an end. This project, the writing and the posting on various Facebook sites as well as my email list, kept me quite busy. Busy is good and now I'll have to find another project. I'd like to thank everyone who took time to read all or part of this work. Some folks have commented that it was a little weird to publish what looks like a book on Facebook. I reminded him that in the 18th and 19th centuries many famous novels were published by Dickens and others serially in monthly magazines. I went this way because I had my target audience firmly in mind and thought this was a way to surely reach them. I will publish a book when circumstances permit.

Way back in part one I laid out my purpose for writing this history. I would like to know who the Korean people are, where they came from, and how and why they came.

Many Koreans today, whom I've spoken to, believe they are a people of destiny, a chosen people. Surely, the belief that 'all things Korean are best' is a common Korean point of view. I'm looking to

find out why. In conclusion I should think about and see if there are any answers. If you start writing about history and your conclusion is already in mind, it's not history it is propaganda. After some thought, here is what I've learned about the Korean people.

Korean people are people that came in waves out of Northeast Asia and as far away as Siberia. They became what we know as Korean after coalescing on the peninsula.

Koreans are a combative people and will fight for what they believe is theirs.

Koreans are a religious people and look for answers that lie beyond everyday reality.

Koreans have blended religions from beyond the peninsula with native beliefs and practices.

Koreans are primarily a tribal people and their strongest loyalty is with family, tribe, and clan.

Koreans have an affinity for positions of power. Royal succession was more often than not contentious and deadly. It's good to be king, it's inconvenient to have to share power.

Koreans tend to hold onto the highest ideals no matter how unattainable. This may be why many Koreans think that all things Korean are the best. I once had lunch with a Korean friend and at the end of the meal

she peeled a couple of Korean pears. She remarked on how delicious they were and didn't I agree they were much more delicious than western pears. She assured me that western farmers planted large orchards and harvested pears with machines. On the other hand the Korean farmer might plant two or three trees. He watches each pear as it grows and harvests it by hand. He invests his Joeng Soeng and it is evident in the quality and taste of the fruit. Joeng Seong is a Buddhist concept that includes effort and sincerity.

Koreans value sincerity and Jeong seong highly.

The Goguryeo spirit; I vividly recall seeing a tomb painting from that distant era that depicted horsemen on the hunt. They obviously were experts at riding and archery. The scene immediately reminded me of the North American plains Indians hunting buffalo on horseback. Both groups of hunters rode "hell-bent-for-leather," as the saying goes in the American west. The other term that comes to mind is "reckless abandon."

The expression reckless abandon is actually "play with reckless abandon." Of course it originates with football and means to disregard and abandon everything else, including life and limb, to make the yardage, the catch, or cross the goal line. It's a single-mindedness that is considered a virtue in not only sports but also reflects the Korean character.

These words that are difficult to translate into English are important, jeong, han and hwa.

Jeong is a word that might mean something like affection but in fact I've come to understand that it means much more. It may describe the state of a relationship that is unbreakable. Unbreakable because it is bound by common experiences of love, hate, familiarity and contempt. It could describe an old married couple that have lived together for a long time or a people that have lived together even longer.

Han is often translated as resentment but that doesn't cover it. I would say that Han is resentment over unfulfilled desire. Folks are filled with desires big and small, legitimate or not, and also reasonable or not. The bigger and more basic the desire is, if one is blocked from achieving it, then surely the resentment goes much deeper. Korean people think they have cornered the market on han.

Hwa means fury or anger. You may have heard of the kimchi temper and you may have been on the receiving end of it. Like the Irish, Koreans are quick to anger but also quick to calm down and reconcile.

Whatever is worth doing is worth doing today. 빨리 빨리 Hurry up, hurry up is absolutely Korean.

Several people also mentioned that Koreans have an uncanny ability to unite and make one mind and act as one when the chips are down. During the 1997-98 Asian financial crisis common people responded to the national financial emergency by digging deep and donating gold and other personal valuables to the national government.

Some cited the 2002 FIFA World Cup and the over-the-top support in the streets for the national team. Not long ago I heard a top-level North Korean diplomat who had defected to the South answer a question about what might happen if the Kim Jong-un regime was suddenly deposed. He replied that there might be chaos temporarily but as soon as a new leadership emerged the people would quickly unite around it. I'm not so sure I can believe that.

The spirit of Hwarangdo, or Flowering Knights of the Silla Kingdom. This highly patriotic, trained in both the military and cultural arts, connotes the highest ideals of selfless loyal youth. They may have been affiliated with a women's group with the same ideals known as Wonhwa.

From the same time period comes the term Hongik Ingan. It may mean a person who lives for the sake of others. The origin of this concept may be in the old text, the "Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms" (Samguk Yusa). I hope to do some more research to track down not only the origin but also its usage yesteryear and today.

Two things we ought to remember about these stubborn, proud Korean people. In many ways they are the product of a dangerous environment. From early times until today they have had to bend with the prevailing winds and at the same time stay true to their destiny. The other thing is they always fight among themselves.

The root lies somewhere in the long history of the Korean people. In many ways it may lie in an accident of geography. Who knows why, but the Korean people have lived on this peninsula, wedged between much larger and more aggressive nations, for thousands of years. Invaded, occupied and preyed upon countless times, they have survived with intense pride in being Korean. Pride in their unique language, culture and history is a thread that runs deep in Korean people no matter where they live, north, south, east, west, at home, or abroad. While nurturing this pride, survival demanded that Koreans often had to defer to the geopolitical realities that continually swept through East Asia and the world. This seems to have produced a deep inferiority complex running just as deep as Korean pride. Here lies the dilemma at the very heart of the Korean soul, an absolute belief in all things Korean and at the same time bowing to the powers that be, at least temporarily.

Based on this survey of the Korean people I might be so bold as to project a future we can look forward to.

The biggest issue confronting Korea today is the continued ideological division North and South. It's a thorny issue and its solution is not obvious.

In the 1960s Korea was known for its rapid industrialization and wealth building export economy. In the 1970s Korea became known for its rejection of dictatorship and democratization. In the 1990s through the 2000s they became known for Kpop, hallyu the Korean wave, and culture exports. The huge talent of young people is being funneled into creative endeavors like games, music, dance, movies, and world class literature. In 2024 the Nobel prize in literature went to South Korean writer Han Kang. Her body of work is uniquely Korean and avant-garde. From the encouragement of her prize I expect more world class Korean literature to emerge.

Korea's greatest genius may be its ability to synchronize religious traditions to create new religious expressions with the power to transform humanity. The huge problem right now is the issue of pekeuraum. Because it was so alien to Christianity and the general ethics of Korean society, anyone who received such a revelation and practiced it had to lie about it. The lie today is a bigger problem than the belief and practice itself. It's time to admit it did happen. At this point it is my opinion that it is no longer a matter of if it took place but instead why it took place.

It has been my pleasure to look into these things and present them to you as accurately as possible.

All the best to you

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