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Korea Today

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KOREA TODAY¹

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ANCIENT HISTORY

Near the end of the 2nd century BC the Korean peninsula fell to the Chinese Han dynasty. This led to succeeding warring states then in the 1st century, three kingdoms grew to control the land until unified by Silla in 676 AD. The Silla dynasty extended from 57 BC to 935 AD.



The Three Kingdoms of
ancient Korea



Dividing Korea into North
and South

Many dynasties followed later until Goryeo period (918-1392) when laws were codified and a civil service system was introduced. During this dynasty the Mongols invaded Korea in 1231 and influenced the country till 1259. King Sejong the Great (1397–1450)

¹ All pictures are from Internet. The author visited South Korea in April 2002 and was impressed by the new airport of Seoul, the town itself, its shopping centers, and the numerous construction works that were going on when he took the bus from Seoul to Onsan in the south [see *De Re Metallica. A Metallurgist on the Move*, volume 5 part ii, pp. 869-883, Métallurgie Extractive Québec, distributed by Laval University Bookstore, www.zone.ul.ca

then reigned from 1418 until his death, implemented numerous administrative, social, and economical reforms, and promulgated the Korean alphabet and Buddhism culture.

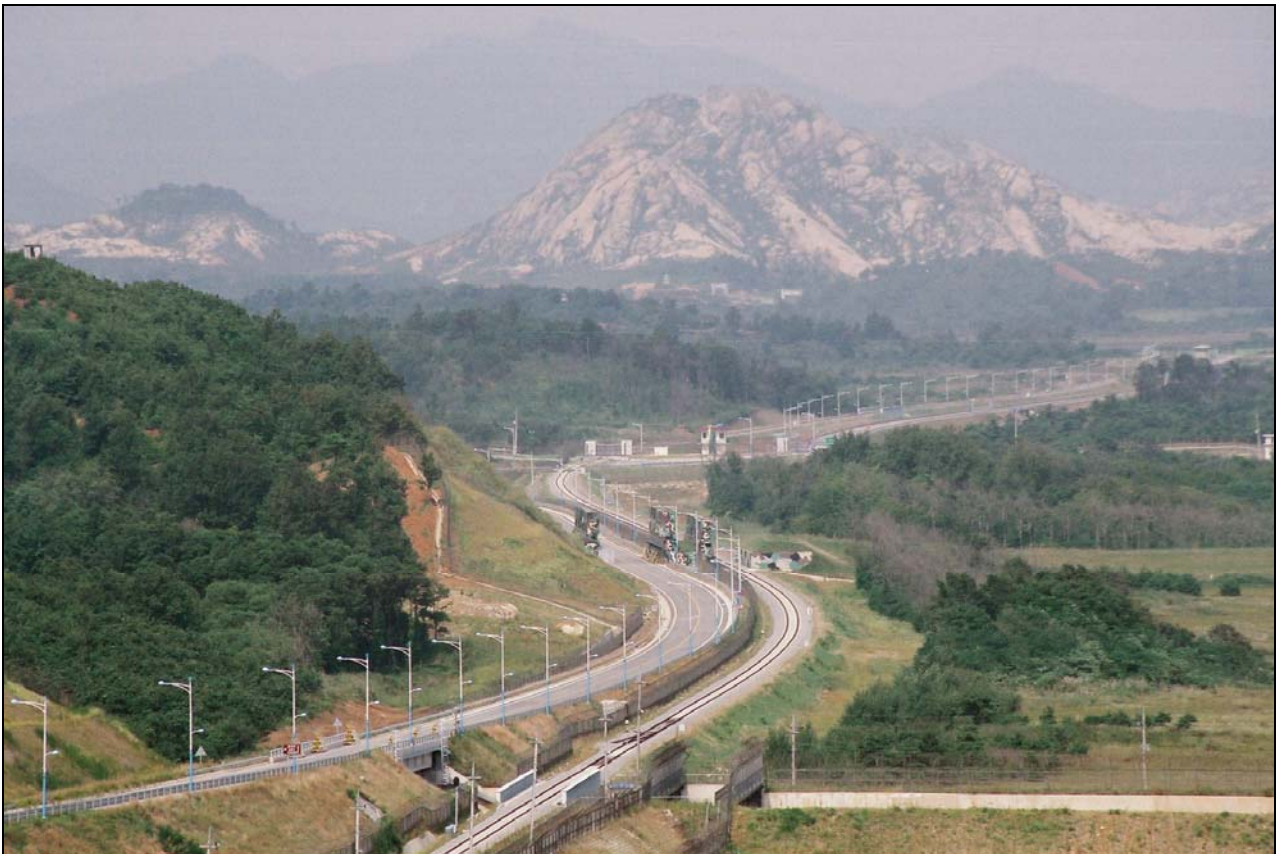
JAPANESE INVASION

From the late 16th century, Korea faced foreign invasions, internal power struggle and rebellions, and it declined rapidly. In 1910 it was annexed by Japan and all attempts were made to eradicate Korean culture, language, religion, etc. and make it part of Japan.

DIVISION

After World War II when Japan surrendered to US, Korea was divided into two occupation zones in 1945, with the United States administering the southern half of the peninsula and the Soviet Union taking over the area north of the 38th parallel. Apparently the division was along the ancient empires Koguryo north and the Silla - Paekji south. The politics of the Cold War resulted in the 1948 establishment of two separate nations with opposed political, economic, and social systems. This division was meant to be temporary. In 1950 the Korean War broke out when North Korea breached the 38th parallel line to invade the South, ending any hope of a peaceful reunification for the time being. A Demilitarized Zone in between.

Demilitarized Zone



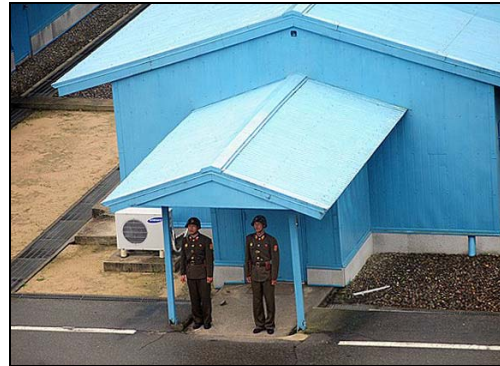


Demilitarized zone and the tunnels which the North Korean Army built to infiltrate South Korea in the 1970s

South Korean side

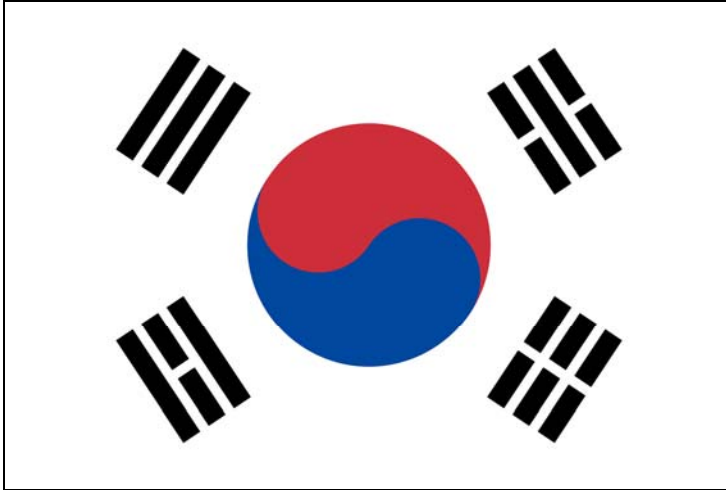


North Korean side



South Korea

South Korea is officially called the Republic of Korea. Beginning with Syngman Rhee (1875-1965) a series of autocratic governments took power with American support and influence. The country eventually transitioned to become a market-oriented democracy in 1987 largely due to popular demand for reform. Seoul is a mega city - - almost a quarter of South Koreans live in Seoul. As the headquarters for Samsung, LG, Hyundai, Kia, and SK, Seoul has become a major business center. It has huge shopping centers and excellent underground transportation system.



Flag of South Korea



Syngman Rhee (1875-1965)



© Dieter Leistner/Gestalten

View of Seoul



View of Seoul



View of Seoul



Seoul at night



Seoul at night





Selected stamps





North Korea

Due to Soviet Influence, North Korea officially called *Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea*, established a communist government with a hereditary succession of leadership, with ties to China and the Soviet Union. Kim Il-sung (1912-1994) became the supreme leader. He struggled against Japan in the 1930s. North Korea fought alongside the Chinese Communists in the Chinese Civil War. However, it soon asserted its independence from both the USSR and China. Though it rejected de-Stalinization, it avoided taking sides in the Sino-Soviet split. As the Communist bloc split, introduced market reforms, and collapsed, North Korea increasingly emphasized *Juche* in both theory and practice.



Kim Il-sung
(1912-1994)



Kim Jong-il
(1941-2011)



Kim Jong-un
(Born 1984)

Kim Il-sung developed Juche or "self-reliance" as the official state ideology and a variant of Marxism–Leninism to achieve true socialism. He argued that socialism in Eastern Europe failed because they imitated the Soviet experience. After his death, his son Kim Jong-il (1941-2011) took power. His son, Kim Jong-un (born 1984), is the current leader, taking power after his father's death. In a visit of CNN representative to the country in 2017 the guide assured him that when Kim Il-sung was born it was cold and the weather was not normal. But somehow on that day the strong wind stopped all of a sudden, the sun began shining through. Everything was bright and a quiet calm took over. The flowers bloomed and in the sky was a particularly bright star. The guide assured the reporter that it was not a legend but it was true.

After the Soviet Union's dissolution in 1991, the North Korean economy went into decline, and it is currently heavily reliant on international food aid and trade with China. The capital is Pyongyang. Pictures of military show are impressive.




Pyongyang



Pyongyang



The Bohemian Blog 



Pyongyang



Pyongyang



Juche Tower in Pyongyang



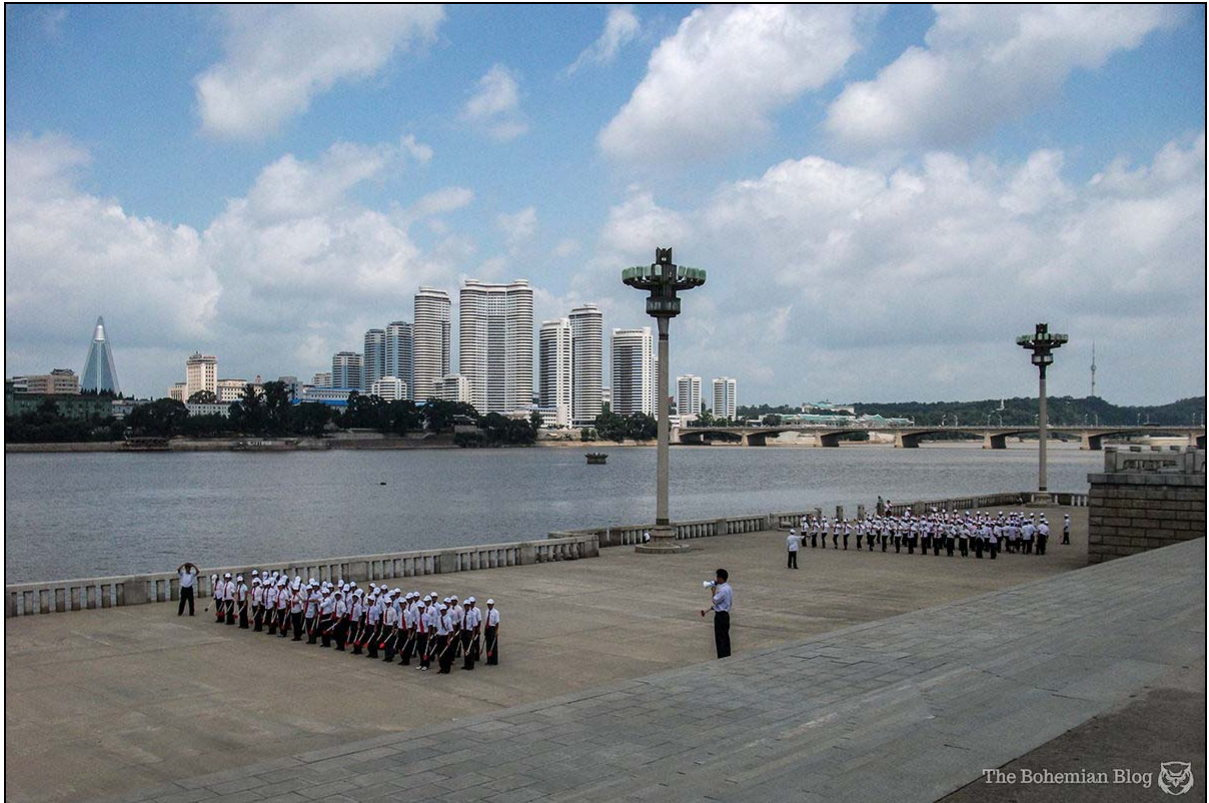
Details of top by day and by
night

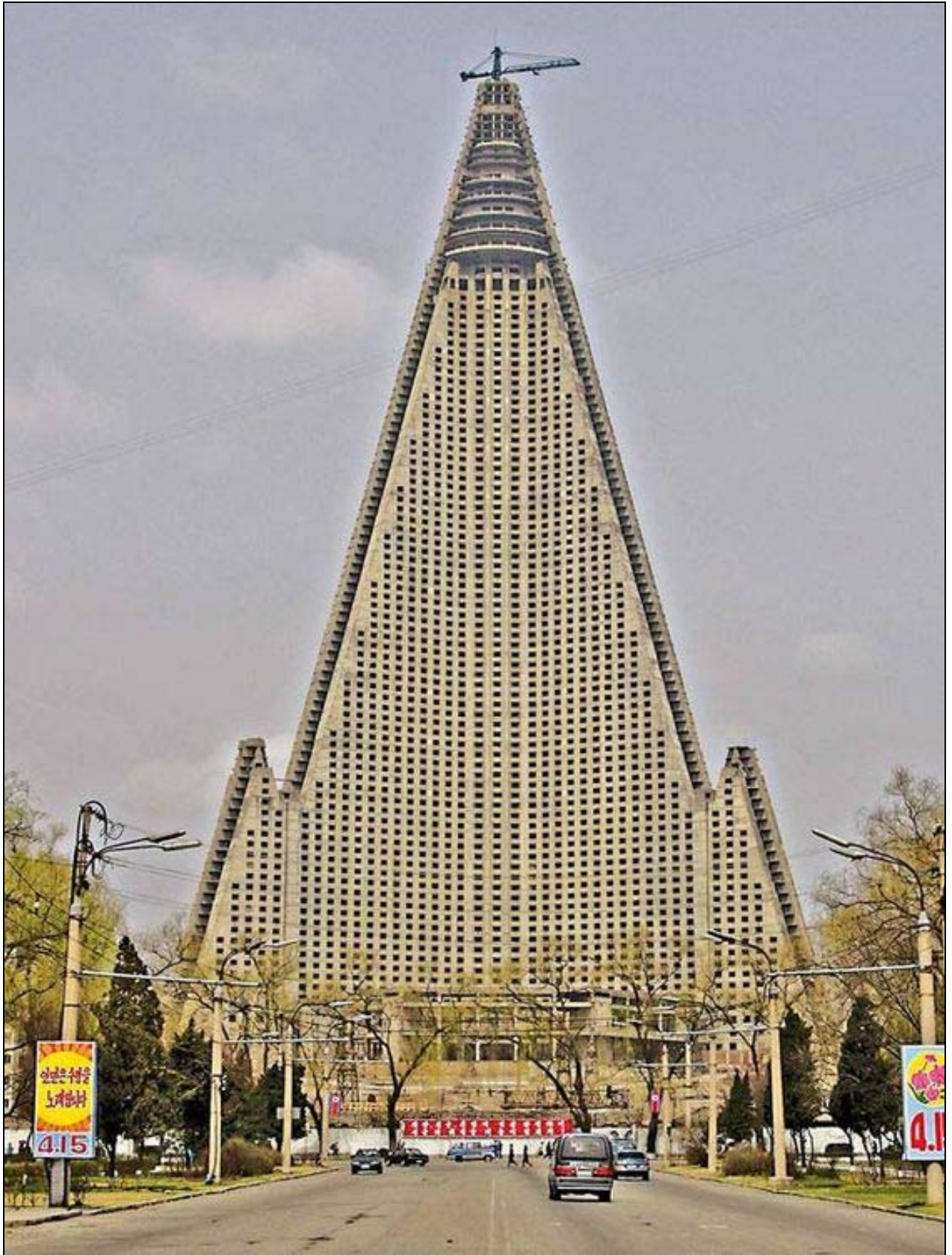


Pyongyang



Science Museum





Ryugyong Hotel in Pyongyang



Workers monument: hammer, sickle, and brush for calligraphy



Pyongyang



Kim Jong-il (1941-2011)



Military show



Military show



© AFP/Getty Images

Military show



© REUTERS

Military show



Military show







Military show





Military show







Dancing ceremony



Dancing ceremony









Military celebrating 70th anniversary of the ruling of Workers' Party







North Korean art



North Korean art



Veneration ceremony



Veneration ceremony



Veneration ceremony



Veneration ceremony







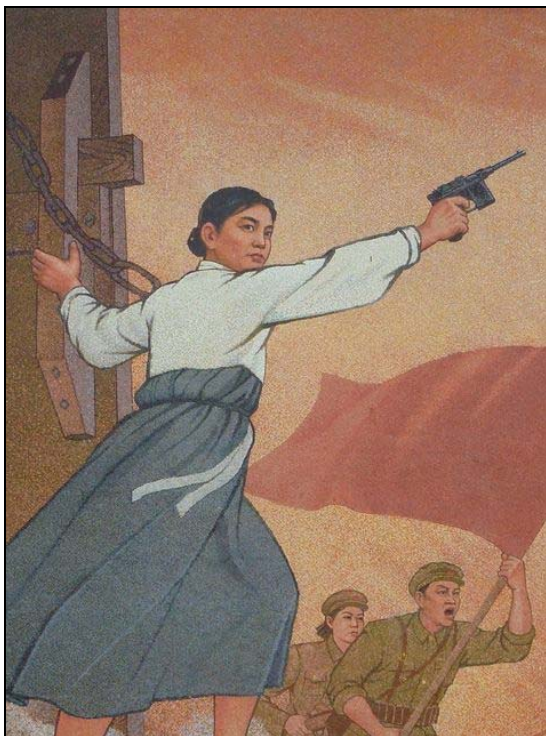
Women wave red flags cheering and dancing to patriotic music to encourage their fellow countrymen to start their day with more vigour.



No bicycle-riding in front of posters of leaders

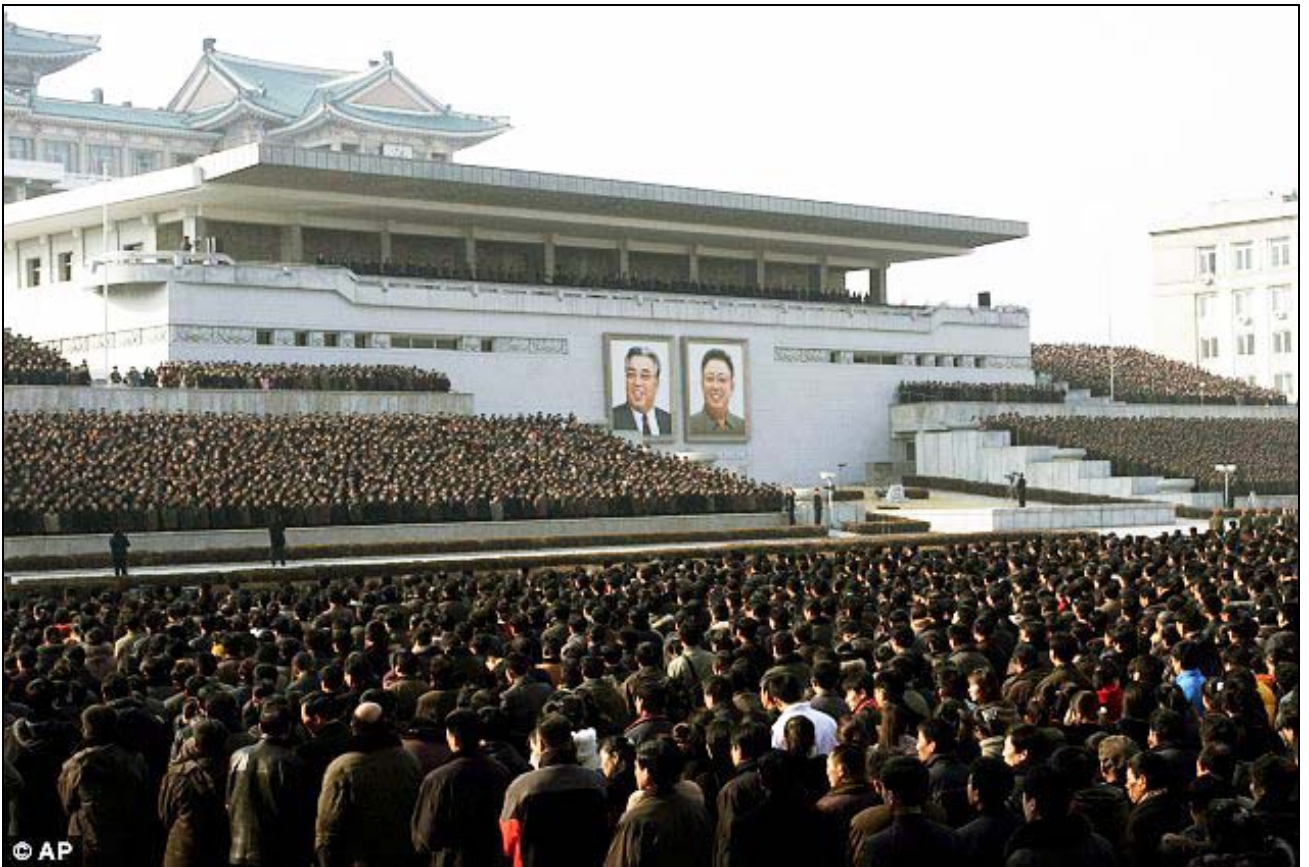


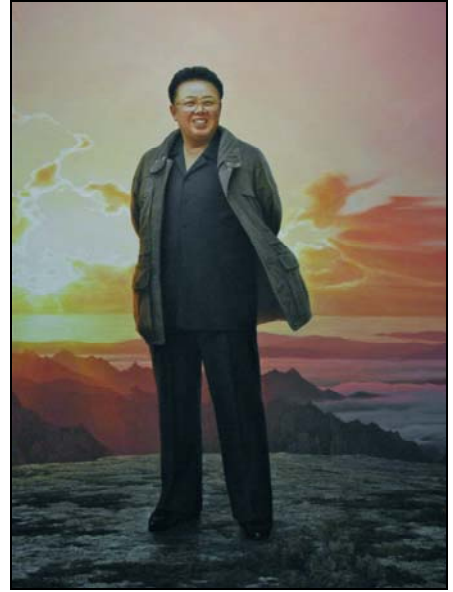




















North Korean art















Selected stamps





CONCLUSION

After World War II when Japan surrendered to US, Korea was divided into two occupation zones in 1945, with the United States administering the southern half of the peninsula and the Soviet Union taking over the area north of the 38th parallel. The politics of the Cold War resulted in the 1948 establishment of two separate nations with opposed political, economic, and social systems. In 1950 the Korean War broke out when North Korea breached the 38th parallel line to invade the South, ending any hope of a peaceful reunification for the time being.

REFERENCES

- [1] Thomas Harbour, *Visit to the Strange Land of North Korea*, YouTube 2017, 1½ hours
- [2] Korean International Travel Company, *North Korea Trip 2016*, YouTube 2016, 1½ hours
- [3] CNN Special Report Documentary, *Secret State: Inside North Korean* 2017, YouTube 2017, One hour