

Development of Democracy in South Korea Notes

Slide 1: What unique forces including Japanese colonization, World War II, a civil war, the Cold War, and military rule eventually led to the development of democratic institutions in South Korea, at the same time that North Korea evolved into a totalitarian communist state?

Slides 2-4: Ohio State Social Studies Standards that apply to the topic.

Slide 5: After the US opened Japan to western influence (Perry Expedition), the Japanese began to rapidly industrialize and participate in imperial competition. Through wars with China and Russia, the Japanese Empire greatly expanded its influence in East Asia. The Japanese first established a sphere of influence on the Korean Peninsula in 1876, by 1905 a protectorate had been proclaimed, and in 1910, Korea became a colony of the Japanese Empire.

Slide 6: Japan invested in Korean communications and transportation primarily to export rice to the home islands that were not self-sufficient in food production. Eventually, mining and other industries were developed, as Japan sought to control all aspects of Korean Society and integrate them into the Empire.

Slide 7: Japan used Korea as a staging ground to expand into China. First, in the neighboring mineral-rich region of Manchuria, and eventually by 1937, an invasion of China (the start of World War II). After attacks upon Hawaii and Singapore by the Japanese, the Allies (China, UK, and US) fought to liberate East Asia from fascism. The Cairo Declaration (1943) of Allied goals, included the eventual independence of the Korean Peninsula.

Slide 8: After promising to engage Japan for months, the USSR responded to the US Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima, by invading China and Korea. Pro-communist Chinese and Koreans were provided confiscated Japanese equipment and weapons. The US moved into southern Korea and after quickly consulting a National Geographic map, proposed a temporary dividing line at the 38th Parallel. United Nations-sponsored elections (boycotted in the Soviet zone) in 1948, led to the establishment of the Republic of Korea in the south. Shortly after, the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea (DPRK) was created in the North.

Slide 9: In 1949, Mao Zedong led the Chinese communists to victory over Chiang Kai-shek's nationalist government. Both China and the USSR supported North Korean communist leader Kim Il Sung in his 1950 invasion of the South. With the USSR boycotting the UN Security Council over the seating of the Chinese delegation, the US passed a resolution to create a UN military force under US command to defend South Korea. General MacArthur's brilliant Inchon Landing reversed North Korean gains, but when he approached the Yalu River (border with China), the Chinese entered the conflict. Eventually, a stalemate near the 38th parallel, led to a 1953 Armistice (which the South refused to sign).

Slide 10: With economic and military aid from both China and the Soviet Union, North Korea developed a totalitarian communist state. Copying techniques used by Stalin and Mao, Kim Il Sung created an all-encompassing Cult of Personality campaign with his birthday (April 15th) becoming a national holiday, known as “The Day of the Sun”. Combined with “Jushe” a nationalistic program of self-reliance, Kim used fears of US invasion to build a massive militaristic climate of self-sacrifice, while amassing a personal fortune. His son, Kim Jong Il and grandson Kim Jong Un have increased the central power of the state by expanding prison camps and developing nuclear weapons, while ignoring mass starvation and economic disaster within the nation.

Slide 11: Singman Rhee, a US educated academic and author, returned to South Korea and partially, because of his excellent English skills, partnered with US General John Hodge to establish defense and police forces in South Korea as World War II ended. Rhee was Republic of Korea (ROK) president from its founding in 1948 until his exile in 1960. He directed wide-scale murder and imprisonment of political opponents during the civil war and refused to sign armistice in 1953. By 1960, the public had tired of his corrupt military rule and developed a short-lived parliamentary government. Rhee fled to Hawaii. A military coup in 1961, resulted in a new military rule under Park Chung He. Park followed his Japanese military training in Manchukou (Japanese Manchuria) to organize the ROK and expanded trade relations with Japan. Over 300,000 ROK troops served under US command in Vietnam. Frequent firefights along the DMZ occurred from 1966 to 1969. In 1972, Park declared a State of Emergency and seized more military powers over the public. Park was assassinated in 1979, resulting in another military leader, Chun Doo-Hwan taking control of the ROK. Chun blamed the Korean CIA for societal turmoil and proclaimed marshal law. Known as the “Butcher of Gwangju” for his brutal suppression of student protests, Chun abolished all political parties and created a national unity party. After the first free election in South Korean history, Chun stepped down in 1988.

Slide 12: Although hand-picked by Chun as president, Roh Tae Woo did win the ROK’s first free election, when two pro-democracy candidates split the vote. By hosting the 1988 Summer Olympics, the ROK gained much international prestige. Democratic reforms and “Nordpolitik” with the DPRK led to reduced tensions on the DMZ. With the ending of the Cold War, both ROK and PDRK joined the United Nations in 1991. Kim Young-Sam allied with Chun and was elected president in 1993. The East Asian financial crisis of 1997, led to the collapse of Kia and eventually a \$58 Billion IMF bailout of the ROK. Both Chun and Roh were convicted of corruption and treason for their role in the 1979 coup. Kim Young-Sam later pardoned and freed them.

Slide 13: The first legal transfer of power between rival Korean political parties occurred in 1998, when Kim Dae-Jung was elected president. During Chun's rule, he had been given the death sentence, but Pope John Paul II's appeal had resulted in US exile. As president, Kim instituted the Sunshine Policy towards PDRK resulting in a 2000 summit with Kim Jong Il and the Nobel Peace Prize in the same year. With Japan, the ROK hosted the World Cup of Soccer in 2002. Elected in 2003, Roh Moon-Hyun, continued the Sunshine policy towards North Korea, but was impeached for illegal electioneering in 2004. The Constitutional Court overturned his impeachment. Relations with Japan and the US became strained and Roh left office under a cloud of suspicion. Facing corruption allegations in 2009, Roh jumped off a cliff, committing suicide.

Slide 14: Former CEO of Hyundai, Lee Myung-Bak was elected in 2008. He ended the Sunshine Policy with DPRK and signed a Free Trade Agreement with the US. Tax cuts for the wealthy and privatization of the national bank were cornerstones of his pro-business policies. Lee was succeeded by Park Geun-Hye, the daughter of former president (military dictator) Park Chung Hee. The first female president in East Asia, Park was impeached for influence peddling in 2016 and received a 24 year sentence (she is currently held in the Seoul Detention Center). A human rights attorney and former aide to Roh Moo-Hyun, Moon Jae-in became president in 2017. He negotiated the participation of North Korean athletes in the 2018 Winter Olympics opening ceremonies and two months later held a summit with Kim Jong Un.

Slide 15: Sources