



KOREAN HISTORICAL PERIODS	
PERIOD	DATES
OLD CHOSON (CAPITAL: PYONGYANG)	?2333BC – 1AD
THREE KINGDOMS (CAPITALS in NORTH and SOUTH)	1AD – 676AD
SILLA (CAPITAL: GYEONGJU)	676- 935
KORYO (CAPITAL: KAESONG)	918 - 1392
NEW CHOSON (CAPITAL: SEOUL)	1392 - 1905
JAPANESE OCCUPATION	1905 – 1945
TWO KOREAS (CAPITALS: SEOUL and PYONGYANG)	1945 -

	NORTH	SOUTH
Official Name	Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)	Republic of Korea (ROK)
Land Mass	55%	45%
Population	25M	50M
Government/ System	Communist THEOCRACY/ dictatorship	Capitalist democracy
GDP	40B	1.2T
GDP per capita	\$1000/yr	\$32,000/yr
Life Expectancy	70	82



THE KOREAS: A CAPSULE HISTORY TIMELINE

Prehistoric and Early History

- c. 40,000 BC: Evidence of stone age tool-making Homo sapiens on the Korean Peninsula
- c. 10,000 BC: Emergence of Neolithic agrarian cultures; pottery (*e.g.*, Jeulmun or "Comb-pattern" pottery) appears, indicating settled communities.
- c. 2300 BC: Mythical founding of Gojoseon (aka Old Joseon, Old Choson), Korea's first state, by the semi-divine Dangun (dated to the year 2333 BC in Korean tradition). Archaeological evidence suggests a Bronze Age tribal society had emerged around this time.
- c. 2,000 BC: Wet rice cultivation and advancing metallurgy develop

Ancient Kingdoms

108 BC: Han Dynasty China establishes footholds in northern Korea, marking early Chinese cultural influence and political incursions

100 BC - 300 AD: Rise of tribal confederacies:

Buyeo: Northern kingdom with cultural ties to Manchuria.

Goguryeo: Founded in 37 BC, grows into a powerful state in northern Korea- capital at Pyongyang

Okjeo and Dongye: Smaller eastern tribes, eventually absorbed by Goguryeo.

1st Century:AD Southern Peninsula sees the rise of loose tribal federations

313 AD: Goguryeo expels Chinese, asserting control over much of the northern peninsula.

Three Kingdoms Period

372 AD: Buddhism officially introduced to Goguryeo from China, spreading across the peninsula.

4th - 7th Century: Emergence and rivalry of The Three Kingdoms:

Goguryeo (37 BCE - 668 CE): Dominates the north, known for militarism and Buddhist culture.

Baekje (18 BCE - 660 CE): Southwestern kingdom, excels in maritime trade and extensive cultural exchange as well as military alliance with Japan.

Silla (57 BCE - 935 CE): Southeastern kingdom, initially weaker but rises through alliances, capital at Gyeongju

527: Silla adopts Buddhism, enhancing cultural and political cohesion.

660: Silla, allied with Tang Dynasty China, conquers Baekje.

668: Silla defeats Goguryeo, unifying the peninsula in the **Unified Silla Kingdom** - capital at Seoul

Unified Silla and Balhae

676: Unified Silla expels Tang forces, establishing independence and control over the southern two-thirds of the peninsula.

8th - 9th centuries: Unified Silla flourishes culturally and economically, with advances in the arts, astronomy, architecture (*e.g.*, Seokguram Grotto) and flourishing trade

935: Silla collapses due to internal strife and rebellions, succeeded by **Koryo** aka **Goryeo** - a northern-based dynasty with its capital in Pyongyang

Koryo Dynasty

918: Koryo unifies the peninsula under a centralized northern-based monarchy with its capital at Kaesong (this history is why the only city to change hands in the Korean War 1950-53 was Kaesong)

935: Koryo absorbs all remnants of Unified Silla, marking full unification.

11th Century: Koryo thrives as a Buddhist state, beginning the production of the famed *Tripitaka Koreana* (Buddhist scriptures carved on over 80,000 woodblocks)

1231-1270: Mongol invasions weaken Koryo, which becomes a vassal state to China's Mongol (Yuan) Dynasty under Emperor Kublai Khan.

1392 CE: General Ye Seong-gye overthrows the Mongol overlords with the help of Ming China, establishing the **Joseon** (aka **Choson**) Dynasty, a semi-autonomous tributary state of Ming China. Northerners to this day view Ye as a sellout to China, while Southerners view him as a national hero.

Joseon Dynasty

1392-1897: Joseon Dynasty rules Korea, emphasizing Neo-Confucianism over Buddhism.

1446: King Sejong the Great introduces Hangul, the Korean phonetic alphabet, revolutionizing literacy.

1592-1598: Japanese invasions led by Toyotomi Hideyoshi devastate Korea in the Imjin War but are ultimately unsuccessful as Admiral Yi Sun-sin's naval victories in his famed turtle ships repel the invaders. The Ming Chinese again provided support on land, further solidifying Chinese political and military influence. For this reason Admiral Yi (like General Ye above) is less revered in the north than the south where he is a great hero.

1636-1644: China's ruling Qing (Manchu) Dynasty forces Joseon to become an outright vassal state.

19th Century: Isolationist policies limit foreign influence and Korea becomes known as The Hermit Kingdom; internal corruption and peasant uprisings weaken the state

Japanese Colonial Period

1895: China relinquishes all claims to Korea - under coercion by Japan which has just defeated China in the First Sino-Japanese War and has eyes on Korea...

1897: King Gojong declares the Korean Empire, seeking modernization and exploiting its new-found independence from China. This dream will soon be crushed by an ascendant imperial Japan.

1905: Japan occupies Korea in the Russo-Japanese War; the occupation is brutal with total suppression of Korean culture

1910: Japan annexes Korea, beginning 35 years of oppressive colonial rule - strongly resented to this day

1919: March 1st Movement—nationwide protests against Japanese rule are brutally suppressed but galvanize Korean nationalism

1945: Japan surrenders; Korea is liberated but divided by the U.S. and Soviet Union at the 38th parallel

Division and the Korean War

1948: The Republic of Korea (South Korea) is established in August under dictator Syngman Rhee, backed by the U.S. The 'Democratic People's Republic of Korea' (North Korea) is founded in August under Stalin's appointed Dictator Kim Il-sung.

1950-1953: The Korean War - Conflict is inevitable with threats from both sides and erupts after North Korea invades South Korea; U.S.-led UN forces intervene for the South, while China supports the North. Ends in an armistice, solidifying the division at the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone) which persists to this day - leaving the two Koreas technically at war.

Post-War - Two Koreas

South Korea:

1961-1979: Military dictatorship of Park Chung-hee drives rapid industrialization

1980s: Transition to democracy with free elections. Spectacular economic growth - "Miracle on the Han River". South Korea emerges as an 'Asian Tiger' (along with Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan) global economic power, a world leader in technology (Samsung, LG, Hyundai). Kim Il Sung begins pursuit of nuclear capability.

1991: US President George H.W. Bush removes nuclear weapons from South Korea in an attempt to defuse inter-Korean tensions.

1994: Jimmy Carter visits Pyongyang and an 'Agreed Framework' for North Korean denuclearization is drawn up (and soon ignored).

1997-1998: Asian Financial Crisis hits - South Korea weathers it well and recovers swiftly. The *Hallyan*

'Korean Wave' of South Korean cultural exports including K-dramas, K-Pop, K-fashion) gains momentum in Japan and Taiwan, followed by the rest of Asia and eventually the world to create a \$100 billion dollar industry. President Kim Dae-Jung actively pursues a 'Sunshine Policy' of rapprochement with North Korea to defuse tensions and stave off North Korea's nuclear ambitions. It will prove an abject failure;

North Korea:

1948-1994: Kim Il-sung consolidates power, establishing a totalitarian personality cult regime with a Juche (self-reliance) ideology.

1985: North Korea signs the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Agreement.

1992: North and South Korea sign an agreement to 'not possess, use, or produce nuclear weapons'

1994: Kim Jong-il succeeds his father, facing famine ("Arduous March") in the 1990s. He actively deifies his father and solidifies dynastic **theocratic** rule in anticipation of his son's ascent.

1995: Kim Jong Il declares the *Son Gun* (Military First) policy

The 21st Century

2003: North Korea formally withdraws from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

2005: North Korea declares itself a nuclear power

2006: North Korea tests its first nuclear bomb.

2011: Kim Jong-un takes power, dramatically accelerating nuclear weapons development. The U.S. stubbornly and unrealistically pursues a policy of 'CVID' - Complete Verifiable Irreversible Denuclearization. Kim is determined and defiant. Rapprochement initiatives come and go with no effect.

2012: North Korea tests its first long-range missile, with capability to reach the US Territory of Guam.

2018: Widely acclaimed Inter-Korean summits between Kim Jong-un and South Korean President Moon Jae-in raise hopes for peace which are soon dashed; North Korea participates in the PyeongChang Winter Olympics. The same year, North Korea's very active long-range missile program achieves progressively longer range, from Alaska to California to covering the entire continental USA.

2019: After decades of antipathy and a period of bilateral bellicose bluster, U.S. President Trump tries a new approach: a 'bromance' with Kim Jong Un in hopes of rapprochement and systematic de-nuclearization. This well-intended approach fails miserably after several Trump-Kim summits. Kim accelerates his nuclear program, achieving long-range missile capability to and beyond all of the continental US and testing increasingly powerful nuclear bombs

2020-2021: North Korea seals borders due to COVID-19, worsening economic isolation.

2022: North Korea ramps up missile tests, prompting international sanctions and tension.

2023-2024: South Korea strengthens alliances with the U.S. and Japan; North Korea deepens ties with Russia and China amid global geopolitical shifts. North Korea provides arms and soldiers to Russia in the Ukraine conflict. Kim definitively rejects and abandons the long-espoused goal of reunification of the Korean Peninsula, in a major departure from his father and grandfather's vision. An already politically polarized South Korea is thrust into greater political turmoil when President Yoon Sook Yeol declares martial law in a power grab, is impeached, and placed under arrest.

2025: The Korean Peninsula remains divided, with inter-Korean relations tense. North Korea is a full-blown nuclear state and deterrence (as with Russia and China) remains the only viable US strategy. Japan's leaders look to continue aggressive defense spending tantamount to re-militarization and to strengthen US military ties in the face of the North Korean threat. Japan's new PM Ishida advocates for an 'Asian NATO' as a deterrent to North Korean (and Chinese) aggression, but the idea is met by resistance from its Asian neighbors and a lukewarm ('it's not the time now') response from the USA. President Yoon is freed from detention in early March. Stay tuned.