

**Prairie U-U Society, Jan. 16, 2000 ---- "Our Korean Friends"**

1. Recorded prelude, "Ode to Kangwon"
2. Welcome, Nancy Schraufnagel
3. Chalice Lighting — Warren, for peace and freedom in Korea
4. Hymn #370
5. Meditation
6. Joys and Sorrows
7. Children in Korea.....Warren (follows)
8. Hymn: "Arirang" .....Doleta will tell about this most famous Korean folk song
9. Program, "Our Korean Friends"

A. Why Korea? Over the years I have worked with many grad students in Sociology from Korea, many of whom I grew quite fond of. More than most other foreign students, the Koreans tend to write about their own country; it's often hard to get them even to take a comparative perspective. I finally got around to reading histories of the country. It's an important country, with 46,000,000 people in the South; it is the world's 14<sup>th</sup> largest economy, larger than Spain; it is a new democracy; and the rivalry between North and South that may lead to destructive warfare. It's an interesting country. It was perhaps the most Confucian East Asian country, it was ruled for centuries by a stable monarchy, and it's easier to see the impact of Confucianism and patrimonialism in a relatively small and homogeneous country like Korea than in such a big and complex society as China.

B. We were struck by the extent to which Korea is simultaneously both a very old and a very new society. Let me give you a little historical background to explain this.

Korea is about the same latitude as Wisconsin, but a bit warmer. At 38,000 sq. miles, it is a little more than half the size of Wisconsin. But today, with its 46,000,000 people, it is the world's 3<sup>rd</sup> most densely populated country, after Bangladesh and Taiwan, 1,221 people per sq. mile, more than the density of N.J. or R.I. ---- which isn't the whole story, since 70% of the country is mountainous and only 22% of the land is arable.

Korea is the 2<sup>nd</sup> oldest independent nation in the world, after China. States developed there by 200 A.D., influenced by Confucianism and with Buddhism as the state religion. Around 700 A.D. there was a single unified Korea under the Silla dynasty. This was succeeded by a 400 year long Koryo dynasty, which gave us the country's name. (They call their country Han-guk.) The Koryo dynasty was interrupted for a time in the 13<sup>th</sup> c. by Mongol conquest. Then it was followed in 1392 by the Choson dynasty, which ruled until 1910. They established this very Confucian rule and were hostile to Buddhism. Buddhism survived as a kind of minority religion; today about 20% of Koreans identify themselves as Buddhist, but the temples and relics are very conspicuous in the country. (Another 21% of Koreans are Christian, but a majority of the population are non-religious.)

Although the Korean language is quite different from Chinese, the Koreans used Chinese

Last October Doleta and I were in Korea, a country about half-way around the world; when the sun is going down there, it's coming up here. We saw lots of children in Korea. There were groups of school children on the streets, in the parks, and in the museums. The children usually wear school uniforms.

*Picture #1* shows children in a park on a mountain in the center of the capital city, Seoul. How old are they do you think?

*Picture #2* shows lots of children in a park looking at some musicians and dancers. Outside of a museum we saw some men and boys playing with a Korean top.

*Picture #3*  
Once you get it going, you can keep it going by whipping it with strings. We gave one to Ben Rodriguez, and he knows how to play with it.

All the children we saw seemed happy and friendly. This picture shows some greeting us at a fair in a seaside city:

*Picture #4*  
They don't look like Doleta or me, and they knew it; I looked so strange to them that some grownups stopped and stared at me, which is rather rude. The Korean language is very different from our own, but the Korean children start studying English in about 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. When we saw Korean children they would practice their English on us....saying....?..... "Hello," or "Hi". Not many Americans know Korean or study it. It has a different alphabet (hold up book); it's easy to learn the alphabet and to pronounce the words, but it's harder to learn what the words mean.

We went to a school in the countryside and talked to a 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> grade English class. They were just starting to learn the English language. Someone asked me to show American money. So first I showed a \$1 bill and then a \$5 bill,

*Picture #5,*  
and I asked them who was on the picture. Who is one the \$1 and the \$5? .....Guess which one they knew: It was Lincoln on the 5, no one said Washington for the one.

In the past many Koreans lived in houses where grandparents, parents, and grandchildren lived together. We visited a farm family like that.

*Picture #6*  
But today, most Koreans in the cities live in apartments where the family might have only one or two or three children and where the grandparents live by themselves. We stayed in the home of Daniel Kim, who is in the picture here playing his flute:

*Picture #7*  
Daniel was born in Madison. He lives in an apartment with his parents and sister. He would like to come back and visit Madison, and he probably will before too long.

ideograms as their written language. Under an enlightened emperor in 1446, they invented their own alphabetical written language, the Han'gul script. A great development, one celebrated by an annual holiday. (It's in October, when we were there, and the holiday wasn't conspicuous. The Koreans work all the time.) In 1592 Korea experienced a disastrous invasion by the Japanese under Hideyoshi, whose rule led to the Tokugawa leadership in Japan until the 1870s. Talking to Koreans, it seems like this happened only yesterday. The Japanese took many Korean scholars and artisans with them back to Japan, and they had a significant impact on Japanese culture.

The Choson dynasty had become old and rigid by the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was highly stratified and very rigid. Oriental religions were inimical to capitalism, and nowhere is this more clear than in Korea. In the official stratification scheme, merchants were placed below peasants, and not much above slaves. Even in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> c. influential ministers argued against having a money economy, preferring a system of tribute in kind and barter exchange. The Chinese, Russians, and Japanese competed to take over, and the Japanese won, with U.S. approval. Korea was annexed to Japan in 1910. Japanese rule was more or less authoritarian, but by the late 1930's Japanese was made the official language, and the use of the Korean language was suppressed, even for personal names.

The Japanese were driven out in 1945, but Korea was partitioned between a Russian influenced North and an American influenced South. Under American sponsorship, Syngman Rhee was president in the South from 1948 to 1960, while Kim Il-song ruled in the North under Soviet sponsorship. Governments in both North and South wanted to conquer the other and were restrained for a time by their sponsors. The Korean war, from 1950 to 1953, was incredibly destructive. Out of a population of 20,000,000 in the South at the time, about 1,000,000 were killed, and about 2,000,000 became refugees. The social structure of the country was disorganized, and the physical structure was very largely destroyed. And, because of American bombing, the North was much more badly destroyed.

So what the casual visitor to Korea sees today is a very new society. The buildings are new, the highways are new, the schools, universities, and businesses are new, almost everything developed since 1960. We think of Madison as new, but there must be a much higher fraction of buildings here that are more than 50 years old than in any Korean city. Doleta was most impressed by the residential structures: urban Korea is very much a high rise society.

*Show slide #1 J - Imagine Blue Mounds - standing on lookout tower (etc.)*

(I suppose the average urban Korean lives in a building about 5 stories high. There is no evidence whatever of our urban sprawl. I couldn't get a clear answer from my students about what this was so. It is a densely populated society, so it makes sense to build up. In the 1950s there was a land reform; the rural landlords invested in urban real estate, and with industrialization urban land values went up. In about 1969, the capital gains in real estate were more than the gross national product. Land rents are high, so people build up. But government policies are also involved; it's very difficult to get permission to build out, even if you're quite rich.)

[...Doleta?....]

In terms of newness, I was most impressed by a bookstore we visited in Seoul. It was about 3 or 4 times as big as the big Borders bookstore near my home. Almost all the books were in the Korean language, and almost every volume had to be set in type after 1950. Although their alphabet is 500 years old, it wasn't used much under the Choson dynasty, since Chinese still

had more prestige, and then the Japanese tried to suppress Korean.

Syngman Rhee was driven from power in 1960, with student rebellions largely responsible. But a coup by General Park Chung Hee led to his dictatorship from 1961 to 1979. This government stimulated the economic takeoff starting in the 1960s. There was much government involvement in the economy, and the large conglomerates, the Chaebol, with government help, dominated the economy and still do; the 5 biggest firms account for about a quarter or revenues in the country.

Park was assassinated in 1979 and then succeeded after a coup by General Chun Doo Hwan, perhaps with American help. In 1980 there was a rebellion and massacre in the Southwest city of Kwangju; thousands were killed by the military. It's a key date in modern Korean history. Many intellectuals were radicalized. Despite government repression, many became Marxists, in a society where it wasn't legal to have a copy of *Das Kapital* until late in the 1980s. It was a repressive regime; many of my students or their husbands were arrested. But the military regimes never succeeded in suppressing resistance.

But the economy thrived. Since Korea has few natural resources, they opted for export oriented industrialization. Since the 1960s Korea has had higher economic growth rates than any other country in the world, higher than Japan and more than twice as high as the U.S. The growth was facilitated by an efficient government bureaucracy, which may owe something to the Confucian tradition. Growth was also facilitated by investments in education, which may also owe something to Confucianism. A larger proportion of Koreans go on to college than young people in France, Germany, or England.

The students have been politically active, and we saw an interesting demonstration: *Slide #2 H & voices. Followed students to a palace gate. More around in bus loads. Finally got a student to tell us they* *Students oppose to the teachers were elementary ed. - students opposed to the teachers' use of hurriedly trained secondary school teachers to fill elementary schools.* *Watching accordion player in the park - heard drums* *democrats*  
This was in Seoul, home to more than one-quarter of the population of Korea. It's also the academic center, with more than a dozen big universities, a kind of combination of Cambridge Massachusetts, Madison, Ann Arbor, and Berkeley. It turns out that these particular students were in elementary education from several universities in the city; they were protesting a proposal to enable middle school teachers to teach in elementary schools without much additional training.

The military rulers were more concerned about the legitimacy of their rule than military rulers in most other parts of the world. (E.g., on a restored Buddhist temple, there was a maxim, in Chinese characters, written by one of the military dictators. My students didn't think this was especially noteworthy.) In 1987 General Chun started to turn power over to General Roh Tae Woo, and Roh was elected as president, with 40% of the vote. He was succeeded by Kim Young Sam in 1992, in a scheme to make a coalition like that ruling Japan for decades. In 1995 Generals Chun and Roh were put on trial and convicted over their actions in the Kwangju massacre. They got off easy, and General Roh now lives on the 15<sup>th</sup> story of an apartment in Taegu opposite that of one of my students Gyu-Won Kim.

In 1997 the Asian economic crisis hit Korea, and this helped lead to the election of Kim Dae Jung as president in 1997, which is where I'll stop. Kim had been imprisoned by the military and was largely self-taught in prison; he narrowly escaped being executed, and was saved with the help of U.S. leaders. Maybe it helped that he was Roman Catholic. Only about 5% of Koreans are Catholic, but they have been important in the democracy movements.

C. Let's talk next about the changing family.

The Confucian ideal stressed hierarchical relations: ruler over subject, husband over wife, father over son, and elder brother over younger siblings. Only the relationship of friends was among equals. The ideal was to have a household of parents, married children, and grandchildren. We visited one such household on a farm near Cheongju:

Slide #3 K

We had to persuade the young women, daughters and daughters in law, to pose. They had been out of sight, working in the kitchen. Take a look a grandma; I'll get back to her. They fed us some exotic mushrooms which they had collected that day.

Patriarchy is still very much in evidence in Korea. Men and women don't usually socialize together. They take separate vacations and separate hikes. In most of the dinners we attended, the women were at one end of the table the men at another. Doleta acted very inappropriately, in terms of Korean norms. Women are disadvantaged in the labor force. While most of our male PhDs in Sociology have become university professors, almost none of the women have, and some are rather bitter about it. *In Sook - lectured 7 hrs in one day*

Women are beginning to opt out of the old system. The picture of the farm family is atypical. Women don't want to be farm wives. We visited a rural school where a significant fraction of the children were from single parent families — the mothers had left for the city.

The mother-in-law problem is changing. In the past, women might accept the system because they could look forward to having their daughters-in-law as servants. Now daughters-in-law are less likely to play that role. The mothers-in-law feel betrayed, having invested in serving their own mothers-in-law and now getting no return. (E.g., Ok-jie Lee and In-sook Kum.)

But despite this, old women <sup>we saw</sup> in Korea seem so happy, sassy, and brassy. It's really visible.

Slides #4 F and #5 G

(And see the old peasant woman.)

Patriarchy doesn't necessarily benefit men. Korean men are under stress. One of my students is doing a survey of men in their 40s and 50s. He said they had the highest morality of any men in that age group of any country in the world. They work too hard, they smoke too much, and they drink too much. (.....ask Doleta....) When they retire, given gender segregation, they can't stay at home. There is a park in Seoul where many old men congregate.

Slide #6 I

But children are really treated well. As I said before, they seem happy and friendly, even if they work very hard in school.

Slide #7 B

(Although they value children, Koreans don't value too many of them. Fertility is relatively low, and has been for decades. Effective birth control contributed to Korea's economic growth.)

D. Now let me say a little bit more about the economy.

Today Korea is an industrial country. The percentage of the population in agriculture is only 17%, down from 62% in 1955. About a quarter of the population are in Seoul, many in manufacturing. Industrial workers have fairly strong unions.

But the fishing and forestry sector are still evident. One of the best parts of our trip was to the East Sea, which is what the Koreans naturally call the Sea of Japan, and we saw people cleaning squid caught the night before:

Slide #8 A [.....Ask Doleta.....]

*A typical breakfast is soup made of vegetables and freshly caught fish.*

*Young Hyung - good job with guest but her boss probably  
he work as his own. Ok Kyeu - might not have a job if  
her mother weren't a professor at the same uni.*

*I got so sick she threw up.  
Has 3 temp. jobs at different  
universities. Oh-jie - Headmaster  
gypsy - driving to Seoul unexpected.  
to find purpose because  
he was a*

*late night drinking has become  
part of the business culture. We  
saw a couple of well dressed young  
men passed out on the street  
and others quite tipsy.  
One of our hosts was a  
chain smoker.*



Our guide to this place was Oh Sangkeun, the husband of my student. He didn't know English, but we could communicate.

Slide #9 D

That's a massage....OK, but I was surprised. Here is another slide of Sangkeun and us eating silk worms (with either In-sook, my student, or Doleta); at first they tasted OK, but the aftertaste wasn't so good.

Slide #10 E

Sangkeun works as an organizer for Hanselim, an agricultural marketing cooperative. He has contacts all over the country. The larger movement is led by a Dr. Cho, a really charismatic leader; we visited with him at his chicken farm in the mountains near Cheongju and had dinner with him in Cheongju. The Catholics are linked with the movement. We visited an American Jesuit in his little house in the country. He was trying to organize farmers into cooperatives, and getting into organic agriculture. Father Daley has a Korean name and is one of very few foreigners permitted to become citizens of Korea. He has a brother who is a farmer in California. He joked that he told his brother that if he produced as much per acre as Korean farmers, his revenues would be more than \$2 billion per year; however, he would have to have a labor force of 200,000 workers. Korean farming is labor intensive; the average farm is less than 3 acres. We also met a Korean Catholic woman who was a leader in the movement. They took us to an impromptu chicken-mushroom dinner, where we had a great time. held because the price of mushrooms had gone down.

Slide #11 L

We had read that Koreans like to sing at little parties. I started off with "Solidarity Forever;" none of them knew what the words meant, but they got the spirit. Then Doleta sang the riddle song, and then they got going.

(Notice the bottles, and the few women. Most of the women were in the kitchen. Notice that there isn't smoking. That was because the father of one of the young farmers was there....upper left, out of sight....and it wasn't proper to smoke in front one one's father. So the young men went out to the kitchen and smoked.)

E. Clearly Korean culture survives, and it is remarkable given the history of conquest and destruction. There is a kind of official high culture, shown in museums and concert halls. This can be very good. The official culture is also represented in the reconstructions of old Buddhist temples, some of the great art of the world, and in the restoration of the old palaces.

Slides #12 C and 13 M

The slides we ordered of crowd scenes didn't come back. Korea really is crowded, but the last slide shows that this isn't always the case. The locale of this temple is about where the Japanese had their headquarters from which they ruled Korea; the Koreans tore it down as soon as they could get around to it.

We saw some drama, and by chance encountered a folk art form called Pansori, where a performer accompanied by a drummer sings and ridicules officialdom. We heard one such in a concert, and another in the part in Seoul where we photographed the old men. Although we couldn't understand the language it was hilarious.

But, although this stuff hangs on, most of the young people seem to be involved in the international kind of mass culture, rock, rap, and so forth. But then, how many of our young people know the old folk songs, even "I've been Working on the Railroad....."

Doleta: Sangkeun got styled hair. We gave him plenty of practice.

Sangkeun Oh, Dr. Cho and Father Daley have all been in prison at close to it. Their fresh-picked mountain game dinner

8. Questions and discussion
9. Offering
10. Introduction of guests and visitors
11. Announcements
12. Closing Hymn: #184 in Hymnal