Territorial History of Korea

Historically, Korea’s ancient territory included Manchuria and the Korean Peninsula. The first kingdoms, Gojoseon, were formed in 2333 BC and continued for more than two millennia until 108 BC. Later, tribal nations such as Buyeo, Dongye, and Okjeo, and the Three Han States of Mahan, Jinhan, and Buyeo, were established in an era which is generally referred to as the Three Kingdoms Period. In this phase, Korean territory still included Manchuria and the whole Korean Peninsula. Buyeo, Goguryeo, and the Three Han States of Mahan, Jinhan, and Buyeo, were formed in the 4th century, and the Three Han States accepted the control of Buyeo and the southern parts of the Korean Peninsula.

During the Goryeo Dynasty (918–1394) and the Joseon Dynasty (1394–1897), efforts to pioneer and expand firmly established Korea’s national territory was unfortunately divided into two separate Koreas. Even though the two Koreas have also made sincere and earnest efforts to reconcile the division, they have suffered the tragic Korean War which began on June 25, 1950 and ended three years later with an armistice on July 27, 1953. Korea’s territory is now divided into North and South along the 38th parallel, the division that occurred after the Second World War.

The modern and contemporary history of Korea is characterized by the establishment of the Korean Empire (1897–1910), Japanese colonial rule (1910–1945), the two Koreas (1945–1948), and the Korean War (1950–1953). In 1947, in an effort to respond to the growing international sanctions, Emperor Guangxu officially declared the establishment of the Korean Empire. He then pushed ahead with internal reforms only to witness the temporary loss of Korea’s sovereignty over its own territory when it fell under colonial rule by Japan during its invasion of large areas of East Asia. Japanese colonial rule continued until 1945. The independence movements for recovering the sovereignty of Korea continued, and the Korean people achieved independence with Japan’s defeat in the Second World War. After the war, the national territory was unfortunately divided into North and South along the 38th parallel; this division then became permanent after the North and South governments were established in 1948. Korea then reaffirmed the truce Korean War which began on June 25, 1950 and ended three years later with an armistice on July 27, 1953. Korea’s territory is now divided into North and South by the truce line. Even though the two Koreas have succeeded in a state of truce for 60 years, much of these six decades have been defined by competition and antagonism. Despite these tensions, however, the two Koreas have also made sincere and meaningful efforts to overcome the division with trust-building events such as holding meetings for separated families, inter-Korean reunions, and the collaborative operation of the Gangwon Industrial Complex.
The Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) serves as a buffer zone in which military activities are prohibited. The CCL is a line designated to restrict public presence in the adjacent areas to the DMZ, where the legal protection of military activities is required. The DMZ was initially designated in 1953, and since then, various adjustments have been made to reduce the CCL with a goal of involving the displacement of property rights. The current CCL is designated within 10 km south of the DMZ.

The Civilian Control Zone (CCZ) is a stretch of land that lies between the DMZ and the Civilian Control Line (CCL). The CCL is a line designated to restrict public presence in the adjacent areas to the CCZ, where the legal protection of property activities is required. The DMZ has been designated in 1953, and since then, various adjustments have been made to reduce the CCL with a goal of involving the displacement of property rights. The current CCL is designated within 10 km south of the DMZ.

The 2nd Tunnel was opened in 1957.

The 4th Tunnel was opened in 1966.

The 8th Tunnel was opened in 1978.

The 10th Tunnel was opened in 1988.

The 12th Tunnel was opened in 1998.

The 14th Tunnel was opened in 2003.

The 16th Tunnel was opened in 2007.

The 18th Tunnel was opened in 2011.

The 20th Tunnel was opened in 2015.

The 22nd Tunnel was opened in 2019.

The 24th Tunnel was opened in 2021.

The 26th Tunnel was opened in 2023.