

# KOREA IN CONTEXT



A map of the East Asia region, showing North and South Korea and neighboring countries



Statue of King Sejong at Gwanghwamun Plaza in Seoul, the capital of South Korea.

## Korea: From Ancient Civilization to High-tech Cultural Hub

Korea sits at the edge of the earth's largest continent, facing the earth's largest ocean, where Asia meets the Pacific. Due to its special location, Korea acts as a gateway to East Asia, well-connected to other countries in the region and across the globe. Ships and planes easily transport people and materials between Korea and trading partners worldwide.

Korea is on a peninsula—an extension of land bordered on most sides by water. Koreans living on the east coast can watch the morning sun rise over the East Sea. In the evening, those on the west coast see the sun set over the Yellow Sea. A narrow body of water, the Korea Strait, separates the southern part of the peninsula from the island nation of Japan. To the north, the peninsula connects Korea with two countries: China and Russia. The territory of Korea, including the several islands that surround it, extends from about 33 to 43 degrees north latitude, placing it in the temperate mid-latitude zone. This location

gives Korea a moderate climate with warm, rainy summers and cold winters.

For thousands of years Korea has been unified by a distinct language and identity. A long tradition of scholarly and artistic pursuits are reflected in the architecture, literature, and culture of the country. Unfortunately, after the Korean War in the 1950s, Korea was split into two countries: North and South Korea. In the decades since the war the economy and quality of life in South Korea have improved greatly. South Korea has emerged as an economic powerhouse, exporting high-tech items such as smart phones and automobiles and sharing its unique food, music, and culture with the rest of the world. As it draws on its deep roots and its rich history, South Korea continues to apply its recent prosperity in a responsible way, engaging in beneficial exchanges with other countries, contributing new ideas and forging new partnerships as a critical member of the global community.



Rice farming



Traditional food



Condominiums in Seoul

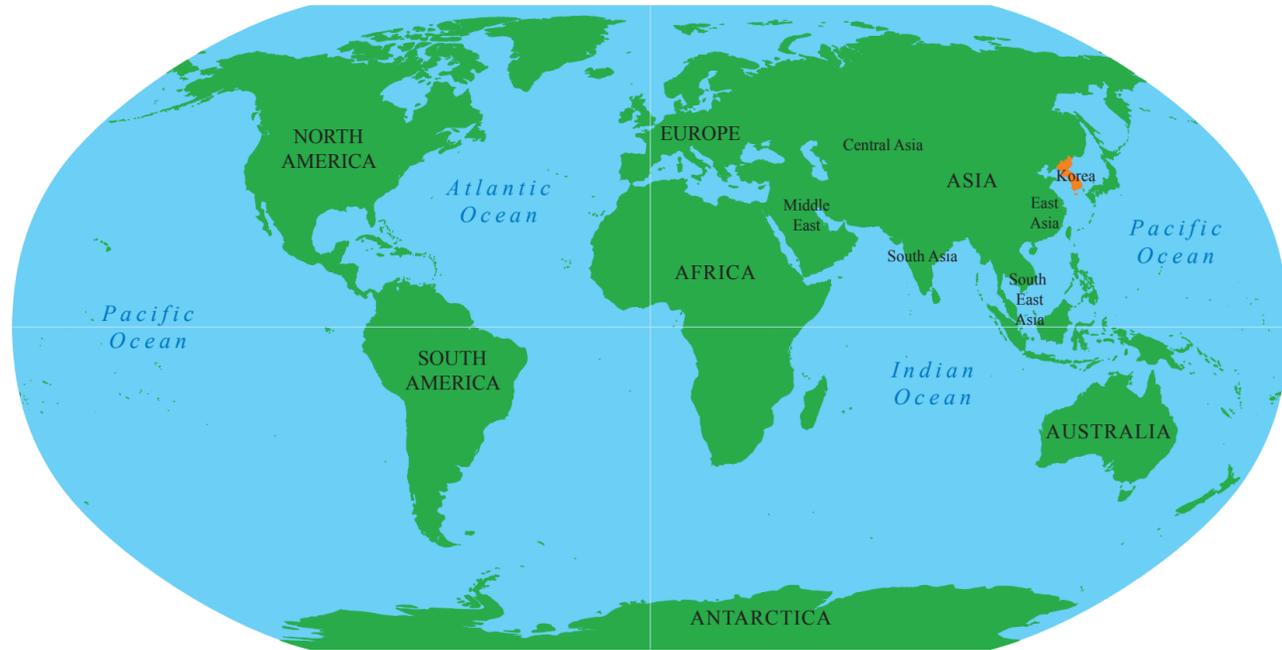


Korean culture, including music, film, and cuisine, has become popular around the world.



# Where is Korea?

## Map Projections and Global Connections



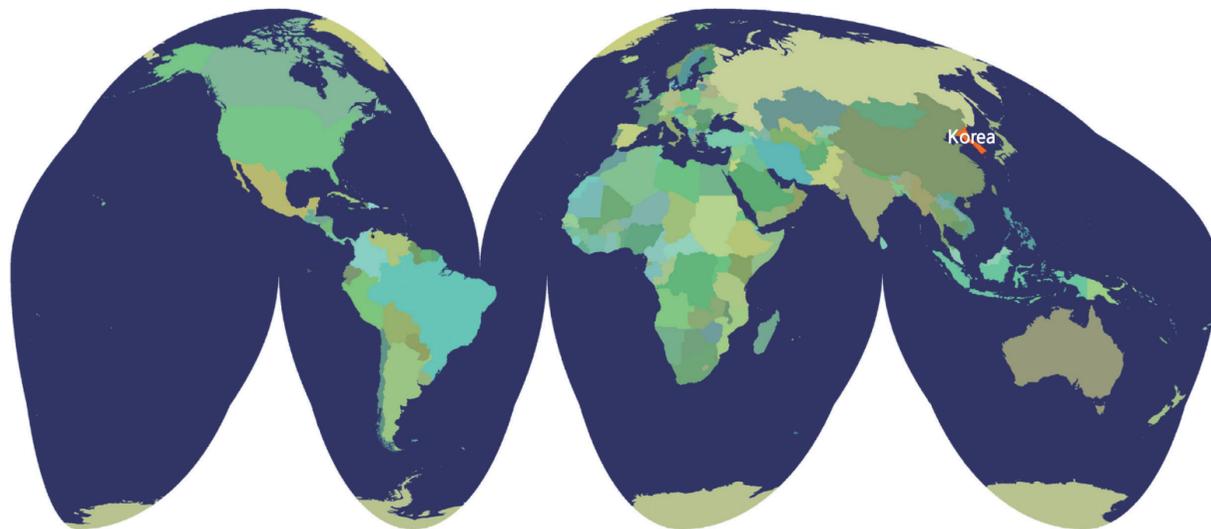
Robinson projection centered on the prime meridian

Maps can be used to tell a story about a place. Just as there are different ways to tell a story with words, there are different ways to tell a story with maps. The maps on this page all tell different stories about where Korea (shown in red) is located on the globe. The way geographic features are shaped and arranged on a map are called a map projection. The map above uses what's called the Robinson projection, which is commonly used to show all of the continents.

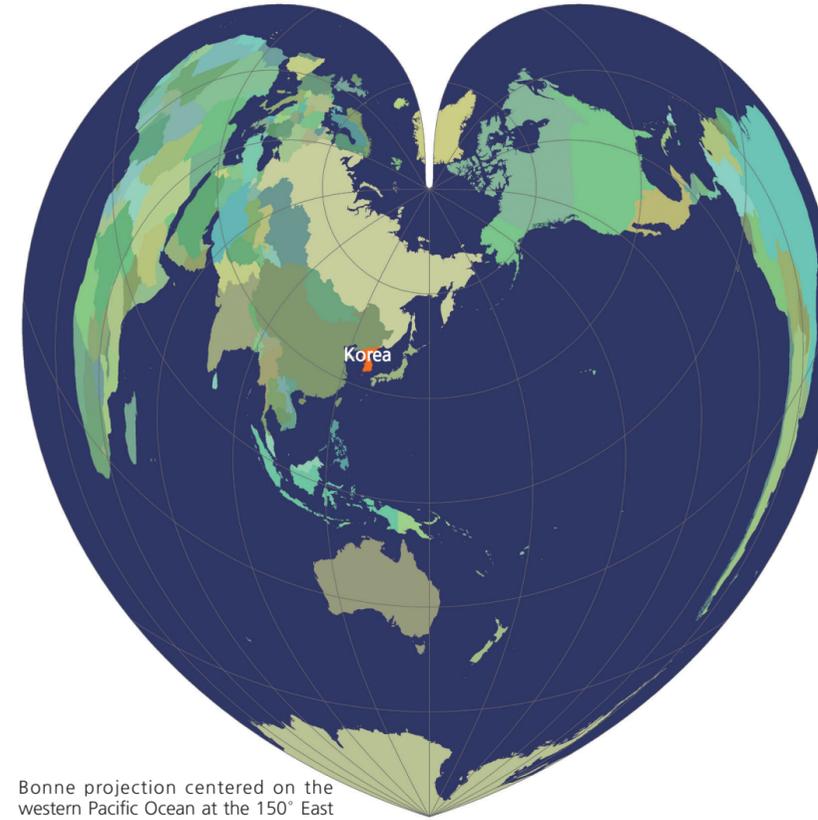
Of course the real Earth is sphere-shaped, like a ball, so when a cartographer (map maker) draws continents on a flat page their shapes are slightly distorted. The Goode projection shown below is

one way to reduce the distortion of the area of continents. It looks like an orange peel, so it's a good reminder that the map represents the surface of a sphere. You can almost imagine putting the peel back into a sphere shape, attaching the edges of the Pacific.

Both of these maps put the prime meridian, running through Europe and west Africa, at the center of the map. These projections make it look like Europe and West Africa are at the center of the world and that Korea off to the side, far from the Americas. A person reading these maps might picture Korea being away from the center of activity or remote.



Goode's Interrupted Homolosine projection



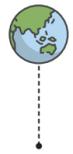
Bonne projection centered on the western Pacific Ocean at the 150° East meridian

The heart-shaped projection above, on the other hand, emphasizes the Pacific Rim, the edge of the Pacific Ocean that borders the Americas, Asia, Australia, and the islands of Oceania. Since Korea lies on the Pacific Rim, this map arrangement shows Korea in a more central position and makes it easy to see how ships can go from Korea directly to ports across the Pacific. It also shows how close Korea is to other places in Asia.

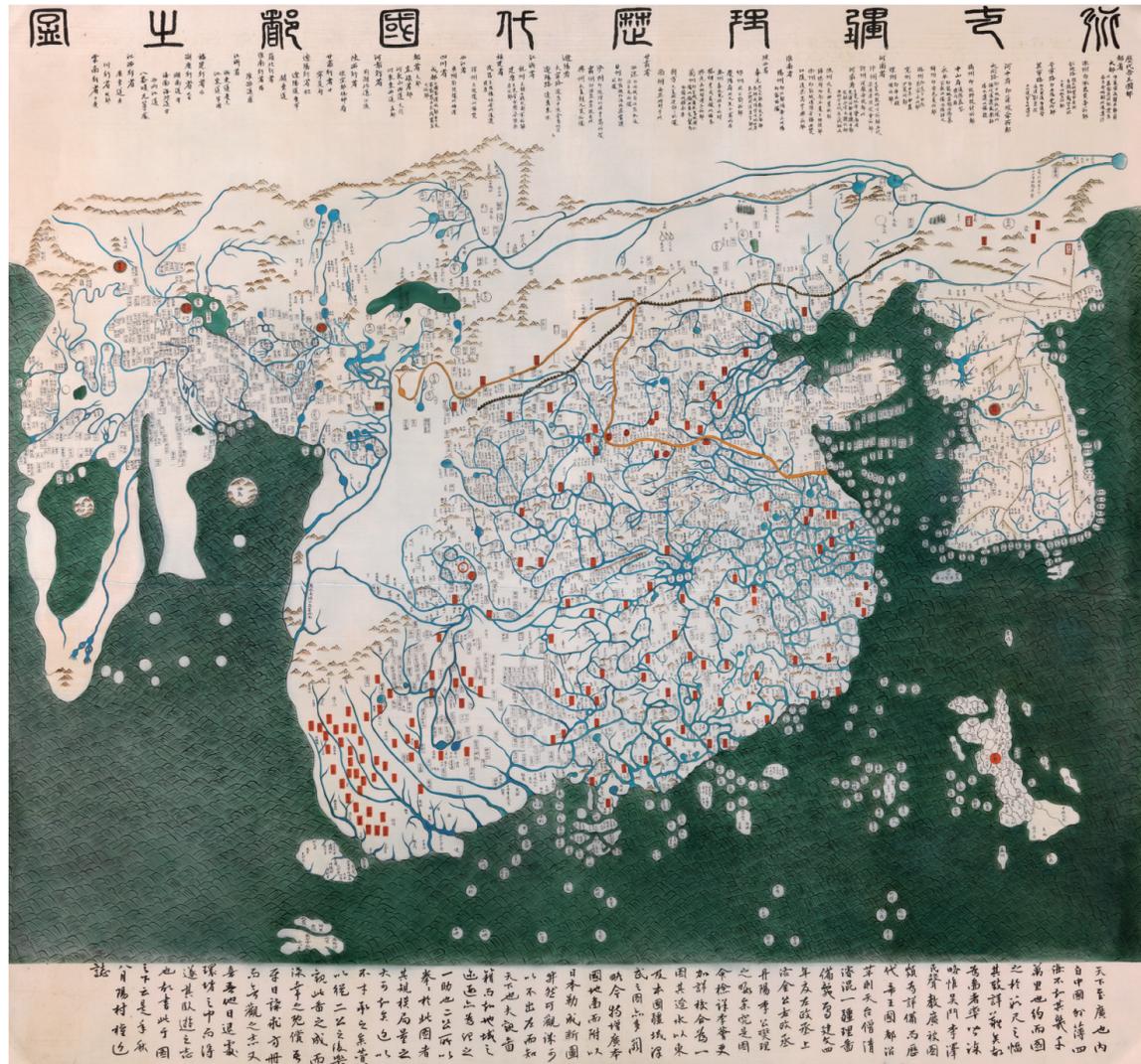


Azimuthal Equidistant projection centered on Seoul, South Korea

The azimuthal equidistant projection, shown to the left, places Seoul, the capital of South Korea, at the center of the map. This projection distorts the shapes and areas of continents. For example, South America is stretched out in a big arc across the top and right of the map. But the projection is good for showing the correct direction (azimuth) and distance from the center point to other places on the map. For example, the shortest route for a plane going from Seoul to New York, 11,000 km away, is to fly over the Arctic Ocean.



# Ancient Civilizations of Korea



Map of an Integrated Territory of Historic Countries and Their Capitals, Kwon Keun and Lee Hoe, 1402

## A long history preserved in maps and monuments

For thousands of years, Korean culture has placed great emphasis on learning and scholarship. Korea has an especially long and distinguished tradition in cartography—the art and science of making maps.

The map above was drawn by Korean cartographers in 1402 and indicates the advanced knowledge of Korea at an early age. The Korean peninsula is depicted in great detail on the right of the map. China and India are shown as a large, combined land mass at center. Japan is the island at the lower right. Though greatly distorted, Europe and Africa are drawn at far left. In general, lands farther from Korea are more distorted and less accurate, with fewer details represented. This map was one of the best of its time and indicates the global outlook and cultural exchanges of the Joseon Dynasty

(1392–1910) of Korean history.

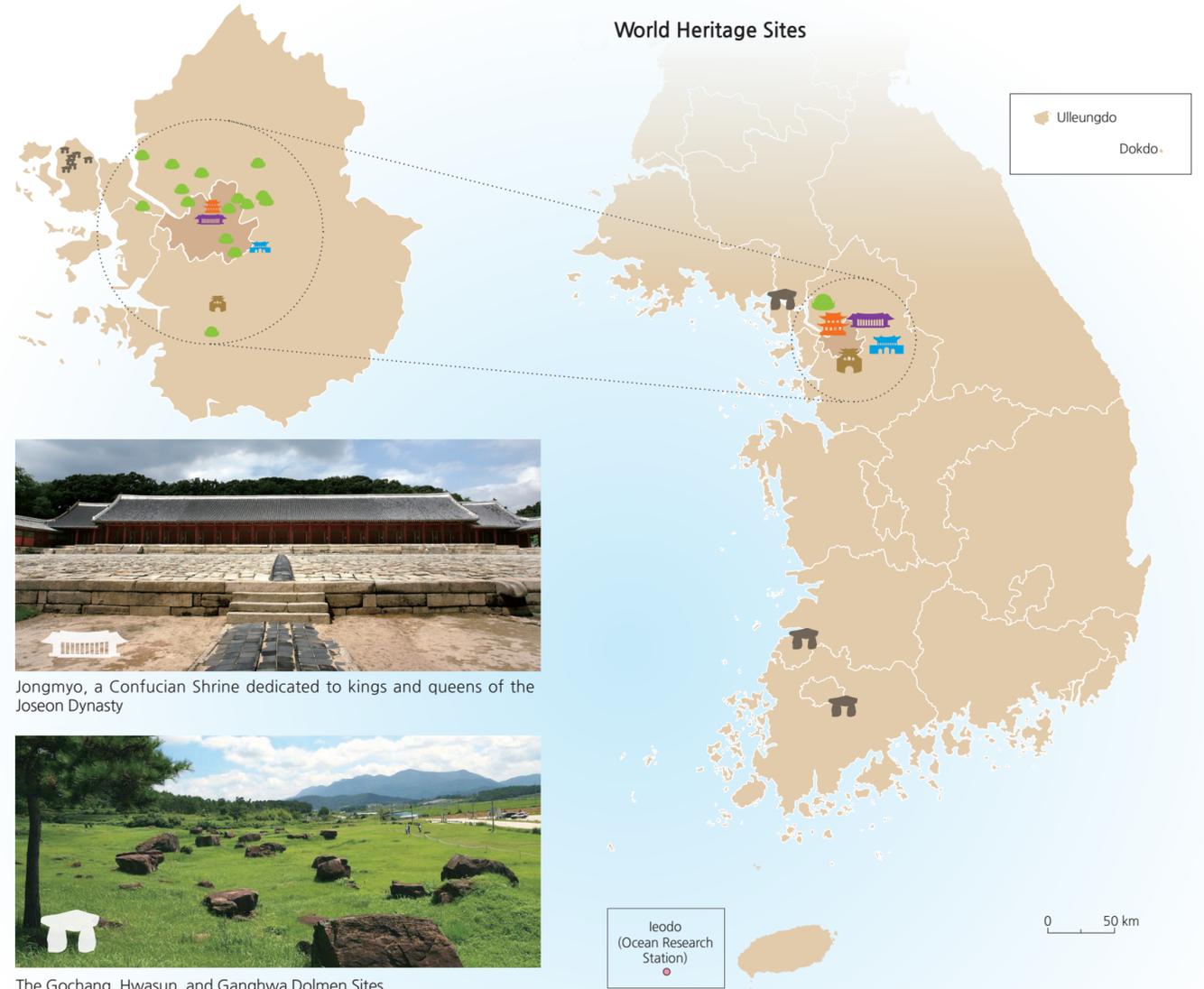
Ancient historical and prehistoric features can be seen across the landscape. The United Nations (UN) has designated many of these sites as World Cultural and Natural Heritage Sites. Some sites feature dolmens—large, stacked boulders linked to the bronze age culture of Korea. Some dolmens served as burial markers. The impressive Royal Tombs of the Joseon Dynasty are found across 18 locations in Korea and signify the worldviews and rituals of the time periods when they were built. Other interesting sites include a palace, a Confucian shrine, and several fortresses. Scattered across the Korean landscape, these cultural monuments attest to the long and continuous nature of one of the most ancient civilizations on Earth.



Hwaseong Fortress, built to defend Seoul by order of King Jeongjo (1776-1800)



Changdeokgung, the King's Palace of the Joseon Dynasty, serving as the main palace for 300 years



Jongmyo, a Confucian Shrine dedicated to kings and queens of the Joseon Dynasty



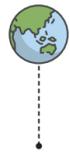
The Gochang, Hwasun, and Ganghwa Dolmen Sites



Namhansanseong Fortress, located in rugged terrain on the eastern side of Seoul



The Royal Tombs of the Joseon Dynasty

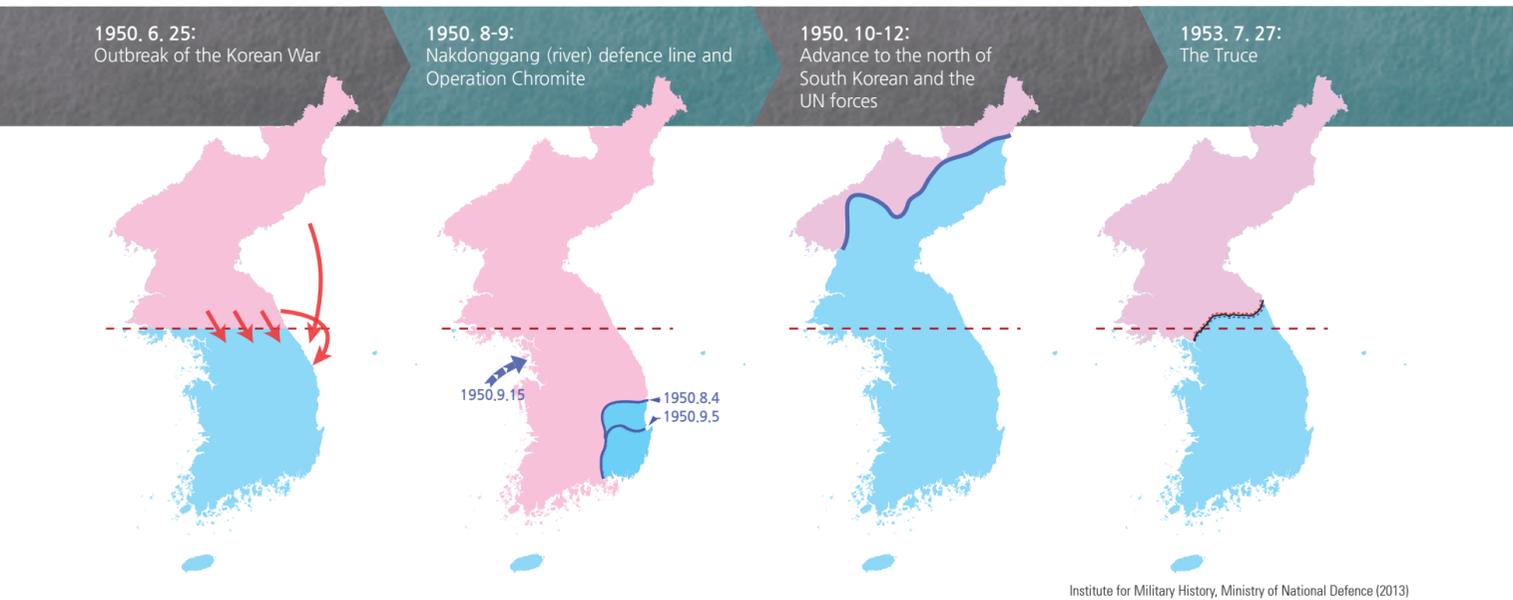


# A Divided Peninsula: North and South Korea

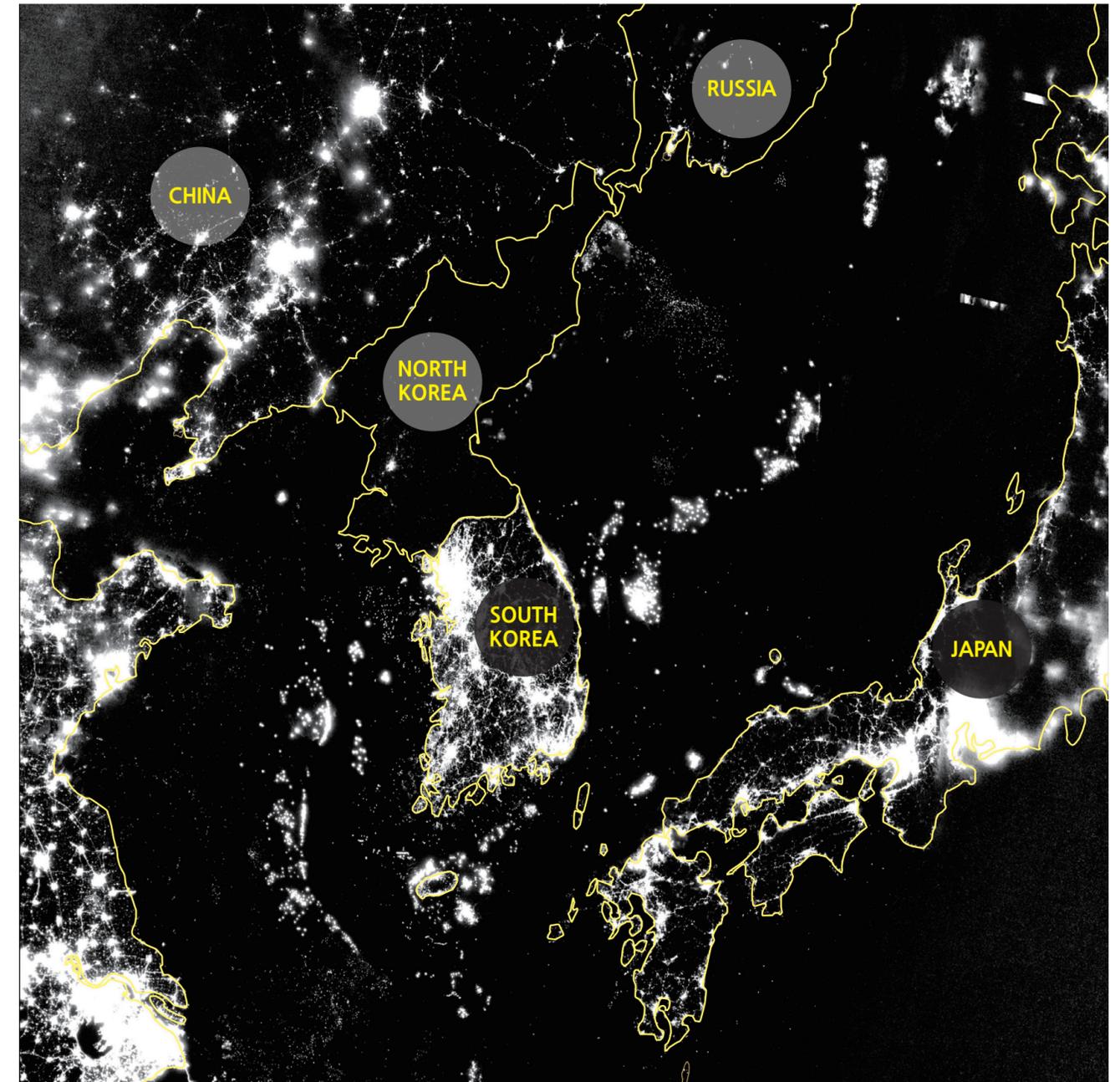
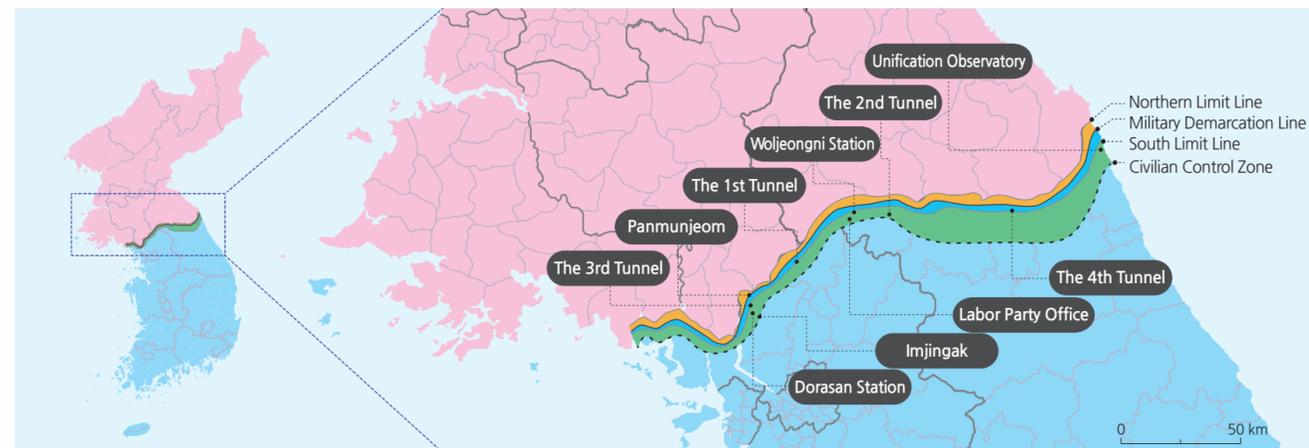
## One Peninsula, Two Nations

After World War II, Korea was divided into North and South along the 38th parallel (the line of latitude 38 degrees north of the equator). Korea then suffered a tragic war, the Korean War (1950–1953). A truce line near the 38th parallel has separated the two Koreas ever since. Although there have been competition and tension between the two Koreas, there have also been many sincere efforts to overcome the division with trust building events, such as holding reunions for separated families, inter-Korean meetings, and cooperative economic endeavors.

The Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) is a 4-km wide buffer zone along the border between North and South Korea where military activities are not allowed. The area is off-limits to civilians and thus uninhabited. Just outside the zone the borders are heavily guarded. Because the DMZ is almost untouched by human activity, it hosts a pristine and diverse natural eco system that is unique in the world. The zone serves as home to many endangered plant and animal species such as the Asiatic black bear.



## Demilitarized Zone and Civilian Control Zone



Night-time satellite image of East Asia. Image courtesy of NASA.

## Korea at Night

This satellite image shows the East Asia region at night as it appears from space. The white areas are well-lighted since they have more people, more buildings, and more electricity use. South Korea, Japan, and much of China are well-lit by street lights, buildings, houses, signs, automobiles, and manufacturing facilities. There are also many lights coming from certain areas in the oceans. These lights are from fishing vessels in search of squid, shrimp, or fish. The fishing boats combine to light up almost as much area as the cities on the mainland of South Korea.

North Korea, in contrast, appears almost completely black. Only the capital city of North Korea, Pyongyang, appears as a small

white blur. North Korea uses only a fraction of the electricity that is used in South Korea, so there are many fewer lights. On average, a North Korea uses less than one tenth the electricity used by South Korea. Ever since the two Koreas were divided, South Korea has grown from one of the poorest nations in the world to become an economic powerhouse. Many new buildings, factories, apartments, roads, and commercial areas have been built up as urban areas have expanded with the new economic growth. Meanwhile, North Korea has remained largely agricultural and has not had the same level of development. The satellite image of Korea at night vividly conveys the stark contrast in economic prosperity between the two Koreas.