



K O R E A

Korea, a peninsula of rugged mountains, lush valleys of green rice fields, and rocky coastlines, arches outward between China (to the west and north) and Japan (to the east), extending about 600 miles into the Yellow Sea. Named after the Koryo dynasty (918–1392) and meaning “high and clear,” the Korean peninsula has long served as a cultural bridge between China and Japan. Throughout the centuries, Korean artists frequently borrowed ideas from China and Japan, but also in turn inspired their neighbors with outstanding artistic achievements. Korean ceramics and lacquer wares have been particularly celebrated throughout the world.

For hundreds of years, **Confucian** rules of conduct, Taoist mystical thought, and Buddhist religious ideals—all belief systems and values imported from China—were expressed throughout Korean culture. At times, however, contact with neighboring countries was aggressive and militant. The Japanese and Manchurians invaded Korea sporadically for centuries, until Japan annexed Korea in 1910; its occupation lasted through the end of World War II. Since 1948, the Korean peninsula has been divided into two nations: North Korea, governed by a communist regime, and South Korea, a republic with an elected government.