

**HOW DOES A PHILOSOPHY SHOW UP IN A KINGDOM?
AN EXAMINATION OF THE EFFECT OF NEO-CONFUCIANISM ON THE CHOSŎN
KINGDOM OF KOREA, AND ITS CONTINUING PRESENCE TODAY**

GRADES: Middle School (6-8)

AUTHOR: Barbara Hall

SUBJECT: Medieval World History

TIME REQUIRED: Two class periods

OBJECTIVES:

1. Recognize the pervasive nature of Confucian philosophy in medieval and modern Korea
2. Recognize that Neo-Confucian attitudes still affect Korean life and thinking
3. Evaluate the importance of the Neo-Confucian teachings on Korea

STANDARDS:

Common Core:

RH 1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources

RH 2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source

RH7 Integrate visual information with other information

RI 1 Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text

SL 1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions

SL 4 Present claims and findings emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with relevant evidence

MATERIALS REQUIRED:

- Handout 1: Background Reading on Confucianism
- Handout 2: Blank 4 Worlds of History
- Teacher Guides: Key to 4 Worlds of History Chart, Additional 4 Worlds of History References for the Teacher
- 16 Cards: Examples of Confucianism in Korea

BACKGROUND:

As the Chosŏn Kingdom rose to power (1392 – 1910), Buddhism was the primary religion of the kingdom. However, due to widespread corruption in the Koryo Kingdom, Chosŏn leaders made a concerted effort to eliminate Buddhism and replace it with Neo-Confucianism. The philosophy of Confucianism became so completely ingrained into Korean life as to change not only political leadership, but the social structure of the kingdom and the culture itself. Even today, as Korea participates fully in the modern world, it is possible to see the continuing impact of the Confucian values on Korean life.

PROCEDURE:

1. Introduce students to the philosophy of Confucianism. Read the Background Reading on Confucianism (Handout 1) as a whole class.
2. Pass out the blank 4 Worlds of History chart (Handout 2). This is a tool for analyzing the impact of a given factor on all facets of a society. Included with the blank 4 Worlds of History chart is a teacher key. Also included are 4 Worlds of History teacher resources with examples of the kinds of things found in each section of the worksheet. More information on using the 4 Worlds of History is available at <http://dornsife.usc.edu/california/four-worlds-of-history/>.
3. Have students work with a partner for 5 minutes to try to think of ways that Neo-Confucianism may have affected the Chosŏn Kingdom. After time is up, share ideas with the whole class.
4. Group the students in mixed-ability groups of 2-3 depending on class size.
5. Each group will receive one card with a picture and explanation of some element of Chosŏn life. Each group must read the card, decide where the information fits on the 4 Worlds of History chart, and prepare to explain their card to the class. (Some items may fit into more than one category, and this is fine. It leads to good discussion.)
6. Give the class 5-10 minutes to read their cards, fill in their charts, and prepare to share their information with the class.
7. Have each group share their information with the class. As each group presents, the rest of the class takes notes on their own 4 Worlds of History charts.
8. When all groups have shared their information, lead a class discussion looking for how one factor may have affected another area. (e.g.: Merchants had a low social status, and that may have affected the economy)
9. Finally, have each student turn over his 4 Worlds of History chart and answer the following question: "What is the most important change Confucianism made to the Korea?"

EVALUATION:

Students will be assessed on their participation in understanding their group's card, presenting the information with the class, and on the quality of the answer to the question in Step 9. A good answer will explain how one change effected one or more sections of the 4 Worlds of History chart.

ENRICHMENT:

In 1920, the Chosŏn Kingdom ended with the Japanese Occupation. In the 100 years since that time Korea has seen world war and civil war. It has lived through occupation, poverty, political corruption, and been torn in half. South Korea has also enjoyed miraculous economic growth in the last 50 years, joining the global economy and emerging as a modern nation to be admired. Despite the chaos of its recent history, Korea has continued to hold on to many Confucian ideals. Some follow up questions may include the following:

1. Is there a place for Confucianism in modern Korea?
2. Will Confucianism continue in modern times?
3. Is stability more valuable than individuality and individualism?
4. Which of the 4 Worlds is driving Korea now – political, economic, social or cultural?

RESOURCES:

Anonymous post to The Korea Times newsgroup, "Obama Praises Korean Education Again," February 20, 2010. http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2011/04/113_61138.html.

Choi, Moonjung. "Korean Traditional Arts." Lecture, Korea University, Seoul, June 28, 2012.

Hudock, Teresa. "Four Worlds of History." Center for Active Learning for International Studies. Last modified 2002. Accessed August 19, 2012. <http://dornsife.usc.edu/califour-worlds-of-history/>.

Kelley, Matt. "The Jongmyo Royal Shrine's Great Rite." *Discovering Korea* (blog). Entry posted May 14, 2010. <http://discoveringkorea.com/2010/05/14/the-jongmyo-royal-shrines-great-rite/>.

———. "Yangdong Village, a UNESCO World Heritage Site." *Discovering Korea.com* (blog). Entry posted August 1, 2010. <http://discoveringkorea.com/2010/08/01/yangdong-village/>.

Kids.Net.AU. "Confucianism." Kids.Net.AU. Accessed August 29, 2012. <http://encyclopedia.kids.net.au/page/co/Confucianism>.

Kim, Andrew Eungi. "Understanding Korean Culture: Its Symbols, Language, Norms and Values." Lecture, Korea University, Seoul, Korea, June 28, 2012.

"King Sejong the Great and the Golden Age of Korea." Asia Society. Accessed August 20, 2012. <http://asiasociety.org/countries/traditions/king-sejong-great>.

Korea Tourism Organization. "Historic People and Places on Korean Currency." Visit Korea. Last modified April 2, 2004. http://english.visitkorea.or.kr/enu/SI/SI_EN_3_6.jsp?cid=255694.

Kwon, K. J., and Madison Park. K. J. Kwon and Madison Park to CNN newsgroup, "South Korean President Apologizes for Bribery Scandals in his Inner Circle," July 24, 2012. <http://www.cnn.com/2012/07/24/world/asia/south-korean-president-apology/index.html>.

Lee, B. J. B. J. Lee to The Daily Beast newsgroup, "Samsung' Female Executives Shatter South Korea's Glass Ceiling," July 30, 2012. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2012/07/29/samsung-s-female-executives-shatter-south-korea-s-glass-ceiling.html>.

Net Universities. "South Korea - History & Background." Education Encyclopedia - StateUniversity.com. Last modified 2012. <http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/1398/South-Korea-HISTORY-BACKGROUND.html>.

HANDOUT 1: BACKGROUND READING ON CONFUCIANISM

Confucianism

Confucianism (literal meaning: "The School (of Thought) of the Scholars") is an East Asian belief system formulated in the 6th - 5th century BC and followed by people in China, Korea, Japan, Vietnam and other Asian countries for more than two thousand years. This great ethical and philosophical system is named after its founder, K'ung Fu-tzu, an ethical philosopher of the late sixth and early fifth centuries B.C. whose Chinese name was later latinised to Confucius by Jesuit missionaries. This form became the convention in most western languages, and accordingly we shall refer to him by this westernized name. He is credited with a number of books, the best-known of which is the *Analects*, a collection of his sayings that was compiled and edited to its modern form during the Han dynasty.

Confucianism specialized in ethics, in the orderly arrangement of society and correct relationships between people. Confucius himself lived in an era (The Eastern Zhou dynasty) when China was divided into a number of small states each ruled by a warlord or nobleman who paid little more than lip service to the emperor who in theory still ruled the Middle Kingdom (China) from the capital, Luoyang. The frequent wars between these states disrupted the structure of society. As a result, there was a deeply felt need for a theory of society that would act as a cohesive factor and that could reunite the Chinese nation. A number of philosophies (e.g. Mohism and Legalism) arose to fulfill this need. That of Confucius was eventually the most successful, due largely to the supremacy it achieved during the Han Dynasty.

Some key concepts in Confucian thought

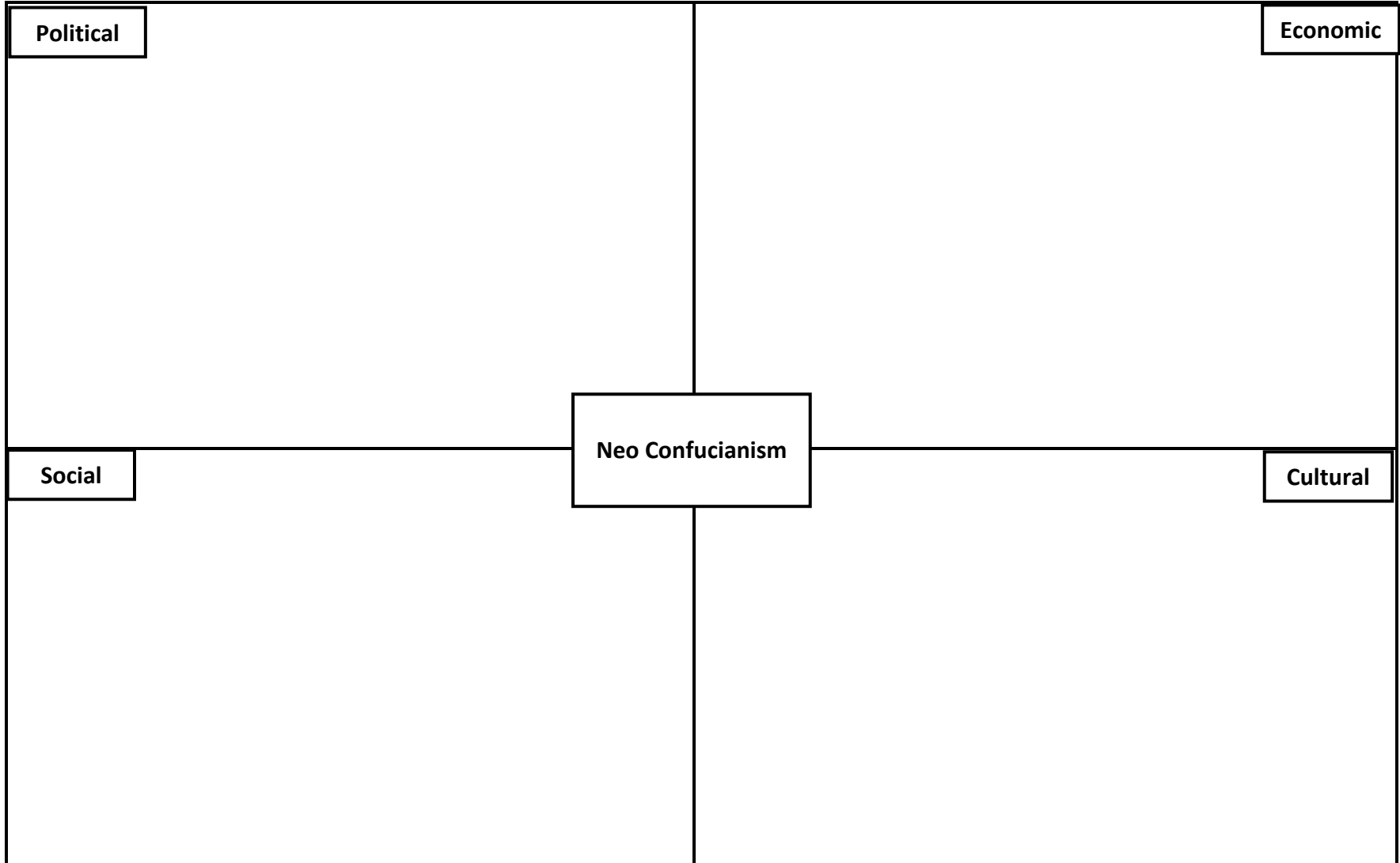
- *Li* (禮) - ritual. This originally meant "to sacrifice". From this initial religious ceremonial meaning, the term was soon extended to include secular ceremonial behavior, and then took on politeness which colored everyday life. Rites were codified and treated as an all-embracing system of norms. Confucius himself tried to revive the etiquette of earlier dynasties, but in later Confucian tradition, he himself was regarded as the great authority on ritual behavior.
- *Xiao* or *Hsiao* (孝) - filial piety. This was considered among the greatest of virtues, and had to be shown towards both the living and the dead. The term "filial" means "of a son" and therefore denotes the respect and obedience that a son should show to his parents (traditionally, especially to his father). But this relationship was extended by analogy to a series of five relationships: those between father and son, ruler and subject, husband and wife, elder brother and younger brother, and that between friends. Specific duties were prescribed between each of the participants in these sets of relationships. Such duties were also extended to the dead, and this led to the veneration of ancestors, to which the living stood as sons to their fathers.
- *Zhong* or *Chung* (忠) - loyalty. This was the relationship between ruler and minister. It was particularly relevant for the social class to which most of Confucius's students belonged, because the only way for an ambitious young scholar to make his way in the world was to enter the civil service of a ruler. Confucius did not propose that "might

makes right", but that a superior who had received "the mandate of heaven" (see below) should be obeyed because of his moral rectitude. But this was soon reinterpreted and became a doctrine which demanded blind, unquestioning obedience to the ruler from the ruled. Confucius would not have supported this - he was far too subtle a thinker for that.

- *Ren* or *Jen* - humaneness. Perhaps it is best expressed in the Confucian version of the Golden Rule, which is always phrased in the negative: "Do not do to others what you would not like them to do to you." *Jen* also has a political dimension; if the ruler lacks it, it will hardly be possible for the subjects to behave humanely. This, in fact, is the basis of the entire Confucian political theory: it presupposes an autocratic ruler, who is then exhorted to refrain from acting inhumanely towards the subjects. An inhumane ruler runs the risk of losing the "mandate of heaven", that is, the right to rule. Such a mandate-less ruler need not be obeyed. But a ruler who reigns humanely and takes care of the people is to be obeyed strictly, for the very fact of this benevolent dominion shows that the ruler has been mandated by heaven.
- *Jun* or *Zi* or *Chun-tzu* - the gentleman. The gentleman is the ideal towards which all Confucians strive. Gentlemen were also expected to act as moral guides to the rest of society. Gentlemen are those who cultivate themselves morally, who participate in the correct performance of the rites, who show filial piety and loyalty where these are due and who have cultivated humaneness.

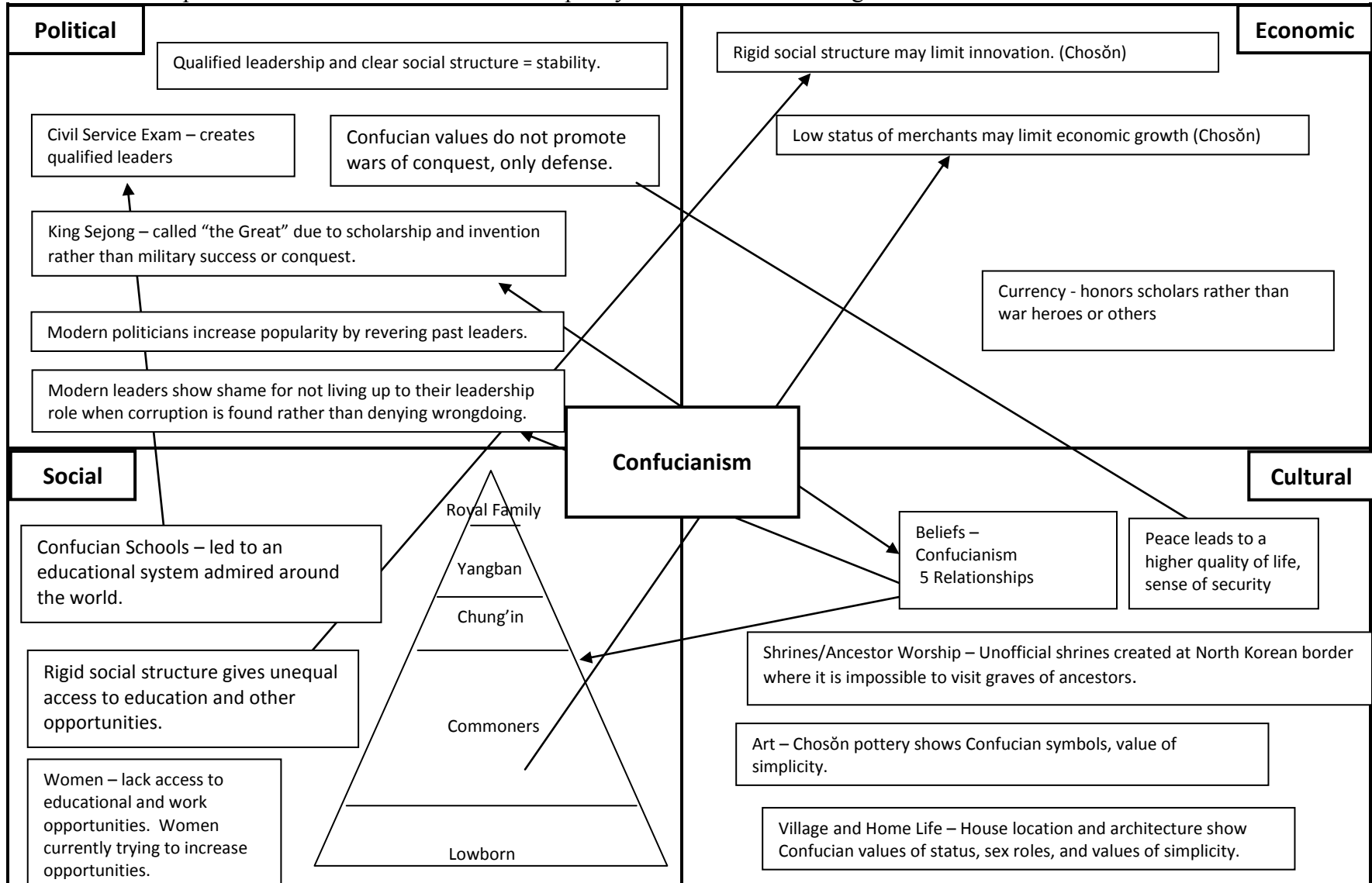
HANDOUT 2: 4 WORLDS OF HISTORY CHART

How did the adoption of Neo Confucianism as official policy affect the Chosŏn Kingdom of Korea?



TEACHER GUIDES: 4 WORLDS OF HISTORY CHART - KEY

How did the adoption of Neo Confucianism as official policy affect the Chosŏn Kingdom and modern Korea? **KEY**

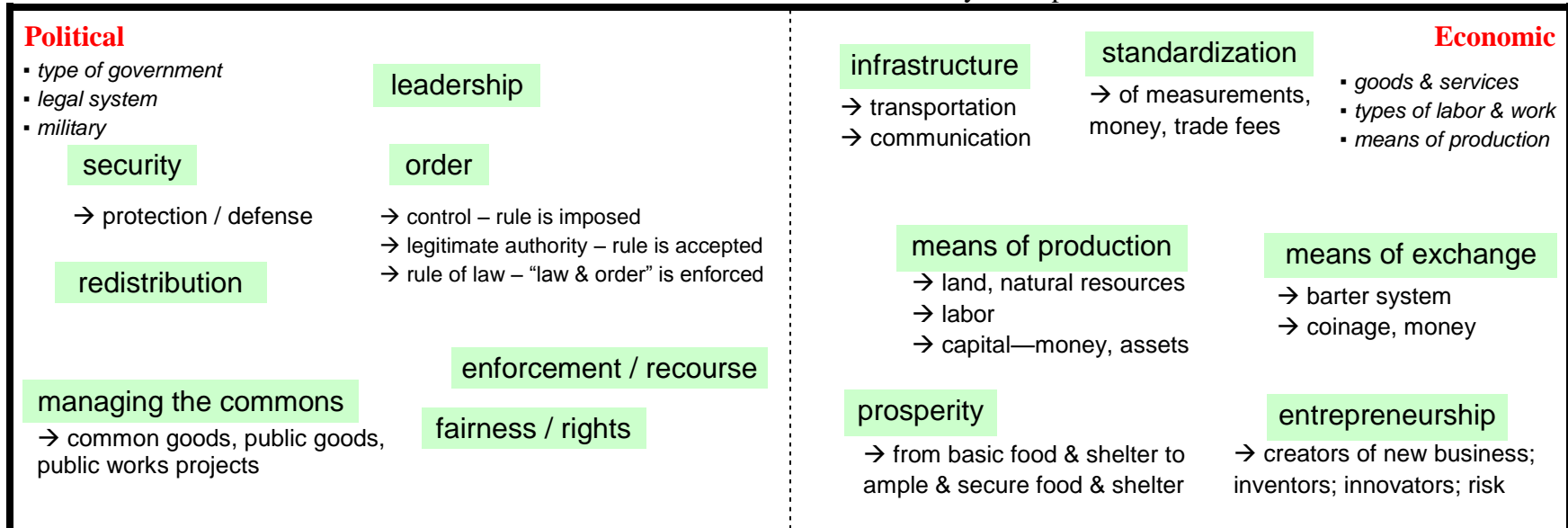


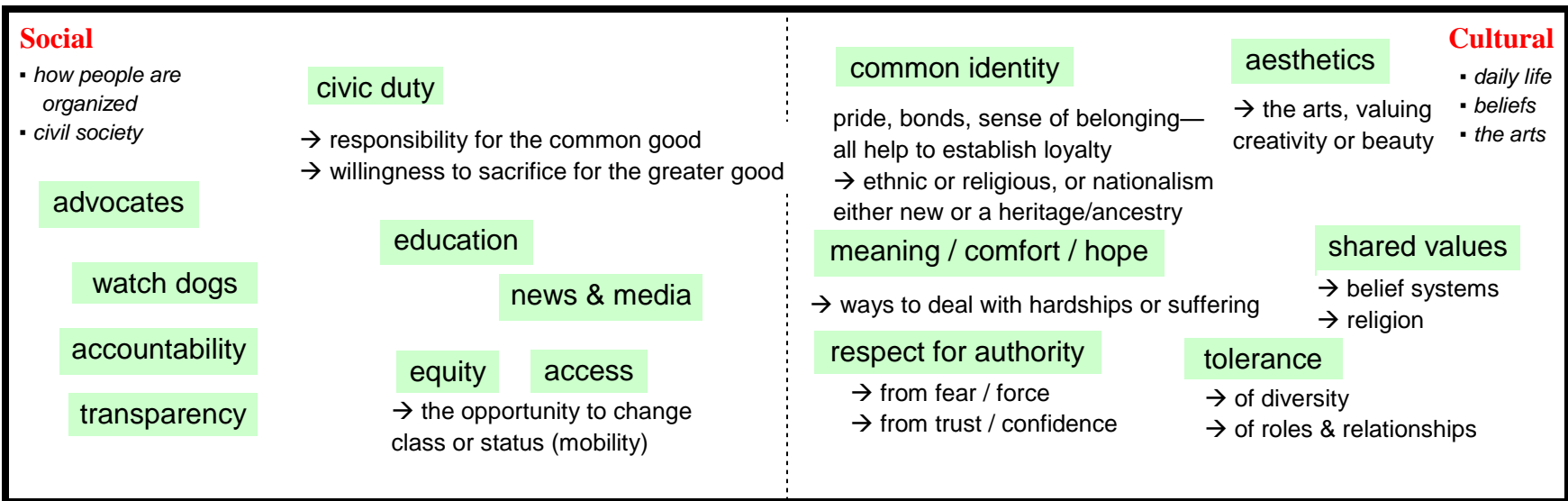
Social Science Factors: basic terms & key concepts

Four Worlds			
Politics	Economics	Social	Culture
<p style="text-align: center;">Governing Structure</p> <p>a. type of government</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ monarchy, democracy ▪ centralized, decentralized <p>b. military: armies, weapons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ defense, protection vs. conquest, expansion ▪ treaties, diplomacy <p>c. legal system</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ laws, standards, rights ▪ judges, police, patrol <p>d. taxes, tribute</p> <p style="text-align: center;">-----<i>Central Concepts</i>:-----</p> <p>e. security</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ order, stability, control ▪ state-building (rise & fall) <p>f. power: limits, transfer, balance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ role of govt / functions <p>g. rule of law vs. force / fear</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Economic Structure</p> <p>a. products / trade</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ goods & services <p>b. production means of production</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ resources: natural, human, financial ▪ tools, equipment, labor <p>c. types of labor, work, jobs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ merchants, artisans, craftsmen, guilds ▪ division of labor, specialization <p>d. infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ irrigation, aqueducts ▪ roads, bridges, ports <p>e. means of exchange</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ barter system ▪ system of money <p>f. standard measures</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Social Structure</p> <p>a. class</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ upper <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ruling class - elite class ▪ middle <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - common class - working class ▪ lower <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - peasants - slaves <p>b. status / position</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ mobility ▪ privilege <p>c. nomadic v. sedentary</p> <p>d. rural v. urban</p> <p>e. hierarchical v. communal</p> <p>f. integrated v. segregated</p> <p>g. role of women</p> <p style="text-align: center;">-----<i>Civil Society</i>:*-----</p> <p>h. civic duty / common good</p> <p>i. education (literacy level)</p> <p>j. equity & access</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Religion & Belief Systems</p> <p>a. origins</p> <p>b. teachings —shared values, moral authority</p> <p>c. texts</p> <p>d. practices, rites & rituals</p> <p>e. influence; role in society</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Other Aspects of Culture</p> <p>a. daily life</p> <p>b. customs</p> <p>c. language</p> <p>d. alphabet / writing system</p> <p>e. literature</p> <p>f. the arts —aesthetics</p> <p>g. architecture</p> <p style="text-align: center;">-----<i>Central Concepts</i>:-----</p> <p>h. identity (pride, bonds, loyalty)</p> <p>i. tolerance (harmony)</p> <p>j. respect for authority</p> <p>k. meaning, comfort, hope</p> <p>l. cultural blending, diffusion</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ justice, fairness h. leadership, stewardship <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ public service, duty i. rights & responsibilities j. managing the commons <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ public goods, infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ length, weight, volume, distance <p>-----<i>Central Concepts</i>:-----</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> g. entrepreneurship h. incentives i. scarcity vs prosperity j. innovation & efficiency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> k. advocates, watchdogs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ accountability l. news; distribution of information; <i>role of the media</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ diversity v homogeneity ▪ assimilation v acculturation ▪ harmony v conformity
--	--	---	---

Social Science Factors: 4W chart of key concepts





Four Worlds analytical framework by Steven Lamy, Professor of International Relations, USC | *Four Worlds of History* adapted by Sandy Line, Associate & Teresa Hudock, Director, CALIS

HANDOUT 3: 16 CARDS, EXAMPLES OF CONFUCIANISM IN KOREA

1. Yangdong Village



UNESCO's World Heritage Committee decided to add Korea's Hahoe and Yangdong historic villages to its World Heritage List. The traditional villages described as reflecting "the distinctive aristocratic Confucian culture and architectural style" of the early Chosŏn Dynasty.

The 500-year-old village is typical among Chosŏn-era *banchon* (반촌), or villages that show the aristocratic lifestyle. Yangdong obeys a Neo-Confucian layout – Members of the *yangban* (양반) fancy class live on the higher ground in tile-roofed *giwajip* houses, while others lived on lower ground in *chogajip*. Unlike Korea's brightly painted palaces and temples, these homes feature the cream, tan and almost pink shades of clay with weathered wood beams and slate gray roof tiles. Many of the homes are in the square "*meeum*" letter shape common in southeastern Korea during the mid-Chosŏn period.

An ancestral shrine dedicated to the village's first resident, Son So, is located at the back of the compound. The village also includes 12 important folk materials and seven cultural properties.

Matt Kelley, "Yangdong Village, a UNESCO World Heritage Site," *Discovering Korea.com* (blog), entry posted August 1, 2010, <http://discoveringkorea.com/2010/08/01/yangdong-village/>.

2. The Jongmyo Royal Shrine



When King Taejo founded the Chosŏn Dynasty in 1392 and designated Seoul its new capital, he built the Jongmyo Royal Shrine to honor his ancestors. Six hundred years later, Jongmyo is the world's oldest and best-preserved royal Confucian sanctuary.

Of the two primary buildings, the Main Hall, or **Jeongjeon**, is a remarkably long series of red wood chambers. With a floor area measuring 5,190 square meters, it is said to be the largest single wooden structure in the world. Forty-nine mortuary tablets, including those of 19 Chosŏn Kings, from its first, Taejo, to its last, Sunjong, reside here.

To the northeast is **Yeongnyeongjeon**, or the Shrine of Eternal Peace. Built in 1421 when space was no longer available inside the Main Hall, the 16 chambers contain 34 spirit tablets, including four of Taejo's ancestors, posthumously designated monarchs and the kings and queens moved there from Jeongjeon.

Over five centuries, Taejo and subsequent monarchs performed neo-Confucian memorial rituals called **Jongmyo Jerye** five times annually. The ceremony was temporarily suspended during the turbulent years of colonization and war, but in 1969, descendants of the Jeonju Lee royal family reinstated the ritual and opened it to the public.

These days, the **Jongmyo Daeje** or "great rite" is performed on the first Sunday in May. Korea is the only country to have preserved its royal Confucian shrine and ancestral rites, which is why the royal rites were added to UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2001.

Kelley, Matt. "The Jongmyo Royal Shrine's Great Rite." *Discovering Korea* (blog). Entry posted May 14, 2010. <http://discoveringkorea.com/2010/05/14/the-jongmyo-royal-shrines-great-rite/>.

3. Civil Service Exam



Confucius taught that men of wisdom and virtue, chosen for their knowledge and moral quality, should lead the government. They were to rule, not by force or law, but by example. This theory of government was an ideal held for centuries by many countries of East Asia; the application of the theory, however, was less than ideal. Korean rulers during the Chosŏn reign established social structures and institutions to enforce Confucian ideology and practice.

King T'aejo instituted the Chinese examination system to recruit wise and moral men into government. Men that could demonstrate through rigorous examination that they understood proper governance, classic literature, and morality, as it was taught in the sacred books of Confucian philosophy, were appointed to government positions. Once in place, they were expected to lead by moral example.

Tripp, Tracy. "Cultural Values of the Choson Dynasty." Instrok. Last modified 2002.
<http://www.instrok.org/instrok/lesson1/page01.html>

4. King Sejong the Great



King Sejong, is considered to have been one of the most outstanding Korean kings of the Chosŏn Kingdom (1392-1910). His reign, which lasted until 1450, was a period of great cultural and intellectual accomplishment in Korea that is often called the Golden Age.

King Sejong governed according to the principles of Confucianism upon which the kingdom had been founded. These principles included the idea that justice and righteousness should characterize the relations between sovereign and subject. King Sejong believed that the basis of good government was a ruler with broad-ranging knowledge, virtue, and the ability to recognize and utilize men of talent for government service.

As an administrator, King Sejong introduced many progressive ideas and implemented reforms to improve the life of the common people. In times of drought and flood, he established relief programs and opened centers to provide food and shelter. For farmers experiencing unsuccessful harvests, he reinstated a loan system that had been used during the Koryo Kingdom (918-1392) in which the government's stored surplus grains were loaned out to them to be paid back in kind with nominal interest.

King Sejong, a noted Confucian scholar himself, placed great emphasis on scholarship and education. He promoted research in the cultural, economic, and political heritage of Korea, and

he sponsored many new developments in the areas of science, philosophy, music, and linguistics. To encourage young scholars to devote their time to study, he established grants and other forms of government support.

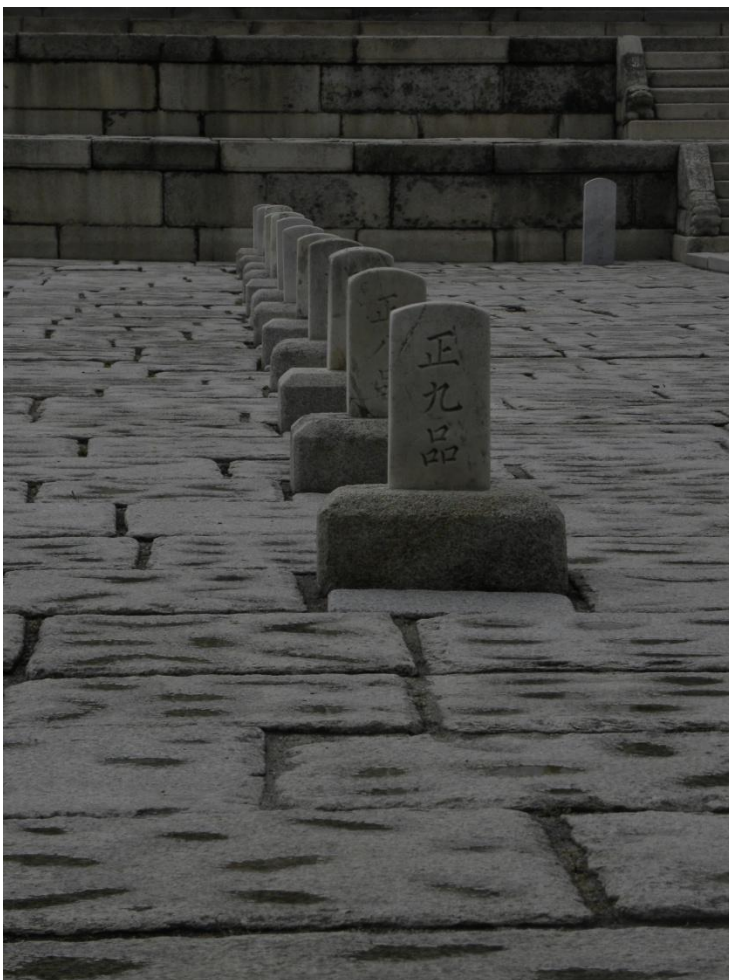
The most outstanding of his achievements by far was the creation of the Korean alphabet, or han'gul. King Sejong wanted to provide Koreans with a written means of expression other than the complicated Chinese system. With this objective in mind, he commissioned a group of scholars to devise a phonetic writing system that would correctly represent the sounds of spoken Korean and that could be easily learned by all people. The system was completed in 1443.

King Sejong commissioned a significant number of literary works. He saw books as a means of spreading education among his people. One of the first works he commissioned was a history of the Koryo Kingdom. Others included a handbook on improved farming methods to increase production, a revised and enlarged collection of model filial deeds, and a illustrated book of the duties and responsibilities that accompany human relations.

King Sejong contributed to Korean civilization in a number of other ways, as well. He made improvements in the movable metal type that had been invented in Korea around 1234. He initiated the development of musical notation for Korean and Chinese music, helped improve designs for various musical instruments, and encouraged the composition of orchestral music. King Sejong also sponsored numerous scientific inventions, including the rain gauge, sundial, water clock, celestial globes, astronomical maps, and the orrery, a mechanical representation of the solar system.

“King Sejong the Great and the Golden Age of Korea.” Asia Society. Accessed August 20, 2012. <http://asiasociety.org/countries/traditions/king-sejong-great>.

5. Changdeok Palace



This palace was built in 1405, when the Chosŏn Kingdom moved the capital to Seoul. In this courtyard for official ceremonies there are two rows of markers placed so that officials can line up according to positions of importance for the king. One row is for scholar officials (Yangban), and the other side is for military officials.

6. Dosan Seowon Confucian Academy

This academy was built in 1561 by Yi Hwang, one of the great Korean Neo Confucian scholars. As the Chosôn Kingdom adopted neo-Confucianism, the goal of education was to create moral



men, who would practice proper judgment in actions—qualities thought essential in all leaders, including the king himself. Respect for knowledge and scholarship was absolute. Members of the Hall or Academy of Worthies, a royal research institute founded by King Sejong (r. 1418-50), enjoyed exceptional privileges.

A national school called the National Confucian Academy was established in 1398 shortly after the dynasty's foundation in 1392. Confucian classics

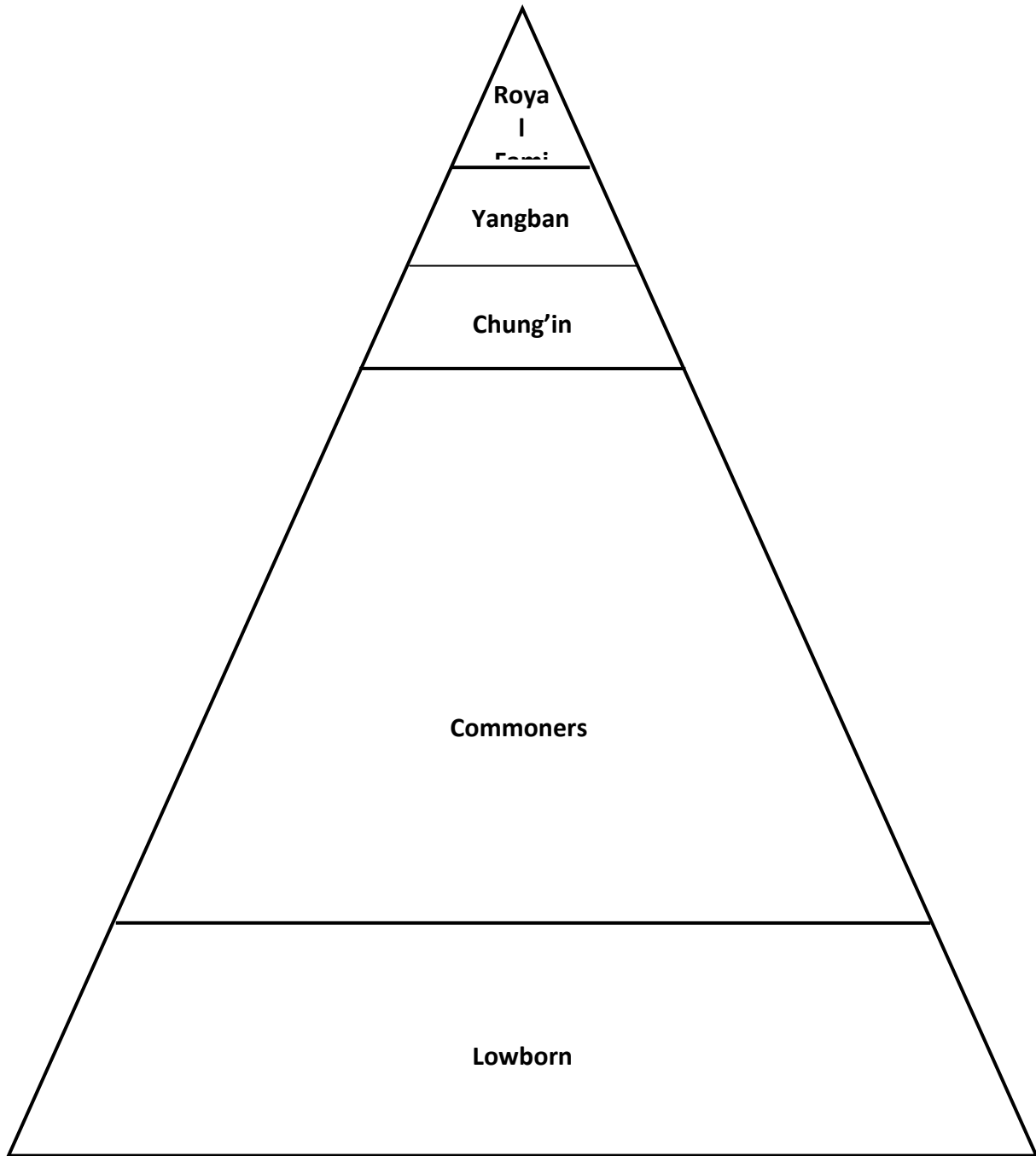
became a major educational focus. However, the system became increasingly examination-oriented and continued to serve mainly the aristocrats with the specific goal of passing the civil service examinations. Although in principle anyone could sit for these examinations, in actuality opportunities to prepare for them were available only to the offspring of *yangban* aristocrats. Because women were supposed to stay within the boundary of the home in Chosôn Korea, they were excluded from formal education meant to prepare men for public service and scholarship.

At an early age, a *yangban* youth entered a private elementary school. There he achieved literacy in Chinese characters. At the age of seven, he would advance to one of the Four Schools in Seoul or to a county school elsewhere, which prepared students for their first examination. After a few years, youths passing the "licentiate" examination were admitted to the Sônggyun'gwan in Seoul, the highest institution of learning. Only those who attended this National Academy could sit for the highest level examination.

By the late 19th Century, there were about 300 private academies. Liberal, humanistic, and Confucian studies were considered the ultimate, while technical subjects such as agriculture, manufacturing, commerce, mathematics, and medicine were despised as "miscellaneous learning." Practical knowledge was considered merely "functional," allowing people to perform limited and superficial activities, while a liberal education was thought to offer general competence to handle unanticipated situations.

Net Universities. "South Korea - History & Background." Education Encyclopedia - StateUniversity.com. Last modified 2012. <http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/1398/South-Korea-HISTORY-ACKGROUND.html>.

7. Social Status



To uphold the Confucian social order, Chosŏn leaders stratified society into rigid status levels with specific duties and privileges. Beginning in 1425, Chosŏn leaders required all adult males counted in census reports to carry a form of identification that stated his name, birth year, class status by the level of civil examination passed and residential county.

At the top of the social hierarchy were members of the royal family.

Below the royal family were the Yangban. Having risen through a state examination system designed to recruit officials of wisdom and moral merit, yangban were expected to continue devoting themselves to the study of Confucian doctrine and self-cultivation so that they could best serve others while in public office. By setting policies by their own example, their primary responsibility was the moral cultivation of Chosŏn people. Yangban were excused from paying taxes. The civil official enjoyed greater prestige than their military counterparts. Similarly, yangban who ran the central government ranked higher than those who oversaw local municipalities. A lower form of yangban were the chung'in who passed miscellaneous civil examinations called chapkwa, and possessed specific professional skills. This group of technical specialists included interpreters and scribes, accountants.

Lower in social standing than the chung'in, but still socially acceptable, were the commoners. Included in this rank were peasant-farmers, fishermen, artisans and merchants. These "ordinary" people, though poor, retained their dignity because they produced food and material goods from their labor. This was not true for merchants. They were seen as parasites, increasing their wealth through the exchange, rather than the production of goods. Considered uncouth by others of similar and higher rank, merchants were heavily taxed to keep from gaining social mobility by ignoble measures.

The lowest rungs of society were occupied by the "lowborn," estimated to comprise close to one-third of Chosŏn society. Most were slaves. Many slaves formed independent households and, rather than provide labor, paid fixed fees to their owners. While this relationship was similar to that between landowners and tenant farmers, by law, slave owners could sell their slaves at their whim. Other outcasts who shared lowborn social status were butchers, tanners, actors, acrobats, shamans, and female entertainers. Being "lowborn" was a hereditary class, which prevented social mobility.

People accepted social inequality based on birthright. Other than birthright, people were also socially measured based upon their education, occupation, wealth, and place of residence. Educational achievement through the civil service examination system was considered the formal channel for advancing through society to the ruling class; however, education was neither universally available nor fair. Only male children of yangban marriages and ancestry were permitted to take the examination.

People were also ranked by occupation. According to Confucian ideology, work that relied on one's intellectual capacity rather than physical strength was held in greater esteem. The value of work was also judged by how many people were served by one's job. Therefore a yangban officer who was responsible for national policy decisions, was placed at the top of the social hierarchy, while a farmer, who labored for his family, was placed much farther down.

Tripp, Tracy, "Cultural Values of the Chosŏn Dynasty," Instrok, last modified 2002, <http://www.instrok.org/instrok/lesson1/page01.html>.

8. The Five Relationships of Confucianism

The Confucian social order centered on five human relationships, those between:

- Kings and subject (loyalty)
- Father and son (filial piety)
- Husband and wife (different realm of duty and obligation)
- Older and younger brothers (precedence by age)
- Friends (faithfulness and mutual trust)

Models for all social interactions, these relationships emphasized the duties and obligations of people to one another. In each case, the stronger person was expected to be kind and protective toward the weaker; in turn, the weaker person was expected to be loyal and obedient to the stronger. Social equality, as imagined by the founder of the United States, would have seemed unnatural to Confucian scholars, except perhaps among friends of the same age and rank.

Confucian teaching extolled the virtues of one's loyalty to the state and one's loyalty to family groups. Family is the most important loyalty. Family relations were the focus of political, social, and economic activities. Individuals had no social status apart from their families. One's social status rose and fell with successes and failures of kin. In all cases, individuals knew that their identities were forever enmeshed with those of their ancestors and progeny.

9. Ojukcheon House



Ojukcheon is a typical Confucian scholar residence for the Chosŏn period. Unlike royal palaces and government buildings that come with elaborate color schemes, these buildings are plain. And in accordance with Confucian moral laws, separate quarters exist for men, women, and servants.

The location of one's residence was also showed social status. Generally, it was more prestigious to live in Seoul, the capital, than anywhere else. This was the case even for members of the yangban class. The highest status yangban lived in Seoul; lower level officials lived in rural areas. Within a city or village, the higher class lived near the center town while outcast groups lived in ghettos outside of the gates.

Tripp, Tracy. "Cultural Values of the Chosŏn Dynasty." Instrok. Last modified 2002.
<http://www.instrok.org/instrok/lesson1/page01.html>

10. Ceramics

“Unlike the Goryeo dynasty which continued on to revere and esteem Buddhism in arts and society, the following Chosŏn kingdom viewed Buddhism as the cause of all corruption and downfall of the kingdom. Hence Buddhism was oppressed, and Buddhist art activity declined, barely continuing on in local levels. In ceramics, Chosŏn viewed white porcelains as the ideal ware for their new Confucian-based government. The color white exemplified the simple, frugal, and noble ideals that prevailed in Confucianism. Koreans, it appears, became more orthodox than other East Asian neighbors in abiding by the strict forms of lofty ideals in frugality and simple life.

“The early white porcelains that soon replaced the rustic bucheong ware present beautiful examples of simple elegance. The clay body was refined and the glaze, thin and translucent. Many examples of early Chosŏn white porcelains display the idealized view Koreans held in the beginning of the kingdom, hopeful of the new ideology. Decorations were rare on white porcelains, but when they were applied, Confucian motifs such as pine tree, bamboo, and plum blossom, dominated the designs. “



11. Filial Piety and Ancestor Worship

“Filial piety can be defined as love of the son for the father, i.e., the son should dedicate himself to his father with all of his heart. Filial piety stipulates the immense debt of children to their parent and by extension, of individuals to their ancestor. It demands strict obedience, unwavering respect for authority, and emotional, financial and ritual care of parents and ancestors by the offspring. Filial piety is performed at three levels: 1) take care of the parent while they are alive; 2) hold an elaborate funeral when they die; and 3) conduct ancestral rituals on death anniversaries and on Korean Thanksgiving and Lunar New Year’s Day.

“These sentiments of filial piety and family loyalty are reinforced through ancestor worship, the culturally most significant feature of Korean customs...The intimate bond between ancestors and descendants is evident in the ancestral rite itself. The most important phase of the ancestral rite involves the descendants’ dedication to their ancestors a carefully prepared setting of foods and alcoholic beverages, which are consumed by the former after the ceremony. By eating and drinking the ritual foods and drinks, which are symbolically consumed first by their ancestors, the descendants become one with them. This manifests a very profound religious meaning. Becoming one with ancestors means that one’s existence” does not end in death but lives on eternally, like all the ancestors who are living in the netherworld. In fact, it is believed that the ancestors’ immortality can be secured only through the ancestral rituals performed by the son(s).”



Since the Armistice ending fighting in the Korean War was signed in 1953, North and South Koreans have been unable to travel across the border. This creates a special problem for families who were divided by this new boundary. Many Koreans were unable to properly venerate their deceased ancestors. In many cases, they do not even know if relatives who were alive in 1953 are still alive today.

To the left is a makeshift shrine near the Freedom Bridge in Imjingak Park near the North Korean border. South Koreans leave ribbons with messages for relatives they can no longer visit.

Kim, Andrew Eungi, "Understanding Korean Culture: Its Symbols, Language, Norms and Values" (lecture, Korea University, Seoul, Korea, June 28, 2012).

12. Women in the Workplace

Samsung's Female Executives Shatter South Korea's Glass Ceiling

by B. J. Lee Jul 30, 2012 1:00 AM EDT

Samsung's female employees are breaking through old barriers

For a country with a centuries-old tradition of patriarchal Confucianism, South Korea has come a long way in terms of gender equality. If current opinion polls prove correct, it may even see its first female president elected in December—Park Geun-hye, a daughter of the late president Park Chung-hee, could well become the first female head of state in northeast Asia. The Parliament is now 16 percent female, the highest proportion in South Korea's history. The country has produced female ministers, army generals, fighter pilots, Supreme Court justices, and even an astronaut. Despite Korea's remarkable economic growth over the past decades, women have taken a back seat in the corporate world. Finally, though, the last glass ceiling in Korea is being broken at the country's leading enterprises, including electronics giant Samsung.

Lee, B. J. B. J. Lee to The Daily Beast newsgroup, "Samsung' Female Executives Shatter South Korea's Glass Ceiling," July 30, 2012.
<http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2012/07/29/samsung-s-female-executives-shatter-south-korea-s-glass-ceiling.html>.

13. Currency



₩1,000

Yi Hwang was a great philosopher and Confucian scholar. Even though he had assumed leadership of the political situation of his time, he declined a high government position in 1559, he returned to his hometown to study and educate younger scholars. His favorite game was tuho, throwing arrows into a jar. When young men came to him for learning, he had them play tuho to help them focus. Note the vase and arrows pictured on the front of the ₩1,000 won bill.

₩5,000

Yulgok Yi Yi is on the ₩5,000 bill, and he has been a strong representative figure for Korean education, politics and military affairs. As a child, he studied the classics from his mother (a rare instance of a capable female educator) and was able to pass the junior civil examination at age 13, also winning first prize in the state examination in 1564. He served various government posts such as the governor of Hwanghae-do Province, inspector general, minister of personnel, punishment and military affairs. He devoted himself to coordinating feuds between the political factions and advised the kind on the need to raise a 100,000-man army to prepare for a possible invasion by Japan. He also worked for tax reforms and introduced a system of community grain storage. He was a renowned Confucian scholar whose fame was matched only by his contemporary Yi Hwang. He led the Koho school of Confucian studies. He was an excellent calligrapher and painter.

₩10,000

King Sejong the Great, (reign 1418-1450), fourth king of Chosŏn Kingdom, is represented on the front side of the ₩10,000 banknote. He had a new alphabet designed to fit the Korean language, Hangeul, and led the nation to prosperity not only in economics but also in politics and culture. Next to his picture is a water clock, created by the top scientist of the Chosŏn period, Jang Yeong-sil. This amazing clock was made in 1438. It would strike a gong and a drum at regular intervals. An improved version was made in 1536, and has since been kept in Deoksugung Palace.

₩50,000

In June 2009, South Korea finally approved the making of a ₩50,000 bill. There was much debate about it but finally it was decided that Lady Shin Saimdong would be the representative figure on it. Lady Shin (1504-1551) was the eldest of five girls and her father very open-mindedly gave her the private education normally given to a son, which was very usually for the gender-segregated strict Confucian era in which she was raised. Even after marriage, her husband allowed her to pursue educational interests and she was not limited to the confines of feminine household operations. Lady Shin Saimdong was "a woman of kind, gentle disposition and deep filial piety. Saimdong excelled in scholarly achievements from her childhood and became the most outstanding woman artist in Korea with her brilliant paintings and poetry as well as sewing and embroidery. She was, at the same time, a most devoted wife and mother."

14. Presidential Scandal

South Korean president apologizes for bribery scandals in his inner circle - CNN.com

By KJ Kwon and Madison Park, CNN

updated 5:52 AM EDT, Tue July 24, 2012



South Korean president Lee Myung-bak apologized to the nation for corruption cases dogging his elder brother and inner circle.

(CNN) -- South Korean president Lee Myung-bak apologized to his country for what he called "shameful incidents" involving his family and inner circle on Tuesday.

Earlier this month, his older brother, Lee Sang-deuk was arrested on bribery charges involving two troubled Korean banks. This week, prosecutors in Korea sought arrest warrants for two former aides to Lee on the suspicion of receiving bribes from the same two banks, according to Yonhap, a South Korean news agency.

Lee addressed the nation with a speech that was carried live.

"I came into the office with firm determination to bring a clean political climate," Lee said. "I tried, by returning my entire fortune to the society and donating my salary. I was proud that I thought I brought in good results. But my heart collapsed and I cannot keep my head up after what happened to people so close to me."

"This is all my fault," Lee said.

His brother, Lee Sang-deuk is a former six-term lawmaker and has widely been considered the major force behind Lee's presidential election in 2007. Lee Sang-deuk has remained in a detention center since his arrest on July 11, over allegations he received about half a million dollars from the banks Solomon and Mirae in exchange for exerting influence over officials investigating the banks, according to a court official.

The operations of those two banks were suspended in May for six months by authorities.

In his address to the nation, Lee said he felt pain and regret over the scandals.

"I will receive any criticism as if it is sweet," he said.

Lee is not running for re-election this year because South Korean presidents are limited to a single five-year term. But the recent scandals could affect his political party in the December elections.

"I express sincere apology to the people," Lee said.

Lee's brother is not the first relative of a South Korean president to face criminal charges.

Former President Roh Moo-hyun committed suicide in 2009 amid an investigation into a bribery scandal that had tarnished his reputation. His older brother was convicted and sentenced to prison.

Former President Kim Dae-jung's three sons were also imprisoned for corruption by the end of his presidential term.

15. Veneration of Past Leaders

Park Visits Graves of Past Presidents, Including Kim and Roh

By: Evan Ramstad



A day after she promised to become a president for “100% of South Korea,” the New Frontier Party’s presidential nominee Park Geun-hye took a step on Tuesday to show that she meant it – by visiting the burial sites of all the country’s former presidents, no matter where they stood on the political spectrum.

That included the sites of her father, Park Chung-hee, and two of his critics, Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun.

Ms. Park’s campaign said she made the trek, which took her from Seoul to Gimhae, as part of a broader effort to promote national unity. At her party’s convention on Monday, Ms. Park spoke in her nomination acceptance of trying to transcend the country’s historic and regional political divisions.

Though the front-runner in national opinion polls, Ms. Park is likely to draw most of her support from the conservative party’s stronghold in South Korea’s southeast. One telling sign of how strongly she feels about her goal to cross barriers will be whether she campaigns in the southwestern Jeolla provinces, which tend to overwhelmingly support liberal and progressive politicians.

/Getty Images
Park Geun-hye placed a bouquet at the grave of former president Roh Moo-Hyun in Gimhae on Tuesday.

South Korean news accounts on Tuesday naturally focused on the graveside visit that represented Ms. Park’s biggest crossing of the political divide – Mr. Roh’s site in Gimhae, near Busan.

Ms. Park met privately with Mr. Roh’s widow, Kwon Yang-sook, after visiting his grave.

Conservative politicians like Ms. Park were prevented by Mr. Roh’s loyalists from visiting after his 2009 suicide. Many of his supporters believed Mr. Roh was driven to kill himself by a prosecutors’ investigation they felt was politically motivated.

But on Tuesday, her visit was welcomed by Mr. Roh’s former chief of staff, Moon Jae-in, who is in position to become Ms. Park’s main opponent in the Dec. 19 election. Mr. Moon is the front-running candidate for the nomination in the Democratic United Party, a race that will be decided late next month.

Mr. Moon told reporters, “Her visit to the grave of President Roh Moo-hyun was a desirable thing for the unity of people. And I see it in a positive way. But I hope that her visit wasn’t just a formal thing but a visit with sincerity to heal the wounds of the past and to seek to integrate society.”

The DUP's official spokesman, Rep. Jung Sung-ho, said Ms. Park's visit to Mr. Roh's grave was a "showy gesture" because she didn't provide a "sincere apology or reflection."

However the political theater of the grave visits plays in public and media opinion in coming days, one thing is clear: Ms. Park is uniquely positioned to champion the theme of national unity.

Her opponents have been trying cast Ms. Park's leadership style as similar to her father's authoritarian methods. They are unlikely to visit Park Chung-hee's grave site in the spirit of overcoming the political divisions of the past.

16. Education

The Korea Times

Obama Praises Korean Education Again

U.S. President Barak Obama has lauded South Korea, again, to encourage Americans to do more on the educational front.

In a speech he delivered in Las Vegas on Friday, he said America cannot succeed in science if India and South Korea produces more scientists and engineers, according to Yonhap News Agency Saturday.

The U.S., therefore, should realize the grave nature of the situation, he warned, according to the report.

Since his inauguration, Obama often used the Korean education to prod the American educators to make more efforts.

In March last year, only one month into his assuming president, for example, he called for the United States to look to South Korea in adopting longer school days and after-school programs for American children to help them survive in an era of keen global competition.

Obama's remarks came as a surprise to many South Koreans at that time as the country's education system has been under constant public criticism due to its lack of creativity and heavy dependence on private tutoring.

South Korean bloggers were not necessarily euphoric about Obama's renewed comment. A blogger commented that the South Korean government should give Obama an award for elevating Korea's international image. Another said, "It's good to be complimented. But I fear his frequent compliments on the Korean education might mislead some South Korean politicians to really believe that the Korean educational system is good enough."



Anonymous post to The Korea Times newsgroup, "Obama Praises Korean Education Again,"
February 20, 2010. http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2011/04/113_61138.html.