

Korea: Traditional and Modern Culture in Pictures

A Photo Essay by Charles Montgomery

In South Korea, traditional and modern culture appears in unexpected and beautiful juxtapositions. A short walk in Seoul treats you to traditional Korean music, beautiful temples and palaces, and a cutting-edge display of B-Boy dancing. Museums hold exhibitions of Western art that would be the envy of any Western city, and Korean cities teem with small and large Korean art galleries of all kinds.

In Asia, *Hallyu* (Korean Wave) has already pushed Korean culture into China, Taiwan, Japan, and other countries. Now, in the twenty-first century, Korean culture is poised to assume a much higher profile in the West.

Korea identifies six “Hans” that are important Korean cultural heritages for internationalization: *Hangul* (Alphabet), *Hansik* (Food), *Hanbok* (Clothing), *Hanok* (Traditional Housing), *Hanja* (Chinese Characters), and *Hanguk-Eumak*

(Music). These are the main themes of Korean culture that embody Korean spirit.

South Korea has a culture of deep spiritual beliefs. Of nearly fifty million people, twelve million are Christian; an equal number are Buddhist. Beneath this, most Koreans are influenced by Shamanism and Confucian philosophy. Korean literature (*Hangul* and *Hanja* used together) has been a powerful force of stability and rebellion and seems destined to earn a Nobel Prize soon. Art exists everywhere and each turn of a rural road might reveal a local museum or literary center. Education is a cultural core and the literacy and education levels of South Korea have aided in creating the “Miracle on the Han.”

*Korean culture is thousands of years old
and still evolving!*



Korean dance ranges from the traditional, often based in harvest culture or Shamanism, to the urban edge. Since 2001 Korean B-boys have won or finished in the Top 10 at the *International Battle of the Year* in Germany--the B-boy equivalent of the World Championships.

Traditional and Contemporary Korean Popular Culture



Dating back many centuries, taekwondo is Korea's national sport. But Koreans "kick" above their weight in many other sports. The South Korean team reached the quarterfinals of the World Cup Soccer Tournament in 2002, and finished fourth in 2008. Also in 2008, the South Korean team took the gold medal in Olympic Baseball.



Korean fashion also crosses time. The traditional hanbok (left) is suited to all of Korea's four distinct seasons, while the streets of Seoul are alive with the latest in haute-couture (above).

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Korea's traditional hanok is made from local materials and intended to harmonize with nature. On the banks of the Han and in every major city in South Korea, highrise apartments jut into the sky.



Traditional Korean music is highly rhythmic, and this emphasis on the beat lives on in South Korean rap music.



Korean ceramics are rightly world famous. In Ichon, foreign visitors can try their hand at casting them.

CHARLES MONTGOMERY received his BS from New York Institute of Technology and his MA in English from National University in California. He is a professor in the English Interpretation and Translation Department at Dongguk University, Seoul. His thoughts on Korean Literature can be found at: <http://www.ktlit.com>.