

Korean Culture, The First Twenty Years 1980–1999 Issues

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CD-ROM (FOR PCs ONLY)

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CONTENTS

The contents of this CD-ROM are quite diverse and impressive, and fields such as art, architecture, religion, history and film are well represented. The CD also includes a large number of translations of various Korean literary works, ranging from poetry of the pre-modern period to novels of the colonial period and contemporary short stories, many of which will be very useful in lessons on Korean lifestyles. Additionally, there are numerous articles covering the lives of Koreans living abroad, including those in the United States and the territories of the former Soviet Union. Also interesting are the numerous pieces—well over twenty such articles—covering collections of Korean art located abroad. As might be expected given the title of the work, the contents are heavily slanted towards the humanities, but nonetheless topics covering contemporary society including education and the changing position of women are addressed.

Analysis and Classroom Application

When I first began looking over *Korean Culture*, I was a bit apprehensive about appraising such a large work in a relatively short review. I was pleased to find a wealth of information—some twenty years worth of articles, many of which were written by leading scholars, covering a wide scope of topics. The articles are, for the most part, well written and informative. Also included on the CD is a brief introduction on the history, people, and geography of Korea, which will provide a solid start for students and instructors who are not familiar with Korea.

To appraise the value of this CD, I tried to put myself in the shoes of a high school student or undergraduate assigned a paper on some aspect of Korea. I chose for my topic, somewhat randomly, life in Chosŏn dynasty Korea (1392–1910). My simple

word search (“Chosŏn” [*sic*]—the CD does not use diacritic marks in transliterating Korean) resulted in 180 hits, covering a good range of topics such as daily life of commoners, women’s poetry, painting, the upper *yangban* class, maps, religion, literature, architecture, and modernization in the late Chosŏn period.¹ This abundance of material would certainly help a student in fashioning a good paper.

The CD also would be valuable to more advanced students or scholars seeking knowledge on a particular aspect of Korean society. And given the broad spectrum of topics, it would also be a useful resource in libraries.

Shortcomings

There are a couple of caveats with this CD-ROM, however. First, it presents a rather “sanitized” version of Korea and Korean history. Controversial historical elements are glossed over or skipped altogether. North Korea and its unique culture are largely ignored—the only brief mention of North Korea is in the introduction when the Korea War is discussed. Although there is relatively frequent mention of the economic growth and success of South Korea in various pieces, there is almost a complete absence of discussion of the poor and disenfranchised left out of the so-called “Miracle on the Han.”² The CD also seems to overlook alternative voices that stand against the “official” voice of the Korean government such as the many writings by the widely acclaimed dissident writer Kim Chiha. This can probably be attributed to the involvement of the South Korean government in producing *Korean Culture*. Another problem is the fact that some of the articles were written by freelance writers with little expertise in Korea, thus resulting in some rather glaring errors. For example, an article on Cheju Island informs that the diving women “have long been a symbol of the island’s matriarchal society” (1996: 17–2, p. 34); while Cheju (and parts of the Korean peninsula) may have once featured a *matrilineal* society, there is absolutely no evidence that there was ever a matriarchal society in recorded Korean history. Students not familiar with Korean history also would have benefited from a timeline presenting the major Korean kingdoms and historical events; information that is more detailed than what is found in the topic “About Korea” on the Main Menu. Finally, the transliteration of Korea words into English does not follow a consistent or recognized system (i.e., the McCune-Reischauer system), thus potentially creating confusion for users not acquainted with Korea.

Conclusion

Overall I believe this CD-ROM is an excellent resource and despite its few flaws will be a welcome addition to the growing number of quality resources available to both students and instructors learning or teaching about Korea. ■

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CD-ROM REVIEW

INTERFACE DESIGN AND NAVIGATION



Korean Culture cover, vol. 13:2, Summer 1992.

The CD's opening animation frames, accompanied by drum and cymbal percussion, end with an assemblage of *Korean Culture* cover photos in tile format. These begin to selectively dissolve while sample covers zoom forward, then disappear to be replaced with others, until finally the entire screen dissolves into the title page, *Korean Culture: The First Twenty Years, 1980-1999 Issues*. Under this title is a menu of five items with buttons: *Magazine*, *Images of Korea*, *About Korea*, *Useful Web Sites*,

Setup IE5, *Exit* (Exit from this Menu closes the CD). When looking at a magazine issue screen, navigation buttons for Issues and Contents are at the bottom of each issues page.

The viewer may click on any one of the Main Menu buttons. (Each hit has musical sound punctuation; there is no button to turn off the sound.) The first button, *Magazine*, produces the entire list of issues arranged according to volume number and date on a side bar to the left; the larger page of this screen shows information category buttons: Publishers Note; Issues; Author Index; Subject Index; Title Index; Credits. When perusing the articles, one can stretch the window frame sideways to better

accommodate the sidebar data, unlike the Main Menu screen which is fixed in size. The CD is easy to navigate; the opening animation, the variety of dissolve transitions between screens, and the sounds are appealing. For repeat visits, viewers should double click on the opening screen to go directly to the Main Menu. The type and the B&W illustrations are clear; the color images beautiful. Overall, I recommend it as a well-wrought digital excursion into aspects of Korean culture. ■

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NOTES:

1. It is also noteworthy that a search for entries on "Chosun" resulted in five additional articles concerning the Chosŏn dynasty.
2. A notable exception is the article by Vincent S. R. Brandt (Volume 4, no. 2) which investigates the squatter villages surrounding Seoul.

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