Of the three great ancient civilizations of East Asia, Korea receives the least attention. Few instructors of introductory Asian civilization classes take much time away from China or Japan to discuss Korea. That is partially because few of us have had much training in Korean history or culture. (Only a few universities in North America offer such courses.) But even if we do feel comfortable discussing Korea in a survey class, we may still refrain from doing so because of a lack of material to share with our students. This photo-CD was produced by the South Korean government to make that second excuse less common.

There is no explanatory text on this CD, only photos. But they are beautiful photos, ninety-nine of them. They include scenes of musicians in traditional garb playing traditional court music, women dancers in brightly colored hanbok (the national dress of Korea) performing both folk and classical dances (including the popular fan dance and drum dance), male folk music troupes with long white streamers whirling from their hats, shamans dancing and cajoling spirits, Buddhists celebrating Buddha’s birthday, and Confucian scholars practicing their calligraphy. There are also several photos of the traditional folk mask dance-drama as well as photos of traditional village games.

No one looking at any of these photos would mistake Korean culture for Chinese or Japanese culture. The clothing, the instruments, and the postures caught by the cam-
era are all distinctively Korean. Consequently, this photo-CD would be very useful for anyone wanting to provide students with visual evidence that Korean culture is quite distinctive and is not nearly as derivative of Chinese or Japanese culture as many students mistakenly assume. Unfortunately, if you are not already familiar with Korean culture, you will need a photo book to go with this photo-CD so that you can tell what these photos are photos of. Fortunately, the Korea Foundation has published (and sent to many libraries in North America) a series of books on traditional Korean culture called Koreana: Korean Cultural Heritage which will allow you to identify the specific folk arts, dances, and religious activities these photos depict.

This CD can be read by computers using either the Windows or the Macintosh operating systems. In addition to the photos, the disk contains the Kodak Photo-CD player to enable you to display the photos on your screen when the disk is in your CD-Rom drive. The disk also contains a program for Macintosh computers called the Apple Slide Show viewer which allows you to quickly scan the ninety-nine photos on the disk.

This photo-CD would be very useful in a classroom which allows a computer to be hooked up to a projector so that the images can be seen by an entire class. (The photos are of high enough resolution that they would still be clear on a large screen.) Alternately, this CD could be placed on reserve in a library where students could view the photos on individual computer screens. Either way, it would allow students to visualize Korean folk culture in all its vitality. Combined with an audio CD of traditional Korean music, and supplemented by a book explaining the various facets of traditional Korean culture (check with your local Korean consulate to see if they can help you obtain those teaching aids), this photo-CD could be used to make Korea come alive for students, and allow them to recognize and appreciate the many ways the people of Korea have expressed their Korean cultural identity over the centuries.

For more information on Koreana: Korean Cultural Heritage contact:
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Images used in this review are examples from the Korean Folk Arts on Photo-CD.