



THE NATIONAL ATLAS OF KOREA FOR CHILDREN

By Jeongchang Seong, Andrew Ivester, Junghwan Kim, and Hojin Jung.

Edited by Seungho Lee and Chul Sue Hwang.

Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, and Transport; and National Geographic Information Institute (NGII), Republic of Korea, 2017.

107 pages

Free online (see “Obtaining this Atlas,” below), ISBN 978-89-93841-27-5

Review by: Aimée C. Quinn, Northern Arizona University–Yuma

IF I WANTED TO TEACH MY CHILDREN ABOUT THE traditions, cultures, and works of my ancestors, I would want an atlas like the fifth volume of the revised *National Atlas of Korea*. It is specifically designed for children, and every page contains maps, illustrations, and language carefully selected to nourish a child’s mind and fascinate their imagination. This volume is new to the *National Atlas* and is intended “to help our children to better understand their nation and to foster a great pride in their nation” (preface). Throughout the atlas, the entire Korean Peninsula is frequently referred to as “Korea,” and several of the maps show it undivided, although many also differentiate the two Korean republics.

Like the other four volumes of the *National Atlas of Korea*, it is beautifully bound—this one features boards covered in a sandstone colored cloth—with the Korean and English titles imprinted on the endpapers. The front and back covers also sport drawings of a colored globe encircled with icons. Unfortunately, these icons do not match the ones used in the table of contents to identify each section, and that, arguably, is a missed opportunity for a compelling design feature. These icons could also have been a playful feature in the “Coloring Maps” section in the back, tying these maps to specific sections of this atlas.

The main body of the atlas is divided into six thematic sections—“Korea: a Story in Maps,” “Korea in Context,” “Natural Setting,” “People and Culture,” “Challenges and Responses,” and “Global Connections”—each containing

a number of short chapters. The thematic sections are preceded by two pages detailing who worked on, edited, and administratively oversaw the atlas. Although not explicitly labeled “appendices,” there are also four additional chapters appended to the end of atlas. The first is a fourteen-page collection of “Coloring Maps” for children: individual outline maps of the South Korean provinces decorated with sometimes quite detailed line drawings of local landmarks, flora, and fauna. These maps are followed by a detailed, six-page map of the entire Korean Peninsula, including the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (i.e., North Korea). Finally, the atlas closes with a map index and list of photo sources. The first thematic section, “Korea: a Story in Maps,” is hardly a “section” at all, as there is no text, and it is unclear what “story” is being told. All we get is an enhanced aerial image of Korea—an image not included in table of contents or map index, or credited in the photo sources—on page 8, facing a political map of the same area on page 9.

The chapter “Where is Korea?: Map Projections and Global Connections” opens the second section, “Korea in Context,” and introduces the young reader to the various ways map projections distort perspectives, perceptions, and, ultimately, the story told by the map. Illustrative analogies such as likening Goode’s projection to an orange-peel and Bonne’s to a heart both provide a grounding in basic cartographic terminology and set a tone for the rest of the atlas. However, more background information should have been included early in this section,

introducing young readers to all the different kinds of maps in the atlas, and the tools used to create them.

The text in this section speaks of maps as affording access to a *story of a place*, rich in history, and a *story of a people*, steeped in a culture that supported their way of life. However, “Korea in Context” moves through history very quickly, using a single map from 1402 to represent over five centuries of the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910), and then jumps to the post-World War II division of Korea, a time-sequence of the 1950–1953 Korean War, and the demilitarized zone created by the 1953 armistice. The section ends with a NASA satellite image showing the disparity in nighttime illumination between the two Koreas, a difference the text ascribes to unequal economic development. Although the war and its tragedies are handled carefully, the entire historical timeline is highly compressed and it is not clear what impression of the context young readers are expected to form. Nonetheless, it all ties together sufficiently to introduce readers to the third section: “Natural Setting.”

The “Natural Setting” section uses simplified geologic and topographic maps alongside color photographs to illustrate the next part of the peninsula’s story. It is one of the best-written portions of the atlas, with language that is precise and to the point. Statements like “The geology of the Korean peninsula is very important for interpreting the tectonic relationship between Korea, China, and Japan. As the East Sea was formed, it separated Japan from Korea and uplifted the eastern part of the Korean Peninsula” (22) provide a simple description of how the Korean landmass developed, in language accessible to young readers. Other parts of this section illustrate the composition of the ground, forests, waters, and atmosphere with well-drawn climographs and several soil, watershed, and weather maps. Numerous photographs are used to showcase the wide variety of fossils, trees, plants, mammals, birds, and ocean life indicative of the biological diversity found throughout the nation. The text in these few pages (26–36) is more scientific than that in other parts of the atlas, and is clearly addressed to older readers, but the writing style here and throughout the volume maintains an admirable factual elegance.

Pages 38 through 52 cover “People and Culture”—the heart of any civilization—and this section of the atlas discusses Korea’s transformation from the traditional to the modern. A multitude of color illustrations fills this section

of the atlas, including photos of food, people at worship, festival posters, and a variety of charts, plans, maps, and other material. It is rich with art that introduces the reader to the Korean way of life. This children’s atlas provides a simple review of what presently constitutes a “Korean culture”—unlike Volume One of the *National Atlas* series, which instead described how Korean culture evolved over time.

Korea’s population density is illustrated with a dot density and a choropleth map, while a cartogram is used to show how the population has moved towards the cities and away from the mountains. As the population changes, so does housing, transportation, and the economy, and these phenomena are also explored with maps, graphs, and photos. For example, traditional housing and transportation corresponded with the natural elements; but modern times require more modern means to house and transport citizens. There is a photo array of housing transformation on page 46. As the atlas notes, “in Korean society, there is a high level of enthusiasm, and spending, for education” (48), so education gets a look, too. Overall, this atlas section provides an informative look at significant cultural influences, but much of the data date from 2010 to 2014, making some of the information several years old at the time of publication. The next section—“Challenges and Responses”—is aptly titled. Korea is facing many challenges—particularly those stemming from climate change, such as environmental degradation, natural disaster, energy challenges, et cetera. The mountainous terrain of the Korean Peninsula, crisscrossed by high ranges and cut by numerous rivers—particularly the Nakdong and Han—somewhat isolates Korea from her Asiatic neighbors. The Nakdong is the longest river in South Korea, and flows southwards from the Taebaek Mountains to the Korean Strait that separates the peninsula from Japan. The Han River begins at the confluence of the Bukhan and the Namhan rivers, and flows into the Yellow Sea—providing water for much of South Korea, including the city of Seoul. All the rivers provide water to much of the nation, yet due to population increases, river conservation and restoration have become major challenges. Since the beginning of this century, soil erosion and natural disasters have challenged governments to choose which is a higher priority to provide the resources and technological development required to maintain a balance with the Korean population and culture. The “Challenges and Responses” section provides an in-depth discussion of the work undertaken, and the significance and difficulties of the work yet to be done.

The last section, “Global Connections,” educates the reader about Korea’s place in the world today. It begins with hospitality, a traditional mainstay in Korean culture. The story moves to a measurement of the satisfaction felt by the many Koreans who have emigrated abroad, bringing their culture with them into the global mainstream. Maps in this section illustrate global partnerships and major research expeditions—just the kind of things to spark national, civic, and cultural pride in the minds of a young readership. There is an overall sense of satisfaction in the tone in the concluding pages of this atlas. The reader should be content to know that they have learned something about this nation, as the authors are very proud of their *National Atlas of Korea for Children*.

OBTAINING THIS ATLAS

All volumes of the *National Atlas of Korea* are available online for viewing or download in Korean and English at no cost by visiting nationalatlas.ngii.go.kr.

Distribution of the five hardcover volumes of the atlas has been delegated to the Korean Geographical Society (KGS). We are told that KGS is distributing a very limited number of the books for \$150 per volume (excluding shipping). It is suggested that interested parties contact KGS directly at this address: Korean Geographical Society, 1413-ho, 213-12, Saechang-ro, Yongsan-gu, Seoul, 140-871, Korea.

