

## Unit 01 : Korean Culture 1

- Confucianism
- Hierarchy

**Objective:** Learn about Korea's

- Short history
- Confucianism
- Hierarchy

### 1. Short history

- More than half a million years of history
- Colonized by Japan: 1910~ 1945
- First Republic: 1948
- Korean War: 1950~ 1953
- Miracle of the Han River (한강의 기적): rapid economic growth after the Korean war
- Economic crisis in 1997 → Korea grew exponentially in international relations and economically
- 21C- Becoming dynamic site for tourist and expats.

### 2. Cultural characteristics

- Respect for elders deeply ingrained
- Age equals seniority
- Koreans work incredibly hard/ long hours
- Team players
- Very conformist due to collectivism
- Collectivism vs Individualism
- Individual and creative thinking may seem not encouraged
- Social structures remain very patriarchal

### 3. Difference between Eastern and Western culture

- Confucianism: birthed in China
- Emphasizes four major virtues: Sincerity, Benevolence, Filial Piety and Propriety

### 4. Confucianism

- Sincerity:
  - stresses importance of being faithful to one's commitments and promises to the group
  - must fulfill one's role and duty in the community
- Benevolence:
  - must always think of the benefits and welfare of the group not individuals
- Filial piety:
  - all children must obey, love and respect their parents and elders
  - seek a life that brings happiness, comfort, and a good reputation to their parents
- Propriety:
  - obligation to diligently conduct oneself according to a certain set of rules (e.g. etiquette, customs and specific moral code) which one must follow
- Hierarchy: Based on age, gender, and position in work place
- Versus Western culture: respect is earned not granted age or position

### 5. Korean philosophies

- Different ways to show respect:
  - bowing to elders or higher status people
  - hand gestures in the giving and receiving items
- Don't be offended when asked age or marital status
  - To be polite according to deferent language and hierarchy

→ Find common ground with others (e.g. age, marital status, work, which school graduate etc.)

- Koreans: Emphasize hierarchy

→ Top down leadership style (will show respect if you have experience in your line of work)

→ Rarely questioning why things are done the way they are

## 6. Western philosophies

- Deductive reasoning (may become root of frustration for Westerners living in Asia)
- Value independence, confidence, individual thought and often resist convention,
- The “how” and “why” questions shown as strength and essential to mature way of thinking
- Asia: “how” and “why” questions conceived as disrespectful whereas acceptance is a virtue
  - Korean employers/ employees showing difficulty
- explaining reasoning behind what they do

## 7. Societal characteristics

- Stresses importance of family (Confucianism)
  - Respecting all tradition and responsibility passed down from ancient culture
  - e.g. Ancestral ceremony *Jaesa* 제사:
  - Pay homage to ancestors and practicing age old traditions
- Based on a strong personal network and close relationships
  - Getting to know people and developing a level of trust is vital
  - Normal to be like a son or daughter to other elders
  - Korean employees seldom resist or set boundaries with their employers

- Emphasis on respect and honor to higher status: elders, bosses, hosts etc.
  - always bow lower than someone of a higher status, always allow your superior to initiate everything (eating, talking, drinking, etc.)
- Confucian ideals: taught and expected from all Koreans from an early age
- Men usually head of the household
- Women's role: caring for their children and maintaining household but a lot of women work these days → shift
- Grandparents: often support their children financially and typically actively involved in raising grandchildren until in need of care themselves
- People in higher positions (supervisors, boss, teachers, etc.) or elders: may seem impolite because act entitled to more respect
- Koreans: timid or modest?
  - Humility a virtue: do not talk about individual achievements (seen negatively as boasting)
  - Extravert and express their opinion frankly?  
e.g. commenting on appearance
- Workaholics?
  - second longest working hours among OECD countries  
(2017- 2,069 hrs, OECD average: 1,764 hrs)
  - national job market extremely competitive
- Saving Face: reputation is everything
  - different interpretation of reputation vs. western culture
  - collectivist perspective
  - does not admit to mistakes in public
  - blundering in public considered as sign of weakness

## 8. Tips for expats

- Hardships as expat:

to expect to maintain own cultural and social standards (in many ways you can) and to expect things to function the way it did in your home country.

- Being positive and flexible will help understand the culture and you will be more influential in your work place.
- Always use two hands when receiving something from elders, accepting money, business card, or anything of importance
- Ajumma (아줌마): older Korean women elbow and jostle for positions
- bbaliy-bbaliy (빨리 빨리): tasks are done quickly but not always efficiently.
- Don't write anyone's name in red ink (= death)
- Don't leave chopsticks and spoon sticking upright in rice bowl (only done at ancestral rituals for the dead)

### Top Tips!

- Be open to new things
- Be positive and flexible
- Understand the culture
- Try to make Korean friends ;)