

The Economic and Cultural Emergence of South Korea

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Seoul's Myeongdong District. Source: Photo courtesy of the author.

This module was developed for the Tennessee high school world history and geography standard No. 85—“Analyze the causes and effects of an increased role of South and East Asian countries in the global economy.”

The content of the module can easily be adapted for high school courses everywhere that incorporate content on post-World War II economic and cultural developments in South Korea, and was field-tested in an AP human geography class of ninth- and tenth-graders.

Estimated module length: Three to five fifty-minute class periods

Overview

South Korea (the Republic of Korea/ROK) is currently (2018) the seventh-largest export economy and the eleventh-largest economy overall among all the world's countries. South Korea's amazing

economic success was anything but certain when it was recovering from a brutal war with North Korea in the early 1950s, and its economic success is widely described as a “miracle.”

This module explores how the ROK has moved from a country dependent on foreign aid and low profit exports to a global leader with exports reaching most parts of the world. Along with its economic success, South Korea has in the last two decades benefited from the increasing popularity of its cultural exports: music, movies, television, and most recently beauty products. South Korea is now an economic power and exerts cultural influence not only in Asia, but in Europe, North America, and elsewhere. As South Korea continues to grow in influence around the world, both economically and culturally, it is essential that students understand the impact South Korea’s success has on the rest of the world, including the United States.

Objectives

Students will:

Explain and discuss how the economy of South Korea has changed since the late twentieth century and explain how South Korea was able to become the world’s eleventh-largest economy.

Discuss and describe how South Korea’s exports changed from 1962 to 2016 and explain how these exports have impacted the United States.

Define, describe, and explain the Korean Wave, its global impact, and its specific influence in the United States.

Prerequisite knowledge

Assumptions are that students are already able to locate the Korean peninsula on a map of Asia and understand that two nations now exist on the peninsula. It is also assumed that students understand the difference between the governments of North Korea and South Korea. This module focuses exclusively on South Korea.

Module introduction

The PowerPoint, worksheets, articles, and other materials for this module appear in both the module narrative and at the end of the module for the convenience of teachers wishing to use all or part of these digital materials.

Click the following links to download the PowerPoint necessary for this guide along with an appendix of all PowerPoint slides.

[PowerPoint](#)

[Appendix of PowerPoint Slides](#)

The module is based on four key websites: [ZeeMaps](#), [MIT’s The Observatory of Economic Complexity](#), [MIT’s Pantheon Mapping Historical Cultural Production](#), and [Gapminder Tools](#). See References and Resources at the end of the module for more information on these sites.

First, students examine how South Korea's exports have changed over time by using *The Observatory of Economic Complexity* website. The statistics students work with begin in 1962. This activity enables students to learn what the ROK exported nine years after the Korean War (1950–1953) and compare and contrast 1962 exports with subsequent South Korean exports, included in fifteen-year intervals (1980, 1995, 2010, and 2016).

Students then focus upon South Korean exports to the United States by researching three separate dates. The first date, 1963, was selected because in that year, for the first time, South Korea's leading exports were textiles (a secondary/ manufacturing activity). Previously, lower-valued fishing and seafood exports (primary activity) constituted the leading South Korean export to the U.S. The second date, 1985, is significant because, for the first time, Air Jordan Nike shoes (see the bell work example that follows) were manufactured. In the late 1980s, South Korea's leading exports were shifting from textiles to electronics. The final, most current date for which data is available (2016) illustrates how drastically South Korea's exports have changed since the 1960s and 1980s.

The final student activity in the module is an examination of the Korean Wave and the global impact of popular Korean culture. Students will learn about these topics using MIT's *Pantheon* website to research famous Koreans who are now known throughout the world. Students will also watch related videos and complete a reading about the Korean Wave and the global significant interest in popular Korean culture.

PowerPoint guide

This module includes a comprehensive (104 slides) PowerPoint that contains handouts, visual images of the websites, videos, student readings, and answer keys. Any reader who would like to see useful graphics related to this module is encouraged to utilize the PowerPoint. A guide for the PowerPoint is included in Appendix I at the end of this module, and activity instructions are included in the PowerPoint itself.

Class No.1

Estimated time: fifty minutes, excluding the optional/enrichment assignments and videos

Prior to class, give students a short homework assignment asking them to locate five clothing items and identify where they were manufactured. The clothing items can include athletic wear, tennis shoes, and t-shirts. It is permissible to have more than one item that comes from the same country. The expectation is that the majority of the clothing items will be produced in Asian and Central American countries (eg, China, *Việt Nam*, Thailand, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Malaysia, Indonesia, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, and Mexico).

Optional first assignment

Because many schools provide students with their own digital devices, it might be possible for students to use a ZeeMap to upload their five examples.

If this is the case, teachers can provide students with the URL of the ZeeMap. Students can go to the URL and, following the directions in the PowerPoint, add to the map the name of their five items and where their five items were made/manufactured.

Bell work activity

First, ask students to name their clothing items and where they were made/manufactured. List the countries on a whiteboard or chalkboard, or if instructors have a world map on the wall, they can place a small Post-it Note on each country students identify. Depending on the size of the class, it might be possible to have students provide additional examples.

If instructors had students create the ZeeMap, display the ZeeMap on the screen or television for the class to see. It is also possible to have students bring in their list of five items and add their five items to the ZeeMap during class. It takes approximately ten to fifteen minutes for students to complete this task.

Looking at the list of countries either on the board or map, ask students why their clothing items are being manufactured in these countries. Discuss with students the various costs that go into manufacturing clothing: labor, materials, transportation, and factory/infrastructure. Ask students why most of the countries listed are in Asia and Central America, not in Europe, Africa, or South America. Ask students why few of the clothing items come from Japan, South Korea, and Singapore. These are all Asian countries that either border or are nearby many of the countries the students will list. However, unlike the countries the students are most likely to list, these are some of the wealthiest countries in Asia—as well as in the world.

In the second bell work activity, have students answer the following question:

One of the school's homecoming dress-up days is 1980s-themed. You decide to wear a pair of Air Jordans. In which country were these shoes made? The five choices are China, Japan, North Korea, South Korea, and *Việt Nam*.

One of the school's Homecoming dress-up days is 1980's. You decide to wear this pair of Nike Air Jordans. In which country were these shoes made?



- A. China**
- B. Japan**
- C. North Korea**
- D. South Korea**
- E. Vietnam**



Source: PowerPoint slide by author. (See module PowerPoint for complete sources.)

The correct answer is South Korea. It is possible that no student had a current clothing item from South Korea, but if this were 1985, many of them would have had clothing items from South Korea. Ask students why they think South Korea no longer produces very many clothing items and why those clothing items are now being produced in other Asian countries. They will learn as they continue with the module that South Korea transitioned from textiles and garments to higher-valued exports such as semiconductors, automobiles, and electronics.

Optional activity to extend the bell work

To help students better understand why clothing companies like Nike no longer use countries like South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan for their manufacturing plants, have students watch the five minute, forty-two seconds long video clip of a speech given by Nike's founder, Phil Knight. The link for the [C-SPAN video clip](#). After students have watched the clip, have them discuss why Nike first moved its factories to South Korea, but then in the 1990s moved their factories to other Asian countries. This short video provides students with the concise reason why Nike does not produce many of its products in the United States: labor and production costs. Knight says in the video that if Nike were to have produced Nike Air Jordans in the United States during the late 1980s, company research findings indicated the shoes would have cost American consumers an additional \$100. He also mentions in the video clip what would have to occur for Nike to move factories back to the United States. If time permits, I *highly recommend* showing students the video clip.

Optional enrichment activity

Nike's website provides specific details about all its manufacturing factories around the world. In this activity, students match the country with the correct factory statistics. This activity is on the accompanying PowerPoint.

When going over answers to the activity, review the following items with students: Japan, the U.S., and South Korea will have the fewest factories because they are the most developed countries. China is in a transitional period; it is becoming increasingly cheaper to produce clothing items in other countries such as *Việt Nam* and Indonesia. The average age of workers is much younger in countries that are not as developed as these four nations (eg, *Việt Nam* and Indonesia).

Further instruction

After discussing the bell work with students, the next step is for students to understand how South Korea's exports have changed over time. To gain some background information on South Korea's economy, students will read one short article and watch at least one short video. These two sources will help provide students with some critical information on South Korea and a brief explanation of how South Korea's economy has been able to prosper since the end of the Korean War. There are discussion questions for students once they have completed the article and video.

Background article and video

Students will read and answer the discussion questions for the article "The Miracle on the Hangang River" from *Korea.net* and view the short video "How Powerful Is South Korea?" by *NowThisWorld* on YouTube.

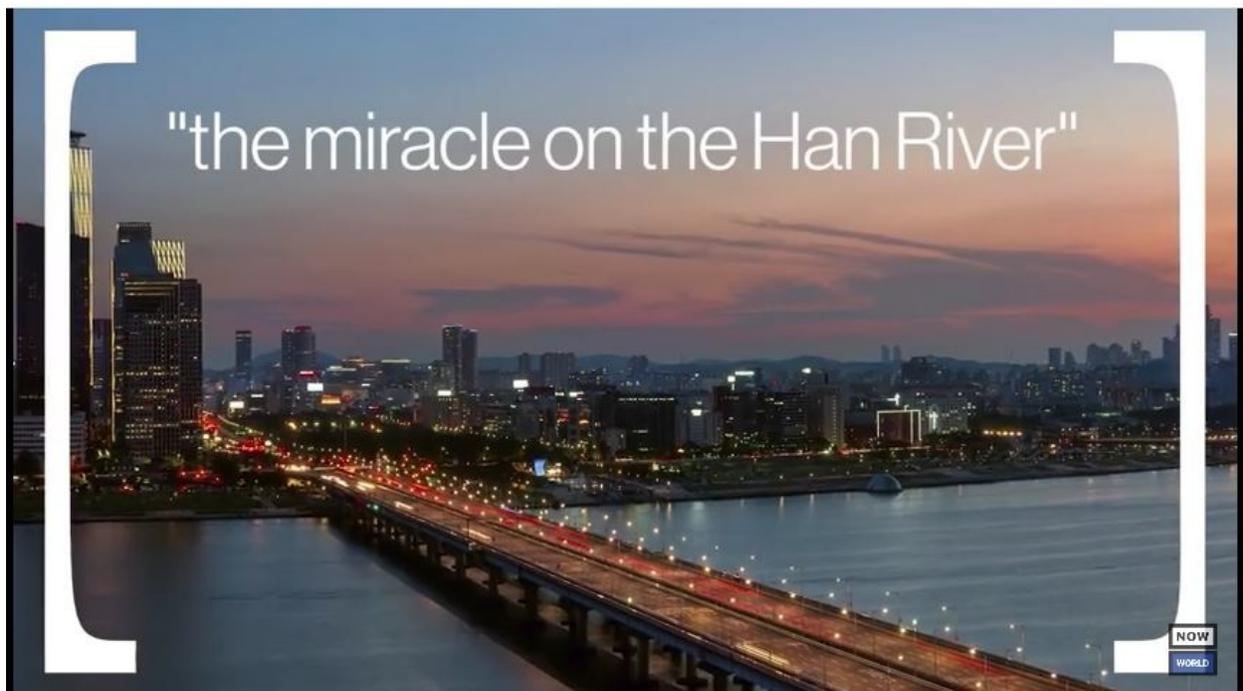
Discussion questions for “[The Miracle on the Hangang River](#)”

Explain the title of the article.

What does the South Korean Constitution guarantee for the people of South Korea?

Create a timeline of the main events that led up to the “miracle.”

Describe South Korea’s economy in 2010.



Screen capture from “How Powerful Is South Korea?” Source: *NowThisWorld* on *YouTube* at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=67zjH6bV8wo>.

Discussion questions for “[How Powerful Is South Korea?](#)” (three minutes, twenty-six seconds long)

Explain the title of the video.

How does South Korea match up with other countries around the world?

Why does the narrator say that South Korea is “super-powerful”?

Optional background videos

There are two longer videos that will provide a more in-depth explanation of how South Korea's economy was able to grow to one of the largest in the world.

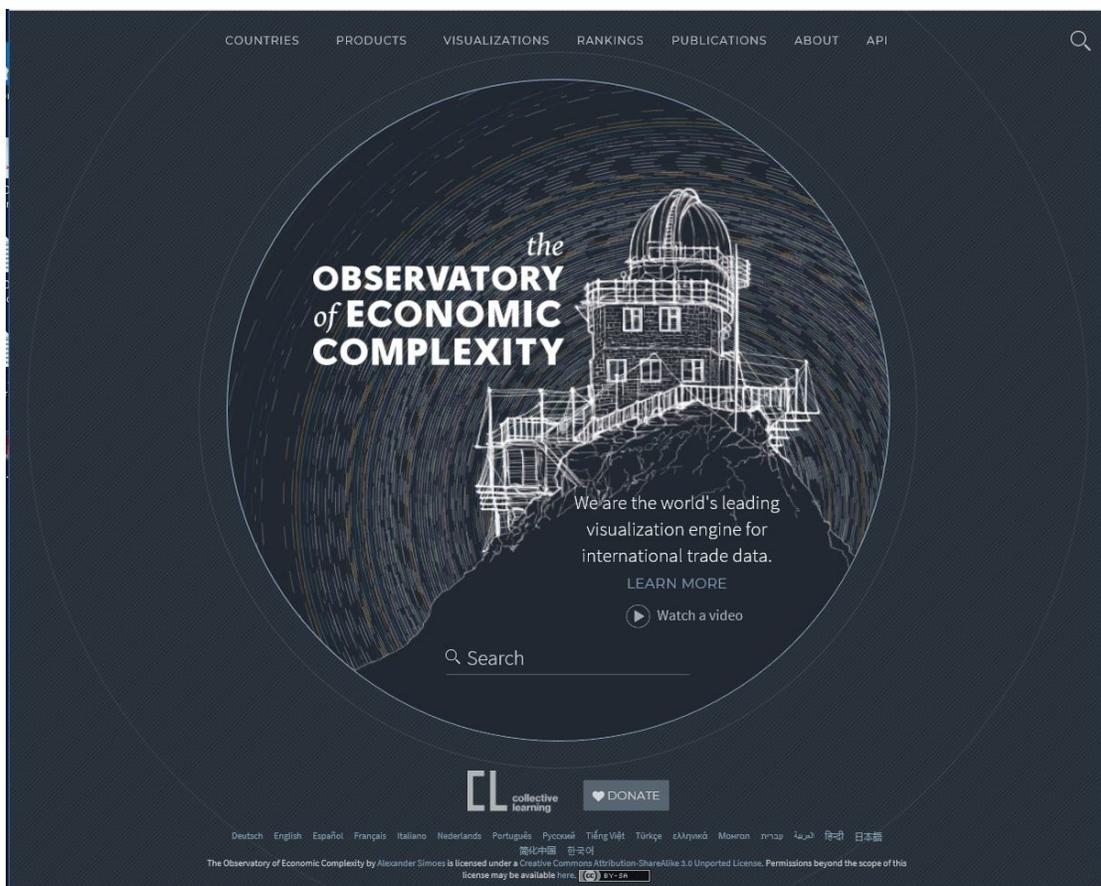
The two videos are linked below:

[Behind Korea's Economic Success](#) by the *Korea Foundation* on YouTube (twenty-four minutes, thirty-one seconds)

[Korea's Economic Miracle](#) from *The Korean Culture Series* on YouTube (thirty-one minutes, thirty-one seconds)

Teaching tip: One way to keep students engaged while viewing the videos is to instruct students to write down one fact for each minute of the video. For example, for the first video, students would write down twenty-four facts. When viewing a video of this length, it may also be a good idea to stop the video two or three times and have a few students report to the class the facts they have written down. The longer videos will not be appealing to some students. Thus, it becomes important to keep students engaged so they understand the important concepts from the video clips.

After students have a better understanding of South Korea's economic growth over time, have them complete the following activities, which will allow them to explore specific changes in South Korea's exports since 1962. The MIT *Economic Complexity* website is a rare resource that can be used in discussing not only South Korea, but in analyzing almost all the world's countries.



MIT: *The Observatory of Economic Complexity* home page. Source: <https://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/>.

Activity No. 1: Using the MIT Economic Complexity website

The purpose of the first activity is to illustrate how South Korea's exports have changed since 1962. Students will access the [MIT website on economic complexity](https://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/), and follow the directions in the PowerPoint on how to access the export information for South Korea. Then they will complete the chart titled "Selected Exports for South Korea 1962–2016." The detailed illustrated directions and handout are in the accompanying PowerPoint.

be possible to have them complete Activity No. 1 for homework and start Class No. 2 with reviewing their answers.

Activity No. 2: Using the MIT Economic Complexity website

In the second activity, students gain a greater specific understanding of South Korean exports.

Students will follow the directions in the PowerPoint. The students will need to click on the depth of “SITC4” to see a more specific list of the exports for each of the main categories. Students will then fill out the information on the second part of the selected exports for South Korea handout.

Discussion for Activity Nos. 1 and 2

Once students have had enough time to complete the two handouts (approximately twenty-five to thirty minutes), lead a class discussion on what the graph illustrates in the way of additional details to what the students read and viewed in the background information. Ask students to explain how the exports have changed and ask them to discuss reasons for these changes.

Short videos on South Korea’s current economic growth

To aid in your class discussion, have students watch two short videos that provide additional detailed information on South Korea’s most important companies. Have the students answer the following discussion questions after viewing the two videos:

Discussion questions for [Six Industries Driving Korean Exports, as Other Industries Stagnate](#) by Arirang News on YouTube (one minute, forty-four seconds)

What are the six export industries that “power the country’s economy”?

Why are these industries crucial to the economy?

Discussion questions for [South Korea’s Biggest Company Produces Ships and Military Hardware](#) by CNN on YouTube (two minutes, seventeen seconds)

How widespread is Samsung’s influence in South Korea? Give specific examples.

How is Samsung influencing Korean popular culture?

What is the “Korean dream”?

Activity No. 3: Using the MIT Economic Complexity website

By now, students should have a good understanding of how South Korea’s economy was able to grow into one of the world’s largest. Students should be able to explain with specific details how South Korea’s exports changed from 1962 to 2016.

The third and final activity has students examine what South Korea specifically imported and exported to the United States during the years 1963, 1985, and 2016. Students complete the USA and South Korean trade handout on how exports to the United States changed over time. This activity should take students fifteen to twenty minutes.

Once students have completed the handout, have a class discussion in which students share their answers to the short essay question on how South Korea's exports to the United States have changed. Also have students discuss how United States imports to South Korea have changed.

Class No. 3

Estimated time: fifty minutes, excluding the optional video



K-pop group Big Bang. Source: *Korea.net* at <http://www.korea.net/AboutKorea/Culture-and-the-Arts/Hallyu>.

Activity No. 4: The Korean Wave

The final activity of the module focuses on South Korea's cultural exports of music, television, movies, and most recently beauty products. This is commonly referred to as the Korean Wave, or *Hallyu*.

To introduce the spread of South Korean culture, have students examine a slide from the accompanying PowerPoint where they are asked to identify the eight Koreans in the photo.

Who are these famous Koreans?



Source: PowerPoint slide made by author. (See module PowerPoint for complete sources.)

The answers are:

1. Psy: K-pop musician
2. Daniel Dae Kim: Actor
3. Yuna Kim: Ice skater
4. Hyun-jin Ryu: National league baseball player
5. John Cho: Actor (the new *Star Trek* movies)
6. Ban Ki-moon: Politician (United Nations)

Students will likely recognize a few of these famous Koreans from television, movies, or sports, and, hopefully, realize at a basic level the growing influence South Koreans are having in the United States.

Next, have students complete the discussion questions below on a background article and two-minute and fifty-eight second video on the Korean Wave. The video and article will give examples of the growing popularity of Korean cultural exports around Asia and also the United States.

Background Korean Wave video and article

Discussion questions for [On the Road: South Korea Popular Culture](#) by CNN on YouTube (two minutes, fifty-eight seconds)

What is meant by South Korea's "soft power"?

What is the K-Wave?

Why are Korean dramas popular around the world?

Discussion questions for [Korean Wave Makes a Splash Worldwide](#) from *Financial Times*

Explain the title of the article.

How has the Korean Wave impacted the United States?

Who are the K-pop fans in the United States?

What is the future of the Korean Wave?

Activity: MIT Pantheon website

To provide students with a more thorough and historical account of South Koreans' impact on world history, students will use the MIT *Pantheon* website. Students will research the most "globally known" South Koreans and complete the handout on the globally known people born in present-day South Korea by writing descriptions for five famous South Koreans. The directions and handout are in the accompanying PowerPoint.

Once students have completed the research and filled out the handout, have them share their examples in small groups of three or four students. This will help introduce students to some of the most famous South Koreans throughout history.

Optional video for more detailed information on the Korean Wave

Use this video if you want a more detailed look at all aspects of the Korean Wave: K-drama, K-pop, and K-movies. The video is eighteen minutes and could easily be viewed and discussed during one class period.

Discussion questions for [Korean Culture Series: Korean Wave, Hallyu](#) from the *Korean Culture Series* on YouTube (eighteen minutes, thirty-five seconds)

Explain the title of the article. What is the meaning and history of Hallyu?

What are the three different genres of entertainment that make up Hallyu?

What are impacts of Hallyu around the world? List up to six examples.

Class No. 4

Estimated time: fifty minutes, including the optional assignments

Some students who take a world history or geography course may have an opportunity the following school year to take the AP human geography course. One component of the AP human geography exam, as well as other AP courses, requires students to complete free response questions. These are essay-style questions that students answer in complete sentences. This final activity is designed in the format of an AP free response question, and it also acts as a summative assessment for the module.

The free response questions

Discuss three ways South Korea's exports have changed from just after the Korean War to the present time.

List and discuss three reasons South Korea was able to transition from being one of the world's poorest countries in the 1960s to one of the wealthiest in 2017.

Discuss two ways South Korea's imports and exports to and from the United States have changed since the end of the Korean War.

Define the Korean Wave and give two examples of its global influence.

Answers to the free response questions

The following are some key items that should be included in the free response questions' answers. The list below contains not the only answers students can have, but they are the most common answers students should give.

1950s foreign aid recipient, 1960s exporter of raw materials/primary activities such as fishing and mining, 1970s and '80s exporter of textiles and garments, 1990s to present exporter of manufactured goods and electronics, such as televisions (Samsung), automobiles (Kia), and appliances (LG)

Government strategies, stable government, educated/motivated workforce (human capital), export-driven industries, government and large corporations. One helpful online presentation is at <https://tinyurl.com/y9gvg8ud> by Tae-shin Kwon of the Korea Economic Research Institute. The answers for this section would mainly come from the articles and videos on South Korea's economy.

In 1963, imports were cereals, vegetable oils, cotton, rice, and soybeans. In 1985, imports were more diverse, such as food items, electronics, machinery, and energy sources. In 2016, imports were mainly machinery, chemicals, and health-related products.

The Korean Wave is the spread of South Korean cultural items: music, television, movies, and beauty products. The impact of the wave is the spread of the South Korean culture, language, and popular culture around the world.

Additional activities for the module

There are two short optional closing activities. These slides and the answers are in the accompanying PowerPoint.

These activities could also be used earlier in the module. Specifically, the first activity could be used with the video on South Korea's six most important industries, and the second activity could be used when discussing USA and South Korean trade.

The first activity has students view a slide of company names and logos to determine which of the companies are South Korean.



Source: PowerPoint slide made by author. (See module PowerPoint for complete sources.)

In the second activity, students examine the following list of twelve countries and are asked to select the five countries that are South Korea's largest export partners.

Australia, Brazil, China, Hong Kong, India, Japan, North Korea, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, United Kingdom, United States, *Việt Nam*

Answer: China, United States, Hong Kong, *Việt Nam*, Japan

Optional activity

As a way to transition from the module on South Korea to instruction about other countries, eg, North Korea, Japan, and China, have students use the *Gapminder* website and complete the life expectancy and income per person for selected countries handout comparing the selected country's income and life expectancy. The selected countries are China, Japan, North Korea, South Korea, and the United States. The handout and the answers are on the accompanying PowerPoint.

References and resources

<https://www.c-span.org/video/?c4712687/nike-korea>: This is the link to the bell work video clip "Why Is Nike in Korea?" from C-SPAN.

<http://www.korea.net/AboutKorea/Economy/The-Miracle-on-The-Hangang>

<http://www.korea.net/AboutKorea/Culture-and-the-Arts/Hallyu>: These are articles on "The Miracle on the Hangang River, Hallyu" from the *Korean Culture and Information Service*.

<https://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/kor>: This is an entry on South Korea from the *Observatory of Economic Complexity* from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. MIT's *Observatory of Economic Complexity* is a website that is used extensively in the module. It allows students to access a tremendous amount of information on a country's specific exports and imports. Students are able to see the historical change in a country's exports and imports, as well as see with whom the country trades.

<http://pantheon.media.mit.edu>: MIT's *Pantheon Mapping Historical Cultural Production* is a website that allows students to see who the "globally known people" are from most of the world's countries. It shows some of the most famous and important people in a wide range of countries from 4000 BCE to 2010. The main categories are politicians, athletes, performers, scientists, and activists.

<http://manufacturingmap.nikeinc.com>: This online map from Nike details where their products are made worldwide.

http://money.cnn.com/news/economy/world_economies_gdp/index.html: This site contains data on the world's largest economies from CNN.

<https://www.gapminder.org/tools>: *Gapminder* is a website that takes country statistics from a wide range of topics and creates an interactive graph that allows students to see how a country has changed over time. Statistics are available on the following categories: economy, education, energy, environment, health, infrastructure, population, society, and work. This website is for an optional activity.

<https://www.zeemaps.com>: *Zeemaps* is a website that allows teachers to create a map that students can access and to which they can simultaneously add information. It is a free website, easily accessible, and easy for students to use. All that is needed is access to the internet. The students can access the shared map by going to its web address.

https://as.vanderbilt.edu/gped/documents/2016_0922_Kwon-Miracle_of_the_Han_River.pdf: This link contains presentation slides by Tae-shin Kwon of the Korea Economic Research Institute, titled "Miracle on the Han River and Beyond: Overview of Korea's Rapid Industrial Development and the Future," for a 2016 Vanderbilt University talk.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=67zjH6bV8wo>: "How Powerful Is South Korea?" video by NowThisWorld on *YouTube*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Umidd8JwO04>: "Six Industries Driving Korean Exports, as Other Industries Stagnate" video on *YouTube*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gAGqpJUkzco>: "South Korea's Biggest Company Produces Ships and Military Hardware" video on *YouTube*.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BvYMq82Fl_k: "On the Road: South Korea Popular Culture" video by CNN on *YouTube*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fvzhNK9MblU>: “Korea's Economic Miracle: From Foreign Aid Recipient to Donor” video by Korean Culture Series and Quick Korean on *YouTube*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQARiOFLBCo>: “Secrets behind Korea's Economic Success_2015 Revised Edition” video by The Korea Foundation_on *YouTube*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sT7yfX6ufuY&t=>: “Korean Wave, Hallyu” video by Korean Culture Series and Quick Korean on *YouTube*.

Digital Materials for the Module “The Economic and Cultural Emergence of South Korea”

PowerPoint

<https://www.utc.edu/asia-program/docs/modules1/robinson/korealessonplanfinal.pptx>

Appendix I of PowerPoint slides

<https://www.utc.edu/asia-program/docs/modules1/robinson/appendix1.docx>

Selected exports for South Korea 1962–2016

<https://www.utc.edu/asia-program/pdfs/modules1/robinson/selectedexports.pdf>

USA and South Korea trade

<https://www.utc.edu/asia-program/pdfs/modules1/robinson/usasouthkoretrade.pdf>

Who are the globally known people born in present-day South Korea?

<https://www.utc.edu/asia-program/pdfs/modules1/robinson/globallyknownsouthkoreans.pdf>

Life Expectancy and Income Per Person for Selected Countries Student

<https://www.utc.edu/asia-program/pdfs/modules1/robinson//lifeexpectancy.pdf>