

DEVELOPMENT OF HISTORICAL INFORMATION ON SITES RELATED TO POST-1945 KOREAN EVENTS AND THE KOREAN WAR (NORTH AND SOUTH)

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Abstract:

Post-1945 events in Korea and the Korean War (1950–1953) constitute a pivotal chapter in East Asian history, profoundly shaping the region's political, social, and security landscape to this day. The end of the Japanese occupation in 1945 resulted in the division of the Korean Peninsula into two spheres of influence: North Korea under the Soviet Union and South Korea under the United States. Diverging ideologies in these regions subsequently ignited the Korean War in 1950. Various historical sites associated with these events remain extant, serving as vehicles for preserving the public's collective memory. This study aims to identify sites linked to post-1945 Korea and the Korean War and to analyze how historical information can be developed and applied at these locations. A historical research method with a qualitative approach utilizing literature reviews and documentation was employed. The findings indicate that sites such as the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), Panmunjom, the War Memorial of Korea, Imjingak Peace Park, and the United Nations Memorial Cemetery hold significant historical value as educational resources. Developing historical information through interpretive media and digital technology can enhance public understanding of modern Korean history

Keywords: Post-1945 Korea, Korean War, Historical Sites, Historical Information, Public History.

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1. Introduction

The end of World War II in 1945 marked the beginning of a major shift in the political dynamics of the Korean Peninsula. Japan's defeat ended the colonial period that had lasted since 1910, but it did not immediately lead to a unified Korea. Instead, Korea was divided along the 38th parallel into two occupation zones: a northern region under the influence of the Soviet Union and a southern region under the influence of the United

States. This initially temporary division evolved into a permanent political separation with the establishment of the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) in 1948 (Armstrong, 2009).

Ideological differences between the two countries later escalated into an armed conflict known as the Korean War (1950–1953). The conflict involved not only North and South Korea but also other countries through the United Nations (UN), the United States, the People's Republic of China, and the Soviet Union. The Korean War became one of the largest conflicts of the Cold War era because it reflected the ideological rivalry between the Western and Eastern blocs. The impact of the war not only resulted in massive casualties and infrastructure damage, but also left a political division that persists to this day (Cumings, 2011).

This historical event left behind various sites that hold significant value as historical legacies and collective memories. Sites such as the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), Panmunjom (Joint Security Area), the War Memorial of Korea, Imjingak Peace Park, and the United Nations Memorial Cemetery represent tangible representations of modern Korean history. In addition to serving as historical relics, these sites also serve as educational resources, explaining the division of Korea, the course of the Korean War, and the ongoing peace efforts (Kim, 2011).

From a public history perspective, the presentation of historical information at historical sites plays a crucial role in building public understanding of historical events. Information conveyed through interpretive narratives, visual media, and digital technology can strengthen the educational function of historical sites while enhancing visitors' learning experiences. Museums, monuments, and memorial areas are no longer viewed solely as repositories for artifacts, but rather as interpretive spaces capable of connecting the public with past events in a more contextual way (Olivadese, 2025).

With the advancement of information technology, the management of historical sites has also undergone changes through the use of digital media such as QR codes, virtual tours, augmented reality, and web-based applications. These technologies enable the delivery of historical information to be more interactive, accessible, and engaging for the public, especially the younger generation. The digitization of historical information is also considered capable of expanding public access to historical sources without compromising the authenticity of the preserved sites (Lee, 2022).

Various previous studies have discussed post-1945 Korean history, the Korean War, collective memory, and historical site management. However, most research has focused on aspects of politics, international relations, military history, or the development of historical tourism separately. Studies integrating the identification of Korean War historical sites with historical information development strategies based on public history and digital technology are still relatively limited. Yet, the presentation of comprehensive and easy-to-understand historical information is a crucial factor in enhancing the educational function of historical sites.

Based on these conditions, this study aims to identify sites related to post-1945 Korea and the Korean War and analyze the forms of historical information development that can be applied to these sites. This research is expected to contribute to the

development of public history, the preservation of historical heritage, and innovation in the presentation of historical information through the use of interpretive media and digital technology.

2. Method

This research uses a historical method with a historical approach. This method was chosen because the research focuses on the reconstruction of past events and the analysis of historical sites related to post-1945 Korea and the Korean War (1950–1953). A qualitative approach was used to understand the historical significance of each site and to analyze the development of historical information as an educational medium for the public.

The historical method in this research consists of four stages: heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. The heuristic stage was conducted by collecting various relevant sources, including books, scientific journal articles, official documents, digital archives, reports from international organizations, and information from institutions managing historical sites related to post-1945 Korea and the Korean War. These sources were obtained through library research from scientific databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, Taylor & Francis, SpringerLink, and national and international journal portals.

The next stage is source criticism, which includes external and internal criticism. External criticism is conducted to assess the authenticity and credibility of sources based on the identity of the author, year of publication, publisher, and publishing institution. Meanwhile, internal criticism was conducted to examine the source content by comparing various references to obtain objective, consistent, and academically accountable information.

Next, the interpretation stage was conducted by analyzing the relationship between post-1945 Korean historical events, the Korean War, and the existence of historical sites such as the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), Panmunjom (Joint Security Area), the War Memorial of Korea, Imjingak Peace Park, and the United Nations Memorial Cemetery. The analysis also focused on the presentation of historical information applied to these sites and the opportunities for its development through interpretive media and digital technology.

The final stage was historiography, which systematically compiled research results based on verified historical facts. The analysis was then presented in the form of a scientific narrative explaining the relationship between the development of modern Korean history, the existence of historical sites, and strategies for developing historical information to strengthen educational functions, preserve collective memory, and promote public history.

Data collection techniques in this research were literature study and documentation. Literature review was used to obtain secondary data in the form of theories, concepts, previous research results, and information on post-1945 Korean history and the Korean War. Documentation was conducted by collecting photographs, maps, digital archives, and visual information regarding the historical sites that were the object of the study. All data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative data analysis,

namely by grouping data by theme, comparing various sources, and then drawing conclusions in accordance with the research objectives.

3. Results and Discussion

This section is the most crucial part of your article. The research analysis or results should be presented clearly and concisely, focusing on summarizing the (scientific) findings rather than offering extensive data. Emphasize the differences between your findings and those from previous studies by other researchers. Tables and figures should be centered and referenced in the text. Ensure that figures are easily readable and have a minimum resolution of 300 DPI for optimal print quality. Tables should follow an open format, without vertical lines, as demonstrated below.

3.1. Korea After 1945 and the Emergence of Two Korean States

The surrender of Japan on 15 August 1945 marked the end of thirty-five years of Japanese colonial rule over the Korean Peninsula. Since the formal annexation of Korea in 1910, the Japanese colonial government had exercised strict political control, exploited Korea's natural and human resources, and implemented assimilation policies designed to eliminate Korean national identity. Korean language education was restricted, many cultural traditions were suppressed, and economic production was directed primarily toward supporting Japan's industrial and military expansion. Consequently, Japan's defeat in the Second World War was welcomed by the Korean people as the beginning of national liberation and an opportunity to establish an independent state (Cumings, 2005).

Although Korea had achieved liberation from colonial rule, independence did not immediately result in the establishment of a unified national government. Instead, the Korean Peninsula became one of the first regions affected by the growing rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. Following Japan's surrender, both countries agreed to accept the surrender of Japanese forces in Korea by temporarily dividing the peninsula along the 38th Parallel. Soviet troops occupied the northern region, while American forces administered the southern region. Initially, this arrangement was intended as a temporary military measure until a unified Korean government could be established. However, the deterioration of relations between the United States and the Soviet Union during the early Cold War transformed this temporary division into a permanent political separation.

The division of Korea reflected not only military considerations but also the broader ideological confrontation between capitalism and communism. The United States sought to promote a democratic political system and a market-oriented economy in southern Korea, whereas the Soviet Union encouraged the establishment of a socialist government in the north. As Cold War tensions intensified, both superpowers increasingly viewed Korea as a strategically important region for protecting their respective security and political interests in East Asia. Consequently, domestic political developments within Korea became closely linked to international geopolitical competition.

In northern Korea, Soviet authorities supported the emergence of communist political institutions under the leadership of Kim Il-sung. Having previously participated

in anti-Japanese guerrilla activities, Kim Il-sung gained considerable political legitimacy among many Koreans. With Soviet assistance, he consolidated political authority, reorganized administrative institutions, and established the foundations of a socialist state. Land reform redistributed land from large landlords to peasants, while major industries, banking institutions, and transportation systems were nationalized. These reforms strengthened state control over economic development and laid the foundation for a centrally planned economy.

In contrast, southern Korea experienced a different political trajectory under the administration of the United States Army Military Government. American authorities supported anti-communist political leaders, particularly Syngman Rhee, who had spent many years advocating Korean independence abroad. Rhee promoted the establishment of a democratic government based on constitutional principles and private economic ownership. Nevertheless, the political transition in South Korea was accompanied by significant challenges, including widespread poverty, food shortages, ideological conflict between left-wing and right-wing organizations, and social unrest inherited from the colonial period.

International efforts to reunify the peninsula were undertaken through the United Nations. In 1947, the United Nations proposed nationwide elections supervised by the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK). However, Soviet authorities refused to allow UN representatives to enter northern Korea, preventing elections from being conducted throughout the peninsula. As a consequence, elections were held only in the south, while northern Korea established its own political institutions independently. The failure of these reunification efforts accelerated the institutional separation of the two Korean governments.

On 15 August 1948, the Republic of Korea (ROK) was officially proclaimed in Seoul with Syngman Rhee as its first president. Less than one month later, on 9 September 1948, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) was established in Pyongyang under the leadership of Kim Il sung. From this point onward, two separate Korean states emerged, each claiming to represent the legitimate government of the entire Korean nation. Their contrasting political systems, economic policies, and foreign alliances reinforced the division of the peninsula and intensified ideological competition (Seth, 2011).

The establishment of the two Korean states significantly increased political and military tensions between North and South Korea. Border incidents occurred frequently along the 38th Parallel between 1948 and 1950 as both governments pursued reunification under their respective political systems. The Soviet Union continued to provide military assistance to North Korea, while the United States strengthened the defense capabilities of South Korea. These developments transformed the Korean Peninsula into one of the principal arenas of Cold War confrontation and created the conditions that ultimately led to the outbreak of the Korean War on 25 June 1950.

3.2. The Korean War and Its Impacts

The Korean War was one of the most significant conflicts in the history of international relations during the twentieth century. The conflict, which lasted from

1950 to 1953, was not merely a war between North Korea and South Korea but also evolved into an arena of ideological competition between the communist bloc and the capitalist bloc during the Cold War. Therefore, the Korean War is often regarded as one of the earliest international conflicts that clearly demonstrated the confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union following the end of World War II (Fitriyawati, 2015).

The origins of the Korean War cannot be separated from the division of the Korean Peninsula after Japan's surrender in 1945. The division along the 38th Parallel resulted in the establishment of two governments with opposing ideologies. North Korea developed under a socialist-communist system supported by the Soviet Union, while South Korea adopted a liberal democratic system backed by the United States. These ideological differences generated increasing political rivalry, as both governments claimed to be the legitimate authority representing all Korean people. Consequently, the Korean Peninsula became highly vulnerable to armed conflict (Fitriyawati, et al., 2015).

Tensions between the two Koreas continued to escalate throughout the period from 1948 to 1950. Numerous border clashes occurred while each government sought to strengthen its military capabilities. North Korea received military equipment from the Soviet Union and political support from the newly established People's Republic of China in 1949. In contrast, South Korea received economic and military assistance from the United States. These developments demonstrated that the Korean conflict was no longer merely a domestic issue but had become part of the global rivalry between the two major ideological blocs during the Cold War (Suhardi, et al., 2022).

The Korean War officially began on June 25, 1950, when North Korean forces crossed the 38th Parallel and launched a large-scale invasion of South Korea. The objective of the attack was to unify the entire Korean Peninsula under the communist government of North Korea. Within a short period, North Korean troops successfully occupied much of South Korean territory, including the capital city of Seoul. This initial success was largely due to North Korea's superior military preparedness compared to South Korea at the time (Fitriyawati, et al., 2015).

The North Korean invasion immediately drew an international response. Through the United Nations (UN), the United States led the formation of a multinational force to assist South Korea. The intervention was justified on the grounds that North Korea's actions constituted aggression that threatened international stability. The UN forces, under the command of General Douglas MacArthur, launched several military operations to halt the North Korean advance. One of the most notable operations was the amphibious landing at Incheon in September 1950, which significantly altered the course of the war and forced North Korean troops to retreat northward (Suhardi et al., 2022).

The success of the UN forces encouraged them to continue advancing toward the Chinese border. This development alarmed the government of the People's Republic of China, which viewed the presence of UN troops near its territory as a serious security threat. As a result, China decided to intervene directly in the conflict by sending

hundreds of thousands of volunteer soldiers to support North Korea. China's entry into the war shifted the balance of power once again and prolonged the conflict for several more years (Fitriyawati, et al., 2015).

The involvement of multiple countries in the Korean War illustrates that the conflict was one of the earliest examples of a proxy war during the Cold War era. The United States and its allies supported South Korea, while the Soviet Union and China backed North Korea. Although the two superpowers did not engage in direct military confrontation, they used the Korean conflict as a means to expand and preserve their respective ideological influences. Consequently, the Korean War is frequently regarded as one of the conflicts that most clearly reflected the dynamics of the Cold War during the early 1950s (Suhardi et al., 2022).

Throughout the war, civilians suffered the most severe consequences. The widespread fighting displaced millions of people, deprived them of their livelihoods, and separated countless families. Numerous cities and villages were heavily damaged by both ground battles and aerial bombardments. Infrastructure such as roads, bridges, railways, schools, hospitals, and industrial facilities suffered extensive destruction. As a result, the social and economic conditions of Korean society deteriorated dramatically (Matsuda, et al., 2024).

In addition to physical destruction, the Korean War caused an enormous loss of human life. It is estimated that more than two million Korean civilians became casualties during the conflict. Furthermore, millions of soldiers from North Korea, South Korea, China, and the United Nations forces were either killed or wounded. The scale of these casualties demonstrates that the Korean War was among the deadliest conflicts following World War II (Matsuda, et al., 2024).

Another significant social consequence of the war was the separation of families. As battle lines shifted throughout the conflict, many families became divided between the northern and southern regions of the peninsula. Following the armistice, the border became increasingly restricted, preventing millions of people from reuniting with their relatives. Even today, many Koreans remain unaware of the fate of family members living on the opposite side of the border. This situation illustrates that the humanitarian consequences of the Korean War did not end with the cessation of hostilities but have continued to affect several generations (Aldikawati, 2015).

After several years of military stalemate, peace negotiations eventually resulted in the Korean Armistice Agreement, signed on July 27, 1953. This agreement ended active combat and established the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) as a buffer area between North and South Korea. However, the armistice was not a permanent peace treaty. Consequently, from a legal perspective, the two Koreas remain technically at war to this day (Matsuda, et al., 2024). In the long term, the Korean War produced different outcomes for the two states. South Korea eventually developed into an advanced industrial nation with a market-oriented economy and a relatively stable democratic system. In contrast, North Korea maintained a highly centralized communist government with a strong military orientation. These differing development paths widened the economic, political, and social disparities between the two countries. The

Korean War also had a profound impact on international relations. The conflict reinforced the division of the world into two ideological blocs during the Cold War. Moreover, the unresolved nature of the conflict has ensured that the Korean Peninsula remains one of the most sensitive regions in global politics.

Military tensions, North Korea's nuclear program, and the involvement of major powers such as the United States, China, Russia, and Japan demonstrate that the legacy of the Korean War continues to influence security and stability in East Asia today (Fitriyawati, et al., 2015). In conclusion, the Korean War was not merely a military conflict between North Korea and South Korea but also a manifestation of the broader ideological rivalry that characterized the Cold War era. The war resulted in massive casualties, extensive infrastructure destruction, family separations, and enduring political tensions that persist to the present day. Although the 1953 armistice succeeded in ending open hostilities, the Korean conflict has not been fully resolved because the two states have never signed a permanent peace treaty.

3.3. Development of Historical Information

According to Lee (2022), the integration of metaverse technology into the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) provides an innovative approach to presenting historical information through immersive digital environments. The use of virtual spaces enables visitors to explore historical sites interactively while gaining a deeper understanding of the Korean War, the division of the Korean Peninsula, and the significance of the DMZ as both a historical heritage site and a symbol of peace. This digital approach also broadens public access to historical education and encourages greater engagement among younger generations.

The development of historical information related to sites associated with post-1945 Korea and the Korean War plays an essential role in preserving collective memory while enhancing public understanding of modern Korean history. Historical interpretation should not merely provide background information about a site but also present the chronology of events, historical significance, and the social and political values embedded within it. According to Jung (2019), the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) is no longer viewed solely as a military buffer zone but has evolved into a Cold War historical landscape with significant potential for peace education and peace tourism. Therefore, historical information should clearly explain this transformation, enabling visitors to understand the relationship between past conflicts and contemporary efforts toward peace (Jung, 2019).

The utilization of digital technology has also become an important component in the development of historical information. Information about historical sites can be delivered through QR codes, digital applications, virtual tours, interactive maps, and audiovisual media, allowing visitors to gain a deeper understanding of historical events. Lee (2022) argues that the development of the Metaverse DMZ Tourism concept can expand public access to historical knowledge by integrating digital technology with historical narratives. This approach not only enhances visitors' educational experiences but also promotes the historical, cultural, and peace values of the DMZ to a broader global audience (Lee, 2022).

Furthermore, the development of historical information requires collaboration among government institutions, site managers, academics, and local communities in preparing accurate and accessible interpretative materials. Historical narratives based on scholarly research strengthen the role of historical sites as instruments of public education rather than merely tourist attractions (Jung, 2019). Consequently, the development of historical information at Korean War-related sites is expected to improve historical literacy while fostering the values of peace, reconciliation, and the preservation of historical heritage for future generations (Lee, 2022).

3.4. Relations Between North And South Korea After The Korean War

Kim (2024) emphasizes that the prolonged division of the Korean Peninsula has been influenced by the interaction of international political environments, domestic political structures, and security concerns. Although several diplomatic initiatives have promoted dialogue and cooperation between North and South Korea, recurring military tensions and North Korea's nuclear program have repeatedly undermined reconciliation efforts. Therefore, sustainable peace requires not only diplomatic negotiations but also long-term confidence-building measures supported by regional and international cooperation.

The signing of the Korean Armistice Agreement on 27 July 1953 ended large-scale military operations on the Korean Peninsula but did not formally end the war. Since no peace treaty has ever been concluded, North Korea and South Korea technically remain in a state of war. The armistice established the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), which functions as a buffer zone separating the two states. Although intended to prevent renewed hostilities, the DMZ has also become a symbol of the continuing political and ideological division of the Korean nation (Cumings, 2005; Seth, 2011).

Following the war, both governments focused on strengthening their respective political systems. North Korea consolidated a socialist system under the leadership of Kim Il-sung, emphasizing centralized planning, state ownership, and the ideology of Juche, which promoted political independence, economic self-reliance, and military strength. In contrast, South Korea maintained an anti-communist political orientation supported by the United States and gradually developed democratic institutions and a market-based economy. These contrasting political and economic systems deepened the division between the two Koreas and reinforced mutual distrust (Cumings, 2005; Oberdorfer & Carlin, 2014).

During the Cold War, relations between North Korea and South Korea were characterized by repeated military tensions and limited diplomatic contact. Armed incidents frequently occurred along the DMZ, including border skirmishes, infiltration attempts, and acts of espionage. Each government claimed to be the sole legitimate representative of the Korean nation, making peaceful dialogue difficult. Furthermore, the strategic interests of the United States, the Soviet Union, and later China continued to influence security dynamics on the Korean Peninsula (Seth, 2011; Cumings, 2011).

Despite prolonged hostility, several initiatives toward dialogue emerged during the 1970s. One important milestone was the North–South Joint Communiqué of 4 July 1972, in which both governments agreed that reunification should be achieved peacefully,

independently, and through national unity. Although the declaration represented an important diplomatic breakthrough, ideological differences, political competition, and mutual suspicion prevented substantial progress toward reunification (Stankiewicz, 2012).

Inter-Korean relations experienced another significant improvement after the end of the Cold War. Changes in the international political environment encouraged both governments to seek greater cooperation. South Korean President Kim Dae-jung introduced the Sunshine Policy, which emphasized dialogue, humanitarian assistance, and economic cooperation rather than military confrontation. This policy created opportunities for increased communication between the two Koreas and reduced tensions during the late 1990s and early 2000s (Kwak & Joo, 2002).

A historic achievement occurred in June 2000 when the first Inter-Korean Summit was held in Pyongyang between South Korean President Kim Dae-jung and North Korean leader Kim Jong-il. The summit resulted in the June 15 Joint Declaration, which committed both governments to expanding economic cooperation, promoting humanitarian exchanges, and working toward peaceful reunification. It also enabled reunions for families separated by the Korean War and increased economic collaboration through projects such as the Kaesong Industrial Complex and tourism at Mount Kumgang (Kwak & Joo, 2002).

However, progress in inter-Korean relations proved difficult to sustain. North Korea's nuclear weapons program became a major source of tension in regional and international politics. Nuclear tests and missile launches conducted by North Korea prompted economic sanctions from the international community and strengthened military cooperation between South Korea and the United States. As a result, periods of dialogue were often followed by renewed confrontation and heightened security concerns (Kim, 2024).

Although reunification remains an official objective of both governments, significant obstacles continue to exist. The two Koreas differ substantially in political ideology, economic development, legal systems, and international alliances. Scholars also emphasize that reunification would require enormous economic resources, institutional integration, and long-term political commitment. Consequently, many experts argue that confidence-building measures and sustained cooperation are essential prerequisites for any future reunification process (Stankiewicz, 2012; Kim, 2021).

4. Conclusion

The history of Korea after 1945 demonstrates how international political rivalry profoundly shaped the future of the Korean Peninsula. Although Korea was liberated from Japanese colonial rule, the division of the peninsula along the 38th Parallel led to the establishment of two separate states with opposing political ideologies. The emergence of the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) reflected the broader confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The Korean War (1950–1953) further intensified this division and became one of the earliest proxy wars of the Cold War era.

Beyond its military significance, the conflict caused extensive human suffering, including millions of casualties, widespread destruction of infrastructure, and the separation of countless families. Although the Korean Armistice Agreement ended active fighting, the absence of a permanent peace treaty has left the peninsula technically still at war, making it one of the world's most enduring geopolitical conflicts.

The preservation and development of historical information related to the Korean War are essential for strengthening historical awareness and promoting the values of peace and reconciliation. Through accurate interpretation, digital technology, and collaboration among government institutions, academics, and local communities, historical sites can function as important educational resources while preserving collective memory for future generations. Finally, relations between North and South Korea since the war have been characterized by alternating periods of confrontation and cooperation. Despite several diplomatic initiatives, including inter-Korean summits and economic cooperation programs, major challenges particularly ideological differences, security concerns, and North Korea's nuclear program continue to hinder lasting reconciliation. Therefore, the history of post-1945 Korea and the Korean War remains highly relevant for understanding contemporary security issues, international relations, and ongoing efforts toward peace on the Korean Peninsula.

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