

THE ARTS OF KOREA

A Resource for Educators

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

These educational materials are made possible by The Korea Foundation.

Geography

The Korean peninsula lies at the easternmost end of the Eurasian land mass. During the last Ice Age, which occurred approximately 15,000 to 18,000 years ago, neither the Korean peninsula nor the central islands of Japan existed as separate topographic entities. At that time, the area of the present Yellow Sea formed a wide, unbroken plain stretching between what are now the western shores of Korea and the eastern shores of China's Shandong peninsula. Similarly, to the south, the present Japanese islands of Honshú, Kyúshú, and Shikoku comprised a continuous landmass with the then undifferentiated Korean peninsula. With the melting of the great glaciers, the sea level rose and the map of northeast Asia as we know it was formed. Korea emerged as a mountainous peninsula tied to Manchuria in the north, facing China to the west across the narrow Yellow Sea, and extending southward toward the Japanese archipelago. More than 70 percent of the Korean peninsula's total area, which is approximately the same as that of England and Scotland combined, consists of mountains.

The rocky backbone of Korea is fashioned from a long chain of mountains that dominates the eastern half of the peninsula from its northern borders on the Amnok and Tuman rivers almost to its southern extremity. Two notable lateral mountain ranges project westward from this great granite wall. One forms a protective barrier around the fertile Naktong River valley in the center of Korea's southern coast, while the other stretches most of the way across the peninsula's width to north of the Han River valley. Korea's climate is temperate, with cold, dry winters and hot summers subject to monsoon rains. The land is fertile, and natural resources are abundant.

