I find South Korea’s take on religion an interesting one. Unlike most countries in the world, the majority of South Koreans do not have a religion. Of the fifty-three percent that are left, Protestant, Catholicism, and Buddhism make up most of what’s left. Other major religions including Islam are represented in South Korea. (Korea.net, 1999) Buddhism arrived in Korea from China around the fourth to seventh century in the Silla Kingdom. (U.S. Library of Congress) Christianity arrives with Roman Catholic missionaries in 1974. (U.S. Library of Congress) Islam may have been a part of South Korea as far back as the seventh century AD when trading with the Middle East. It wasn’t until after the Korean War that it started regaining popularity. (Hyong-ki, 2015)

The role of religion in South Korea is an interesting one. South Koreans tend to blend elements from different belief systems and make it into their own. The role that current day religion plays in South Korean society is the teaching of tolerance. With all of the religions that exist with a fairly large piece of the population, the constitution creates religious freedom, separation of church and state (just like here in the US), and the prohibition of religious discrimination. (Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, & World Affairs)

There are no sacred religious sites for the major religions in South Korea. There are a few sites that are of religious importance, like the Bulguksa, a Buddhist temple in the North Gyeongsang province. The temple is more of an example of Silla architecture than a sacred place for the Buddhism. (Sacred Destinations, 2005) There are many other places of similar importance in South Korea, including the Chungdong First Methodist Church in Seoul which was founded in 1897. (Korea.net, 1999)

There is no role of religion in the government in South Korea. It would be nearly impossible to place a single religion in the government. As previously stated, the South Korean Constitution prohibits discrimination against a single religion, and also requires the separation of church and state. According to (Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, & World Affairs) it’s not like no one has tried though. President Lee Myung-bak was allegedly discriminating against Buddhists, by giving cabinet positions to 13 Christians (out of 15), and maps pointing out churches and not temples. The government later apologized for some of the policies. (Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, & World Affairs)

South Korea would make an interesting case study on religions. There are so many places throughout the entire world who cannot have peace, even when they have the same religion. Then we have South Korea who not only has about half of the country with no religion, and the other half consists of almost every other religion. Yet, despite all of this, you don’t hear about bombings, or other problems that religion usually brings with it. I think the entire world would like to know South Korea’s secret.