

Cherry Creek Teacher Gets Field Experience of a Lifetime in South Korea

This past June, David Valdez, an A.P. Human Geography Teacher at Cherry Creek High School, traveled with Western Michigan University professor Dr. Joseph Stoltman and 16 other A.P. Human Geography teachers from the country to participate in an eight-day field study and conference in South Korea.

The AP Human Geography teachers participated in the Eighth Annual Geographic Naming Conference which focused on the geopolitics of the Korean Peninsula and the territorial and geographical naming issues that have persisted since the end of World War II.

The naming issue is one of particular interest to the Koreans as they have worked to convince Western mapmakers to create the dual name of the Sea of Japan/East Sea on maps to honor the historical names of each country uses for the body of water. Other issues included discussion about the Dokdo Islands, a pair of disputed islands located between Korea and Japan.

As part of the field study the group Panmunjom in the Demilitarized Zone between North and South Korea. The tour of the area included a visit to the Joint Security Area buildings straddling the border used for negotiations between the countries.

An overnight stay at the Seonusa Buddhist Temple provided insight into the teachings and practices of Korean Buddhism as well as the opportunity to participate in several temple rituals, including evening and morning chants, and a ritual of 108 prostrations.

Visits to historical sites, including several UNESCO Cultural Heritage sites, museums and a tour of the Hyundai Truck Assembly plant were also part of the field study, and ample time was provided to explore the historic sites of Seoul.

The trip was organized by the Northeast Asian History Foundation which paid for the teachers' airfare, hotel and field study and related professional activities during the visit. The NAHF sponsors this trip every year for a new group of AP Human Geography Teachers.



The entrance to the Geongbokgung Palace built in 1395 by the Joseon Dynasty.



The Joint Security Area of the Demilitarized Zone. The blue buildings in the foreground are conference buildings that straddle the border. The building in back is the Panmunjom Hall, North Korea.



The 4th king of the Joseon Dynasty. He is credited with the invention of the hangul alphabet and reforms that brought prosperity to Korea.



A statue of Buddha framed by paper lanterns with prayers attached.