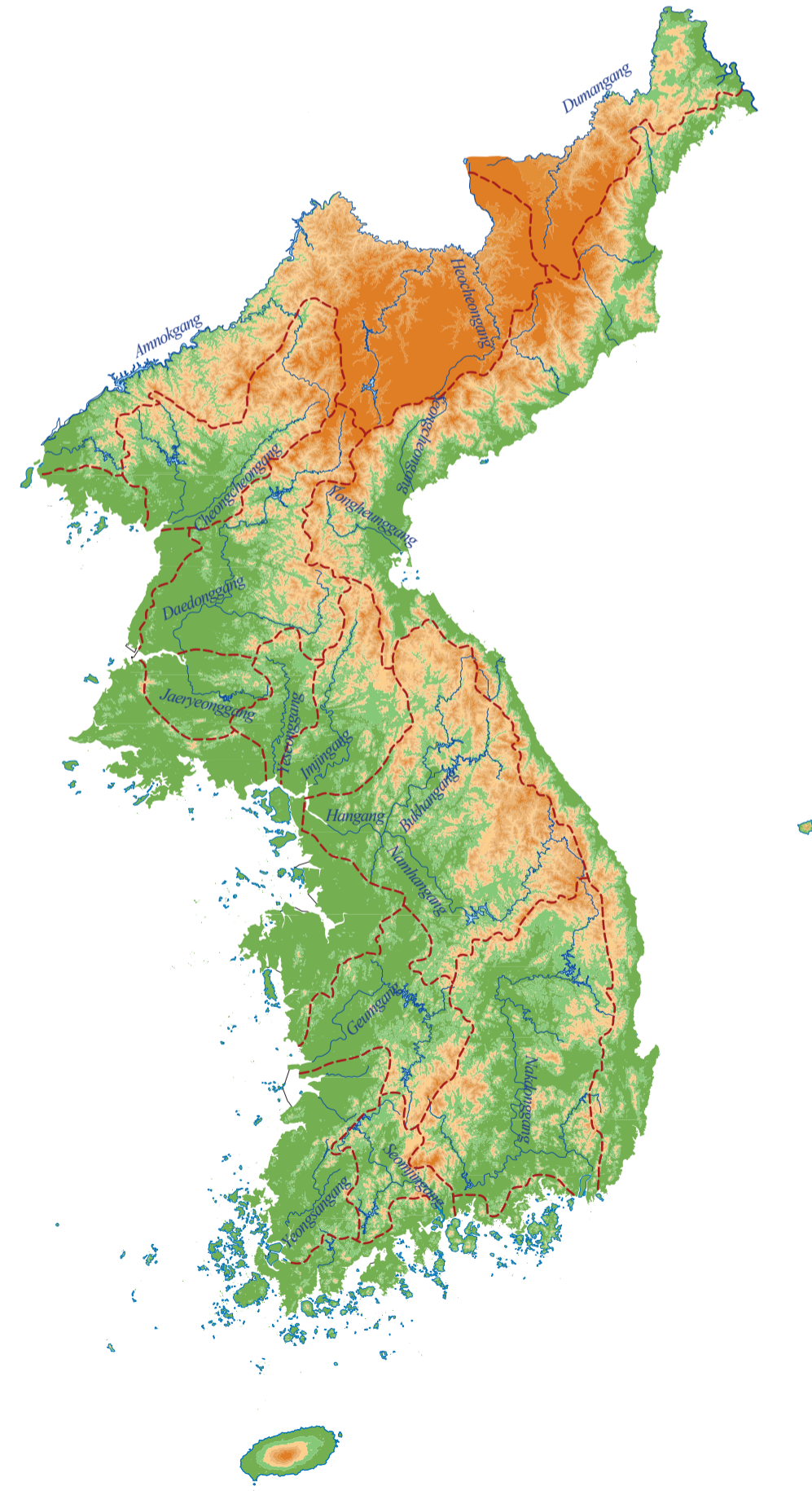# Classification of Regions

Korea has used the administrative regions and geographical features to define its sub-regions. The administrative classification refers to classifying regions according to administrative districts while the geographical classification assorts regions into homogeneous and functional regions. In Korea, a combination of the administrative and geographical classifications has been applied. For example, the distribution of mountains and rivers enabled the geographical classification by living area and administrative districts established from Goryeo Dynasty became the root of the contemporary administrative districts. The provinces as administrative district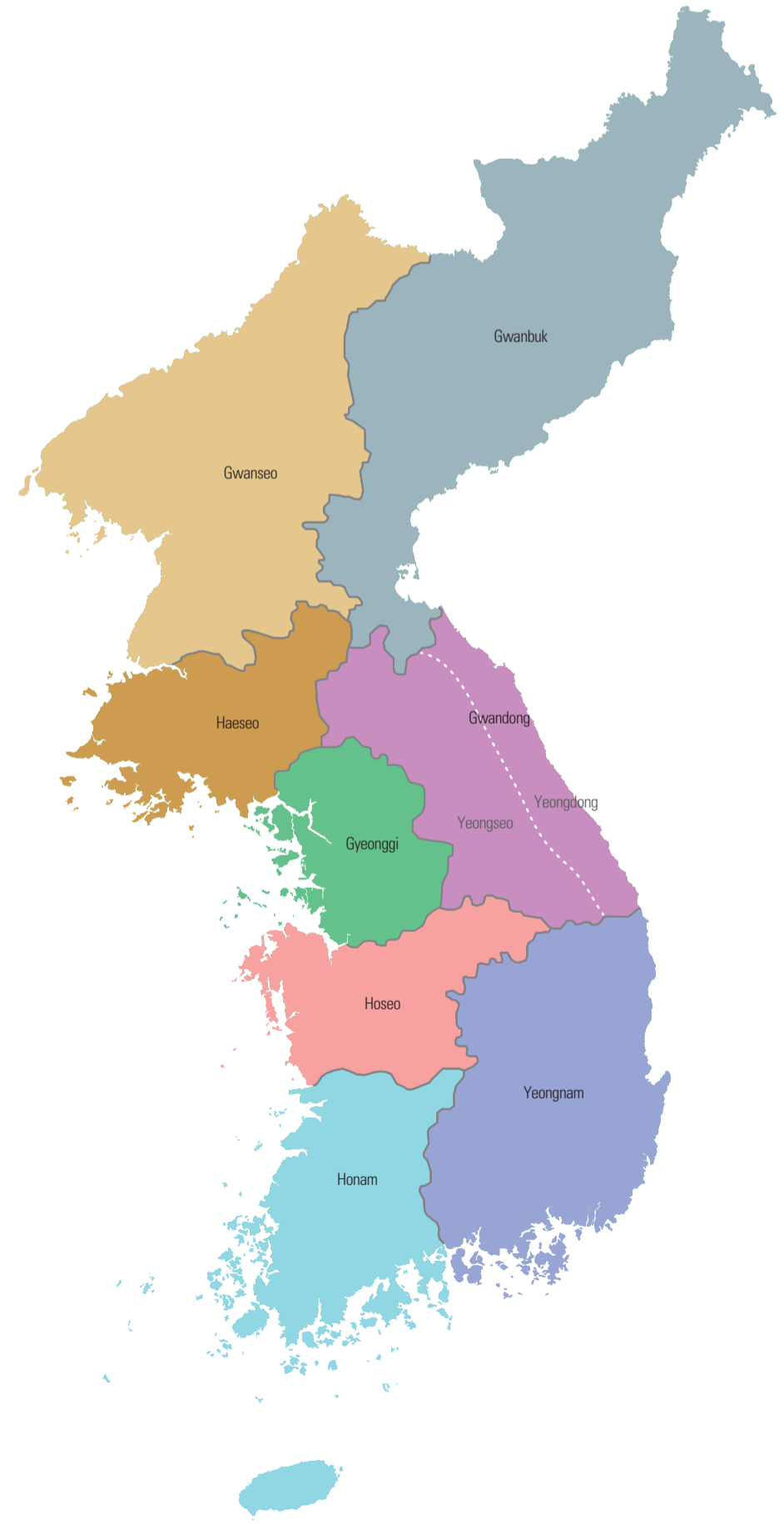s have been considered significant in Korea's regional classification. The contemporary regional classification of Korea is similar to the traditional regional classification that descended from the Goryeo and Joseon Dynasties. Regional differences are getting narrower today than in the past thanks to the development of efficient transportation that enables the transfer of traditional values from one region to another. Under these circumstances, the distributions of various dialects that are still used by local residents today are an important indicator in the historical classification of regions.
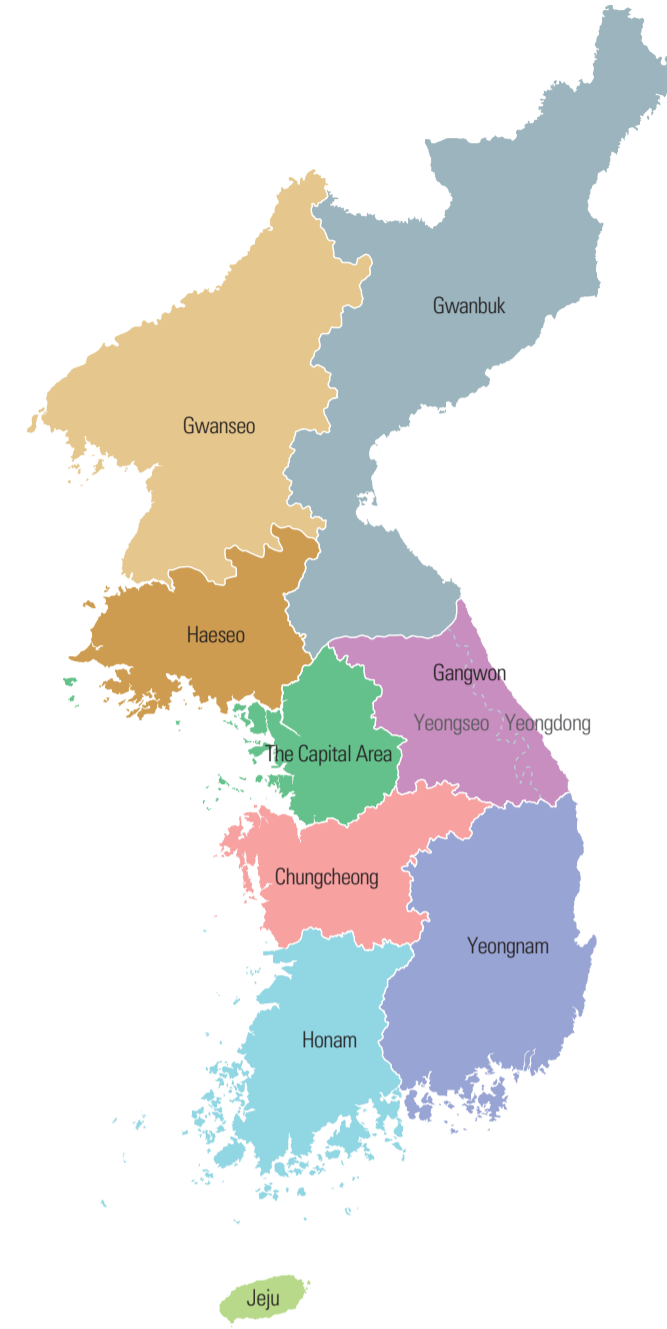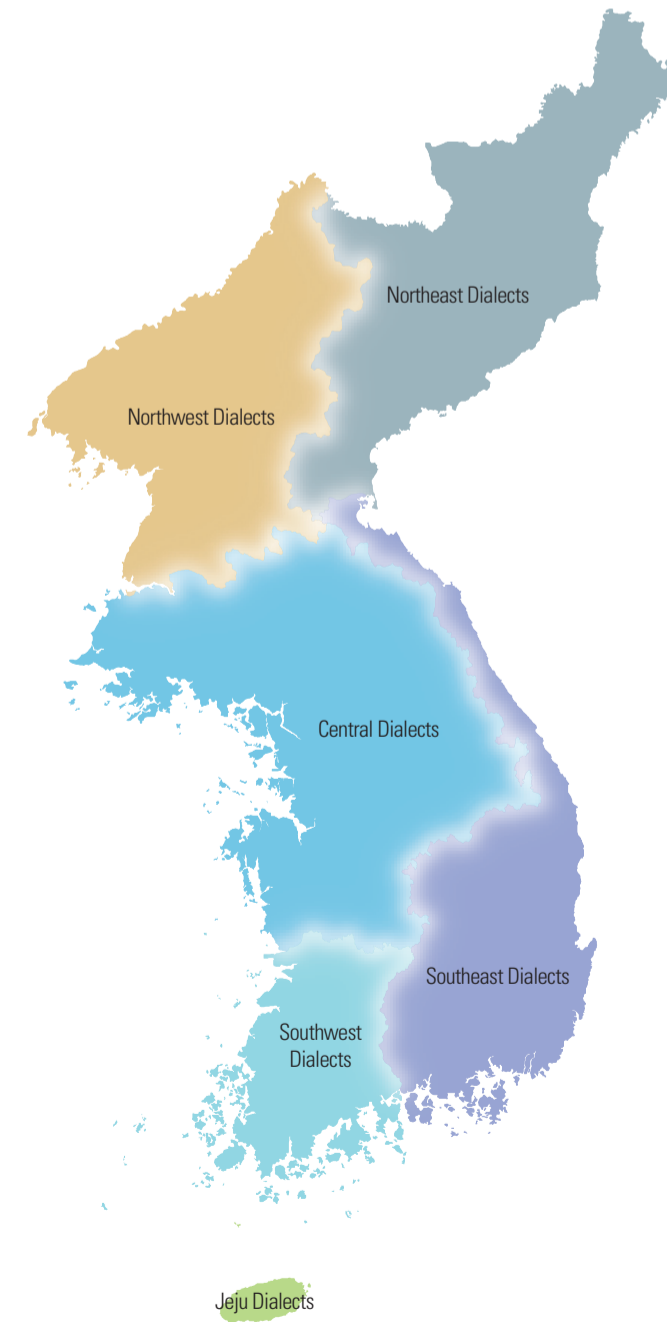
Classification of Topographies and Basins

Traditional Classification of Regions

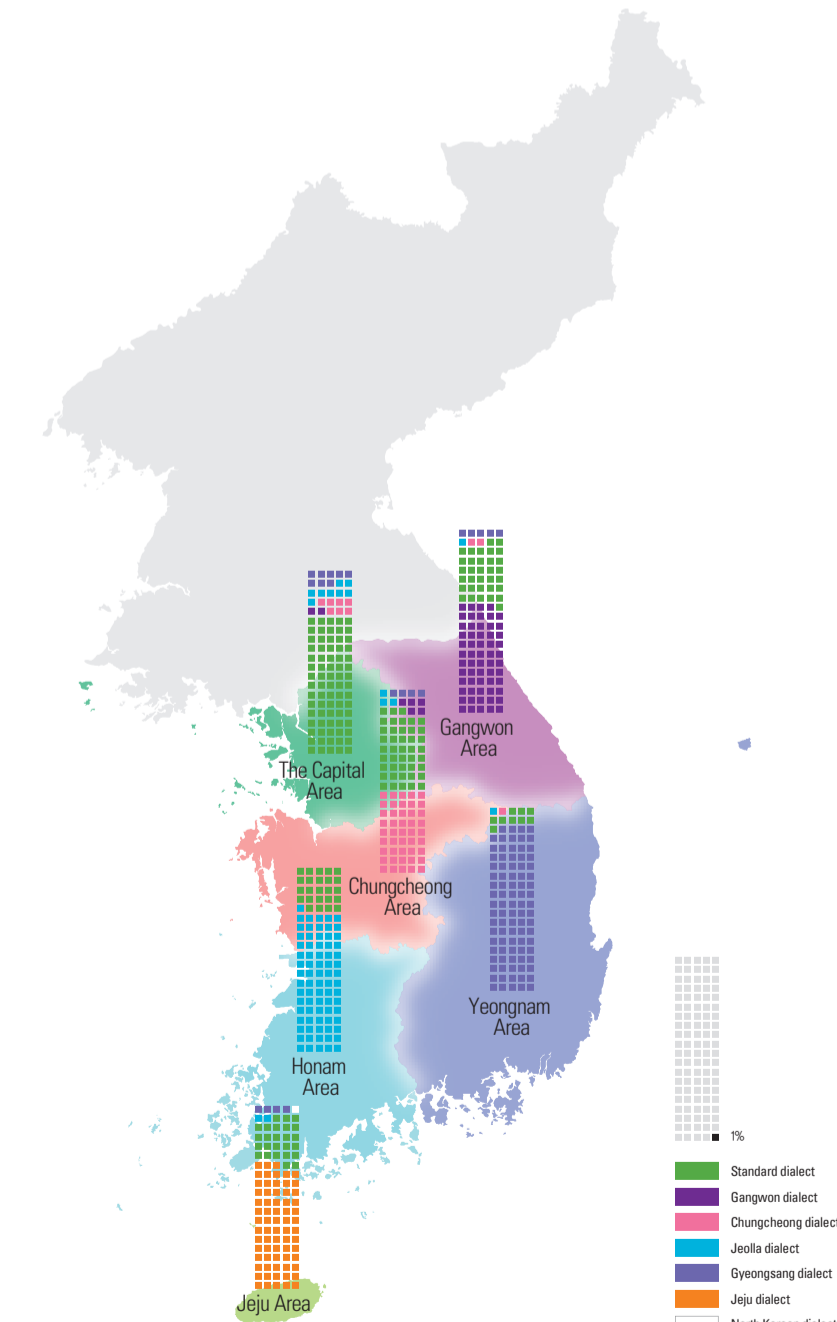
Contemporary Classification of Regions I

Contemporary Classification of Regions II

Region Classification by Dialects

Ratio of Each Dialect by Region

Considering Korea's traditional classification of regions, each present-day regional name corresponds highly with administrative districts of the era of the Goryeo and Joseon Dynasties. The Gwanseo Region is based on the Joseon Dynasty's administrative district with Pyeongan-do as the center; Gwanbuk, Hamgyeong-do; and Gwandong, Gangwon-do. Among them, the Gwandong area is subdivided along the Taebaeksanmaek (Taebaek mountain range) into two regions with the eastern part renamed Yeongdong and the western part renamed Yeongseo. The Haeseo is based on Hwanghae-do at the center. The Gyeonggi Region refers to Gyeonggi-do including Hanyang (currently Seoul). Hoseo is a region centered around Chungcheong-do which corresponds to the Joseon Dynasty's administrative districts while Honam is a region centered around Jeolla-do that includes Jeju Island. Yeongnam, with Gyeongsang-do as the center, literally means the southern part of Joryeong (pass) of the Sobaeksanmaek (Sobaek mountain range).

Some of the traditional methods of classifying regions still influence Korean livelihoods today, but with the changes of the country's administrative districts, the spatial arrangement of each district has also changed. According to the highest level of classification, the country is divided into the North, Central, and South regions. In general, the entirety of North Korea is considered the North Region, and the rest is divided into the Central and South Regions. At the next (lower) level of classification, the North includes Gwanbuk, Gwanseo, and Haeseo regions; the Central includes the capital area of Seoul, Chungcheong, and Gwangwon; and the South includes Honam, Yeongnam, and Jeju. The Gangwon area, as in the traditional method of classification of regions, is still divided into Yeongdong and Yeongseo along the Taebaeksanmaek.

In general terms for all of Korea, classification of regions by language is known to involve six major dialects based on directions: northwest, northeast, central, southwest, southeast, and Jeju dialects. The central dialect is mainly formed in the capital area, Chungcheong-do, the Gangwon Yeongseo region, and Hwanghae-do. The southwest dialect is found in Jeollanam-do and Jeollabuk-do. The northwest dialect is located in in South and North Pyeongan-do. The southeast dialect is found in Gyeongsangnam-do, Gyeongsangbuk-do, and the Yeongdong area in Gangwon-do. The northeast dialect is in Hamgyeongnam-do and Hamgyeongbuk-do and the Jeju dialect is found on Jeju-do.

In specific terms to South Korea only, the classification of regions based on dialects largely involves 6 dialects, namely the standard, Gangwon, Chungcheong, Jeolla, Gyeongsang, and Jeju dialects. This classification was used in a 2010 survey performed by the National Institute of the Korean Language that set out to measure Koreans' consciousness of language dialects. The South Korea nationwide survey showed that the percentages of those who claimed that they use the standard dialect ranked highest at 38.6%; the Gyeongsang dialect was second at 30.9%; the Jeolla dialect followed at 14.7%, the Chungcheong dialect at 9.2%, the Gangwon dialect at 4.5%, the Jeju dialect at 2.0%, and the North Korean dialect at 0.1%. The ratio of those who use the local dialect is affected by population movements and urban developments. In general terms, the ratio of those who replied that they use the local dialect in the Honam region and in the Yeongnam region was higher than that in other regions.