



A Concise History of Korea: From Antiquity to the Present

By Michael J. Seth

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Now in a fully revised and updated edition, this comprehensive book surveys Korean history from Neolithic times to the present. Michael J. Seth explores the origins and development of Korean society, politics, and still little-known cultural heritage from their inception to the two Korean states of today. Telling the remarkable story of the origins and evolution of a society that borrowed and adopted from abroad, Seth describes how various tribal peoples in the peninsula came together to form one of the world's most distinctive communities. He shows how this ancient, culturally and ethnically homogeneous society was wrenched into the world of late-nineteenth-century imperialism, fell victim to Japanese expansionism, and then became arbitrarily divided into two opposed halves, North and South, after World War II.

Tracing the seven decades since 1945, the book explains how the two Koreas, with their deeply different political and social systems and geopolitical orientations, evolved into sharply contrasting societies. South Korea, after an unpromising start, became one of the few postcolonial developing states to enter the ranks of the first world, with a globally competitive economy, a democratic political system, and a cosmopolitan and dynamic culture. North Korea, by contrast, became one of the world's most totalitarian and isolated societies, a nuclear power with an impoverished and famine-stricken population. Seth describes and analyzes the radically different and historically unprecedented trajectories of the two Koreas, formerly one tight-knit society. Throughout, he adds a rare dimension by placing Korean history into broader global perspective. All readers looking for a balanced, knowledgeable history will be richly rewarded with this clear and concise book.

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Editorial Review

Review

The first edition of Michael Seth's book became a benchmark for an overview of Korean history in English. Now bigger and better, it promises to become a standard for Korean history in any language. (John Lie, University of California, Berkeley)

In this highly readable text, Michael Seth scores a number of important achievements. He provides a narrative from earliest times to the present that explains the transitions in Korean history in a clear manner and, in the process, doesn't shortchange the premodern period. Seth raises questions that historians have long grappled with and proposes answers. In updating his earlier work, he cites the most recent research, adds a section on Korea from a global perspective, and also provides a primary source entry for each chapter, enabling students to look at original documents. This is an excellent text that includes all the essential information any undergraduate would need. (Edward Shultz, emeritus, University of Hawaii at Manoa)

Michael Seth's book provides a clear and accessible survey of Korean history, deftly covering all of the key topics that should be included in a course on the subject. I would highly recommend it to anybody looking to gain a stronger understanding of the historical development of Korea. (Gregg Brazinsky, George Washington University)

Now in a fully revised and updated edition, this comprehensive book surveys Korean history from Neolithic times to the present. Michael J. Seth explores the origins and development of Korean society, politics, and still little-known cultural heritage, showing how this ancient, culturally and ethnically homogeneous society was wrenched into the modern world, ultimately to be arbitrarily divided into two opposed halves after World War II. Tracing the six decades since, the book explains how the two Koreas, with their deeply different political and social systems and geopolitical orientations, evolved into sharply contrasting societies. Throughout, he adds a rare dimension by placing Korean history into broader global perspective. All readers looking for a balanced, knowledgeable history will be richly rewarded with this clear and concise book.

About the Author

Michael J. Seth is professor of history at James Madison University.

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