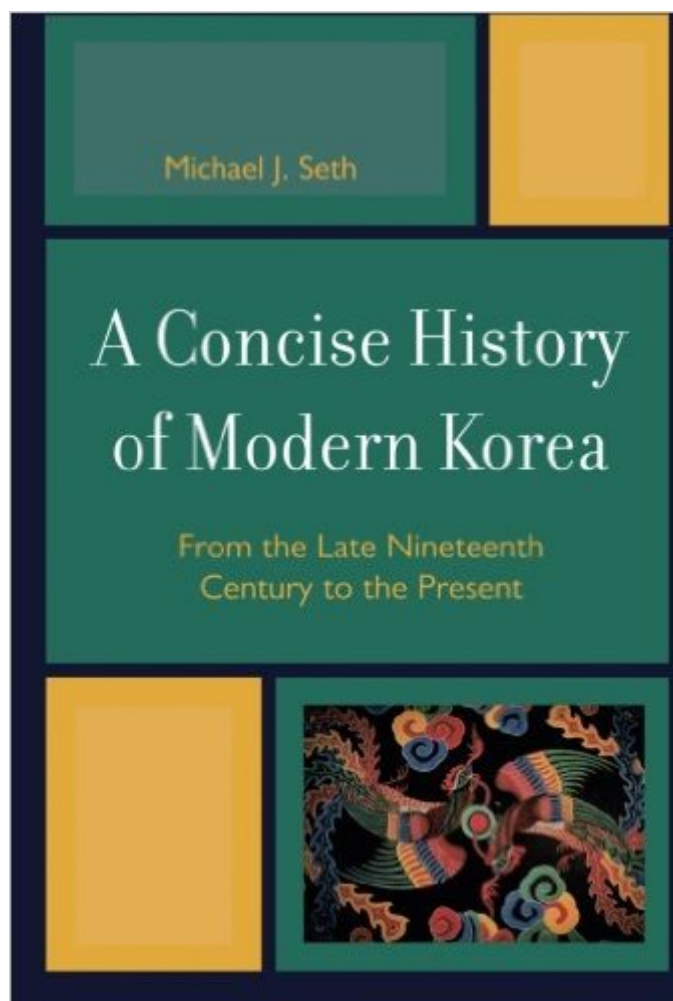


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A Concise History Of Modern Korea: From The Late Nineteenth Century To The Present



Synopsis

This comprehensive and balanced history of modern Korea explores the social, economic, and political issues it has faced since being catapulted into the wider world at the end of the nineteenth century. Placing this formerly insular society in a global context, Michael J. Seth describes how this ancient, culturally and ethnically homogeneous society first fell victim to Japanese imperialist expansionism, and then was arbitrarily divided in half after World War II. Seth traces the postwar paths of the two Koreas—”with different political and social systems and different geopolitical orientations”—as they 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. By contrast, North Korea became one of the world’s most totalitarian and isolated societies, a nuclear power with an impoverished and famine-stricken population. Considering the radically different and historically unprecedented trajectories of the two Koreas, Seth assesses the insights they offer for understanding not only modern Korea but the broader perspective of world history.

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Customer Reviews

In crucial respects, Korea is arguably the oldest nation in the world. People of Korean ethnicity-language group have occupied essentially the same region for centuries with a remarkable degree of cultural and institutional continuity. To an unparalleled extent, Korea has been a unified state for centuries. In the late 19th century, Korea was overwhelmingly rural, discouraged foreign

trade, very socially stratified, had been ruled by the same dynasty for centuries, and was more Confucian in its intellectual culture and institutions than China itself. In the early 21st century, Korea is divided and its 2 different halves the products of 2 remarkably different approaches to achieving modernization. In this clearly written and concise book, Michael Seth outlines the very interesting history of how this happened. Seth begins with the late 19th century structure of Korea and the powerful forces that destroyed traditional Korean society. A small nation surrounded by a much larger and turbulent China, a rapidly modernizing Japan, and the expanding Russian empire, plus the aggressions of other western Imperial powers, Korea's traditional position and society was untenable. Seth outlines well how the Korean elite attempted to fend off other powers, and how a small number of Koreans attempted to push Korea down a path to modernity. Following the success of the Japanese in its wars against China and Russia, Korea became a protectorate and then an outright colony of Japan. Much of what would happen subsequently in Korea has its roots in the colonial period. The Japanese were exploitative and often brutal overlords but also began to develop modern educational systems and the initial industrialization of Korea.

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