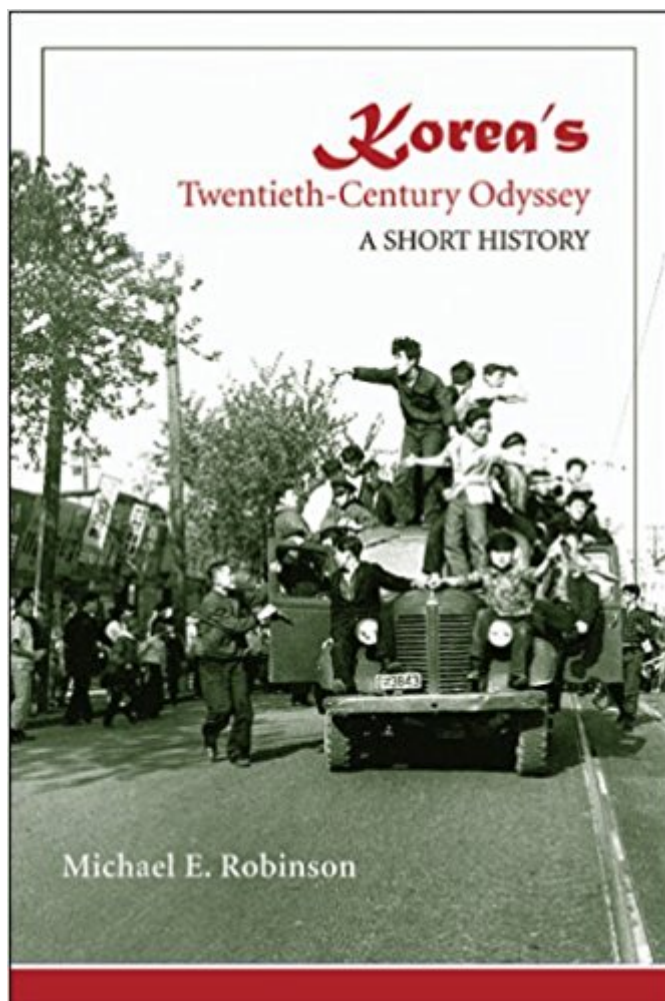


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Korea's Twentieth-Century Odyssey: A Short History



Synopsis

For more than half of the twentieth century, the Korean peninsula has been divided between two hostile and competitive nation-states, each claiming to be the sole legitimate expression of the Korean nation. The division remains an unsolved problem dating to the beginnings of the Cold War and now projects the politics of that period into the twenty-first century. *Korea's Twentieth-Century Odyssey* is designed to provide readers with the historical essentials upon which to unravel the complex politics and contemporary crises that currently exist in the East Asian region. Beginning with a description of late-nineteenth-century imperialism, Michael Robinson shows how traditional Korean political culture shaped the response of Koreans to multiple threats to their sovereignty after being opened to the world economy by Japan in the 1870s. He locates the origins of both modern nationalism and the economic and cultural modernization of Korea in the twenty years preceding the fall of the traditional state to Japanese colonialism in 1910. Robinson breaks new ground with his analysis of the colonial period, tracing the ideological division of contemporary Korea to the struggle of different actors to mobilize a national independence movement at the time. More importantly, he locates the reason for successful Japanese hegemony in policies that included and thus implicated Koreans within the colonial system. He concludes with a discussion of the political and economic evolution of South and North Korea after 1948 that accounts for the valid legitimacy claims of both nation-states on the peninsula.

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Customer Reviews

Robinson's effort overshadows other publications in Korean studies because of its clear, concise,

succinct, and easily accessible writing style.-- "Southeast Review of Asian Studies (30, 2008)"An excellent book which concisely and succinctly presents the reader an opportunity to better understand the 20th century historical and cultural context for events occurring on the Korean peninsula today.-- "Korean Quarterly (11:3, Spring 2008)"Michael Robinson has written an excellent survey of twentieth-century Korean history that will be useful for both students and interested readers. . . . The book is concise enough not to overwhelm the reader yet informative enough to provide a firm foundation for understanding modern Korea. . . . It is unmatched in its treatment of the crucially important colonial era. For this reason Robinson has produced what is probably the most useful survey text on modern Korea.-- "Acta Koreana (11:1, 2008)"Robinson's effort overshadows other publications in Korean studies because of its clear, concise, succinct, and easily accessible writing style.-- "Southeast Review of Asian Studies (30, 2008)"An excellent introduction to modern Korea for college-level courses or for the general reader. The author brings together representative research studies, including his own, and offers a succinct, dynamic and synthesized history of modern Korea. . . . [H]e pays close attention to how the everyday life of ordinary people intersects with the rapid economic and cultural transformations, rendering a highly engaging and captivating narrative with precision, wit and balanced viewpoints.-- "Pacific Affairs (80:4, Winter 2007-2008)"The wait for a succinct yet comprehensive history of modern Korea is over. This volume, deftly written by Michael E. Robinson, comes as a welcome alternative to histories of Korea too long or too complex for typical undergraduates. . . . Striking photographs throughout confirm this impressive volume's status as the new standard in the field. . . . Essential.-- "Choice (November 2007)"

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It is a very good brief of modern history of Korea starting from late 1800s to recent years. The book is about Korea, which means that the author covers both North and South. The book is written in an analytical and informative manner and clearly shows the connection of each historical events leading to the status quo of Korea. Many may be aware of the division and polarization of the country and if you want to have a glimpse of what's the story behind, this book is highly recommended.

I think this book does a great job at giving aspects from different views of the Modernization of Korea, however, I feel as if the chapters are oddly organized. The chapters do very well in explaining their topic however, I feel as if there is too many times in which the author addresses events in years that happened far previous of the current topic that I am reading. It makes it confusing to follow in my opinion. Otherwise, a nice view and very informative piece of Korea's Independence.

The entire Chapter 3 is missing from the book.....

I needed this book for my Korean literature class, after reading it, I find that it takes longer to read than less dense material, because this is written as if it were a history textbook (which might be what it intends to be). The information is useful and I find some of it interesting, but sometimes I feel like it's become redundant asking myself, "didn't I just read this ten pages ago?" There is one spelling mistake and it looks like a space was forgotten between words. Also, one thing I think this book and all books teaching a foreign history in a different language, is to include the native language for nouns, and anything Romanized for the sake of pronunciation, with there being so many interpretations and methods of Romanization, I feel Hangul (if you can read it) would be

helpful.

Informative. A good read. Enough detail yet well paced and kept me interested. I would recommend to anybody interested in the recent history of Korea.

never interesting always cyclically boring....author should write scripts for paint drying come on - history just can't be that boring

"Ironically, what was the Hermit Kingdom in the late 19th century is now where the major powers of the world are congregated, tied in a knot by their inability to find a new paradigm for stability in Northeast Asia." This brilliant sentence sums up the transformation and tragic history Korea went through in the 20th century. Michael Robinson does a very good job in reconstructing this transformation on less than 200 pages. The book is written in a very concise way, while covering many important issues related to politics, economics, geopolitics, international relations, social issues and culture. Given this wide range of issues, of course you can't expect much detail, but you'll still get a pretty good idea of most of the topics important in modern Korean history. In the last few chapters, there is a strong focus on politics and geopolitics. Elections are described in some detail and nuclear crises are analyzed several times. The author also describes the Asian financial crisis and social issues, but neglects South Korea's recent economic transformation. While doing a pretty good job in explaining the developmental state under Park Chung-hee, Robinson almost completely misses the transformation of the developmental state in late 1980s and 1990s: The role of the state underwent a major transformation, responding to increasing domestic pressure from labor movements and students as well external pressure peaking during the Reagan administration and later democratization. Interventions in the economy became less strategic and more reactive, mitigating adverse effects of the market economy (as opposed to development planning). The South Korean state increasingly embraced free trade, free markets, reduced control over the chaebol, and reduced restrictions on labor movements, allowing employees to demand a larger share of the pie. Only the last point - increasing incomes and as a result consumption - and efforts to establish a welfare state are mentioned in the book. The author completely misses other important issues related to this transformation, such as the increasing and largely unchecked power of the chaebol. If you're interested in politics and geopolitics, including relations between the Koreas and the USA, this book is perfect for you. If you're more interested in economic development (like me), I still recommend you to read it - It will give you great background on any aspect of modern South Korea

you want to study.

The wait for a succinct yet comprehensive history of modern Korea is over. This volume, deftly written by Michael Robinson (Indiana University), comes as a welcome alternative to histories of Korea too long or complex for the typical undergraduate. His book is divided into an introduction, eight chapters (none longer than twenty-five pages), and an epilogue, each of which may be profitably read or assigned on its own. The first chapter surveys traditional Korea, and argues that the seeds of Korean modernity were present even in the Choson dynasty. In Chapters Two through Four, Robinson -- a specialist in Korea's colonial period -- surveys the brutal decades of Japanese rule, elucidating the unique features of Japan's colonizing efforts from the 1910s to the 1940s. He also draws attention to the ideological divisions within Korean society during this period that led to the eventual bifurcation of the peninsula into two confrontational nation-states after WWII. The remaining chapters examine Korea's postwar split, devoting space to developments in both North and South Korea, while a thought-provoking epilogue explores the peninsula's role in East Asian geopolitics in the twenty-first century. Striking photographs throughout confirm this volume's status as the new standard in the field.

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