



A Concise History of Premodern Korea: From Antiquity through the Nineteenth Century: Volume 1

By Michael J. Seth



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Editorial Review

Review

The second edition of Korea expert Seth's two-volume work provides an extremely dense history of Korea from antiquity to the present, focusing on economic and state or national formation. The first volume, subtitled *From Antiquity through the Late Nineteenth Century*, includes more information on art, literature, religion, and philosophy than the second volume, subtitled *From the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present*, but both would have benefited from illustrations beyond the maps provided before the introductions, particularly in chapters 7 and 8 of the first volume. Whether exploring the rise and influence of Buddhism and Confucianism on the Korean people as they developed a homogeneous society or illuminating the distinctions between the arbitrarily divided peninsula into the radically divergent 'lifestyles and living standards' separating North and South Korea, Seth provides a tremendous amount of material within a few succinct paragraphs. The title a 'concise history' is quite apt, and Seth's writing style and use of sources ensures the work a prominent place within the historiography, particularly for undergraduates. Both volumes benefit from revisions from the first edition that reflect the rapid development of Korean historical understanding in the West along with chapter essays on Korea in global perspective, which focus on specific issues of economic development: state formation and ideology in its many forms, foreign policy from antiquity to the present in East Asia, imperialism and colonialism, education and meritocracy, and warfare. Seth also includes a selection of primary source extracts relating to ideas or individuals discussed at the end of each chapter. Excellent maps in both volumes, appendixes providing information on Romanization, a glossary of Korean words, and an annotated select bibliography. Good use of chapter notes.

Summing Up: Highly recommended. All undergraduate and graduate collections. (*CHOICE*)

The first edition of Michael Seth's *A History of Korea* 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 explains the transitions in Korean history in a clear manner and proposes answers to questions that historians have long grappled with. In updating his earlier work, Seth 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)

About the Author

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

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