



The New Koreans: The Story of a Nation

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Just a few decades ago, the Koreans were an impoverished, agricultural people. In one generation they moved from the fields to Silicon Valley. The nature and values of the Korean people provide the background for a more detailed examination of the complex history of the country, in particular its division and its emergence as an economic superpower.

Who are these people? And where does their future lie? In this absorbing and enlightening account, Michael Breen provides compelling insight into the history and character of this fascinating nation.

The New Koreans: The Story of a Nation Details

Date : Published April 4th 2017 by Thomas Dunne Books

ISBN : 9781250065056

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Format : Hardcover 480 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, History, Business, Politics

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Staci says

This book **opens** with the Sewol Ferry tragedy. Well, technically it opens with a preface about Breen's earlier book *The Koreans: Who They Are, What They Want, Where Their Future Lies* but then the first chapter is about Sewol and how Sewol can be seen as a metaphor for the modern or "New" Koreans. The chapter is short and doesn't do the best job explaining the tragedy (or really how it can be used as a metaphor, although that presumably will be explained throughout the rest of the book). For those who are not already familiar with the tragedy, it may not be clear or make much of an impact but if you--like a good number of people who would probably pick up this book--are interested in Korean culture and were interested in it when Sewol happened in 2014, you're probably aware of how shocking that tragedy was for the Korean people at the time: it's like their Titanic (and also, in many ways, a pre-Watergate for them; the president, was heavily criticized for the tragedy and would later be impeached for corruption). If you're aware, the use of Sewol packs an emotional punch right from the get go, I get why Breen would pick it. And yet, and this could be seen in comments made on articles about the disaster at the time, there are a couple of other disasters Breen could easily have picked, most notably the collapse of the Sampoong Department Store in 1995. Breen probably picked Sewol because it was the most recent and this was originally an updating of his previous book for the 21st century. (Also, as some would point out, the Korean people have historically accepted a lot of negative things as more or less status quo and have always done what they do best which is pick themselves up and trudge on, relegating their unhappiness to *han* and not holding out too much hope of any fundamental change and thus being immensely surprised when change actually does occur. It will be interesting to see in a few decades if Sewol manages to maintain an immense hold on the people's emotions.)

It may be a fair argument to say that Breen tilts perhaps a bit much to the optimistic side: at one point early in the book he envisions a future in which ALL countries have transitioned out of poverty, "at such a time, ironically, it may be natural for national boundaries to melt and for the rules we live by to be set at one end by regional and global government and at the other end by local government. Nations may remain for purposes of identity and selecting World Cup teams, but they will no longer need weapons". Yeah, maybe when we have discovered other forms of life in space (or they have discovered us) and Earth has become just one of many planets joined in some sort of peaceful Intergalactic United Nations...although, given the way humans have imagined our encounters with aliens in various books and movies, we might have more and stronger weapons at that point than ever before. Although, to play devil's advocate, Breen may not be making *too* far-off of a claim, after all, as he states just before the above "World Peace" scenario, nobody including the Koreans believed that Korea could have accomplished what it did or in as short of a time as it did and yet, of course, that is why this book exists, because they did just that. "Their rise out of poverty in the face of such circumstances to democratic capitalism underlines the theme of our age."

Breen, for the most part seems to know what he's talking about, with a real insider's look into Korean society (as he should, having been there since the '80s). However, there are a few moments that stand out, probably because of how rare they are, where you sort of wonder "did/does he really not get what's going on there?" For example, Breen mentions how it was years, YEARS, before he thought to question the toilet-paper-in-the-waste-basket-instead-of-down-the-toilet phenomenon. He also mentions about an argument he had with an office manager where afterwards the office manager brought him some apples, without mentioning that the Korean word for apple and apology is the same, *sagwa*, and thus the office manager was offering him a literal apology and not just, as Breen put it, "[prioritizing] the relationship and office harmony".

The organization of the book is a little lacking. The first section, the "Portraits", feels rather disjointed and seems to hop from topic to topic with no real plan (and frankly, no complete coverage of the topics either). These chapters almost feel as if they should have been dispersed throughout the rest of the book, almost as interludes. As it is, it is 115 pages before we get to the parts of the book that actually seem to be organized so that chapters dealing with similar subjects are actually together; that is almost certainly too long as it is a rare person who would continue to read 100+ pages in the hopes that the book would get its act together. Indeed, the rule I've subscribed to for many years, though I can't remember where I first learned it, is to give a book 100-minus-your-age pages before you give up on it, e.g. if you are twenty-seven you would read 100 minus 27 pages, that is, 73 pages before deciding to give up on a book (if a book is less than 100 pages, I usually make up my mind around a quarter of the way through). Also, even in later chapters, when we have actually gotten to the main topics, some of the chapters feel less organized, rational, and understandable than the others. Parts of them I recognize as being almost verbatim from the earlier book, *The Koreans* but the chapters read at times as if those parts were simply copied-and-pasted without enough consideration for how the chapter (or book, for that matter) read as a whole. "[A]t what point does a flaw represent a critical obstacle to continued growth?" This is ostensibly a main question of the book but it's not clear if it ever gets fully answered. And perhaps, it is the attempt to answer the question that really bogs down the book, since it would involve being somewhat able to see into the future, always a difficulty. The last section of the book, "Next", even attempts to do that and between that and the first section mentioned above, "Portraits", the book is somewhat representative of Breen's analysis of the South Korean President's five-year-term, where the first year is a learning period and the last year is a lame duck period (South Korean president's can only serve one term): the first section is a mess and the last section seems highly doubtful or even something to be approached with a high dosage of cynicism so only the three middle sections really hold any weight and, as mentioned, above they can waver in and out in their clarity.

I was excited for this book, since it was to be an updating of the previous one, since I had read the 1999 book and found it interesting but dated. Unfortunately, this book did not do it for me. Part of that is probably due to the fact that Breen is still trying to say what will come next as opposed to just focusing on what has already come and what it is about the Koreans that caused such things to occur. Breen in the previous book had predicted a relatively immediate reunification of the two Koreas and at the end of this one he mentions having once made a bet about Korean unification and chose April 15...1992. Needless to say, in both cases, he was obviously wrong. That doesn't, however, stop him from making predictions yet again. There are better books out there for those interesting in learning more about Korea and the Koreans, new or old. Breen does list what looks to be a rather comprehensive and up-to-date bibliography, so the book may be worth checking out from the library for that alone.

Chris Jaffe says

Good book, but I had trouble getting into it. I'm not sure why. Compared to the other Korean book I've read this year (Seoul Man by Frank Ahrens) -- this one is much more informed about Korea, and the author has a lot more to say about it.... BUT it's also more of a slog to get through. Ahrens had the advantage of being new to the culture so was more focused on the elements of the culture that stood out.

This book is more amorphous. Is it a history? An examination of the culture? A study of its politics? A look at its economy? Yup. It's all of those things. But it's never standout on any of it. And it's often seems a little too generalized about what it's trying to get at, especially in the early chapters. There are some errors, too. He says China's first Olympics was in 1988. No, there were in LA in 1984. Well, that's minor. But he begins Chapter 12 by saying how Korea savored its chances in the new century. Um, I know somethings about East

Asia in those years. Korea was already getting kicked around like a football between the main powers. It already had diminishing room to maneuver.

Don't get me wrong. It's still a good book. I am giving it four stars, after all. But it can be annoying. (If I could give half-stars, this would be 3.5). There is some good info in it. Some stray things that stuck with: the importance of the group dynamic and group orientation in Korea. There is an ongoing tradition of shamanism in Korea, and even a crackdown against it in the 1970s in South Korea. The movie *The Admiral: Roaring Currents* sounds interesting. Currently, they have the Sampo generation - people who have the three give ups: love, marriage, children. They just play video games. Syngman Rhee flatly defied the US on the 1953 armistice negotiation, but only agreed to keep his mouth shut in return for a defense treaty - and this worked out for him.

The section on WWII (p.161-64 in the hardcover book) is really strong. Millions of workers were uprooted. Korean was banned in the classroom in 1940 and they were all made to adopt Korean names. 360,000 served as either soldiers or civilian employees for the military. Japan states that 131,955 died in war service, and 21,000 are commemorated at the Yasukuni Shrine. 30,000 died in the nuclear bombings. Between 4 to 7.8 million were mobilized for war labor and 1/6 of Koreans lived in Japan or Japanese-controlled Asia as workers. Women were put in the Comfort Corps. Interestingly, people who lived through it seem less upset at Japan than those born later.

Korea's DMZ is supposed to be 4 kilometers wide but the North moved forward unilaterally, but this violation is never mentioned and foreign press accounts of the DMZ repeat the official info, not the reality.

It's #1 in university entrance for its young (70.9%). It's #1 in shipbuilding, with the top four firms. It's #1 in TVs, home appliances, and 2nd in mobile devices and semiconductors. It's 9th in electricity generation, 4th in nuclear power production, and has the 2nd biggest carbon market (after the EU) imposing caps on emissions. But their likely to have a drop in people who can work.

Kaede Johnson says

You get exactly what you're expecting. Read it if you're interested in learning about South Korea.

It covers a range of topics: social mechanics / culture, ancient history, modern history, economy, politics, the future (I'm pulling this from memory; there's more nuance but I've captured the broad strokes). The author's been a journalist in Korea for decades and both acknowledges and limits his personal slants, which makes his account credible enough for me.

Some of the chapters are more colorful than others - an inevitability given the author's lack of personal connection to ancient history and his apparent lack of passion / knowledge for economics. Reading the portion on Korea's presidents changed what I thought I knew about Korean democracy. I'm glad to have read the book for that alone.

However, I'll admit that I grew tired of a topic here and there. It seems the author grew weary too; the final chapters are noticeably rushed, with several instances of consecutive paragraphs and even consecutive sentences sharing leading phrases and words. If the author was rushed to finish it's a shame, because if he'd waited a while longer to finish the book, he might have had something to say about the potentially exciting new chapter in Korean relations unfolding in 2018.

I feel I understand Korea's journey much better and I'll retain a couple neat factoids across a range of topics to illuminate it. Give this book a read if that appeals to you.

Allen Patterson says

Anyone planning on traveling to Korea for business or pleasure, especially if it is going to be for an extended time, would do well to read this book. If you are just interested in the history of Korea, distant and close to present, and where it maybe headed, this book would be hard to beat. I know I was and that is why I was glad to win this book in a Goodreads giveaway.

Hadrian says

Broad survey of the changes in South Korea since independence. While I am a touch suspicious of the author's claims of cultural determinism, I learned a good deal from his anecdotes and personal recollections from the thirty-plus years he has lived there.

Ronald Chapman says

It's an excellent book covering topics such as the democratization of South Korea. The author details the "power shift" from military rule to democracy. I enjoyed reading chapter 24 "The Miracle Of Affirmation." Very easy and fun read.

-----Stop Spoilers-----

Spoilers

Some videos I researched after reading each chapter.

(1) "The Broken Ship"

South Korea ferry disaster: Heroes of the Sewol

<https://youtu.be/CD-f1b6LVpc>

A Thousand Winds violin cover(Eng.sub)_Sewol Ferry Disaster after two years

<https://youtu.be/pnkk8n0EZuo>

(2) "Out of Gangnam"

Gangnam District sights, sounds, and nightlife in Seoul, South Korea

<https://youtu.be/Lq8Pa3HTUmw>

(3) "The Defiant Land"

North Korea Looks Strangely Dark From Space In Asia Fly-Over | Video

<https://youtu.be/YE7bueQ-xs4>

An Exciting South Korean Taxi Ride

https://youtu.be/lj_C6zSpE4k

(4) The Case for Hanguk”

Have you ever heard about this country? Korea *?? ?? *?? *???? *

<https://youtu.be/gezflNAThC0>

G20 Seoul Summit 2010 Video - Real Story Of Korea

<https://youtu.be/mmeVI0NKjpI>

(5) “The Group as Refuge”

Korean Stereotypes: Blood Type Personalities

<https://youtu.be/tj7rCA9kaus>

Ring the bell in Buddhist Temple, Korea

<https://youtu.be/OUpNdanOLCY>

(6) “Jesus and Local Messiahs”

Korean Catholicism sees prodigious growth after long, faithful history

<https://youtu.be/pDo9SgcKQDI>

The Calling (A story about Ruby Kendrick)

“If I had a thousand lives, Korea should have them all.

<https://youtu.be/jB89evRn3LM>

Confucianism (Window on Korean Culture #3 ??)

<https://youtu.be/xTWyQH22Ko4>

(7) “Suffering in the Republic of Others”

Very shocking

As a foreigner not living or never visiting South Korea. It took me six months to learn about the "dark pit" of Korean depression by reading the book “I Have the Right to Destroy Myself” by Young-ha Kim

Korea is not all K-POP and K-drama that the foreigner sees and hears. That was five years ago.

The thing I also noticed is when I try to explain this to other people around the world. They do not believe it.

I guess the correct term is brainwashing.

[Sub] ??? ??? / The Tough Life of A Korean Student

<https://youtu.be/MBi7rLICJMk> (*Adult Subject)

(8) “Nationalism and Other Things”

Spirit of Korea _ Kim Koo, A leader who will be remembered forever(?? ??)

https://youtu.be/8COvvWLzE_A

(9) “Love and Learning When Your DNA Isn't Yours”

Korean Women: Traditional & Modern (KWOW #111)

<https://youtu.be/9Y9b3QW35cw>

(10) “Beginnings”

Korean Wave from 5000 Years of History

<https://youtu.be/2PwCYdnlpdY>

(11) “The Quest for Purity”

When & How to Bow in Korea

<https://youtu.be/jJLrEzpzpYA>

[Korean Culture Series] Korean language, Hangeul

<https://youtu.be/LMJnbSTzkTU>

The Life of Dr. Philip Jaisohn - ??? ?? (Soh Jaipil) - Philip Jaisohn Video Contest 1st Place Winner

<https://youtu.be/dwZXY3y4hfk>

(12) “Being Second Class”

Korean History -Japanese Occupation Period

<https://youtu.be/c7WJEN6vUlk>

(13) “Brother no More”

Have you ever thought why the 38th parallel was chosen to separate the two Koreas?

Korea: A History Of The North-South Split

https://youtu.be/d712Qt_q0f8

(14) “Desperation”

South Korea Documentary HD Eng

<https://youtu.be/z8gw5qNr6PU>

(15) “Economic Warriors”

South Korea's miraculous economic development

https://youtu.be/Rra4_Glgw10

Reconstructing Korea's Crippled Economy Korean Miners and Nurses in Germany

<https://youtu.be/XbmW5OaZM1U>

(16) “The Smell of Money”

Korean Start-Ups v Chaebols | FT Business

<https://youtu.be/Pr1Lf7CNTh0>

(17) “The Chaebol Problem”

(18) "Work, Work, Work"

South Korean employees work excessive hours

https://youtu.be/l_ZFlI9BX9w

Korean Business Etiquette: Company Dinners

<https://youtu.be/wdAIQQVw5tM>

(19) "At Least Pro the Right Kind of Democracy
Gangnam Style Singer Psy's 'Anti-American' Controversy
https://youtu.be/bBHLaBXu_k4

History of Korea; the June 10 civil uprising of 1987
<https://youtu.be/M-5YJ62E1NI>

(20) Power Shift
6? 1987- June 10, 1987- Civil Uprising in South Korea
<https://youtu.be/hpr1J6-VedQ>

(21) "The First Democratic Presidents"

(22) "Dissidents in Charge"
In memory of Kim Dae Jung (1925-2009)
<https://youtu.be/5VQ-7bVqLXM>

(23) "Two Steps Back"
South Korea Protest 7th candlelight vigil
<https://youtu.be/zIwHpVnvh0I> ← "People Power."

(24) "The Miracle Of Affirmation"
I Want A Gangnam Style Face: S. Korea's Bizarre Surgery Trend
<https://youtu.be/ZCKShGLyeK0>

4 Angles _ Korea's Dansaekhwa Fever Spreading across the World(K-??, ??? ??)
<https://youtu.be/L5HKHC40GIU>

??? ? ??? (SeoTaiji and Boys)- ? ??? (I Know)
<https://youtu.be/y8em1w3KIFA>

Interview with a famous poet "Ko Un" [Korea Today]
<https://youtu.be/tYvcxf1lUpY>

The Pansori Epic Chant
<https://youtu.be/YfGT-mN6ngw>

Sopyonje trailer (Im Kwon Taek)
<https://youtu.be/fu6gmh4Wvys>

Shin Joong Hyun / Kim Jung Mi - The Sun
<https://youtu.be/oMBH-Ns2HeE>

BIG BANG LIVE in NEW JERSEY - FANTASTIC BABY SUPER HD
https://youtu.be/b7tGEr_kjvQ

PSY - GANGNAM STYLE(?????) M/V

<https://youtu.be/9bZkp7q19f0>

2NE1 - FIRE(Space Ver.) M/V
<https://youtu.be/ISEoXdHb4W4>

Shiri MV - When I Dream
<https://youtu.be/XQ5-GJSKREg>

Joint Security Area - J.S.A. (Park Chan-wook 2000)- Korean Trailer [Eng Subs]
<https://youtu.be/7IEl2BVcnnc>

Oasis Korean Movie Trailer 2002
<https://youtu.be/A5Tu0i-GaWw>

Onara-Ost Dae Jang Geum [Rom+Eng Sub]
<https://youtu.be/O4H-Qrd1gTQ>

(25) “For Wider Acceptance”
How to Eat Korean BBQ - Stop Eating it Wrong, Episode 22
<https://youtu.be/AuyptkdfYaE>

(26) “A Wealthier Future”

(27) “The Future of Democracy”

(28) “Time to Unify”

Louise says

The book begins with a 2014 maritime disaster. In the chapters that follow, you see how the tragedy has elements of both the old and the “New Korea”.

Michael Breen has been living in Korea (as South Korea is now commonly called) and writing about it for over 30 years. The book shows not only his knowledge of the people and their history, it displays Breen’s ability to engage a previously uninformed reader. When he says “democracy began in Korea in 1988” he’s walked you through the history so even though you know that Koreans had been voting for over 40 years, you know what this means. He has an eye for human interest. For instance, westerners will enjoy the story of Emperor Sukjong and Lady Chang as sounding very much like Henry VIII and Anne Bolyen.

Through statistics and short life stories you see the physical and emotional devastation wrought by generations of war and occupation. Freedom from colonization/occupation in and of itself did not change Korea’s poverty. Even into the 1960’s there were years of rice-less Fridays. Somehow, this small crowded nation with few natural resources emerged from among the world’s poorest to be its 15th largest economy.

Education is not only an element of Korea's economic growth, it is a mammoth change in and of itself. After the war, only 10% of the population was literate. Now high school graduation is almost 100% and 70% of the population is college educated.

The government set a goal of increasing exports. It created a tax code and loan system to favor exports (at the expense of the service industry). Early targets were \$100/capita annual exports. Now numbers exceed \$1,000/capita. Another is the competitiveness of the culture. This may be the legacy of recent poverty: the great-grandparents and grandparents of today's corporate masters had to scramble for a bowl of rice.

There are memorable stories, such as the unusual biography of the first president, Syngman Rhee; the release in the 1980's of thousands of political prisoners (how they got to prison; length of term; impact on families); and the many anecdotes about the brutality of the pecking order in the culture, schools and the workplace. There are inspiring stories such as how women supported the nation's economy in the recent financial crisis by donating their wedding rings and light stories such as the re-naming of the streets of Seoul.

I had bits of knowledge about this South Korea and its people. Breen put it all together in a way that intuitively fits my understanding.

Jeffrey Miller says

When it comes to writing about Korea—its people, culture, and history—there is no one better up to that onerous task than Michael Breen who has devoted most of his life observing and writing about the country.

However, this is more than just an outsider's take on Korea. To be sure, Breen with journalistic flair and cultural sensitivity offers an in-depth look at modern Korea that is unrestrained and honest. This is more than a history of modern Korea, however. Breen endeavors throughout this impressive tome to help readers understand who the Koreans really are through anecdotal musings and historical evidence.

Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the opening chapter which talks about the Sewol tragedy when a ferry sank off the southern coast of the peninsula in the spring of 2014. This was a rather bold on the part of Breen to lead off with this tragedy, but this chapter and his delicate, cultural understanding set the tone for the rest of the book when he tries to make sense of why something like the tragedy and its aftermath could happen. I remembered when this tragedy happened and immediately on Facebook, foreigners in Korea started to chime in about "their take" on the accident and the "culture" that allowed it to happen. Breen, though, the acute observer of Korea that he is, can analyze something critically without being shackled by his deep appreciation for the country. In the process, he helps the reader understand the Korean psyche and character without running the risk of being biased.

One of the things that I liked most about the book were all of his anecdotes and his loving attention to detail. Even for this old Korean hat who has lived and worked in South since 1990, I learned some new things about my adopted home. Whether it's talking about why there's a wastepaper basket next to a toilet in a public restroom or the manner in which Koreans number and name their streets (one of the first things I learned when I came to Korea and took a taxi—in the days before GPS—was always to make sure I could tell the taxi driver a landmark to help with navigations) Breen's observations and analyses make for some very enjoyable and insightful reading.

Another thing I liked about the book was how he divided the sections and named the chapters, which helps readers develop a better understanding of Korea than by saying this happened, and then this happened because something else happened. We want to know why it took Korea as long as it did to finally rise from the ashes of the Korean War and become the nation that it is today. We want to know why the Chaebol continue to have a stranglehold on the Korean economy and culture. We want to know why men like Park Chung-hee and Kim Dae-jung played pivotal roles in South Korean politics and their legacies that remain until today. We want someone to explain why K-Pop has become an international phenomenon. And yes, we want to know why something like the Sewol incident could happen.

If there was one book that I would recommend to anyone thinking about coming to Korea to work, study, or simply visit, I would recommend Breen's book hands down. There's no one writing about Korea these days more knowledgeable and understanding of Korea than Michael Breen.

Jeffrey Miller,
Bureau 39

Mikey B. says

I was flipping through the New York Times one day when I came across several full page ads of Samsung products – and I thought “that’s Korean, isn’t it?”. Then I realized that LG is also Korean (by Korean I mean South Korea). I already knew that Hyundai and KIA were Korean-made. I also thought that I don’t know a whole lot about this country that makes so many of these hi-tech products that I take for granted in my house - from the androids and tablets to the refrigerator and stove.

So here was this recent book published this year by an English fellow who has been living for decades in South Korea working as a journalist. It’s entertainingly written in a folksy and humorous style. None of that scholarly-academic writing from our author Michael Breen. We are provided with some history. For example, after the Korean War all of Korea was a basket case – at the bottom level of underdeveloped countries. It was mostly agrarian-poor and illiterate.

So what happened? Korea today is urban and possibly the most Wi-Fi connected country in the world. Mr. Breen recounts this astounding transition. Sometimes democracy is a one-step forward, two-steps backward system – as recent events with Park Guen-hye demonstrate.

The 1988 Olympics were seen as a massive turning point – where South Korea over-shadowed North Korea in terms of development and modernization. Up till then North Korea had been telling the world that its society was superior to that of South Korea. The participation of the entire world in those 1988 Olympics, including North Korea’s purported allies (the Soviet Union, China...), forever put to rest the myth of North Korean supremacy.

South Korea has since demonstrated its’ “can do” attitude even more so in the economic and technology spheres. For example in 1996 during a financial crisis the IMF provided a 58 billion dollar loan.

Page 376 (my book)

Korea repaid its IMF loan by the summer of 2001, three years before it was due.

In 1963, 63 percent of working Koreans farmed or fished for a living...Forty years later, this sector was down to 8.8 percent of the workforce... But after 2003, something unusual occurred. The manufacturing sector started expanding again... Indeed, Koreans have become even better at making things.

This is a history of a country doing remarkable transitions from its often violent past and its tense relationship with the North. The problems it now faces and its many accomplishments are well outlined in this book.

Zak says

This book made me realise how awesome the South Koreans really are. From being an agrarian economy that was devastated by the Korean war, which unofficially ended in 1953, leaving the bulk of its people poor and starving, South Korea has in a few short decades managed to turn itself into a technological, manufacturing and shipping powerhouse, transformed from a dictatorship into a thriving democracy, hosted both the Summer and Winter Olympics, jointly hosted the FIFA World Cup, chaired the UN, produced numerous blockbuster, international award-winning movies, given us K-POP, produced the worldwide phenomenon "Gangnam Style" which was once the most-viewed video on Youtube and won the MAN Booker Prize (Han Kang's "The Vegetarian").

This book was written by a foreign journalist who has lived and worked in South Korea since 1982 and is married to a local. It is eye-opening and written in a very accessible, non-academic style. The long sections on politics might be a bit dry but overall I found it a fascinating read.

Animesh says

I feel this is a right time to know what Korea was, is and can be and I am talking of both North Korea and South Korea. This read is more like a documentary and a good read for someone who loves watching history or cultural shows because the book is narrated in that sense.

Divided into five parts : portraits, roots, wealth, power, what's next - I felt that the first two sections are wonderfully written. The portraits section is literally like the writer has painted a Korean street and you are gazing it, understanding the strokes and admiring the colours. The book is also inspiring in a sense of how the government though authoritarian and the people coordinated among themselves to bring South Korea from a "basket economy to advanced economy". I was awe-struck just by reading the figures of Korean standings in different fields.

You get to know about religion, internal politics, and the cultural values also. It is not to say that the society does not have any flaws but times are changing everywhere and Korea is changing as well with new generations.

Nicole Means says

This book is actually a revision from Breen's 2004 book, and it is a great intro for anyone who wants to learn about Korea's complex history and society. Breen's love of Korea is contagious and his brilliant storytelling is made authentic through anecdotes made me laugh out loud! "New Korean" reminds us that we cannot lump all East Asians into the same category-- Korea is a unique culture and should be appreciated for more than kimchi or K-Pop's YouTube sensation, rapper Psy, but rather for its diversity and growing importance on the global market. I recommend reading "New Korean" to anyone looking to learn more about South Korea.

James Mackenzie says

This book provided an excellent overview of Korean culture, history, economic policy, politics and pop culture. Having lived in Korea and being fairly well-read in the academic and popular literature on the country, I still learned quite a bit. He successfully put into words many of the things and other expats think about and added insights into the reason why things are the way they are. That being said, I felt that the author is overly optimistic regarding the economic outlook. He didn't address the widespread youth unemployment that pervades the country and the resulting generation gap. I spent the whole last year hearing from college graduates unable to find work combined with bad economic news.

Reza Amiri Praramadhan says

After reading so many books about North Korea, it is very refreshing to read about its southern neighbour. Overall, this book discussed many things, from its prehistorical and dynastic times to current days. It is fascinating to note, that although separated by the DMZ and divided by ideologies, deep down, Koreans from both sides are similar to each other. For example, South Koreans were only freed from dictatorships only recently, while the Northerners still have much to catch up. I am particularly interested to the South's economy-building, which associated very closely with its nation-building process under the (military) leadership of Park Chung-hee, transforming South Korea from a third-world agricultural economy into a first-world manufacturing economy. Reading this book, you will not get bored, I can guarantee, for the author has skillfully mixed the historical thingy with interesting life stories of his own.

Ashley says

I, unfortunately, had to return this but I absolutely loved reading this!!
