

DONALD STONE MACDONALD (Author) / DONALD N. CLARK (Ed. and Reviser), *The Koreans. Contemporary Politics and Society*. Third Edition. Boulder, Colorado and Oxford: Westview Press, 1996. XX, 332 pages, £ 16.95 (pb), ISBN 0-8133-2888-8. £ 51.95 (hb), ISBN 0-8133-2889-6

In this new edition, Donald Clark, who is professor of history and director of international studies at Trinity University, has revised and updated Donald Macdonald's introduction to Korea, describing and assessing developments on the Korean peninsula until 1995. Clark has reworked the existing text from the perspective of the mid-1990s to take account of the enormous political and economic changes in South Korea and the recent events in the relationship between North and South.

Donald Macdonald's original survey was written from the viewpoint of a senior American scholar-official who had his first encounter with Korea as a young army officer with the U.S. military occupation forces in 1946. As third secretary in the American Embassy he experienced the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 and later worked in different government departments dealing with Korea. After his retirement he earned a Ph.D. in political science and contributed as a Research Professor to the Korean Studies Program at Georgetown University. He died in 1993 before he could realize a third edition of *The Koreans*.

In the preface to the first edition the author outlines the main propose of the book: it is intended as a corrective to Western ignorance about Korea and as an endeavor to explain why Korea is important - strategically, economically and culturally. The author stresses that Korea should be seen as a single nation, despite its division into two states due to superpower rivalry and ideological differences. To emphasize this point *north* and *south* are not capitalized in the text when referring to the two states on the peninsula. Accordingly, "north Korea" and "south Korea" receive the same attention in each topic discussed even though the North has been given less space due to the lack of detailed information.

The book tries to provide a complete overview. Starting with an introduction giving the basics about geography, people, resources, history, politics, economics, culture, international relations and security, the rest can be understood as a detailed exposition of these subjects, offering a well organized collection of information in a clearly understandable and easily readable fashion. Further information about tradition, political culture, religion, education, the role of women, family values, environmental problems, lifestyle and way of thinking are intended to provide the Western reader with deeper insight into this strange culture.

In the parts dealing with politics and economics the author relies on official information to the exclusion of anything he might have learnt behind the scenes and disregards the informal ties between politics, economy and military as, for instance, dealt with by the journalist Mark L. Clifford in his book *Troubled Tiger. Businessmen, Bureaucrats, and Generals in South Korea*, New York 1994. In his treatment of the political systems and political cultures Macdonald refers to current theories of the political sciences thus adding to the analytical qualities of his study.

The most elaborate part in the historical parts of the book is the account of the events prior to the Korean War. Obviously the author speaks as an eye-witness of the dramatic developments after World War II. He blames the Western world of ignorance and indifference concerning the Korean question and the longing of the Korean people for freedom and independence. Due to a series of misperceptions and disregard of national pride, seen for example in the setting up of an administrative apparatus based on the former Japanese colonial structure, the U.S. authorities gave the impression of being incompetent and insensitive, thereby losing the Korean people's confidence.

Contrary to the more current view, Macdonald asserts that the Korean War took place from 1947-1955, with a hot phase from 1950-53. In so doing he takes into account the smaller scale violence which time and again erupted from ever increasing ideological polarization even before 1950.

Like most books on Korea the final chapter deals with the "Problem of Korean Reunification". The review of history prior to the Korean War is largely a repetition of what was already explained in the beginning of the book. With regard to the factors that had led to the division of the Korean peninsula the author names the split that had occurred within Korean society. The sudden liberation from colonial rule in 1945 released the furies of the collaboration issue, with Koreans accusing each other of having profited from Japanese rule or having helped the Japanese to oppress their fellow countrymen. Because of this rift Korean factions deepened the division of the country, in which the United States and the Soviet Union had been playing their part rather than joining hands to resist it. Viewed in retrospect, Macdonald supposes that the much criticized trusteeship proposal might have protected Korea from the rival ambitions of neighbouring powers, thereby enabling the Koreans to develop their own political structure.

In Macdonald's view it is reasonable to expect that Korea will be unified some day, since the period of separation is but a minor episode in Korea's national life. After providing a chronological record of attempts to achieve reunification after 1945 the author predicts unification as the result of a partial or total collapse of the North Korean regime triggered perhaps by



some unforeseen disaster or upheaval. To avoid the implosion of the North, efforts should continue to connect it to the outside world, and to seek unification by negotiation.

An extensive appendix provides a glossary with explanations of Korean terms, suggestions for further reading in English, and an explanation of the Korean writing system together with its romanization for which the system of McCune-Reischauer is applied (except that the diacritical marks above "o" and "u" are omitted). Including a number of charts, maps, tables, photos, notes and an index, the well-structured book is a helpful introduction to the most nagging of the problems that beset modern Korea.

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