Modern Korean history, much like Korea itself, has emerged in recent years out of the shadows of its larger and better known neighbors China and Japan. Several decades ago it was possible to place almost all the scholarly literature on Korean history in English on a single shelf of books. Indeed, Korea was so little understood that when it appeared at all in Western textbooks, it often was restricted to developments related to the Korean War and the Cold War. But in recent years the historical scholarship available to non-Koreans has grown enormously.

A tributary of China, a colony of Japan, it failed to emerge in Western consciousness as a distinctive variant of East Asian culture with its own long historical tradition. The study of Korean history was also hampered by the formidable linguistic challenges, generally requiring at minimum the knowledge of the difficult Korean language, and in most cases the ability to read Japanese as well as classical Chinese. Furthermore, there were few institutions in the West that had Korean studies programs or the staff and facilities to train scholars and few positions for academics who had Korea as their specialty. And for those interested in North Korea, the near impossibility of gaining access to its archives or even entering the country was a serious impediment. As a result Korean history was a neglected area of study.

In recent years this neglect of Korean history has been replaced by a rapidly developing interest by Western academics. Partly this reflects the general expansion of East Asian studies, but it is also due to South Korea’s emergence as a major economic, cultural and political presence in the world. In 2008, South Korea became a member of the G-20, major economic powers whose leaders meet annually. South Korean products have penetrated almost every market and have given the country a degree of recognition it previously lacked. South Korean popular culture, what is called the “Korean Wave,” has made the country a major exporter of TV dramas, movies, pop music and videos, and Seoul has become the pop culture capital of the Pacific Rim of Asia. Furthermore, South Korea’s “economic miracle” has drawn the interest of economists, historians, and social scientists as well as policymakers. Many aspects of its economic development have become models for countries from China to Chile. The country’s transition from authoritarianism to a vibrant democracy has also been the subject of many scholarly studies. Then of course, there is the interest in North Korea. The country’s truculent posture, its isolationism, the security threats it poses and more recently its human rights record have drawn international attention.
And there is a popular fascination with the seemingly bizarre behavior of its leadership and its overall “strangeness.”

The essays in this volume both reflect this growing interest in Korea and represent the trends in the study of modern Korean history by South Korean and Western scholars. The modern period for Korean history has been defined in different ways. South Korean historians often regard “modern history” (hyŏndaesa) as beginning with the establishment of the Chosŏn period (also referred to as the Yi Dynasty) in 1392. This handbook defines modern more narrowly as starting from the 1860s, when the old Sino-centric political order in East Asia began to crumble and Korea entered the world of late nineteenth-century imperialism. Although somewhat arbitrary, the essays are then divided into several groupings. The first is the late Chosŏn period, that is, from the start of the modern era to the Japanese annexation in 1910 and the end of the dynastic state. This is followed by the colonial period from 1910 to 1945, the division of Korea in 1945, North Korea since 1945 and South Korea since 1945.

Although a significant body of Western scholarship on modern Korean history has appeared only in the past several decades, it was preceded by earlier work in Korea. Korean intellectuals began to study their modern history in the first decade of the twentieth century. They already had a long, sophisticated tradition of historical scholarship in the Chinese-style Confucian mode, but the nature of historical literature changed when scholars began to examine their past, employing Western concepts and analytical tools. These often came via Japanese translations of Western works that students read while studying in Japan or that circulated in Korea. Meanwhile, the Japanese scholars carried out historical and archaeological research mainly focused on the early period of Korean history, and in doing so, introduced more modern methods of historical scholarship to Koreans. Historians and political thinkers such as Pak Un-sik (1859–1923) and Sin Ch’ae-ho (1880–1936) began reexamining Korea’s place in the world and what it meant to be Korean. In 1908, the young Sin published an especially important essay, “A New Reading of History” (“Toksa Sillon”), in which he borrowed the concept of “Volk” (Korean: minjok) from Japanese and Chinese writers and placed it at the center of history. Sin sought to replace the older narratives that reinforced loyalty to the king with one based on a new ethnic–national identity. The history of Korea became a history of a Korean nation and its unique cultural tradition.

Korean historical scholarship soon became preoccupied with understanding the loss of their country’s sovereignty in 1910 and the humiliation of Japanese rule. Many Korean intellectuals sought to counter the work of state-sponsored Japanese scholars that found Korean history characterized by stagnation in contrast to the progressive societies of Japan and the West. Writers such as Ch’oe Nam-sŏn (1890–1957) sought to create national histories that pointed to the unique and dynamic nature of their nation’s past. Ch’oe looked for Korea’s “soul” or ǒl, its unique Volkgeist that he traced from ancient times. Korean history became a story of the struggle of Koreans to develop their society and maintain their political and cultural autonomy while threatened by outsiders. Historians such as Yi Pyŏng-do began to take a more academic approach to history, attempting to produce objective scholarship. They established the Chindan Hakhoe (Chindan Society) in 1934 to publish historical scholarship. The same period saw an emergence of Marxist historical scholarship pioneered by Paek Nam-un (1894–1979). This focused on class struggle, with peasant masses struggling against their feudal, landowning exploiters. Marxists also sought to place Korean history within the context of universal historical processes. All basic schools were similar in their linear, progressive view of history and their incorporation of Western concepts and categories for understanding their past. They also saw themselves as guardians and promoters of the nationalist spirit. Historical scholarship during colonial times, however, was hampered by Japanese restrictions, and historians were frequently arrested.
After 1945, with the division of the country, Paek and many other leftist historians went to North Korea. There, history had to conform to ideological purposes to such an extent that little real scholarship could flourish. In South Korea, scholarship on modern Korean history was hindered by a series of anti-communist authoritarian governments which feared that the examination of the messy origins of the South Korean state in the years since 1945 could undermine its legitimacy. Twentieth-century history, as a result, was often avoided by scholars.

In the late 1970s and 1980s, however, historians such as Song Kŏn-ho, Kang Man-gil and Choi Jang-jip began a refocus on more recent history. Among the issues to emerge was the origins of modernization. Yi Ki-baek, in his major work *Kuksa Sillon (A New History of Korea)*, incorporated American ideas of modernization theory to trace its origins back to the emergence of modern science and the political ideas in eighteenth century Europe. Modernization began in Korea toward the end of the eighteenth century, he argued, when Koreans began to adopt these Western concepts and practices. Others such as Kang Man-gil held to the “sprouts of modernization” concept that saw an autonomous Korean path to the modern world that began in the late Chosŏn. These scholars, rather than seeing Korea as a stagnant society, saw it as having its own dynamic nature. They pointed to writers, thinkers and reformers in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, a group they labeled *Sirak*, who were critical of their own society and proposed progressive changes. They saw the development of commerce, the growth of a more monetized economy and improvements in agriculture and technology as signs that Korea was developing its own parallel modernization. It was not initiated by Western and Japanese imperialist interventions in their country but hijacked by it. Many of these writers came from or were influenced by the leftist nationalist tradition; modernization, they often argued, came not from the top but emanated from the common people: peasants rebelling against the feudal landlord class, low-caste merchants seeking economic opportunities, and “middle people” (*chungin*), sub-elites of talented professionals who were open to new ideas resisted by the aristocratic class. In the past two decades, an increasing number of South Korean historians have focused on their often troubled recent past, including the social and political costs of South Korea’s “economic miracle.”

The lack of translations into Western languages and the nationalist preoccupation of Korean scholars have limited the influence of these works outside Korea. Nonetheless, most non-Korean historians have remained indebted to their efforts. And in recent years, free from political restraints, historical scholarship is flourishing.

**Late Chosŏn**

One issue examined by Western as well as Korean historians is whether Korea, just prior to its “opening” in the late nineteenth century, was a society in political, economic and social decline. Historians have often seen Korea as going through a period of political stability, effective governance, economic prosperity, cultural creativity and even technological innovation in the eighteenth century and then falling into a period of political corruption, factionalism, weak and ineffective rulers, economic stagnation or decline, social unrest and less cultural creativity in the nineteenth century. James B. Lewis along with Jun Seong Ho and Kang Han-Rog (2009) have argued that the country went into economic decline after 1830. Lewis in this volume states that imperialism came at a time when internal political and economic crises were coming into “conjunction.” Japanese and Western imperialism arrived, many historians believe, at a time when the government was weakened by fiscal problems, a subject touched upon in Owen Miller’s essay in this volume.
Historians have attempted to understand the collapse of the old order in Korea and the country’s loss of independence by studying the international and regional diplomacy that country became enmeshed in. An important early work still valuable on this was Eugene Kim and Han-kyo Kim’s *Korea and the Politics of Imperialism* (1967). In later works, Kim Key-Hiuk examined the international politics surrounding the “opening of Korea” and the collapse of the Chinese tributary system (1980). Swiss historian Martina Deuchler documented the efforts to adjust to the new diplomatic order (1977). Japanese specialists such as Hilary Conroy (1960) and Peter Duus (1995) focused on Tokyo’s involvement in Korea, while Kirk Larsen in *Tradition, Treaties, and Trade: Qing Imperialism and Chosŏn Korea, 1850–1910* (2008) has looked at the role played by China during this period, arguing that Qing was an imperial power using modern diplomacy, international law, telegraphs and steamboats to aggressively assert itself in Korea. More recently, Yumi Moon in *Populist Collaborators: The Ilchinhoe and the Japanese Colonization of Korea, 1896–1910* (2013) has looked at the active participation of Koreans in the annexation. Much of our understanding of the international politics from this period is summarized in Larsen’s essay in this volume.

Korea during this period was undergoing dynamic internal change that historians are still exploring. Albert L. Park in this volume looks at religious ferment and change during this period, and Carl Young (2014) in a recent work and in this volume examines the Tonghak Rebellion in 1894 and its legacy. A number of reform movements emerged in the late nineteenth century, which are examined along with the historiography on them in Joshua Van Lieu’s essay. Historians have debated over both the effectiveness of these late reforms and the reasons why they failed to save the country’s independence. Rather than viewing Koreans as hapless victims, and late Chosŏn internal politics as the tug and pull of various factions by the Japanese, Chinese, Russian or other foreign patrons, some historians studying domestic developments have found that the state was proceeding along with reforms that were effective in some areas. But the country’s precarious geopolitical position made reform difficult. Owen Miller in his essay points out the inability of late-Chosŏn Korea to develop an independent path to economic modernization as a result of Chinese and to a greater extent Japanese economic interference. Others scholars have searched for the beginnings of modernity and national consciousness. Koreans, because of their ethnic-linguistic homogeneity, their geographic isolation and their country’s long political unity, appeared to have a sense of identity as a folk or culture that went beyond dynastic loyalty. However, most historians have argued that nationalism is a modern identity. Andre Schmid (2002) argues for the beginnings of modern Korean nationalism in the emergence of a community of educated readers of journals and newspapers. Gi-Wook Shin (2006) similarly traces the emergence of national identity as beginning at the end of the nineteenth century.

The colonial period

Historians have tried to understand to what extent Korea’s modernization was a product of colonial rule. Related to this issue is the puzzle of how the foundations of the two very different societies in North and South Korea can be traced to the same colonial legacy. As a result, historians have given considerable attention to the Japanese colonial period, 1910–1945. Arguments have been made that colonialism in Korea did not resemble that of other colonies. It differed in that Koreans were colonized by a neighboring people with whom they shared many cultural traditions. Japan’s attempt at coerced assimilation gave it a unique character, as did the intense nature of its occupation with several hundred thousand soldiers, police and officials from the metropolitan state penetrating deep into Korean society. And Korea underwent a greater degree
of industrialization than was the usual case for colonies. All of this made the colonial experience of Koreans, it has been suggested, both unusual and deeply traumatic.

Scholars are increasing our understanding of this period by placing it in the broader context of modern colonialism. An early example of the first trend is *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895–1945* edited by Ramon Myers and Mark Peattie (1984), which examines colonial Korea as part of an expanding Japanese colonial empire. Two recent works by Mark Caprio (2009) and E. Taylor Atkins (2010) look at the colonial rule from a broader perspective informed by recent studies of colonialism. Caprio places colonial Korea in the larger context of colonialism, finding that the Japanese carried out policies drawn from German and French cultural assimilationist practices that were almost doomed to failure. In his essay in this volume he points to the gap between the rhetoric of assimilation and integration of Koreans into Japanese culture and society and the reality of practices that separated the two peoples and categorized Koreans as a distinctive, subordinate race of imperial subjects. The Koreans who accepted a larger Japanese imperial identity were almost always disillusioned by the failure of the Japanese to accept them. Atkins, who relies on official Japanese documents, pays attention to metropolitan Japan, viewing Korea and Japan as a “unitary field of study.” Drawing from the concept of Orientalism, he finds that the Japanese needed to exaggerate the primitivism of Korea in order to elevate their own civilizing mission. His work, much of it summarized in his essay, is revisionist in that rather than erasing Korean culture, Japanese policy intended to “orientalize” and market it.

Some historians have examined the economic and social legacy of Japan’s colonial rule in Korea. Carter Eckert in *Offspring of Empire* (1991), a study of the small Korean entrepreneurial class and its connections with the colonial administration, looks at how the landowning elite and the business class prospered under Japanese rule, providing a more complex picture of Korea during this period. Eckert’s work is important because it provides not only insights into the colonial period but also into the post-liberation period as well, since the South Korean entrepreneurial class has its origins in patterns from that earlier period. Dennis McNamara (1990), Chong-soon Kim (1998) and Soon-won Park (1999) have also studied the entrepreneurial class. Park, in her study of the Onoda Cement factory, also sees in colonial business and labor practices much that presages later South Korean economic patterns. Edwin Gragert (1994) has furthered our understanding of socio-economic history during this period with his study of land ownership. While the attention of these studies has been more on the economic elite, Gi-Wook Shin (1996) in *Peasant Protest and Social Change in Colonial Korea* has looked at the peasantry.

Historians have looked at colonial origins of modern Korean nationalism, a topic examined by Franklin Rausch in his essay in this book. Michael Robinson’s examination of nationalist movements in colonial Korea, *Cultural Nationalism in Colonial Korea, 1920–1925* (1988), was influential in shaping our understanding of the origins of the ideological divisions of post-liberation Korea. This important work focuses on the split during the 1920s between radical and moderate nationalists, the latter Robinson calls “cultural nationalists,” a term that has since then been widely adopted. The religious response to colonial modernity has been studied by Albert L. Park (2015) and the important role of Christianity in shaping nationalism by New Zealand scholar Kenneth Wells (1990).

A major concern of colonial studies has been to challenge the dominant narrative of colonial repression and Korean resistance for a more complex understanding of the period. In recent years there has been an explosion of literature reexamining the colonial experience. This includes understanding the relationship between colonialism, modernity and nationalism, and providing a more inclusive approach that incorporates issues of gender. This is reflected in a collection of essays edited by Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson, *Colonial Modernity in Korea* (2001). Theodore Jun Yoo has looked at gender in the colonial period. In *The Politics of Gender in
Colonial Korea: Education, Labor, and Health, 1910–1945 (2008), Yoo examines how the “Korean woman” underwent a radical transformation during the Japanese colonial period. Many women moved out of their traditional spheres to take jobs in schools, factories, hospitals and elsewhere. The experience of these women was complex because they faced two forms of modernity: Western and Japanese. Some conformed to the Japanese conventions of dress and social behavior, while others identified with and sought to follow more radical Western models, which are issues examined by Sonja Kim in her essay in this volume. While some of these studies looked at elite women, Janice Kim in To Live to Work: Factory Women in Colonial Korea, 1910–1945 (2009) examined what modernization meant to factory women. Another topic that has drawn considerable attention is the “comfort women.” George Hicks (1995) was one of the earliest scholars to examine this topic, while Sarah Soh (2008) has also made a notable recent contribution. The best of these studies deals not only with the victimization of the Koreans by Japanese but also with the discrimination Korean women faced within their own society. In these studies we see an extremely complex picture of modernization, not only Robinson’s different views of the national agenda, but two different models of modernity.

While some Korean nationalist historians see the colonial experience as purely exploitative and a setback in the country’s modern trajectory, much recent scholarship has emphasized the more progressive nature of its development. As Atkins points out in his essay in this volume, this can be exaggerated; modernization that took place under the Japanese was a “colonial modernity,” modernization in a colonial context. The benefits of that modernization, as others have shown, accrued to the colonizer more than the colonized. Another perspective is provided by Donald Clark (2003) in his account of the foreign missionary community in Korea, providing an interesting window into colonial life. In the early 2010s, there was a number of new studies that presented a more complex picture of the colonial rule, including Todd A. Henry’s study of public space in colonial Seoul (2014), Jun Uchida’s work on Japanese settlers (2011), an examination of Koreans who fought for Japan during World War II by Brandon Palmer (2013), the collection of essays edited by Hong Yung Lee and Clark W. Sorenson, Colonial Rule and Social Change in Korea 1910–1945 (2013) and another collection edited by Christopher P. Hanscom and Walter K. Lew, Imperatives of Culture: Selected Essays on Korean History, Literature, and Society from the Japanese Colonial Era (2013). Our picture of the colonial era through these works has thus become more complex and nuanced.

Division and war

The division of Korea in 1945 and the Korean War that soon followed the creation of two separate and rival Korean states was to many its great modern tragedy. How can we account for the creation of two Koreas? How exactly did this happen? S. S. Cho (1967) provided an early study of the division by placing it within the geopolitics of the Cold War. Jongsoo Lee’s The Partition of Korea after World War II: A Global History (2005) is a recent study of the diplomacy around the division of Korea that makes use of Soviet archival material. He argues that there is no clear evidence that the Soviet Union immediately after the war had a set plan to create a separate state in the north. His essay in this volume summarizes his argument and addresses some of the historiography on this issue. While the thirty-eighth parallel was an arbitrarily drawn line imposed on the Peninsula by the United States and the Soviet Union, historians have often traced the foundations of the two regimes to the ideological divisions during the colonial period, a topic touched upon in Rausch’s essay.

A long debate over the origins of the Korean War has shifted from viewing it as an international conflict within the context of the Cold War to understanding it within the context of a domestic
revolution. The most comprehensive treatment is by Bruce Cumings (1981, 1990), whose two-volume *Origins of the Korean War* is an important study of Korea in the five years before the Korean War. Some of the author’s arguments have been undermined by more recent evidence, but this is still valuable as a source of information on Korean political developments prior to the war. The first volume includes an especially valuable, detailed study of South Korean politics immediately after liberation. Recent studies of the Korean War itself have emphasized the brutality on both sides, the civil war nature of the conflict and its continuation since 1953. Some have focused on the internal conflict; others, such as Japanese historian Wada Haruki (2014), have attempted to place the conflict within its international context without losing sight of its dimension as a civil war. Grace Chae’s essay in this volume points to the deep ideological division before 1945 as a contributing factor and addresses some of the issues on the war itself.

**North Korea since 1945**

Despite the lack access to sources, a number of historical studies on North Korea have appeared in recent years. Pioneering works in English were Chong-sik Lee’s *History of the Korean Workers’ Party* (1978) and Dae-sook Suh’s biography of Kim Il Sung (1988), the latter still a standard work. More recently, several historians have focused on the establishment of the North Korean state. An especially significant work on this topic is Charles K. Armstrong’s *North Korean Revolution, 1945–1950* (2003). By examining North Korean documents captured in the Korean War, he was able to draw insights into the founding of the regime. He sees the Koreans in the North as full participants in carrying out a revolution, a revolution sponsored by the Soviet Union but also one that was a product of the kind of radical nationalist vision that Robinson has traced. The author persuasively argues that the North Korean government developed into a nationalist regime from its early days. Rather than simply a creation of the Soviet Union, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea was a product of internal Korean historical forces with Koreans as active agents. This theme has been further explored in Suzy Kim’s *Everyday Life in the North Korean Revolution, 1945–1950* (2013). Suzy Kim in her essay in this volume further traces the revolutionary impact the North Korean regime had on women and family as well as the limits of that revolution. Others historians such as Andrei Lankov (2002), while acknowledging the revolutionary nature of the regime and its nationalist elements, have placed more emphasis on Moscow’s role in the creation of the regime. An Australian scholar of North Korea, Adrian Buzo has followed Japanese historian Wada in arguing that North Korea developed as a “guerilla state” (1999) shaped by the experience of the youthful Kim Il Sung and his partisans fighting the Japanese in Manchuria.

The history of North Korea since the Korean War has been the object of study of several historians. Andrei Lankov’s *The Real North Korea* (2013) presents a highly accessible study. James Person of the North Korea International Documentation Project at the Wilson Center in Washington, D.C. has overseen the largest collection of materials on North Korea in America, collecting documents from around the world. Person himself has reevaluated some of the standard beliefs about its history, for example, finding the role of factionalism to be much less important than is given in most accounts (2006). Stephen Kotkin and Charles Armstrong (2006) have looked at the role foreign aid has played in North Korea’s economic development in the early years. Other scholars have tried to examine the ideology and national identity of North Korea, again, grounding their studies within the context of Korean history. Armstrong (2005) and Brian Myers (2010) have traced a distinctive indigenous path of ideological evolution that draws upon the country’s Confucian and Japanese imperial heritages as well as the Stalinist model. James Person’s essay in this volume focuses on the importance of the development of the official ideology.
of Juche for understanding North Korea. Sheila Miyoshi Jager (2013) has examined both North and South Korea’s development within the context of an ongoing Korean War, while Charles Armstrong (2013) has examined North Korea’s relations with the rest of the world in Tyranny of the Weak: North Korea and the World, 1950–1992. South Korean scholar Lim Jae-cheon (2009) has provided a systematic look at Kim Jong Il’s rise to power using available information to present a lucid analysis of how that political system has evolved.

The catastrophic economic decline of North Korea and the regime’s ability to survive has drawn the attention of scholars, three of whom are represented in this volume. Andrei Lankov’s essay examines the roots of the economic disasters of the 1990s in policies implemented in the 1950s and 1960s. Marcus Noland’s research on North Korea’s famine in the 1990s and that of others is summarized in his essay in this book. Adrian Buzo’s essay looks at the ability of Kim Jong Il during his seventeen-year reign to maintain a disciplined political system which, while widely despised abroad, is nonetheless durable.

South Korea since 1945

As one of the postcolonial “success stories,” scholars have produced a large body of literature on South Korea that focuses on its economic and social modernization as well as its democratization. Much of the literature on South Korea’s “economic miracle” has been influenced by Joel Migdal’s theory of a strong state (1988) able to override vested and parochial interests to push through a national development agenda and by Chalmers Johnson’s concept of a developmental state (1987) that gave primacy to economic development over all other goals. These models have been adopted, modified and challenged. Eun Mee Kim (1997) has examined how the state-directed model of economic development needs to be seen more as an interplay between chaebols and the state. Other studies looking at the complex factors that account for development include Jung-en Woo’s Race to the Swift: State and Finance in the Industrialization of Korea (1991) and John Lie’s Han Unbound: The Political Economy of South Korea (1998). Hagen Koo (2001) and others have looked at the roles various sectors of society have played in economic development as well as the social cost of economic modernization. Michael Seth (2002) has looked at the historical factors that contributed to educational development and its impact on the country’s social and economic development. His study and those by Doh C. Shin (1999), Geir Helgesen (1998) and Denise Lett (1998) have found the persistence of Confucian values important in shaping South Korea’s recent modernization. Laura Nelson has examined how economic development targeted and impacted women (2000).

In recent years, North American scholars have contributed to several collections of essays on the Park Chung Hee era. Many of these essays argue that any examination of South Korea as a model of how a poor country can climb out of poverty needs to factor in the personality of Park Chung Hee and the domestic and international politics of the time. Chung-shik Lee (2012) has added to our understanding of this period by tracing the personal background of Park in his Park Chung-Hee: From Poverty to Power. Other historians such as Oh Ingyu (2000) have pointed to the thuggish and oppressive nature of the Park regime, the collusion of government and big business, the suppression of workers as well as other social costs, criticisms presented by Oh and Hannah Jun in their essay for this volume.

South Korea’s turbulent political history and its transition to democracy have also attracted the attention of historians. An early study by Gregory Henderson, Korea: The Politics of the Vortex (1968), although now somewhat dated, is still a provocative and insightful history of South Korea in the first two decades after World War II. Sung-joo Han in The Failure of Democracy in South Korea (1974) and Alexander Joungwon Kim in Divided Korea: The Politics of Development
1945–1972 (1975) looked at the pre-democratic era. South Korea’s democratization has been examined by historian Gregg Brazinsky in Nation Building in South Korea: Koreans, Americans, and the Making of Democracy (2007), and in his essay in this volume he highlights the U.S. role in democratization. Namhee Lee has examined the place of the minjung movement in the country’s transformation from an authoritarian to a more open society in The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea (2007). Hwasook Nam in Building Ships, Building a Nation (2009), a case study of shipyard labor unionism in the 1960s, places the 1980s democratization within the context of earlier labor activism. Some scholars have moved from tracing economic development and democratization to examining how citizenship has been defined, the nature of ethnic and national identity and changing gender roles. All three issues are examined in Seungsook Moon’s Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea (2005) and in Sheila Miyoshi Jager’s Narratives of Nation Building in Korea: A Genealogy of Patriotism (2003), while Hyung Il Pai (2000) has looked at the role of archaeology in constructing a national identity. The essay for this book by Laura C. Nelson and Cho Haejoang surveys the many issues and large body of literature on women and gender in recent South Korea.

Today South Korea, once poor, isolated and little known, has become a major player in the increasingly globalized world. Jamie Doucette’s essay in this volume examines the changes in South Korea’s economic and social development in a post-development state since 1997. The embracing of neoliberalism has resulted in greater inequality while at the same time it has become a society of greater personal freedom. John Lie in his essay looks at the society undergoing a radical change from a xenophobic society with a strong isolationist tendency to one that is increasingly embracing globalization.

The contrast between the two Koreas provides one of the most fascinating puzzles that modern history can present to historians. How could two societies that are so different emerge among such a homogeneous peoples? Nowhere in the world do two sovereign states with such a wide gap in living standards, such radically different economic and political systems and radically different ideological orientations border each other. And yet within living memory they were the same state, the same society. Both Koreas share the same historical heritage yet in two generations have evolved so contrastingly that they provide a unique case study of how the decisions leaders make and the paths states take in their quest for modernization can produce widely divergent outcomes. Modern Korean history suggests that contingency and human agency do matter in history, matter greatly. Then there is the question of reunification. A large body of literature has studied the relations between the two Koreas and their prospects for unification, a topic summed up in this volume in Avram Agov’s essay. As he points out, the tasks of reconciliation between the two Koreas are “daunting” but not inconceivable. More studies are needed to understand just to what extent the two Koreas have become not just two states but two nations.

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