A Korean History for International Readers

What Do Koreans Talk About Their Own History and Culture?

The Association of Korean History Teachers
To Non-Korean Readers Who Read This Book

Hoping to get closer to each other through Korean history

Are you ever reminded of any images or words when you hear about Korea? Or have you ever had a chance to talk about Korea with your friends?

Korea has a long history, and therefore it has cultivated diverse cultures over many years. The diverse experiences of Koreans and their culture that have long been accumulated are significant parts of the world history. We believe this book, *A Korean History for International Readers*, would contribute to studying the world history by introducing Korean history to the world.

This book is a historical text that covers Korean history from its foundation to the modern era. It especially deals with pre-modern societies of Korea in detail. Despite its long history, life in its society and its culture are rarely spoken of outside the peninsula.

Rather than arranging the historical events chronologically, this book focuses more on the details of the historical events by questioning how the diverse experiences that Koreans had affected their life and culture and what influences that culture had on constructing Korean history. This is the reason why we publish this book, although there are already numerous books introducing Korean history. Readers could realize what Koreans have endured and how it lead to their position in the world today. It also mentions their moral values and what they believe is right or wrong.

This book was written by the Association of Korean History Teachers, a major representative of history professionals. Up until now, this association has published alternative text books on Korean and world history to reform its education. In addition, it has published many research papers that cover theories of an alternative history educational process. Although this book is written by two teachers, it is the product of many minds.
History teachers try to grab the interest of students towards an unfamiliar past by speaking in their language. This book was written based on that experience that history teachers have had while attempting to bridge the gap with their students. Looking at Korea in the past and the present, we have written this book as a reminder of what is possible for the future. We did our best to compose it for readers who are unfamiliar or unaware of Korea and its history, in hopes to bring them one step closer to understanding Korea.

Thus, this book differs from any other general history books in that it organizes narrative methods to be read easily and allows readers to feel closer to Korea by using various maps and picture materials. Readers could learn cultural assets, customs, and formalities that all symbolize the lifestyle of Koreans. Also, it introduces historical sites where significant events occurred with vivid photography. Moreover, it describes in detail many important figures whom Koreans respect as their role-models.

It has been already 6 years since we began to prepare this book, and this journey has come to end. It’s not a simple task to fully understand what is familiar to us when looking from another perspective. It is said, “A Journey is the experience where I meet another one of myself at strange places”. We hope those readers who read this book could meet another part of themselves by being able to relate to the historical journey of Korea.

Nov. 2010

The Association of Korean History Teachers
B.C. 500000 ~ B.C. 1C

B.C. 500000
Stone tools, which were used by the humans who lived in this period of time were unearthed at the Geoneunmorudonggul (cave).

B.C. 50000
A human bone fossil, which is believed to have belonged to a person at the age of 35, was discovered at the Seungrisandonggul (cave).

B.C. 8000
Polished stone tools and pottery, which were used by the humans who lived in this period, were unearthed at Jeju-do (Is.). From this evidence we may assume that the Neolithic Period began around 10,000 years ago.

B.C. 4000
Agricultural production began in numerous regions throughout the Korean Peninsula. The beginning of agricultural production brought stability to the settlements and also led to fast social changes.

B.C. 3200
Sumerian civilization was formed.

B.C. 2333
According to *Samgukyusa* (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms), Dangun founded Gojoseon in B.C. 2333. This was the first state that ever emerged in the Korean Peninsula and Manchuria.

B.C. 6C
Persia united the Orient.

B.C. 4C
While Gojoseon was developing into a kingdom, it assimilated political authorities in its vicinities. It conflicted with Yan China, which was established by the people of the Chinese Han race.

B.C. 221
Qin united China.

B.C. 109–108
Having resisted Han's invasion for more than a year, Gojoseon was finally defeated. Nonetheless, the command posts established by Han China came to face fierce resistance from the Gojoseon people.

B.C. 1C
Upon the fall of Gojoseon, various states including Buyeo and Goguryeo emerged in the Korean Peninsula and several regions of Manchuria.
In the Neolithic Age, a large population based upon agriculture settled inside the Korean Peninsula and its surrounding areas. New groups of people came here every now and then, and some of them occasionally moved to Japan, yet most of them settled down here. Descendants of these people are related to the Koreans today. They founded Gojoseon with an advanced farming culture. Gojoseon developed into an independent entity, and later both negotiated and conflicted with the dynasties in China. Koreans today consider Gojoseon as the very first state of Korea.

*Danyang Geumgul* The oldest Paleolithic relics of Korea were unearthed inside the Geumgul of the Danyang area in the Chungcheongbuk-do province. Several fossil layers, from the Paleolithic Age to the Bronze Era, were also discovered at this cave.
Prehistoric Culture of the Korean Peninsula and the Historic Periods

The lands in the vicinities of the Korean Peninsula changed several times since the emergence of human beings upon it. The East Sea was originally a lake, and people were able to walk across the Yellow Sea. Considering the land’s such configurations in the past, some fossils may very well be found inside the Korean Peninsula, like fossils of the humans who are believed to have lived in the southern part of China about 1,800,000 years ago, or of the Homo erectus (also called Peijing-men) figures.

The tools that may have been used by people of the Korean Peninsula around the time of the Peijing-men were unearthed inside the peninsula. Crude tools seem to have been made by cracking stone. They show us what the lives of the people back then were like: living with a lot of difficulties to prepare food. And they also show how a new era was ushered in overcoming the obstacles of nature.

The Neolithic Era began in the Korean Peninsula about ten thousand years ago. Around 4000 B.C., Koreans settled down to farm. When their lives were settled upon farming, and livestock farming was stabilized as well, political communities were formed to unite those who were scattered across the region.

Joseon was the first nation that emerged in the northwestern part of the Korean Peninsula. With its emergence, the first chapter of the history of the Korean people was opened.
Remains unearthed at the Jeju-do Gosan-ri vestige Prehistoric era started around 8000 B.C.

Comb-patterned pottery

Grinding stone board and grinding stone

Foundation of Gojoseon

Liaoning Bronze dagger

B.C. 8000
B.C. 5000
B.C. 3000
B.C. 2000
B.C. 1000
B.C. 10

Mesopotamian and Egyptian Civilization formed

Ancient Egyptian Kingdom Period;
Construction of Pyramids;
Formation of the Indus and Yellow River Civilizations

Paleolithic and Neolithic Relic Sites of Korea

- Major paleolithic sites
- Major prehistoric sites
- Major excavation sites of human bones

Liaoning Bronze dagger

The Beginning of the Korean History 23
Since When Did the Existence of Man Begin on the Korean Peninsula?

Neolithic remains found all over the Korean Peninsula

The Hangang (R.) which is quite a large river, flows across Seoul, the capital of South Korea. Located along the banks of the Hangang in this overcrowded modern city are large and small prehistoric settlement sites. “Amsa-dong,” which is located at the eastern tip of Seoul, is widely known as one of these Neolithic sites.

Today we are able to visit and observe the nine ‘pit dwellings’ that provide evidence of prehistoric human activities in the region. Various tools used by the prehistoric inhabitants near the Hangang are exhibited at the pavilion of “Amsa-dong.” Judging from the tools, fashioned by ground stones and bones as well as clay potteries, we can trace back to the farming and fishing life of a communal society that settled along the banks of the Hangang thousands of years ago.

It is common to find such prehistoric remains like “Amsa-dong” throughout Korea, and these show