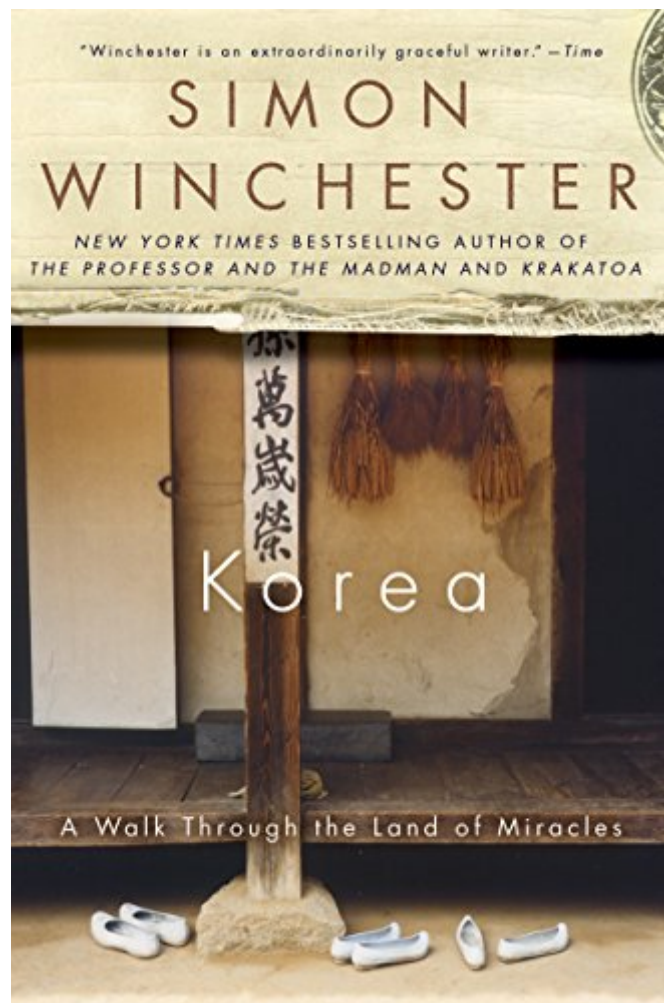




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# Korea: A Walk Through The Land Of Miracles



## Synopsis

In the late 1980s, New York Times bestselling author Simon Winchester set out on foot to discover the Republic of Korea -- from its southern tip to the North Korean border -- in order to set the record straight about this enigmatic and elusive land. Fascinating for its vivid presentation of historical and geographic detail, *Korea* is that rare book that actually defines a nation and its people. Winchester's gift for capturing engaging characters in true, compelling stories provides us with a treasury of enchanting and informed insight on the culture, language, history, and politics of this little-known corner of Asia. With a new introduction by the author, *Korea* is a beautiful journey through a mysterious country and a memorable addition to the many adventures of Simon Winchester.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

As the writer of the online articles "No Source for Winchester's Hanging-Priests Calumny" and "Simon Winchester's Smooth Forked Tongue" and having been influenced by some of the negative customers' reviews, I was very much prepared not to like this book. I read it out of curiosity because of my previous acquaintance with Winchester's writing and because Korea is a subject that is very near to my heart. I instituted a monthly full-day orientation session for new arrivals into our

command when I was the director of training for the U.S. Army's 20th General Support Group in Korea in 1967-68, I once taught a college May-term course on Korean culture, and my wife of almost 45 years is a native of Korea. Last October, I was the only non-native-Korean in a 3-week tour of Korea. It was my first time back in 38 years. I must say that I thoroughly enjoyed Winchester's book, finding it entertaining, informative, and quite fair and balanced. He is very much a man of the world and a fine writer with the resultant ability to put things in their proper perspective. How anyone could read this book and come to the conclusion that he hates Korea or Koreans frankly amazes me. I recently read and reviewed *The Voices of Heaven* by Korean native Maija Rhee Devine and the impression I get is that Winchester actually likes Korea a good deal more than Devine does. And he did not spend an inordinate amount of his time with U.S. military people and among the sordid element of Korean society. He spent more time with Catholic priests and Buddhist monks and nuns. The U.S. air bases at Kunsan and Pyeontaek happened to be on his chosen route, the route that the first Westerners to encounter Korea took to Seoul, and his visit to the DMZ necessarily entailed associating with U.S. military people. I also did not find his method of interspersing historical and social observations among his own daily accounts of his experience the least bit off-putting. It's a very good way to hold the reader's attention, and it's one of the reasons that I would assign the book to my students if I ever taught another course in Korean culture. The technique might be called "the spoonful of sugar that helps the medicine go down." Concerning his various encounters with Korean females, one must consider that he was a charming, not-bad-looking tall man in the prime of his life walking alone. This glorious male-female thing, like the spice of the food, the seasons of the year, and the political emotions, is something else that seems more intense in Korea. That's one of the reasons, I believe, that their romantic dramas are so popular now throughout East Asia. And if Winchester comments on numerous occasions on the attractiveness of the Korean women he meets, I don't think he is being sexist; he's being objective to my mind. The book is now remarkably dated not because of the great economic changes that have taken place since the year leading up to the Seoul Olympics when Winchester made his trek, but because of South Korea's wonderful political transformation. Reading the book is a good reminder of what a short time ago it was that the country was a military dictatorship ruled by the unenlightened, corrupt though thankfully rather weak despot Chun Doo Hwan. Now I think South Korea has passed the United States on the democracy scale. They have come to grips with the bad things in their recent past much more honestly, I believe, than we have in the United States. While they have become freer and more open, we have been moving rapidly in the opposite direction, particularly since 9/11. Finally, I do agree with one of the reviewers that Winchester probably isn't completely truthful when it comes to

his sexual encounters. But then, who is? I also get the impression that he is not the sort of writer who would let the truth get in the way of a good story. When it concerns something as inconsequential as one person's experience as opposed to important history, who really cares? He is in the best English tradition, after all, when it comes to shading the truth, if, in fact, he did it from time to time. In the two World Wars of the 20th century, the Germans had it all over them when it came to military organization and weaponry, *Blood, Tears, and Folly: An Objective Look at World War II* but no one has ever been in the class of the English when it comes to propaganda. *Desperate Deception: British Covert Operations in the United States, 1939-44* (Brassey's Intelligence & National Security Library) Remember, it was Winston Churchill who said, "In wartime, truth is so precious that she should always be attended by a bodyguard of lies." Winchester, I gather, has taken Churchill to heart, and not just in times of war.

To paraphrase Historian John Lucas, there is a difference between motives and purposes; a difference regrettably confused because of the vocabulary and practices of twentieth-century psychology and thought, the attribution of motive having become a pestilential habit [my italics]. Add this: Motive is a push from the past while purpose is the pull from the future, so critics who tend to the negative are, with the rarest of exceptions, products of this American Academy mindset, whose curricular recommended reading tends to the parochial, contemporary, commercial, optimistic, juvenile, obsessed with suffering, and progressive, which is where these shallow criticisms of good books come from. Winchester has gotten it right, and throughout. There is no latent or blatant *sexism* in his book; no *racism*, nothing of the sort or even remotely related to such. To say otherwise is mindless commentary. I served in South Korea commencing 12 February 1969 through late November 1974, visiting that wondrous country and people again on another official mission in 1994. Winchester captures it well. However, the Korea I served in is gone; even that described by Winchester is gone; lost in the mists of time; abrogated by the unimaginably prosperous present made possible, at least in great part, by American military power.

I just finished this book 10 minutes ago and I am still warm with thoughts, good feelings and fascination for this amazing country whose history, culture and peoples are so well described and shared. A wonderful book about a fascinating country. Simon Winchester is a gifted story teller who continues to captivate readers no matter what he writes about.

Usually i don't let others' book reviews influence my own thoughts about a book, but this time, I'm

going to have to side with them. Although this book depicts the amazing countryside history and culture of Korea not seen by the average tourist, Winchester's writing tends to always be sexist towards women, constant rhetorical bashing of the "typical" American sloth (Pp. 71-75), and non stop bragging about how Englishman are "Gentleman

Mr. Winchester has done a credible job relating Korea in this short work. I lived and worked there for six years, was fortunate enough to have married and lived with a Korean for 40-plus years, so understand a bit about the country and its civilization. I was pleased to be in accord with his writing throughout, though believe, nevertheless, that the North Korean government ought to be destroyed, lock stock and barrel, and without the slightest regret. The book relates Korea, well.

An interesting story about a walk from south to north in South Korea. Clearly Winchester hadn't yet developed his characteristic writing style used in later books. This book, though full of interesting things about Korea, is written more in the style of a newspaper or magazine news article.

For a person who has lived and taught in South Korea for a year this book was a sheer delight. The details all ring true, and the book contains a lot of historical and other information of interest and value.

I'm a full-on Winchester fan, and this ambulatory expedition through both Koreas is up to his usual standard of diligent, detailed, delightful and droll, er, alliteration. No, descriptive excellence. Highly recommended.

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