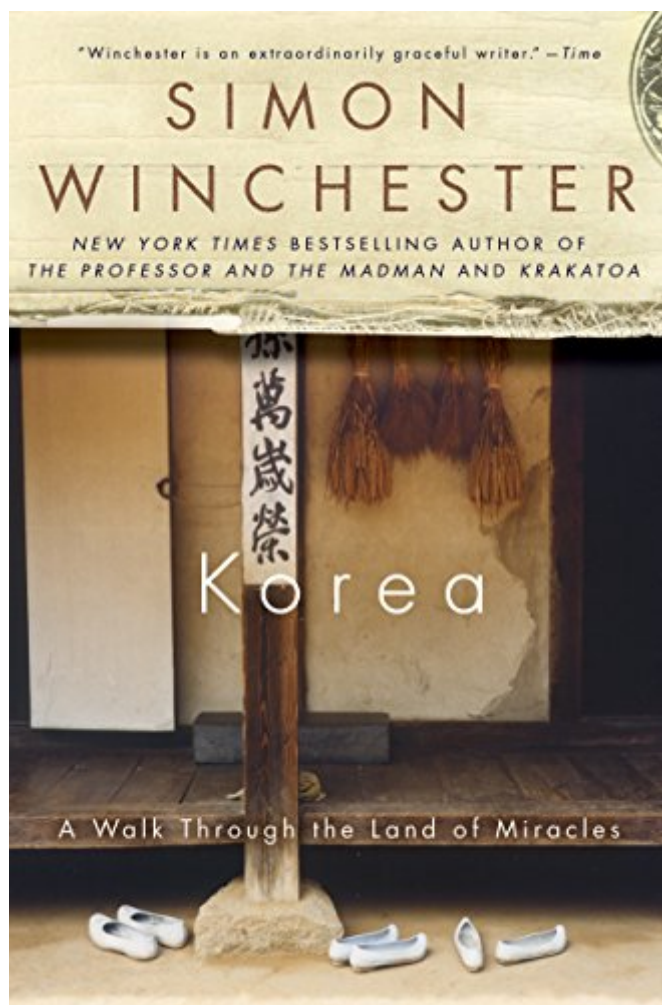


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Korea: A Walk Through The Land Of Miracles



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

I picked up this book hoping to get some insight into Korean life, culture, and customs. The subtitle--"A Walk Through the Land of Miracles" was also very appealing. However, Winchester should have subtitled this book--"Why I Hate Korea". His condescending attitude drips off of every word. The first problem with this book is that for a book that is supposed to be about Korea, he spends an awful lot of time with foreigners in Korea. In fact, you'll learn more about Irish missionaries and American soldiers than you will about Koreans. I would say that about 50 percent

of the people he encounters in this book are not Korean. To make matters worse, the Koreans he does encounter are a weird lot (probably due to the fact that he is hanging around American bases rather than where descent family people would go). Of the Koreans he encounters, nearly half of them are prostitutes. From Winchester's account, you might believe that Korea is crawling with prostitutes. This is surprising due to the fact that Korea is a quite conservative country. My only guess is that Mr. Winchester went out of his way looking for prostitutes. So, instead of the land of miracles promised in the subtitle, you get the land of seedy red light districts. As if this weren't bad enough, Mr. Winchester has a very sexist attitude. Of the Korean women he met that weren't prostitutes, he always adds the adjective pretty or attractive, as if he were sizing up every woman he met for a romantic encounter. In fact, he tells us that many of them threw themselves upon him. Well, good for him, but I don't want to waste my time on reading about it. None of the Koreans he mentions seem to have any personality (as described by Winchester). There's no sense that he is meeting actual people.

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.

Before reading this book, my understanding of Korea was as hazy as a foggy day in Seoul. Korea?

Didn't they host the Olympics a few years back? And I think there was a messy war in the fifties that led to partition; the South became prosperous; the North became weird. Oh, and don't they eat dogs? Well, now the fog has cleared, and it's all thanks to Simon Winchester's absorbing and entertaining journey through this fascinating land. And yes, there are some references to canine cuisine, but more of that later. The basis of the book is the author's decision to follow in the footsteps of a group of Dutch sailors who were shipwrecked off the Korean coast in 1633. And I really do mean in their footsteps: he walks all the way from the southern coast to the edge of the North Korean border (he would have gone further, but the American border guards threatened to break his legs). He describes the places and people along the way, but digresses to explain Korean history, culture, politics and language in a way that's far removed from the dusty old history book. His journey begins on Cheju Island, off the southern coast, where thousands of Koreans go for their holidays. It's here that he meets Father Patrick McGlinchey (one of the McGlincheys of Cheju, presumably), who explains how a group of Irish missionaries raise sheep and knit Aran sweaters, which I think is an inventive way of converting folk to Christianity. They've been here since the 1950s and feel quite at home - apparently, if you screw up your eyes until they're almost closed, Cheju looks just like Connemara. Reaching the mainland, the author continues his trek, and finds drivers and bus passengers waving, smiling at him, offering him lifts, food and cans of fruit juice, just like they would in Glasgow.

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