

An assessment of the Plans for a Cambridge History of Korea

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As the general editor of the proposed multi-volume *Cambridge History of Korea*, I will comment on the plans presented by the editors of the specific volumes planned. It is important that the *Cambridge History of Korea* be published soon. At many colleges and universities in the English-speaking world, professors who studied Chinese or Japanese history in graduate school are being asked to teach broad surveys of East Asian history and/or civilization. With a growing number of students of Korean descent as well as students without no Korean-family background wanting to learn more about Korea, it is essential that Korea be included in such broad surveys. However, without a *Cambridge History of Korea* for those professors to turn to in order to fill in the gaps in their knowledge of East Asian history and culture, what will be taught may be incomplete or even incorrect.

I will be interrogating the volume editors to see if they plan to produce volume chapters that can stand alone when a reader, whether a professor, a student, or just an educated layperson, needs a source to turn to for a reliable account of some aspect of Korean history and civilization. I will also discuss with them whether or not they plan to include chapters on issues such as gender, literature, social change, religious change, scientific and technological developments, and changes in daily life that are often given little attention in general surveys of Korean history. In addition, I will question them about how they will incorporate references to the latest scholarship from both Korea itself and the Korean Studies field beyond the peninsula in the narratives they present in their chapters. It is important that the *Cambridge History of Korea* not only provide a broad and accurate account of how Korea has changed over the centuries but that it also provide references useful for those who want to dig deeper into a particular topic they discover in the chapter or chapters they read.

This is a large project. It should cover the history of the Korean peninsula from pre-history up into the 21st century. To write chapters based on the latest scholarship, the authors of the various chapters will have to draw on the works of scholars based in Korea, Japan, China, North America, and Europe. They will also have to include a comparative perspective, since many of the readers will come to these volumes with prior knowledge of Chinese and/or Japanese history and will want to see what Korea borrowed from its neighbors, what it gave its neighbors, and how it differs from its neighbors. Despite how daunting this task appears, it is imperative that it be completed within the next few years. Cambridge histories of China, Japan, India, and even Southeast Asia have been available for decades. A *Cambridge History of Korea* needs to join those volumes on the library shelves of university libraries around the world. I will interrogate the volume editors about the specific plans they have for ensuring that their volumes are completed in a timely fashion while being of sufficient academic quality to merit the title of the *Cambridge History of Korea*.