

BOOK REVIEWS

Living Dangerously in Korea

The Western Experience, 1900–1950

BY DONALD N. CLARK

NORWALK, CT: EASTBRIDGE, 2003

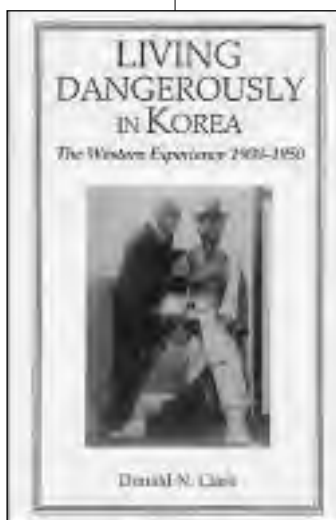
454 PAGES. PAPERBACK

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Donald Clark has written an engaging account of the small number of Westerners who lived and worked in Korea during the turbulent first half of the twentieth century. This period saw the end of the five-century-old Yi dynasty, the four-decade-long occupation of Korea by Japan, the Second World War, the division and occupation of the country by the Soviet Union and the United States in 1945, and the outbreak of the Korean War. The book is essentially two intertwined tales: the unfolding of Korean history from the viewpoint of the Western community, and the story of the expatriates themselves, often as caught up and confused by the tumultuous history of the period as were most Koreans. The Westerners Clark describes include diplomats, business speculators, soldiers, and refugees from Europe and North America—but he focuses primarily on American Protestant missionaries, the largest foreign community in the country, numbering in the hundreds.

It is written in two parts. The first and longer deals with the period from the arrival in Seoul in 1902 of Charles and Mabel Clark, Presbyterian missionaries from Minnesota, to the evacuation of the Americans from Korea during the period before Pearl Harbor. While many missionaries became deeply acquainted with Korean culture, most, even the best intentioned missionaries, lived in foreign compounds separated from both the Koreans and the Japanese by language barriers. We see the Westerners' general disgust for what they regard as the "wretched" state of Korea under the aristocratic yangban class. Although a few became champions of Korean independence, most welcomed or at least accepted the change brought by Japanese colonial rule. Yet relations between the Western expatriate community and the Japanese colonial rulers were often tense. This points to some of the anomalies of Japanese colonialism. While the Japanese were bringing the kind of "progress" to Korea that most Europeans and Americans recognized and appreciated, the Japanese officials often viewed Westerners with suspicion. The activities of missionaries in particular came into conflict with Tokyo's imperial vision, and the autonomy of Christian churches, schools, and other institutions conflicted with the increasingly totalitarian nature of the

colonial regime. Tensions between Westerners, especially missionaries, and the Japanese grew more strained in the 1930s as the latter sought to force Koreans into Shintō worship, and the oppressive nature of the colonial regime became more pronounced. After 1938 the Japanese took control of mission institutions, and Christian organizations such as the YMCA had to break their international ties. Korean Christians with Western connections suffered surveillance, persecution, and sometimes arrest. Western missionaries were so carefully watched that their best assistance to Korean converts was to avoid them



While the main focus is on the American missionary community, Clark provides interesting stories of others. These include Canadian missionaries operating along the Manchurian-Korean border and Catholic priests and nuns of various nationalities. Among the non-church-related expatriate community was Gaylor Marsh, a long-serving US diplomat who had little sympathy for Korean nationalists and who saw missionaries as making trouble when they should be adhering to Japanese regulations. There were also those Americans managing the Oriental Consolidated Mining Company that, until taken over by a Japanese company in 1939, operated the gold mines of Unsan County in northern Korea, virtually enslaving the Korean workers there. Especially interesting is the little known White Russian community of Korea with

its colorful and eccentric characters earning livings in a variety of ways.

The shorter part two deals with post World War II years. Most of the missionaries were eager to return to Korea after the war, but found resumption of their work in the South difficult and in the North impossible. Disturbingly, they often found American forces in the South acting in ways that resembled the Japanese. Clark describes the often horrific violence and oppression that characterized the postwar period. Yet, the foreign community for the most part supported the anti-Communism policies of the US military government and its Korean allies. Clark points to the "irony" that the Western missionaries who knew Korea best and who had once resisted and loathed Japanese repression of Korean freedom of religious expression "did not question the use of violence by American forces and the police and constabulary" in dealing with peasant dissension (p. 322). Clark also provides the tragic story of the small foreign community captured by the North Koreans and their "death march," as well as the depressing fate of Korean Christians under the Communist regime.

Although a number of stories of individual Korean Christians depict the difficulties of this community, we mostly see Koreans through Western eyes. This might bother some readers, but it seems appropriate enough since it is about the Westerners in Korea. Clark alternates summaries of events in Korea with stories of foreigner communities participating in or reacting to these events. A large number of foreigners are dealt with, but the life stories of a few,

such as the Clarks and the Underwoods, provide a narrative thread holding the book together. Despite the author's own background and his admiration for many in the Western Christian community, he does little to romanticize them. Instead he presents a balanced as well as illuminating account.

A previous knowledge of Korean history would be helpful but is not necessary to appreciate this book. Clark periodically provides historical background for those unfamiliar with Korean history, and his tales of Westerners are always carefully placed within the context of major historical events. There is little new in the way of interpretation. Nonetheless, the book's wealth of anecdotes and vignettes will enrich anyone's understanding of Korea.

Clark's vast knowledge and familiarity with modern Korea and with the Western community is apparent. We are reading the distillation of a lifetime of study informed by his own upbringing as a "Korean Kid." This book should be accessible to most undergraduate students, and should be on the reading list of anyone with an interest in modern Korean history or the story of Westerners and Asia. ■

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BOOKS RECEIVED LIST

The editors recently received books listed here. Normally, we do not plan reviews of titles on this list.

CHINA AND TAIWAN

Dikötter, Frank. *Imperfect Conceptions: Medical Knowledge, Birth Defects, and Eugenics in China*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998. ISBN: 0-231-11370-6 hardback

Friedman, Edward and Barrett L. McCormick (eds.). *What if China Doesn't Democratize? Implications for War and Peace*. Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 2000. ISBN: 0-7656-0567-8 hardback

Fung, Hung-Gay and Kevin H. Zhang (eds.). *Financial Markets and Foreign Direct Investment in Greater China*. Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 2002. ISBN: 0-7656-0804-9 hardback

Hsiung, James C. *Hong Kong the Super Paradox: Life After Return to China*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000. ISBN: 0-312-22293-9 hardback

Nathan, Andrew J. *China's Transition*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997. ISBN: 0-231-11023-5 paperback

Riskin, Carl, Zhao Renwei, and Li Shi (eds.). *China's Retreat from Equality: Income Distribution and Economic Transition*. Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 2001. ISBN: 0-7656-0691-7 paperback

Whiting, Susan H. *Power and Wealth in Rural China: The Political Economy of Institutional Change*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001. ISBN: 0-521-62322-7 hardback

Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China: An Annotated Translation and Study of the Chanyuan Qinggui*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002. ISBN: 0-8248-2494-6 hardback

JAPAN

George, Timothy S. *Minamata: Pollution and the Struggle for Democracy in Postwar Japan*. Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001. ISBN: 0-674-00364-0 hardback

Hawaii Nikkei History Editorial Board. *Japanese Eyes, American Heart: Personal Reflections of Hawaii's World War II Nisei Soldiers*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999. ISBN: 0-8248-2144-0 paperback

Howland, Douglas R. *Translating the West: Language and Political Reason in Nineteenth-Century Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002. ISBN: 0-8248-2462-8 paperback

Hudson, Mark J. *Ruins of Identity: Ethnogenesis in the Japanese Islands*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999. ISBN: 0-8248-2156-4 paperback

Kinsella, Sharon. *Adult Manga: Culture and Power in Contemporary Japanese Society*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000. ISBN: 0-8248-2318-4 paperback

Odin, Steve. *Artistic Detachment in Japan and the West: Psychic Distance in Comparative Aesthetics*. Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 2001. ISBN: 0-8248-2374-5 paperback

Schellstede, Sangmie Choi (ed.). *Comfort Women Speak: Testimony by Sex Slaves of the Japanese Military*. New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc., 2000. ISBN: 0-8419-1413-3 paperback

Sue, Sumii. *My Life: Living, Loving, and Fighting*. Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, 2001. ISBN: 1-929280-09-2 paperback

van Rij, Jan. *Madame Butterfly: Japonisme, Puccini, and the Search for the Real Cho-Cho-San*. Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 2001. ISBN: 1-880656-52-3 hardback

KOREA

McCann, David R. and Barry S. Strauss (eds.). *War and Democracy: A Comparative Study of the Korean War and the Peloponnesian War*. Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 2001. ISBN: 0-7656-0695-X paperback

SOUTHEAST ASIA

Riddell, Peter G. *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World: Transmission and Responses*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001. ISBN: 0-8248-2473-3 hardback

Thông, Huynh Sanh (ed., trans). *An Anthology of Vietnamese Poems: From the Eleventh through the Twentieth Centuries*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996. ISBN: 0-300-09100-1 paperback

Wickberg, Edgar. *The Chinese in Philippine Life 1850-1898*. Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2000. ISBN: 971-550-352-7 paperback