

Charles K. Armstrong, *The Koreas*. New York: Routledge, 2007. xii + 210 pages.

When developing a reading list for my college course on modern Korea, I found that it was not easy to find a book that deals simultaneously with both contemporary North Korea and South Korea. My main text, Bruce Cumings's brilliant *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005), does have some chapters devoted to North Korea, but Cumings makes

only limited attempts at cross-comparisons. It was only when I read Armstrong's *The Koreas* that I found quite what I needed.

Armstrong, associate professor of history and director of the Center for Korean Research at Columbia University, is one of the leading experts on Korean affairs and author of many books on the subject. His short book covers a wide range of topics on contemporary Korea, including Korea's place in the world, South Korea's rise to globalism, the limits of North Korea's "self-reliance," the Korean diaspora, and the question of unity. Armstrong's clear, analytical writing in these chapters gives the student or general reader an excellent view of what is transpiring on the Korean peninsula today.

Armstrong's last and most interesting chapter, "One Korea, Many Koreas," focuses on the challenging question of Korean unity, which he views more as a distant ideal rather than as a readily attainable reality. He is not optimistic when he notes that "*there has never been a modern, independent Korean nation-state*. The Korean nation has been, and remains, a nation in fragments. Foreign domination, colonization, national division, and diaspora characterize Korea's entire 'long twentieth century' from the late nineteenth century to the present" (p. 168, original emphases). The division of Korea into two mutually exclusive regimes, he argues, contradicts the idea of Korean unity. "But division also reinforces unity as an ideal: the abstract goal of political unification elides both the real differences that have emerged between the two societies since division, and the differences within each of them. It almost goes without saying that after sixty years of radically different political, economic, and social systems, the two Koreas have evolved into two very different kinds of societies" (p. 169). The ideal goal of unity is also hampered by the huge economic gap between the two nations—not only would hordes of poverty-stricken North Koreans swamp South Korea's economy, but the vastly different cultural and social differences that have grown up between the two would make it hard, if not impossible, for people from both countries to live together. The reality is that we now have two very separate Koreas that are not at all amenable to unity anytime soon.

Armstrong's *The Koreas* is a clear and concise analysis of the impact of globalization on both North Korea and South Korea. He discusses the various ways we can look at Korea and Koreans: how in fact there are today many different Koreas—including large Korean communities in the West—and how Koreans and the Koreas look at (and to) each other. Armstrong offers a fascinating interweaving of facts and analyses to demonstrate just how complex the problems of Korea are today. Readers also learn how very important Korea has become in world affairs. There is no other recent publication on Korea that does as good a job in bringing together so much on Korea as does Armstrong's *The Koreas*.

DANIEL A. MÉTRAUX
Mary Baldwin College