Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese (pp. 46-59). The index of the era names is distinguished by the inclusion of a very large and detailed table of the non-official era names – these used by the leaders of the peasant rebellions or nobles’ mutinies in China, for example, including also the era names known only from epigraphic sources and never mentioned in the dynastic chronicles. Kontsevich managed to collect more than 600 such era names from a variety of sources, and gave also detailed commentaries on the historical circumstances in which each such era name emerged (pp. 545-599). Such attention to non-official era names is rather unique in the existing Russian reference literature on East Asian history. However, the methodology Kontsevich uses for compiling his comprehensive index of East Asia’s historical capital cities (pp. 600-639), cannot but give grounds to doubts. As he acknowledges himself (pp. 618-619), some of the identifications of the historical capital cities are based on Wikipedia or the site of a Chinese tourist agency (www.soobb.com) – hardly the most reliable sources, to put it mildly. The bulk of the information Kontsevich uses seems, however, to be derived from primary historical sources and traditional Chinese dictionaries and encyclopedias.

Certain shortcomings notwithstanding, Kontsevich’s Khronologiya is definitely a major reference work, most likely to be used by several generations of Russophone scholars of China, Korea, Vietnam, Japan and Mongolia in the future. It is noteworthy that such a titanic, region-wide project was undertaken by a Korea expert – indeed, by the scholar who arguably deserves the title of the “dean” of Russia’s Korea experts. It shows the regional side of the Korean studies tradition in Soviet Union/Russia – the study of pre-modern Korea being in most cases done as a part and parcel of more general studies of the whole Sinitic cultural region, combining the respect for Korea’s particularity with deep interest in its connectedness to the rest of East Asia.

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Korea in World History by Donald N. Clark. Ann Arbor, MI: Association for Asian Studies, 2012. 76pp. (Key Issues in Asian Studies, no. 10)

When teaching classes about Korea, one is often confronted with the complete lack of background knowledge by students. I have often wished for a short
overview of Korean history to give to students taking classes in which basic knowledge about Korea was presupposed, yet turned out to be lacking. This slim overview of Korean history seems to fill that gap. While numerous histories of Korea have appeared over the years in English, this is the first one that can easily be read in a few hours.

The problem is of course how to condense centuries of complex historic events into a mere 76 pages. Condensing without simplifying is impossible, and simplification easily leads to distortion. On the whole the author has admirably managed to avoid this pitfall; the chapters on colonial Korea (ch. 3), the division of the country and South Korea (ch. 4), and North Korea (ch. 5) are focused and incisive. They explain the gist of modern Korea’s predicament by outlining the basic facts in an engaging narrative in which the author sometimes makes clear his own feelings yet without becoming partisan.

The focus is therefore very much on the modern period; the premodern period is packed into the 20 pages that make up chapter 2. Though I cannot help but regret that the premodern period is given short shrift, I think this decision is justified, since most students without any prior knowledge of East Asian history would be turned off by the “strangeness” of premodern history and an overload of dates and terms. Unfortunately, however, in this chapter the author’s attempt at condensing and simplifying has led to some distortion and error.

Take for example the following two sentences on p. 30, which attempt to sketch the events leading up to the opening of Korea: “There were outbreaks of dissatisfaction in the form of peasant revolts, and an uprising of unhappy miners in northwestern Korea nearly became a civil war: In the 1860s a religious leader in the southwest founded the ‘Religion of the Heavenly Way’ (Ch’ondogyo), recruited thousands of peasants, and briefly threatened central control over his region.”

While the first sentence is backed up by a footnote referring to Kim Sun Joo’s book on the 1812 Hong Kyŏngnae rebellion, as far as I can see Prof. Kim’s book does not argue that “unhappy miners” were behind this rebellion. If forced to condense the rebellion into one sentence, one would be much closer to the truth by pointing to dissent over discrimination meted out by the center against the northern region.

As for the second sentence, it is almost impossible to unpack all its errors without writing a separate review. But again it can easily be remedied by referring to the 1894 Tonghak rebellion as being rooted both in the religious ideals of Ch’oe Cheu (d. 1864), local peasant grievances, and the general sense of unease about foreign

encroachment. There are a couple of other passages that are similarly problematic yet easy to correct.

Finally, as a European, it is a bit disconcerting to find that “world history” apparently only includes the US and Korea. The opening chapter, “Korea, the United States, and the World,” emphasizes the importance for Americans of understanding Korea, yet fails to highlight its importance in “world history.” This is of course perfectly understandable given that the book is published by a US-based organization (the Association for Asian Studies) and that the series editor, Lucien Ellington, has dedicated himself to bringing Asia into the US high school curriculum. Nevertheless, with some minor additions and a change in wording here and there, this volume could have been much more welcoming to a non-American audience. Despite these minor gripes, however, I am very happy this book exists, and will definitely recommend it to Korea-ignorant students taking my classes; it is suitable for both high school students, undergraduates and the general reader, and even graduate students can benefit from it.

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