Kim has written a very readable guide both for professionals doing business in Korea and for scholars and students who are interested in Korea. She defined Korea as a country of changes. In fact, Korea has been going through a series of major changes since 1992, including a civilian government, the opening of financial markets, the restructuring of chaebols (Korean conglomerates), women’s role in society and business, and the development of a new relationship with North Korea. She cited Lee Kun Hee, chairman of Samsung, (one of the leading chaebols), who said, “Everything changes except for your wife and children.”

“Quick, quick, quick” was the title of a lengthy Korean survey published in the Economist, on June 3, 1995. They reported Korea “a country in a hurry.” This expression does, indeed, typify Korea. Expatriates who have been doing business there agree that Korea is very unique market. Kim clearly shows that Koreans are different from other Asian consumers in their product preferences and purchasing habits; Chinese consumers place more emphasis on technology and purchase value, while the Japanese value instrumental factors across all ages, but Koreans have exhibited no consistent pattern even within different age groups.

Kim illustrates the differences by giving relevant examples. In marketing their products, many companies (both Korean and foreign) emphasize the importance of both product and corporate image. For example, American companies can choose either to play up their Americanism or keep a more local profile. IBM Korea and Citibank have used opposite approaches. IBM Korea emphasizes its localization within Korea. At IBM Korea, Korean flags are hung all over the walls in the president’s office. The company has tried to be seen as “a Korean company in the minds of its employees, customers, and community.” IBM Korea was one of the first foreign companies to adopt a Korean language contract. Furthermore, it has consistently sought a partnership with the community. For example, it sponsors endowments for Korean traditional arts and Korean literature and has given grants to scholars and scholarships to students. The company has also encouraged employees to be mentors to disadvantaged children. The effort is so strong that a senior Korean executive at IBM Korea actually said that he never felt he was working at foreign firm.

In contrast, Citibank has emphasized its Americanism, with its headquarters in New York. It sponsored a concert by the New York Philharmonic Orchestra and a Broadway show in Korea. One marketing executive said, “We believe in the ‘Accept me as I am’ approach. We’ll never be a Korean company, so we have to play up our strengths.” Obviously Citibank’s positioning has also been successful, as in recent years Citibank has been the most profitable foreign bank in Korea. IBM Korea and Citibank are both very successful foreign firms in Korea, and Kim does well to describe the way these (and similar) companies have capitalized on their strengths.

Kim describes two types of Westerners; those who know that Korea hosted the 1988 Seoul Olympics and those who have an image of Korea as a third-world country. She stresses that international businessmen often come to Korea with the perception that it is too difficult to do business in Korea even though the business atmosphere has dramatically improved in recent years. Regarding this issue, she states that “Unfortunately for those who have not been informed of Korea’s new reality, their perception often becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.” Without cultural understanding and awareness of changes, business people intending to work in Korea cannot be culturally competent and will encounter difficulties in their every endeavor.

This book is about the New Korea and its changes. There has been a great need for an updated reference on changing business practices in Korea, especially among students of Korean studies and professionals working with Korea. Kim relates that in a New Korea, Korea’s traditional culture, developed and
refined over thousands of years, coexists with newly imported cultures from the west. The two cultures are in conflict at times, but they contribute to preparing Koreans with a global mindset. She stresses that it is important for international managers to be aware of both traditional values and newly acquired cultural traits, because both influence the Korean way of doing business. Certainly, understanding Korean culture enables international businessmen to know what to expect in their business dealing with Koreans—presentations, negotiations, decision making, and so on.

It is in the light of these issues, then, that Kim wrote this book, to give both academicians and professionals a better understanding of Korea's changing culture and business practices. The material in the book is based on interviews with more than 100 global managers—Koreans, Americans, Japanese, Chinese, and Europeans—all of whom have worked in Korea. The book consists of three parts. Part 1 is on understanding Koreans, Part 2 is on doing business in Korea, and Part 3 is on working with Koreans.

Part 1 consists of three chapters. Chapter 1 presents a country profile and Korean trends. The major changes in Korean government, business, and industry since 1992 are emphasized. Kim presents interesting information on financial reform and liberalization, which has been implemented since August 1993 by former President Kim. Even though this book does not include the dramatic changes made at the behest of the IMF, generally speaking it does well in describing the background needs for financial reform (pp. 17–18). It also discusses the improved status of women at home and work. On the issue of the relationship with North Korea, Kim says that every Korean should be united soon, but they do not agree on the logistics. She assumes that, having seen the high price of German unification, it is believed that economic cooperation should precede political unification. The book also tells about rising demographic groups who are generating good public relations. As illustrated earlier in this review, there are many ways to present an image, such as in the ways Malaysia,º to attract Koreans, foreign firms must develop rapid societal changes. These include those over 55, between 43 and 55, between 35 and 43, between 25 and 35, and the “X generation” (pp. 26–129).

Chapter 2 examines cultural awareness. Here, Kim describes traditional Korean assumptions and values and then contrasts those with the changing characteristics of Korean culture. She then goes on to describe what the core Korean values are and what new Korean values have emerged. Distinctive Korean behavior, such as fatalism, familism (a Korean family's strong mutual support), elitism (explaining why Koreans place so much emphasis on education) are described and explained. Kim goes further to explain changing Korean characteristics (pp. 40–53). For instance, the sense of self, which can be easily influenced by family expectations and peer pressure, leads the importance of public image; what others think of them is often more important than what they think of themselves. Also included is a discussion of beliefs and attitudes, militaristic values and norms, emotions and feelings, communication, and relationships. It is commonly held that emotionalism is what sets Koreans apart from the Chinese and Japanese. Kibun and Hahn are the most important perspectives of emotion and feeling in Korea (pp. 43–44). Kim goes on to explain Korean phrases such as “Silence is golden,” explaining that this is why Korea is sometimes called “the silent country.”

In describing Korean society, she depicts Korea as a relationship-based society with a strong network of social ties. Koreans are open to friends and relatives, but they are completely closed to strangers. This is exactly correct. Chapter 2 is, in my opinion, the most valuable one in this book for those either doing business in Korea or contemplating it.

Chapter 3 is about cultural competency. Koreans' self-image is discussed and their perceptions of the world, including the United States and Japan, are explored. The cultural variety in Korea is also highlighted and a summary developed as a guidelines for inter-cultural effectiveness. Information on chaebols is included, giving some detail on owners and their new, distinct Korean corporate cultures compared to Western companies (pp. 65–72).

Part 2 is organized around four major challenges Westerners face in doing business in Korea: corporate communication, human resources management, working through the Korean system, and business communication. Chapter 4 deals with the importance of effective external communication and provides specific tips on corporate image management, dealing with the media, marketing Korean style, and advertising in Korea. Corporate image is very important in Korea as mentioned earlier. This chapter shows how truly important the image is. Kim shows by examples that Koreans are impressed with big company names such as Samsung, LG, Sony, GE, IBM, McDonalds, and so on. Koreans generally seem to prefer “Made in USA” or “Made in Italy” to “Made in China” or “Made in Malaysia.” To attract Koreans, foreign firms must develop good public relations. As illustrated earlier in this review, there are many ways to present an image, such as in the ways IBM and Citibank have done. Kim gives many tips on how to manage these issues (pp. 86–90). For instance, position to local characteristics, adapt products to the local market, create a brand image, don’t always adopt a low price, make customers feel special, give something extra, use cohesive networks, and excel in customer satisfaction.

Chapter 5 discusses the issue of human resources management and emphasizes the significance of internal communication. It is explained how Western management can adapt to the Korean compensation system as well as communication style. In this chapter the basic strategies are described, from the point of view of both expatriate and local managers. To have a successful operation in Korea, the headquarters should be sensitive to the needs of both expatriates and Korean employees. It is essential to make a long-term commitment, to promote fairness between expatriates and locals and keep them informed, to give empowerment, to schedule on-site reviews as needed, and to allow expense accounts (pp. 96–97).
This chapter also contains useful hints about how expatriates should manage their Korean staff. Daewoo’s (a Korean Chae-
bol) Group President gives a good example of what is distinct-
tive in Korean; he says that Japanese people act like a machine
while Korean are more emotional. It is based on this type
of perception that Kim offers ways to manage Koreans (pp.
97–100).

Chapter 6 presents ways to work through the Korean sys-
tem. The importance of contacts in Korea is explained and
the decision-making processes in Korean organizations are
described. An exploration is made of what can go wrong
in joint ventures and successful joint venture strategies are
presented. “It is who you know, not what you know.” This
is truer in Korea, perhaps, than anywhere else in the world,
and Kim stresses that knowing the right person is vital to
one’s success. Again, examples are used to show just how
important it is. It is also contented that even when a dispute
arises, it is more important to maintain a good relationship
with partners rather than win the game (pp. 118–120).

Chapter 7 deals with what to expect in business commu-
nication with Koreans, and advises readers how to negotiate
and persuade Koreans in meetings. The author suggests ten
reasonable strategies to reach negotiations with Koreans (pp.
121–125). This section also includes comments on effective
presentation and telecommunication skills. The advice offered
to Western women will be particularly helpful to those expatri-
ate women who might find Korea’s male-dominated culture
uncomfortable.

Part 3 covers the interpersonal communication aspect of
working with Koreans. In a relationship-oriented society such
as Korea, the impact of interpersonal relations cannot be over-
emphasized. Chapter 8 takes a step-by-step approach to devel-
oping effective interpersonal relations, from how to develop
rapport in the first meeting to how to use proper names and
titles in addressing Koreans. It explains the nature of Korean
friendship; how to make friends and how to prevent conflicts.
Specific ways to entertain Korean clients or guests are sug-
gested and insights into the nearly institutionalized gift-giving
practice of Koreans are provided. As a good example, President
Clinton made a mistake when he visited Korea 1993. He
called the First Lady, wife of President Kim Young Sam, “Mrs.
Kim” when her name was actually Sohn. The importance of
familiarity with such customs cannot be overemphasized. This
book shows how important it is to know the customs in each
country, in order to do business successfully. Kim explains
the importance sometimes by giving examples and sometimes
by offering an appropriate theoretical framework.

In Chapter 9, Koreans’ nonverbal communication is dis-
cussed, from creating a first impression to the use of the office
and furniture. Specific Western gestures and body language
that might offend Koreans are discussed (pp. 154–157) and
practical advice is given on greeting, exchanging business
cards, looking professional, and maintaining the proper physi-
cal distance.

Kim’s book is an excellent information source for both
academics and business practitioners. She is thorough in her
documentation of both cultural and business issues. Learning
about another culture requires several years of study and
mastery of the local languages, it takes time and patience. In
the book Kim attempts to give readers practical guidelines
for effective cross-cultural communication skills rather than
simply a theoretical framework of the Korean business system.
Western professionals doing business in Korea will find this
material especially important in their business operations,
communications, and interpersonal relations with Koreans.
Other Asian business professionals will also find the work
useful in providing an insight on the different culture stance
in Korea. Scholars and students in Asian studies, Korean stud-
ies, and international business areas will all find some benefi-
tial information.