

Book review: Scott A. Snyder: South Korea at the Crossroads - Autonomy and Alliance in an Era of Rival Powers; New York: Columbia University Press 2018, ISBN 978-0-23118-548-6

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tions complicated Seoul's and Washington's attempts at engagement at the end of the 1990s, creating a zig-zag pattern in Pyongyang's foreign policy behaviour. An analysis of whether such behaviour is indeed unintended, or instead a bargaining tactic, would have been helpful here. Nevertheless, the question of overcoming suspicions of genuine offers of cooperation is now once again of the utmost importance.

As becomes clear in her contributions to the book, Helga Picht has a broad and deep knowledge of Korean history, language and culture in addition to having worked in Pyongyang for many years. Her insights from one of her first trips to North Korea in the early 1950s offer indispensable information about the country's internal state before Kim Il Sung's seizure of absolute power (p. 90). Helga Picht's profound knowledge of East Asian history and culture allows her to draw valuable comparisons and conclusions: she explains North Korea's constant aim of gaining political and ideological autonomy, especially with respect to China and the Soviet Union (p. 83). Nationalism and the determination to break free from the common Korean self-description as a shrimp among whales are driving Pyongyang's omnipresent narrative of self-determination. Helga Picht skilfully illustrates North Korea's internal struggle to create fitting philosophical underpinnings and emphasises how the enabling, socio-psychological circumstances have made it easy for the ideology of Tschuche and Tschuchesong to take root in the population (p. 106).

As there are (at least) two sides to a story, this book offers the other side of a commonly known narrative. The authors fulfil their stated objective of clarification, but tend to emphasise solely all the wrongdoings on the US and South Korean side. Despite the refreshing counter-narrative, many depictions and arguments run short, as they fail to reflect on North Korea's own actions and instrumentalisation for the sake of the stability of the regime. It should be noted that for a complete and comprehensive discussion of the conflict concerning North Korea, this book is certainly to be recommended, but only in conjunction with the existing literature.

Elisabeth Suh

SCOTT A. SNYDER, *South Korea at the Crossroads. Autonomy and Alliance in an Era of Rival Powers*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2018. 355 pages, \$35.00. ISBN 978-0-23118-548-6

Scott A. Snyder is Senior Fellow for Korea Studies and Director of the Program on US-Korea Policy at the Council of Foreign Relations (CFR), a renowned US think tank, and has widely published on the Korean peninsula.

Snyder's aim with this book is to explain the necessity of South Korea's past, present and future alliance with the US despite the increasing influence of a growing China in the East Asian region: "I contend that despite growing international pressure and intensifying domestic debates, South Korea's only viable strategic option for the foreseeable future is continued cultivation and strengthening of the alliance with the United States" (p. 15). To make this argument, the book is organised into two parts. In the first half of the book Snyder recapitulates the foreign policy orientation of all administrations (up to Park Geun-hye, 2016) since the foundation of South Korea in 1948. Based on this retrospective analysis, in the second part he discusses the future of South Korea's foreign policy and its alliance with the US with regard to its role as a middle power, Korea's position between the US and a rising China, the unification of the Korean peninsula, and Korea's alliance with the US.

In the introductory chapter, Snyder puts forward a "Framework for Understanding South Korea's Foreign Policy" (p. 7), and brings in additional factors that affect the course of this policy (pp. 10–14). The framework resembles a classic model with two coordinated axes representing, vertically, the spectrum between an outwardly-oriented (international) foreign policy orientation and an inwardly-oriented (parochial) foreign policy orientation, and, horizontally, the spectrum between an orientation towards alliance and an orientation towards autonomy. He adds three important factors that have to be considered when making sense of shifts in South Korea's foreign policy orientation: its geopolitical environment, its growing capacity and its changing domestic politics. Geopolitics is known to be one of the most crucial factors that has influenced South Korea in various ways, not only since the end of World War II but from long before. However, the division of the Korean peninsula under the conditions of the Cold War, and the ensuing hot Korean War (1950–53) hardened a constellation of power competition in Northeast Asia within which South Korea's only reliable ally has been the US. Changes in the geopolitical situation, such as the warming up of the Cold War and the development of global markets, represent opportunities and risks that have to be taken into account when explaining South Korea's foreign policy orientation. This is closely related to the second factor put forward by Snyder: South Korea's economic, military and developmental capacity in relation to that of its neighbours. In other words, the less dependent it is on the US, the more South Korea is able to pursue a more autonomous foreign policy vis-à-vis neighbouring countries such as North Korea, China, Japan and Russia – as well as the US, of course. The third factor is the continuing democratisation since the late 1980s, which produced a stronger demos with an increasing say in politics as well as strong interest groups, such as the large conglomerates (*chaebol*), with strong leverage on state affairs.

Using these conceptualizations Snyder runs through South Korea's contemporary history and discusses the succeeding administrations and their respective foreign policy orientations – always torn between the desire for autonomy from and the need for alliance with the US (pp. 20–191). The author comes to discover an evolving pattern of increasingly internationalisation-orientated alignments as time goes by and administrations follow each other, while the tendency of aligning with America as an ally remains stable. According to Snyder's observation, the foreign policy orientation of South Korea during the authoritarian era (1948–1987) of the first three presidents – Rhee Syngman, Park Chung-hee and Chun Doo-hwan – can be chronologically traced from a strong dependence on the parochial alliance with the US moving increasingly towards more internationalism. Rhee Syngman (1948–1960) pursued a hostile North Korea policy based on fundamental economic and military support from the US, but his ultimate aim was to unify the Korean peninsula by invading the North. Park Chung-hee (1961–1979) attempted a more independent approach, but soon realised that he, too, was constrained by the need for US support. When the *détente* set in at the end of the 1960s, Park approached North Korea to settle matters on the peninsula, and even started an open-door policy towards China and the Soviet Union; later he attempted to develop a nuclear bomb to lessen South Korea's dependency on the US – a strategy also pursued by his successor Chun Doo-hwan (1979–1987), who, however, was ultimately convinced by the Reagan administration to scrap the programme.

After the transition to democracy in 1987, the Roh Tae-woo administration (1987–1993) realigned its foreign policy to an even more internationally oriented approach, better known as *Nordpolitik*, which was mostly spurred by shifts in the liberalising global environment, South Korea's growing economic capacities and the influence of domestic actors. These changes towards an alliance-enabled internationalist foreign policy orientation continuously increased with each of the succeeding presidents, known respectively as the "Sunshine Policy" under Kim Dae-jung (1998–2003), "Balancer Policy" under Roh Moo-hyun (2003–2008), "Global Korea Policy" under Lee Myung-bak (2008–2013) and "Asian Paradox" under Park Geun-hye (2013–2016).

In the second part of the book Snyder draws on these patterns to discuss the outlook of South Korea's options and possible choices. In his view, South Korea will be trapped for the foreseeable future in its dilemma of striving for a more autonomous foreign policy while still remaining too dependent on its US alliance (pp. 192–211) – even in the face of a rising China next door (pp. 212–236) and also with regard to a possible unification on the Korean peninsula (pp. 237–261) – unless the country develops the necessary capacity.

The selected source documents detailed in 60 pages at the end of the book come in quite handy for those who want to review the major historic agreements and declarations of South Korea, the US and North Korea. Also, the

chronology of important events in South Korean strategic history (pp. 293–307) is a helpful guide for following the book’s argumentation. The relatively detailed index is useful, as well. All in all, Snyder presents a somewhat simple but at the same time tidy observation of South Korea’s foreign policy developments, and helps the reader who is not familiar with the history of the Korean peninsula to understand the dynamics that have shaped the region, and how they might do so in the future. The flow of the book is somewhat hampered by the reiterations of facts and arguments throughout the chapters and subsections, which might owe to a certain style of writing for an audience such as “government officials, business executives, journalists, educators and students, civic and religious leaders, and other interested citizens” (front matter). Nevertheless, overall *South Korea at the Crossroads* is indeed a fine source book on the recent history of South Korea’s foreign policy strategy, and will be a solid reference for scholars of comparative foreign policy interested in the East Asian region.

Hannes B. Mosler

FRANK JAKOB, *Tsushima 1905. Ostasiens Trafalgar*. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2017. 217 pages, €29.90. ISBN 978-3-506-78140-6

The global political significance of the naval battle between the Russian Baltic Fleet and the Japanese at Tsushima, a Japanese island in the Korean Strait, on 27/28 May 1905 can hardly be compared with that of the victory of the English admiral Nelson over the Franco-Spanish fleet at Trafalgar – only in the extent of the respective defeat. Russia lost nearly all of its heavy units, battle-ships, cruisers and destroyers, and lamented the death of about 5,000 men. On the Japanese side, however, only three torpedo boats were lost, and only 127 seamen were killed. Similarly, the French fleet was almost completely destroyed in 1805, leaving France to remain a land power, much like Imperial Russia after 1905.

The author rightly concentrates, therefore, on the multi-layered political dimensions of the sea battle, its historical background and consequences, both for international politics as well as for the internal development of Russia and Japan. In doing so, he somewhat neglects the military events, which are dealt with on only 14 pages. Still, the defeat of the Russian Baltic Fleet, which was almost as strong as that of the Japanese, was determined as much by the inability of Russian policy to accept Japan as an equal power in East Asia, as by military factors.