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Review Essay 97

Ramon Pacheco Pardo, *South Korea's Grand Strategy: Making Its Own Destiny*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2023. ISBN: 9780231203227 (hardcover, \$140.00); 9780231203234 (paperback, \$35.00); 9780231554930 (E-book, \$34.99).

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Seventy years ago this past July an armistice agreement ended fighting in the Korean War. This brutal conflict left both the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in the north and the Republic of Korea (ROK) in the south in ruins, especially North Korea, which experienced devastation as a consequence of massive US aerial bombardment. The DPRK, however, was able to recover economically during the following decade as it industrialized, although its population suffered systematic political repression, especially after Kim Il Sung consolidated his political power over the government after 1956. Meanwhile, the ROK's economy remained underdeveloped and Syngman Rhee, who had become the nation's first president in 1948, maintained authoritarian rule. A popular uprising forced Rhee into exile in June 1960, but the new government under Prime Minister Chang Myon was weak and failed to unite the population behind its leadership. In May 1961, Major General Park Chung-hee staged a coup d'état and seized power. Thereafter, he established dictatorial rule over South Korea, but also implemented a program of state-directed economic development that industrialized and modernized the country. After Pak's assassination in 1979, his successor Chun Du-hwan, another general, was arguably a harsher leader who accelerated popular opposition to despotism. Mass protests climaxed in 1987 and resulted in South Korea becoming a democracy the following year.¹ Ramon Pacheco Pardo argues in the study under review that, thereafter, South Korea adopted and pursued after the end of the Cold War a grand strategy to establish its world status as a middle power, which it continues to pursue in 2023.

In his introduction, Pardo contends that domestic and world events from 1988 to 1997 created a new consensus “among South Korea's political, military, diplomatic, economic, and bureaucratic elites” that advocated achievement of “independence of action” in leading the nation down a “long-term path to security, prosperity, and status” (1). ROK leaders formulated a grand strategy to achieve this goal. It involved increasing the nation's military capabilities, relying on its alliance with the United States, and expanding its diplomatic corps, trade, investment, aid, soft power, and public diplomacy. According to the author, South Korea has implemented its grand strategy since 1988 in “four concentric circles”—“a triangular core including North Korea, the United States and China; East Asia, including both its northeast and southeast; Greater Eurasia and the Indian Ocean including Russia, Central Asia, South Asia, the Greater Middle East,

¹ Sheila Miyoshi Jager, *Brothers at War: The Unending Conflict in Korea* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2013); Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History* (Reading, PA: Basic Books, 1997); Michael E. Robinson, *Korea's Twentieth-Century Odyssey: A Short History* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007).

Europe, Australia, and the Indian Ocean itself; and the rest of the world and global governance” (2). Pardo acknowledges that there has been political debate, division, and disagreement during the eight presidencies of the Sixth Republic, but argues that there has been no change in the pursuit of these grand strategic objectives. In this first book-length study of the ROK’s recent foreign policy, the author promises to demonstrate that “South Korea is an important foreign policy actor” (3) who is not “condemned to react to the whims of great powers” (8). Pardo also describes South Korea as “the quintessential middle power” (4), arguing that his examination of its foreign policy makes a valuable contribution to the field of international relations because it introduces a framework for analysis of the agency of nations other than great powers who pursue middle-power status in world affairs.

Chapter 1’s title—“The Grand Strategy of Middle Powers”—directly identifies its contents. Pardo states at the outset that he will follow an international relations approach in explaining the topic. Oddly, the author also states that he will not define grand strategy, but then does so when he writes that “grand strategy takes a long-term perspective is focused on a state’s primary ends, and makes use of all available means to achieve them” (16). Nations utilize a variety of means to achieve their objectives, including diplomatic, informational, military, and economic. Throughout this chapter, Pardo summarizes and critiques the literature on grand strategy, explaining that these writings focus on the approach of great powers.² He asserts that while weaker powers also can have a grand strategy, these nations have received less attention from scholars. His category of middle powers includes Australia, Canada, South Korea, and Sweden, as well previous great powers such as France, Germany, Japan, Russia, and the United Kingdom. In their foreign policy behavior, these nations share in common “their support for multilateralism and multilateral solutions to international problems, their proclivity to find compromise in international disputes, and, in general, their participation initiatives to find solutions to global problems” (24). In contrast to great powers, middle powers, Pardo contends, are “good citizens” who promote stability, predictability, and peace in global affairs. Moreover, middle powers act as “honest brokers” in practicing “network diplomacy” (25) to foster international cooperation and build coalitions. Although their activism must have a “regional scope,” (29) middle powers also can use “their military capabilities to support international operations to enhance their influence and status” (27). Most important, middle powers possess agency and autonomy that allows them “to choose their own patterns of behavior” (27).

Pardo next sets the historical stage in the second chapter, which he titles “Historical Background, 1948–1987.” He provides an excellent, concise summary of the main events in Korea from the founding of the ROK and DPRK in August and September 1948 respectively to the triumph of democracy in South Korea. Pardo explains that power politics early in the Cold War resulted in Korea’s division, but astutely emphasizes that the previous 45 years of Japanese colonial rule over the nation was the key reason for the partition. “South Korea did have the types of ends that middle powers pursue: security, prosperity, status, and, to an extent, autonomy,” he then explains, but it “did not have the geographic scale, temporal scope, or means that a middle power grand strategy requires” (33). The ROK’s foreign policy during its first four decades reflected the fact that the nation was weak, although its primary goal was reunification and it secured observer status at the United Nations. The Korean War placed the “Korean question” on the UN agenda as a regular issue for discussion. Three months after the armistice in July 1953, the United States signed a Mutual Defense Treaty with the ROK, which resulted in the continued deployment of US troops in South Korea and the placement of US nuclear weapons in 1958. Nevertheless, the Rhee government remained fearful of US abandonment and expanded its own military capabilities. This also was a major reason for Park Chung-hee to promote economic development as a way to reduce the ROK’s dependence on the United States, as well as to increase

² A short list of these studies includes Hal Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy?: Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004); Lawrence Friedman, *Strategy: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Paul Kennedy (ed.), *Grand Strategies in War and Peace* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991); William C. Martel, *Grand Strategy in Theory and Practice: The Need for an Effective American Foreign Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Williamson Murray, Richard Hart Sinnreich, and James Lacey (eds.), *The Shaping of Grand Strategy: Policy, Diplomacy, and War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

defense spending. In addition to the normalization of relations with Japan, Pardo discusses Park's pursuit of reconciliation and eventual reunification with North Korea. The chapter concludes with coverage of events during Chun Du-hwan's presidency, "a period in which South Korea began to escape its weak power status and be recognized as a more relevant global actor" (52).

As its title indicates, chapter 3 discusses "South Korea's Grand Strategy: Factors, Ends, and Means" during the years since democratization. After 1988, Pardo asserts, South Korean elites adopted "new strategic thinking" that led to the development of the means that were necessary "to fulfill the core interests of security, prosperity, and status" (55-56). The author then examines the eight factors that explain South Korea's grand strategy. Korea's division and the US-ROK alliance are the first two, which originated with the early history of the establishment of South Korea as an independent state. Dating to before democratization, but gaining greater relevance after, were the next three—China's rise, economic development, and regional integration and globalization. Following democratization there emerged the last three factors of democracy itself, middle power identity, and the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997. In discussing each of these factors, Pardo advances a number of important conclusions. First, the US alliance provides not just deterrence of North Korea, but also supplements South Korea's military capabilities and is "an enabler of Seoul's grand strategy" because it "enhances the country's reach and policy options," and its actions give "an added layer of legitimacy." Second, relations with China occupy a central place in the ROK's grand strategy because of its alliance with North Korea, its status as South Korea's largest trading partner, and Beijing's "willingness to use its military to assert its territorial and other claims" (61).³ Third, the ROK, because of its developed economy, has been able to use trade, investment, and aid to expand its influence globally, but this has imposed on it new obligations and responsibilities. Finally, with the end of the Cold War, South Korean policymakers developed a new self-identity of assertiveness, creating the "expectation that their country will behave in a way that has long been associated with middle powers" (64).

Pardo also describes the ends and means of South Korea's grand strategy in chapter 3. He argues that Seoul's "very clear overarching goal [is] to make its own destiny" (67). In its pursuit of autonomy, South Korea has sought to achieve "four grand strategic ends" (68) that Prado describes in detail—protection from outside military threats; reconciliation and reunification with North Korea; deeper integration with the global economy; recognition as an influential middle power. With respect to external threats, the author adds cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns. Reducing tensions with North Korea would promote peninsular stability and enhance the ROK's regional status. Pardo argues that South Korea has encouraged foreign direct investment and signed free trade agreements, as well as joining the World Trade Organization in 1995 to promote domestic prosperity. South Korean policymakers viewed the ROK's admission to the United Nations in 1991 and membership in 1996 in the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development as global recognition of it as a middle power. In pursuit of this grand strategy, South Korea has used military, diplomatic, and economic tools, as well as soft power and public diplomacy. The ROK after 1988 consistently increased its defense spending to tenth in the world by 2020 and the next year its military ranked as the sixth most powerful. South Korea also placed a priority on diplomacy, becoming "more active and diversified" after 1988 with diplomatic postings "in every corner of the world" (77) and in seeking positions of leadership in international organizations. South Korea also has used "trade, investment, and aid as strategic means to pursue its goals" (78). Finally, the ROK not only increased the number of Korean cultural centers around the world, but promoted *Hallyu* (Korean wave) to enhance its prestige as it sponsored Korean movie screenings, K-pop concerts, and exhibitions worldwide.⁴

³ Robert Kong Chan, *Korea-China Relations in History and Contemporary Implications* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Jae Ho Chung, *Between Ally and Partner: Korea-China Relations and the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Scott Snyder, *China's Rise and the Two Koreas: Politics, Economics, Security* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2009); Min Ye, *China-South Korea Relations in the New Era: Challenges and Opportunities* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017).

⁴ Jung Bong Choi and Roald Maliangkay (eds.), *K-pop: The International Rise of the Korean Music Industry* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Euny Hong, *The Birth of Korean Cool: How One Nation Is Conquering the World Through Pop Culture*

The final four chapters describe in succession how each presidential administration since 1988 has pursued South Korea's grand strategy in the four concentric circles of foreign policy action identified at the outset of this review. Pardo's goal is to show how "South Korea acknowledges that recognition as a middle power requires deeper engagement with regions and institutions even when its core interests are not at stake" (90). But chapter 4 focuses first on the "Triangular Core: Inter-Korean Relations, the US Alliance, and China's Rise." All eight South Korean presidents since 1988 have strengthened the US-ROK alliance to deter North Korea. They also have viewed China paradoxically both as a threat and as critical to South Korea's prosperity, thus relying on increased military power, but also "diplomacy, trade agreements, or soft power" (93). Roh Tae-woo's bold *Nordpolitik* strategy persuaded North Korea to join in bilateral pursuit of reconciliation, while substituting partnership for dependence in US relations and normalizing relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC). The US negotiation of the Agreed Framework to end the North Korean nuclear crisis of 1994 without ROK participation caused Kim Young-sam to accelerate expansion of South Korea's military capabilities, while "embracing China as a partner for economic and political cooperation" (106). Kim Dae-jung's "Sunshine Policy" resulted in his personal meeting with DPRK leader Kim Jong Il in Pyongyang, as well as bilateral economic projects and inter-Korean family reunions. While the George W. Bush administration's opposition to this vigorous pursuit of reconciliation, plus trade disputes, soured US-ROK relations, Kim utilized public diplomacy and soft power to boost collaboration with the PRC.⁵ Pardo finishes the chapter with similar coverage of the ROK's implementation of its grand strategy under Roh Moo-hyun, Lee Myung-bak, Park Geun-hye, Moon Jae-in, and Yoon Suk-yeol.

Chapter 5, titled "East Asia: Regionalism and Regionalization," examines in turn how each of the eight post-1988 ROK presidents implemented the ROK's grand strategy in the area just outside of its "triangular core." South Korean leaders before democratization, Pardo explains, had already seen East Asia "as a single economic and security community," but "it was only the end of the Cold War that allowed [them] to truly develop regional links and institutions" (155). Roh Tae-woo instituted a pattern continuing under his successors of seeking to resolve with Japan unresolved issues from colonization, as well as encouraging its reconciliation with North Korea. Roh also used aid and investment to improve "infrastructure and social development" (159) in Southeast Asia. Kim Young-sam, adding to Roh's Japan policy, attracted increasing trade and investment, while actively pursuing participation in regional organizations in Southeast Asia to elevate the ROK's status as a middle power. Kim Dae-jung "was most successful in obtaining support of Tokyo for his inter-Korean strategy" (163). Cooperation on North Korea continued under Roh Moo-hyun, who also worked to make South Korea "the trade and investment hub of East Asia" (168). Lee Myung-bak's visit in August 2012 to the disputed island of Dokdo badly damaged relations with Japan. Meanwhile, South Korea increased arms sales to Southeast Asia and began importing large amounts of liquefied natural gas. Park Geun-hye's policies paralleled those Lee followed in Southeast Asia, but she tried to minimize historical grievances against Japan. Moon Jae-in promoted both bilateral military exercises with Japan and trilateral operation with US forces. He prioritized, however, expanding trade, investment, and aid in Southeast Asia, while making "extensive use of public diplomacy and soft power..." (178). Yoon Suk-yeol met with the Japanese prime minister in 2022 and dormant bilateral military exercises resumed. His policies in Southeast Asia replicated those of his predecessors.

Pardo's final two chapters address "Greater Eurasia and the Indian Ocean" and "The Rest of the World and Global Governance." In chapter 6, he observes that while at first "South Korea's interests in this vast region

(New York: Macmillan, 2014); Sangjoon Lee and Abe Markus Nornes, *Halhyu 2.0: The Korean Wave in the Age of Social Media* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015); Ramon Pacheco Pardo, *Shrimp to Whale: South Korea from the Forgotten War to K-Pop* (London: Hurst, 2022).

⁵ Tae Dong Chung, "Korea's Nordpolitik: Achievements & Prospects," *Asian Perspective* 15, no. 2 (Fall-Winter 1991): 149-178; Kim Dae-jung, *Conscience in Action: The Autobiography of Kim Dae-jung*, Jeong Seung-hee, trans. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); Hyung Gu Lynn, *Bipolar Orders: The Two Koreas since 1989* (London: Zed Books, 2007); Gilbert Rozman, Sue Mi Terry, and Eun A Jo, *South Korea's Wild Ride: The Big Shifts in Foreign Policy from 2013 to 2022* (New York: Routledge, 2024).

focused on its own economic interest, over time the country's policymakers have also developed a grand strategy related to political and security concerns" (182). Russia, although secondary in importance in East Asia, affects South Korea's pursuit of autonomy, protection, world economic gain, and recognition as a middle power. India, Kazakhstan, Saudi Arabia, and Uzbekistan are also especially relevant for South Korean global strategists. A couple of highlights emerge in Pardo's discussion of the policies of each of the eight most recent presidents toward this area. Securing access to oil imports has been a key motivator behind Seoul's actions, and explains its discussion of building a pipeline to Russia through North Korea and reliance on the Middle East for eighty percent of its oil and gas. In addition to the ROK army participating in the Gulf War and peacekeeping operations, its navy also has conducted "joint exercises, patrols, and counterpiracy activities together with the navies of other countries" (200). Chapter 7 describes how South Korea, because it views itself as a middle power, "feels the need but arguably also *has* the need to take a global outlook" (207). "Canada, Latin America, and sub-Saharan Africa matter for South Korea," Prado contends, "primarily, to promote autonomy and for economic reasons including access to resources" (207-208). All of the ROK's presidents since 1988 have sought a meaningful role for South Korea in world organizations and financial institutions. Ban Ki-moon's service as UN secretary general from 2007 to 2016 provided clear evidence of South Korea's status as a bona fide middle power.⁶

South Korea's Grand Strategy: Making Its Own Destiny is a selection in *Contemporary Asia in the World* series published by Columbia University Press. It relies on extensive research in published primary and secondary sources, especially South Korean government documents. Pardo also conducted 71 interviews with high-level ROK civilian and military officials, "over a hundred background conversations with South Korean diplomats, military personnel, and formal and informal advisors" (9), and interviews with policymakers from other nations. In addition to a list of abbreviations, there is a diagram of the four concentric circles and five tables listing the factors, ends, and means for South Korea's grand strategy overall and in each area of application. Pardo's narrative is well organized and his clear prose presents his arguments convincingly. There are, however, numerous careless errors, including misspelled words, improper punctuation, random capitalization, missing words, and ending sentences with prepositions. Pardo also invents a new word—"powerness" (231)—which is not an entry in the dictionary. A factual error is his dating of the North-South Conference in North Korea after rather than when it occurred before the May 1948 elections in South Korea. One can also question Pardo's listing of Spain and Poland as middle powers, as well as the dubious claim that since 1988, Russia, China, and Japan have confronted South Korea with a genuine threat of a military attack. Pardo's assertion that "the constructive role that the Bush administration played [in the Six-Party Talks] in trying to come up with incentives to offer North Korea provided support to Roh's pro-engagement policy" is mistaken (119). In fact, the United States was consistently obstructionist during the talks and this strained relations with the ROK, as well as with Russia and the PRC.⁷

In his conclusion, Pardo reiterates that "South Korea has a well-defined grand strategy" with "the single, overarching ultimate end" (222) of gaining autonomy. He then summarizes the information and arguments he presents in the narrative about the four factors that South Korea has pursued since 1988 to achieve this goal—security, reconciliation and reunification, prosperity, and middle power status. "As of 2023," Pardo declares, "South Korea has partially achieved the goal of autonomy" (224), identifying reconciliation and reunification as the "most fundamental" (235) objectives that the ROK has yet to accomplish. He claims that

⁶ Hae Won Jeong, *South Korea's Middle Power Diplomacy in the Middle East Development, Political and Diplomatic Trajectories* (New York: Routledge, 2022); Hyo-sook Kim, *South Korea's Foreign Aid The Domestic Politics of Middle Power Diplomacy* (New York: Routledge, 2022); Sook Jong Lee (ed.), *Transforming Global Governance with Middle Power Diplomacy: South Korea's Role in the 21st Century* (New York: Springer, 2016); Scott A. Snyder, *South Korea at the Crossroads: Autonomy and Alliance in an Era of Rival Powers* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2018).

⁷ Tim Beal, *North Korea: The Struggle against American Power* (London: Pluto Press, 2005); James I. Matray, "The Failure of the Bush Administration's North Korea Policy: A Critical Analysis," *International Journal of Korean Studies* 20, No. 2 (Fall 2013): 140-77; Charles L. Pritchard, *Failed Diplomacy: The Tragic Story Of How North Korea Got the Bomb* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2007).

reunification has been a primary goal of all South Korean presidents since 1988 because this will create a stronger nation with more people and territory and reduce spending on defense, but there is much evidence to the contrary. The enormous cost of rehabilitating East Germany after reunification caused ROK political leaders and the general public to minimize this goal, given North Korea's dilapidated economy and uninformed population.⁸ Another more unfounded contention is that "all South Korean leaders in power since democratization have sought dialogue and engagement" (70) with North Korea and have consistently supported US policy on this question. In fact, there have been jarring changes in approach on dealing with North Korea since 1988. In one of many examples, Lee Myung-bak swiftly scuttled Kim Dae-jung's "Sunshine Policy" for reconciliation after he replaced Roh Moo-hyun, installing instead an approach of blunt confrontation. He also resumed moving in lockstep with US policy, after Roh had sought "grand strategic autonomy" (118). When Moon Jae-in replaced Park Geun-hye, the reverse occurred. Pardo argues unconvincingly that "behind the facade of disagreement lays a consensus about the ends and means that serve South Korean interests best" (234). Nevertheless, one cannot quibble with his conclusion that "a bright future awaits South Korea" (236).

Ramon Pacheco Pardo's study makes a praiseworthy contribution to the emerging literature covering the recent foreign policies of the Republic of Korea. It has particular value because the author examines this topic in an interpretive framework explaining how South Korea provides an example of how nations establish themselves as a consequential middle power. Until classified documents become available, *South Korea's Grand Strategy: Making Its Own Destiny* will be the authoritative source on South Korea's role in recent world affairs.

James I. Matray is emeritus professor of history both at California State University, Chico and New Mexico State University. He has published more than 50 articles, book chapters, and essays on US-Korean relations during and after World War II. Matray's most recent major publication is *Crisis in a Divided Korea: A Chronology and Reference Guide* (ABC-CLIO, 2016). He serves as editor-in-chief of the *Journal of American-East Asian Relations*.

⁸ Melissa Chan, "What Would It Take to Unify Korea?: Germany Offers Lessons," *The Atlantic*, 7 November 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/11/german-reunification-offers-lessons-korea/601297/> (accessed 22 January 2024); Eunwoo Lee, "South Korea's Shift Away From Reunification Is a Bad Sign for the Korean Peninsula," *The Diplomat*, 8 February 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/02/south-koreas-shift-away-from-reunification-is-a-bad-sign-for-the-korean-peninsula/> (accessed 22 January 2024); Gregory Macris, "A Focus on Costs, Not Benefits, Dampens Koreans' Desire for Reunification," *Joint Force Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (2012), <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA619886.pdf> (accessed 22 January 2024).