

The Four Powers and Korean Unification Strategies

by Tae-Hwan Kwak(ed.), Seoul: Kyungnam University Press, 1997

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This volume, *The Four Powers and Korean Unification Strategies*, is a collection of papers presented at an international conference on Korean unification strategies for the 21st century held by the Institute for Far Eastern Studies at Kyungnam University from May 22-23, 1996. Most of this volume is devoted to discussion of the policies of the four powers surrounding Korea—namely, the United States, Russia, China and Japan—regarding the unification of the Korean peninsula. In addition, this volume presents two chapters which discuss the unification policies of both Koreas. Lastly, two more chapters were added to introduce options for peace processes and confidence building measures to stabilize the Korean peninsula. The contributors to this volume, in accordance with the main objective of the conference, were invited from the United States, Russia, Japan and China. David E. Brown, who is a senior advisor on the Policy Planning Staff at the U.S. State Department and former Director of Korean Affairs, clarifies the American perspectives on the issue of Korean unification. Valery I. Denisov, currently the Russian Ambassador to Pyongyang, strongly argues that Russia should be recognized as a participant in the discussion of the Korea issue. Toshimitu Shigemura and Gan-Cheng Zhao, from the *Mainichi Shimbun* in Japan and the

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Shanghai Institute for International Studies in China, respectively, represent the Japanese and Chinese viewpoints with regard to unification of the peninsula. For the part of South and North Korea, Young-Ho Park from the Korea Institute for National Unification and Hak Soon Paik from the Sejong Institute contribute articles explaining the unification policies of both Koreas. In addition, Samsung Lee of the Catholic University and Kang Choi from the Korea Institute of Defense Analysis offer good opportunities to probe various ways to build a peace regime on the Korean peninsula and possible CBMs (Confidence Building Measures) in inter-Korean relations.

Overall, the theme of this volume tends to adopt a neoliberal approach. Neoliberalists view that cooperation between states is easier to achieve than neorealists argue. At the same time, they believe regimes and institutions may to some degree constrain states' behavior in contrast with the neorealist argument which stresses that states tend to maximize their expected utility under a systemic environment set by anarchy. The most striking difference between neoliberalists and neorealists stems from the question of whether or not peace, regional or global, is possible to attain through cooperation between states and the convergence of national interests into goals, norms, principles and peace-keeping mechanisms asserted by institutional arrangements, namely, regimes.

Introduction by Tae-Hwan Kwak puts heavy emphasis on the Four Party Talks proposal, a type of regime to secure peace on the Korean peninsula. He argues that, through various cooperative measures entailed in the Four Party Talks, not only the talks may be realized but a promising step toward Korean unification can be made. Kwak strongly calls for a North Korean apology for the submarine incident as a way to facilitate the Four Party Talks and lessen the degree of tension on the peninsula. (p. 9) This introductory chapter was written at the end of 1996, or before the apology from Pyongyang; however, his call was realized and Pyongyang did apologize. The remaining calls by Kwak include observance of the Korean Armistice Agreement, South Korea's

constructive engagement policy toward its northern counterpart, and ultimately building a peace regime through international cooperation. All these arguments are basically in accordance with neoliberal ideas. Another call by Samsung Lee (Chap. 7) for a peace system-building formula is also rooted in neoliberal arguments since his main concern lies in formulation of a multilateral security forum and a consensus of the national community surrounding the Korean peninsula. Kang Choi's chapter 8 is the exception. Instead of relying on neoliberal arguments, he asserts various confidence building measures on the basis that any rapprochement between two Koreas is not plausible unless they are accompanied by the appropriate political, military and socio-economic frameworks to guarantee a stable status quo and practical measures for preventing armed clashes on the peninsula. Instead of regimes and other peace-keeping mechanisms which require norms, principles and regulations for restraining the behaviour of both Koreas, Choi is calling for an "incremental and prudent" approach by adopting CBMs over a certain period of time which would, according to his argument, ultimately guarantee a stable Korean peninsula (p. 217).

Regarding Korean unification, there may be various important issues to discuss; however, there are two most important sets of puzzles— international and inter-Korean questions. Regarding the international environment surrounding the Korean peninsula, one may describe the current situation as a struggle between the surrounding powers over influence on the Korean peninsula, especially the northern part. For the past 50 years, the northern part of the peninsula has been under the influence of the Soviet Union and China. In the nineties, however, the influence of China has been the sole competitor against the newly emerging influence from Washington.

David E. Brown (Chap. 1) makes it clear that Washington's policy of engagement in East Asia and its policy toward North Korea are never meant to improve ties with Pyongyang at the expense of Seoul. He asserts that North Korea should "recognize that in the U.S. there is a deep reservoir of friendship and respect

for South Korea, supported by powerful commercial and philosophical bonds" (p. 30). This signifies that the U.S. policy of enlarging its influence on Pyongyang is based on a firm maintenance of its relations with Seoul.

For the Russian part, Valery I. Denisov (Chap. 2) stresses equidistance between Seoul and Pyongyang. Explicitly expressing Russia's dissatisfaction over the past Russo-South Korean relations, especially in terms of trade, Denisov, a high-level Russian foreign ministry official, discloses that while maintaining the current ties with Seoul, Moscow is now trying to "refresh" its relations with Pyongyang (p. 40). In so doing, the two traditional allies are trying to expand trade and economic ties and introduce new forms of cooperation including the creation of joint ventures and the utilization of North Korean labor in projects like construction, agriculture, mining, and timber cutting (p. 41).

Shigemura (Chap. 3), a Japanese journalist, is the only author to remind readers about the importance of the Chinese influence over North Korea. He calls for a careful approach by Tokyo toward Pyongyang in a way not to stimulate China, which has been sensitive to changes in the northern part of the Korean peninsula. In addition, he further discloses a background explanation of why the process of normalization between Tokyo and Pyongyang has been repeatedly delayed. In his analysis, the Foreign Ministry of Japan seems to worry about double payment. There is a widely accepted view that, at the time of normalization between Tokyo and Pyongyang, Japan will have to pay at least three to five billion dollars from which "Japanese politicians and firms should not profit" (p. 52). Again, at the time of North Korea's collapse or unification of the peninsula, Japan would provide not-so-small amount of money to aid the unified Korea. Shigemura quotes the director of the Asian Affairs Bureau of the Japanese Foreign Ministry who is said to argue that the postponement of normalization negotiations with North Korea is "a smart option for Japan" (p. 55). The director is further quoted to mention that "if Japan does not want to pay the money twice, rapid normalization should be avoided."

Gan-cheng Zhao (Chap. 4), while appearing to be very critical about the U.S. policy of engagement which in fact is purported to contain China, argues that China's policy toward the peninsula and its unification may vary according to changes in Sino-American relations. He argues that Sino-American relations "have recently suffered a series of setbacks" due to the U.S. containment strategy and that "a deteriorating relationship between China and the U.S. would be of no help" to the stability of the Korean peninsula (pp. 75-76).

Overall, the dominant feature of the international order surrounding the Korean peninsula shows a struggle for influence between the United States and China while Russia tries to recover its former dominant leverage over North Korea. Japan is still exercising caution in its approach toward Pyongyang not only because of Chinese influence but due to its worry of double-pay.

The second puzzle relating to Korean unification is how to solve stalemate between the two Koreas. If the previous discussion deals with international environment, this second subject is on how to settle issues inside the peninsula. Since the death of Kim Il-Sung, there has been virtually no direct official contact between them until representatives from both sat together at the negotiation table set for explaining the Four-Party Talks with diplomats from Washington. On the question of how to improve inter-Korean relations, this volume suggests South Korea's open-ended rapprochement with Pyongyang.

Young Ho Park (Chap. 5) clarifies his view that South Korea should adopt "a future-oriented approach" to unification by "helping North Korea to end its isolation and participate in the global order" (p. 106). However, his argument does not mean an unconditional, unilaterally benevolent approach; he makes it clear by stating that "the South's policy will be closely associated with the North's change" (p. 106).

Hak Soon Paik (Chap. 6) views North Korea as utilizing its unification policy as an offensive tool for its survival. According to his analysis, the Geneva agreement of 1994 between Washington and Pyongyang was an endeavor through which

North Korean leadership tried to install a stalwart external framework that would guarantee its survival (p. 124). Assuming that economic and security questions are more urgent than unification for Pyongyang, his analysis predicts North Korea's further maneuvers to maximize its gains either in its contacts with Washington or dialogue with Seoul. Participation in the Four-Party Talks may be understood in the same vein.

As mentioned earlier, this volume suggests a neoliberal approach toward Korean unification in general. In detail, it concludes that institutional measures like forming an arms control regime or a five-way peace talks regime would do good for bringing about stability on the Korean peninsula. In addition, at the inter-Korean level, it recommends political, military and socio-economic CBMs for providing a consolidated and practical foundation on which the two Koreas might approach unification.

Overall, this volume brings both regional and theoretical insights together into the discussion on Korean unification. While failing to provide balanced views on how to invent peace mechanisms, theoretically, by slanting toward neoliberalism, this volume was quite successful in offering deep insights on the Korean unification by the four powers by inviting informed and experienced contributors from each country. As a collection of papers presented at a conference, however, this volume lacks efforts by contributors to edit their original drafts and reshape them to be more suitable for a volume. Despite this flaw, this book is well qualified to fill a line of a bibliography in most theoretical and policy studies on the subject. ■■■