

Forthcoming

## DIPLOMACY, TRADE, AND SOUTH KOREA'S RISE TO INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCE | By Dennis Patterson and Jangsup Choi

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Although South Korea has risen to the status of a major politico-economic powerhouse on the stage of world politics in a relatively short period, scholars and policymakers so far have neglected to explain how the country has made the remarkable ascendance possible from a diplomatic—not economic—perspective. While previous studies overwhelmingly underscore an export-led growth strategy as the main engine of the country's economic success and international influence, Patterson and Choi's book traces the diplomatic efforts through which former presidents have helped boost trade ties with other countries, ultimately elevating the country to the level of a high-income and politically influential economy. South Korea has grown into a relatively new middle power in international relations in large part because former presidents successfully increased its bilateral relations with other countries and intergovernmental organizations.

The title of the book is catchy to readers who are interested in the way South Korea's diplomacy and trade relations have contributed to an increase in its international influence. Readers may be aware that the country's armed forces are ranked as the sixth most powerful military force in the world as of 2020 and engage in national defense against foreign enemies and in peacekeeping, humanitarian, and disaster-relief operations worldwide. Although the book does not discuss these politico-military influences, it delves into the details of a soft side of the country's international influence: the politics of diplomacy. Given that diplomacy is on the opposite end of the politico-military spectrum, the book offers another set of valuable insights on the past, present, and future of the country's shared responsibilities on the stage of world politics.

The book should be commended for employing a mixed strategy of qualitative and quantitative approaches. Although most books about South Korea are heavily case-based studies, this book qualitatively explains how (post-)Cold War diplomacy has raised the international profile of the country, which is also well-supported by advanced quantitative methods. The mixed approaches skillfully demonstrate that former presidents, especially Park Chung-Hee, put the country on the path to an internationally influential middle power by engaging in deliberate diplomatic efforts while relying on export-driven growth.

When I picked up the book, I was eager to know about how South Korea wields its politico-economic and military influence on world politics. In particular, I was excited to learn about how the country, as a member of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, can "mold donor policies for the distribution of Official Development Assistance (ODA)" (7). Given that South Korea used to be a big recipient of economic aid from other advanced countries, I expected that the book would address a new international role of the country: being a big aid donor. Unfortunately the book does not provide a detailed discussion of this subject, which should continue to be explored in future research.

Although the book explains the diplomatic efforts of former President Park Chung-Hee in raising the profile and influence of South Korea in world politics, it would be more beneficial if it provided a complete discussion of the Northern Diplomacy, or Nordpolitik, of Roh Tae-Woo. In fact, I agree with the assessment of the book: "Roh Tae-Woo's Nordpolitik approach, taken together, put South Korea on a path to where it could continue to elevate itself into the influential middle power it is today" (52). However, the assessment is too brief to convey the significance of the Northern Diplomacy. Readers should be curious about how Seoul's diplomatic ties with Hungary, Poland, Yugoslavia, Romania, Czech Republic, Bulgaria, and Mongolia have contributed to an increase in its bilateral trade. Seoul's relationship with China and the former Soviet Union should also be explored since that period marked the pivotal time that South Korea started actively interacting with communist countries, which was then used as leverage against North Korea.

China, the United States, Vietnam, Hong Kong, and Japan are South Korea's five top trading partners in terms of export sales during 2019. These five countries consist of more than 50 percent of total Korean exports. Since South Korea disproportionately trades with the five countries, the analysis on South Korea's diplomatic ties with other trading partners may not be as instrumental as it should be. Put differently, are the five countries outliers in the sample data used in chapter 5 or do they represent the typical interaction? If they are outlying countries rather than typical trading partners, the empirical results and inferences are likely to be biased. Unfortunately, the book performs no outlier diagnostics, so the problem remains unresolved. Future research should further look at South Korea's diplomatic and trade relations with the five trading partners before moving onto sophisticated regression analyses.

The book claims that South Korea's trade growth and diplomatic connections "grew nearly in tandem" (87). Figure 5.1 indeed shows that the two factors move together. Since there is cointegration between the two factors, the book should have proceeded with the error correction model which includes the variables in difference form plus the error correction term to capture the speed of the adjustment to the equilibrium. But the statistical model of chapter 5 relies on feasible generalized least squares that fail to appreciate the cointegrated relationship between the two factors.

All in all, the book starts with a provocative research idea: that the rising influence of South Korea in international relations is a result of former presidents' strategically targeted diplomatic efforts—which have also led to economic prosperity—rather than an outcome of rapid economic growth. However, this provocative idea needs to be tested further with more research endeavours and more rigorous statistical analyses; until then, the book leaves us with more questions than answers.

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