

Reviews

Tim Beal, *Crisis in Korea—America, China, and the Risk of War*. London: Pluto Press, 2011, xii + 268pp. ISBN 978-0-7453-3162-1

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (the DPRK or North Korea) has received much publicity, often negative, during recent years. Heightened tensions with the Republic of Korea (ROK or South Korea), the death of its leader Kim Jong-il and succession of his youngest son Kim Jong-un, along with the 100th anniversary of founder Kim Il-sung's birth, have all contributed to this publicity. With such interest in North Korea, and the Korean Peninsula, Tim Beal's new book on Korea is a timely and provocative contribution to the study of this major international issue.

The author has divided his study into three parts. Part One examines Korea and post-1945 geopolitical transformation in the context of the struggle between imperialism and nationalism. Beal believes that Kim Jong-il was reconciled to preserving the North Korean state, whereas President Lee Myung-bak's South Korea seeks to precipitate the North's collapse, and absorb it into a reunified Korea with American assistance. Significant post-war changes impacting upon North Korea include the Soviet Union's collapse, which had a devastating impact on the North's economy. It removed "a formidable bulwark against the ongoing hostility of the United States and fluctuating attitude of South Korea and Japan" (p. 50). However, China's rising power has helped the North largely to withstand American "economic warfare" (p. 51). Contrasting with China's rise is the decline of the US, giving the impression of "strategic paralysis", its policy on Korea seemingly "captured" by President Lee (p. 74).

Beal then focuses on increased Peninsula tensions, and the 2010 sinking of the South Korean naval vessel *Cheonan*. He believes that President Lee's "hard-line" approach to the North might act as the "trigger" to a second Korean War, this approach predicated on the North's weakened state (pp. 76-77). Thus, tightening sanctions and increasing military and political pressure along with heightened tension will precipitate the North's collapse, or at least cause sufficient disarray to persuade the US that an invasion would meet limited resistance. More specifically, the South's assertion that a North Korean torpedo sunk the *Cheonan* is "fabricated" (p. 98). The most plausible explanation for the torpedo found is that it was planted by the South, probably with President Lee's involvement. Based on President Lee and perhaps US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton knowing the North did not sink the *Cheonan*, military exercises near the North can be viewed as a "deliberate escalation of tension" against North Korea and China, and perhaps preparation for war (p. 111). "However much North Korea might want peace, the powerful forces arrayed against it have other ideas" (p. 113).

Finally, the “looming crisis” with North Korea is discussed. According to Beal, the unlikelihood of the Pyongyang regime collapsing or facing a succession crisis is less important than whether South Korea and the US will utilise a reported crisis to invade. He writes that both the *Cheonan*’s sinking and Yeonpyeong Island artillery exchange started by the South are closely linked with the Northern Limit Line (NLL). This is the disputed and illegal maritime boundary maintained by the South to “increase tension with the North” (p.116). As it is unfeasible for Pyongyang to invade the South, the aims of US-ROK military exercises in the area include justifying the large South Korean military, and wearing down the North’s military. In addition to US military plans against the North, Washington DC employs sanctions aimed at changing the North’s policies, and destabilising the regime. These sanctions have “grievously damaged” the DPRK (p.184). However, the costs of invading the North should not be under-estimated, and China’s potential role is another important factor that must be recognised. Ultimately the Peninsula’s future is unclear.

Beal’s book provides an interesting critique of common arguments and assumptions, whilst at the same time raising questions that highlight the importance of studying the Peninsula. The potential costs of conflict, the need to resolve tensions peacefully, and the region’s unpredictable future are rightly recognised. However, some key arguments are flawed. Beal continually identifies and focuses on what he views is ROK-US aggression in contrast to a North which seeks peace and only wishes to preserve itself. This approach fails adequately to recognise the North’s long record of hostile actions, which help to explain the ROK-US position. Indeed Beal refers to the North’s initiation of the Korean War as a “mainstream Western interpretation” (p. 11). This is despite the overwhelming evidence that the North started the conflict. His understanding of the NLL is debatable, while evidence supporting the theory that the South planted the torpedo linked to the *Cheonan*’s sinking, and that President Lee has captured the Korea policy of a declining US, is tenuous.

Another weakness is the lack of coverage in some key areas. The Korean War and United Nations receive limited attention, there is a lack of discussion on how smaller Asia-Pacific countries like New Zealand might help address Peninsula tensions, and no final chapter brings together all the book’s conclusions. The impact of sanctions is rightly covered as they can cause serious suffering among the general population, and sanctions have contributed to the North’s plight. However, the regime’s own major contribution to the country’s difficulties, isolation and the international community’s imposition of sanctions is inadequately assessed. This contribution includes the regime’s appalling human rights record, its failure to abide by international conventions, military expenditure and nuclear weapons programme, economic mismanagement, and illegal activities. Nor are the necessities of life evenly distributed as many North Koreans face severe hardships while the regime’s elite enjoys palatial lifestyles. Some evidence is also questionable. For instance, an estimate of a 700,000-strong North Korean army is much lower than estimates from authoritative sources.

Overall, Beal’s book is a timely contribution to the study of a major international issue and raises important questions. Its provocative approach should encourage discussion and debate. However, the book contains some very debatable conclusions,

and does not adequately recognise the significant contribution of the North's authoritarian regime to Peninsula tensions and its own people's plight.

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James Beattie, *Empire and Environmental Anxiety: Health, Science, Art and Conservation in South Asia and Australasia, 1800-1920*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, 320pp. ISBN 978-0-230-55320-0

Beattie's monograph greatly adds to our understanding of the origins and development of conservation policies in the British Empire. It examines how the dynamics of European settlement, migration, and empire between Australasia and India during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries transformed the environment and societies of each region. It provides the most balanced and thorough assessment of how global and local forces shaped conservation policies in the nineteenth to mid twentieth centuries.

At the core of the book, Beattie argues for the concept of "environmental anxiety" as the driving force in the creation of conservation programs in India and Australasia. He defines environmental anxiety as concerns generated when environments did not conform to European preconceptions about their natural productivity or when colonization set in motion a series of unintended consequences that threatened everything from European health and military power, to agricultural development and social relations (p. 1).

Beattie's concept of environmental anxiety does not simply trace how environmental changes led to human responses, and vice versa, but demonstrates how the interplay of cultural perceptions of nature actually changed the environment and how the changing environment led to complex and shifting views of nature. This innovative theoretical approach does not deny environmental agency or apply an overly environmental deterministic framework.

Beattie's theoretical and methodological approach diverges from previous engagements with the topic of conservation in the British Empire. The vast majority of scholarship on this subject focuses on what Gregory Barton calls "Empire Forestry", the rise of state forestry in the British Empire during the mid nineteenth century. Previous scholars tended to emphasize the metropole or periphery. Beattie integrates the metropole and periphery together by focusing on the interaction between localities and networks that stretched across geographic regions. Here he utilizes Tony Ballantyne's concept of "webs of empire", David Livingstone's focus on "locality", and David Lambert and Alan Lester's idea of "imperial careering". This provides Beattie with a fresh perspective on a subject that has all-too-frequently been studied either from the London or former colonial archives. Beattie uses archives from each continent (with most of the research on India naturally coming from the vast India Office archives at the British Library).

One of the book's many strengths is its engagement with and incorporation of different historiographical and theoretical perspectives. For example, Beattie