

Ulasan Buku / Book Review

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Changing Power Relations in Northeast Asia – Implications for Relations between Japan and South Korea
by Marie Soderberg Routledge Place of Publishing: European Institute of Japanese Studies East Asian
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This book elaborates and analyses on the relationship between Japan and South Korea and how this relationship was viewed from different perspectives. The importance of Japan and South Korea relations especially in politics, security, economics and culture are important as it drive the power relation in Northeast Asia. Northeast Asia is one of the most rapidly growth region in terms of economic has been important in the direction of the economic growth for the whole of Asia. The author of the book realize the importance of this region towards the regional economic and political stability and therefore has compiled a number of issue with regards to the Japan – South Korea relations in one book to discuss in detail the relationship between both countries.

Marie Soderberg is a Professor and Director of the European Institute of Japanese Studies in Sweden, during the time she wrote and edit the book. Therefore she is a very well-known scholar in the field of East Asia in Europe. Soderberg and seven other writers in the book have highlighted a very interesting topics and issue with regards to Japan-South Korea relations. There are ten chapters altogether in this books and Soderberg alone has wrote three chapters in this book. Among the issues highlighted in the book are the history of relations between South Korea and Japan. In the first three chapters Soderberg and two other writers emphasizes on the historical part of the relation between this two countries.

The next chapter of the book, the authors has highlighted and analysed on the regime types of Japan, South Korea and North Korea and how this will relate and impact their bilateral relations among each other. Obviously in the case of Japan and South Korea leadership come and go as these two countries are democratic countries and when it comes to North Korea it is a different approach as it is an autocratic country with different style of leadership. Therefore relationship between Japan and South Korea are more easy to develop and flourish due to same ideology and the author has emphasize that relationship between Japan and South Korea would dictate a future Northeast Asia geopolitical stability.

Then in the next chapter on the topic of the security relationship between Japan and South Korea the author try to assess relationship between Japan and South Korea where both countries also experience some tense territorial dispute. In this regards, Japan – South Korea relations in some circumstances has been over shadowed by relation with China. At some stages South Korea has a close relationship with China in terms of security this is due to China actively playing a role in influencing the North Korean regime in stabilizing the geopolitical condition of the Korean Peninsula. The reason for South Korea to be close with China maybe China has some leverage in dealing with the North Korean regime and therefore it will depend on China to deal with the North Korean regime with regards to nuclear issue and other security issue with regards to the Northeast Asia region. Since China will become increasingly important as an economic and political force in the region, their roles in determining changing of power relations cannot be discounted.

Overall the strength of this book is the ability of the author in highlighting the importance of internal politics of both Japan and South Korea in determining their foreign policy and how culture of both countries influences their political master decision making. The author also highlighted that United States is one of the major element in defining Japan-South Korea relations. The author emphasizes that since both countries have security agreement with the US, it means that both of them are under the same camp and it shows that they share the same wave length with regards to the region security. In fact their close relations with the US are seen as a stumble block for better relationship with other Northeast Asian countries in the likes of China and North Korea. In this regards, both South Korea and Japan should be close allies since both of them have security agreement with the US.

Since the book has been written in 2011 a lot of issue and event has happen. However, the author manages to address and highlight several complex and difficult issue especially with regards to the Japan-South Korea relations. Some of the issues are still relevant until today such as the nuclear issues in the Korean Peninsula and other historical and territorial both countries. This book would be very interesting if the author could

have focus more on Japanese and South Koreans relations with other regional grouping especially ASEAN. ASEAN has been vital as a regional economic grouping not only for Southeast Asia region and countries but also towards countries in the Northeast Asia. Since the region is lacking in economic integration and regionalism ASEAN has provide platform for Japan, South Korea and China to be involve in regionalism activities under the ASEAN Plus Three.

However the dynamic and geopolitical stability of the region has been changed thus far. The book still can be consider as a good reading but it should be more interesting if China rise as a super power in the region could be consider also as a changing power relation in this region. Together with China the regional stability has been changed especially after the historical meeting between Trump and Kim Jong Un situation in the Korean Peninsula has been very calm. Relation between South Korea and China has been in good term under President Moon Jae In. Japan under Shinzo Abe's leadership has shown a very strong character in leading Japan to be a leader again in the Northeast Asia regional geopolitical activities. Therefore we can see in the future the new characteristic of Japan and South Korea relation in the context of Northeast Asia, whether Japan and South Korea will remain close with the US or move closer with China is something is interesting to analyse.

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