

ENGAGEMENT IN AN AGE OF DIVISION: MOON CHUNG-IN'S SUNSHINE POLICY

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Despite the end of the Cold War, the Korean peninsula has remained divided, its future still uncertain. Since its division, inter-Korean relations have been a—and often *the*—critical issue in Northeast Asia. There were two inter-Korean Summits in 2000 and 2007 to promote peaceful cooperation, the pinnacle of engagement between Seoul and Pyongyang, but missile tests and underground nuclear testing by the North indicated, according to some, the failure of engagement as a path to peace. Inter-Korean relations have been particularly strained since the events of 2010: the sinking of the South Korean naval corvette, the Cheonan, and the Yeonpyeong Island shelling in 2010.

The Sunshine Policy: in Defense of Engagement as a Path to Peace in Korea, authored by Yonsei professor and editor of *Global Asia*, Chung-in Moon, is a book which addresses the issue of inter-Korean relations from the position that engagement did not fail because of inherent flaws in the policy but because circumstantial issues prevented its success. The Sunshine Policy is broadly defined as a strategic and holistic approach which aims at genuine, long-term improvements in inter-Korean relations through the promotion of exchanges and co-operation, trust-building and peaceful co-existence (p. 17). The policy was first articulated by Kim Dae-jung in 1998, called at first “the policy of reconciliation and co-operation” and alternatively referred to as Kim’s “engagement policy,” and served as the foundation of the South’s North Korea policy throughout the duration of his administration and that of his successor, Roh Moo-hyun.

This book is divided into three parts. In Part I, Moon touches upon the phil-

osophical foundation, ideas, principles, and rationales of the Sunshine Policy, in addition to recapping the two inter-Korean Summits during the administrations of Kim Dae-Jung and Roh Moo-Hyun. Analogous views can be found in Moon's previous works. In "Understanding the DJ Doctrine: The Sunshine Policy and the Korean Peninsula," written in 1999, Moon examines the nature of the Kim Dae-jung government's Sunshine Policy and its feasibility and desirability by considering domestic and external opportunities and constraints, and gives policy suggestions.¹ In 2001, Moon wrote "The Sunshine Policy and Ending the Cold War Structure: Assessing Impacts of the Korean Summit," a contribution to an edited volume on the Sunshine Policy that traces the impacts of the 2001 summit meeting on the dismantling of the Cold War structure on the Korean Peninsula.² Where the book differs from his prior works is that Moon focuses on the Lee administration's North Korea policy as a way to critically evaluate the Sunshine Policy.

In Part II, Moon presents the external, domestic and military challenges to the Sunshine Policy dealing with the Bush and Lee administrations and defense patterns on the Korean Peninsula. In the last part, Moon presents the future of the Sunshine Policy by analyzing the contending models of Korean unification and concludes that the "unification model by consensus," the model supported through the Sunshine Policy framework, is the most feasible and desirable. Moon supports the effectiveness of the Sunshine Policy and suggests that the South Korean government readopt it.

Opinions on North Korea: Many Sides of the Same Cube?

Moon contrasts the current North Korea policy under the Lee administration to that of two previous administrations by juxtaposing their distinctive ideological foundations and views on North Korea's future. Moon states that the Sunshine Policy is based upon the political philosophies of liberalism and constructivism, which support an engagement strategy with the North (p. 18), whereas the Lee administration's containment approach is rooted in the realist school of political philosophy. Whereas the Kim and Roh administrations supported unification by consensus, the Lee government's approach is founded upon the unification by

1 Chung-in Moon, "Understanding the DJ Doctrine: The Sunshine Policy and the Korean Peninsula," in Chung-in Moon and David I. Steinberg, ed., *Kim Dae-jung Government and Sunshine Policy* (Yonsei University Press 1999), 35-56.

2 Chung-in Moon, "The Sunshine Policy and Ending the Cold War Structure: Assessing Impacts of the Korean Summit," in Chung-in Moon, Odd Arne Westad and Gyoo-hyoung Kahng, ed., *Ending the Cold War in Korea* (Yonsei University Press, 2001), 279-318.

absorption model, based on the presumption that the North's collapse is imminent—something Moon condemns as the sort of wishful thinking that stymies improvement in North-South relations.

Based upon Moon's evaluation of the Lee government, readers may come to view contemporary conservatives in South Korea as containment-advocates, tried and true. However, conservatives can and have pursued containment and engagement policies simultaneously or have employed policies of conditional engagement.³ One example is the July 7 declaration of 1988 under the conservative Roh Tae-woo administration, which emphasized the promotion of mutual exchanges through multiple channels, reunion of separated families and exchange of letters between people from the North and South. Most importantly, the declaration called for cross-recognition of the two Koreas by the four major powers (p. 29). Therefore, as even Moon acknowledges, the Sunshine Policy is not the only way to engage North Korea. It would have provided the reader with a more balanced and fair evaluation if Moon had recognized the variety of approaches to engagement that conservatives employ.

Regarding North Korea policy, why do conservative and progressive approaches differ to such an extent in South Korea? Mainly, their respective evaluations of the North's intentions are different. Generally speaking, the evaluations paint conservatives as hardliners and progressives as softliners. Hardliners, the so-called "hawks," view the North's (often provocative) behavior as motivated by evil intentions, whereas the softliners, the so-called "doves," view the same acts as primarily motivated by external threats to its survival.⁴ Moon takes a softliner stance and argues for recognizing North Korea as a normal state and respecting its right to exist (p. 147). Moreover, Moon argues that North Korea is not irrational, but a state that makes decisions based on cost-benefit analysis, which supports his view that North Korea is just as capable of cooperation as any other state (p. 116). Moon supports his view by showing that North Korea has never engaged in provocative acts while the Six-Party Talks were in progress.⁵ However valid Moon's points are in support of the Sunshine Policy, it

3 Victor D. Cha, "Weak but Still Threatening," in Victor D. Cha and David C. Kang ed., *Nuclear North Korea: A Debate on Engagement Strategies* (Columbia University Press 2003), 37-38.

4 Cha and Kang, *Nuclear North Korea: A Debate on Engagement Strategies*, 1-2.

5 Moon's understanding of North Korea behavior is supported, however unlikely, by long-time North Korea watcher and establishment figure Victor Cha who, in front of the US House Committee on Foreign Affairs, stated: "Never once in the entire 27 year period was there a period in which the DPRK provoked [the major parties involved] in the midst of negotiations involving the United States." In other words: When there is engagement, there is no provocation. See "Testimony of Dr. Victor D. Cha," CSIS Office of the Korea Chair, Before the United States House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, March 10, 2011, http://csis.org/files/ts110310_Cha.pdf.

would be better, and certainly more convincing, if he had presented ways to encourage cooperation between two opposing camps within South Korea as well. As the book stands, it reads more like a political manifesto than a book making a fair and balanced evaluation of the South's North Korea policy.

The Roadblock to Peace: US and South Korean Obstructivism

Regarding the effects of the Sunshine Policy, Moon points out the significant role the US has had in influencing North Korea's behavior and consequently inter-Korean relations. Moon contends that despite a strong appeal by the Roh Moo-hyun government, the North virtually cut off ties with South Korea and began test-launching missiles and undergoing its first nuclear test in 2006 (p. 56). Moon chides the Bush administration's moral absolutism, hegemonic unilateralism, hardline strategies of military action based on offensive realism and malign neglect for North Korean behavior. Nevertheless, Moon's claim is relatively weak because, though he admits that the Sunshine Policy's success is highly dependent on the US stance, he does not provide explicit measures to convince the US to approve and promote the Sunshine Policy. Further, Moon does not reflect on the South Korean public's reaction toward a series of provocative acts by North Korea in 2006. In fact, the public started to highly doubt the effects of the Sunshine Policy despite the seemingly improving inter-Korean relations after the summits.

Pertaining to the Lee government's stance, Moon argues that the Lee administration's efforts at denuclearization through the "De-nuke, Open 3000" initiative, the Mutual Benefits and Common Prosperity Policy and the "Grand Bargain" Proposal further irritated the North, since they only included the US in negotiating over nuclear issues. Moon also criticizes the May 24th Measures, which were implemented following the sinking of the Cheonan. The measures included the adoption of a military posture of so-called "proactive deterrence," a series of hardline economic measures and a coordinated regime of sanctions (pp. 123-124).

Moon's tone reveals his skepticism of the Lee government and his belief that North Korea's provocative behavior is due largely to South Korea's hardline policy (and abandonment of the Sunshine Policy). Moon argues that the testing of the Taepodong-2 missile in April 2009 and North Korea's second underground nuclear test in May 2009 were reactions to provocative South Korean policies. Moreover, Moon claims that "in retrospect, a more proactive handling of the Mt. Geumgang incident, such as resuming the project as early as possible, could have prevented a worsening of the situation.

Both the Cheonan and Yeonpyeong incidents could have been avoided had Lee Myung-bak's government honored the promise...in the October 4 Joint Declaration" (p. 130).⁶ Though the Lee government was responsible for ceasing political and economic exchanges with the North due to its hardline policy, it is understandable that it abandoned the Mt. Geumgang project for safety concerns, as the North did not accept the demands of the joint investigation of the incident, failed to issue an apology and refused to make an official pledge to prevent a recurrence of such an incident as requested by officials in the South. Before taking a polemical stance against the Lee administration, Moon should also take into account the South Korean public's shifting views of the North after the sinking of the Cheonan and shelling of Yeonpyeong Island in 2010.

Unification: As Many Models as There Are Barriers

Lastly, dealing with the future of the Sunshine Policy, Moon introduces contending models of Korean unification: unification by absorption, by consensus, by force and delayed unification after third-party intervention. According to Moon, the first one is unlikely in the wake of a violent emergency in North Korea, and the last two options should be avoided because they could threaten the prestige, autonomy and even survival of the Korean nation (both North and South Korea, p. 197). Therefore, he concludes that unification by consensus is most feasible and desirable and goes hand in hand with the Sunshine Policy. Predictably, Moon condemns the Lee administrations approach, which, despite its claim to adhere to the consensus-based mode, actually operates under the assumption of imminent collapse (p. 195), which is evidenced, according to Moon, by the Lee administration's Operational Plan 5029, the current US-South Korean military contingency plan for North Korea's potential collapse and the idea of a unification tax (p. 180).

Although Moon's unification model sounds peaceful and attractive, its practicality is questionable. According to Moon's model, given the economic and social crises persisting in the North, the leadership should attempt to resolve them through major changes in policies and institutions, helped along by South Korea and the international community (p. 188). Then, he suggests possible paths to economic opening and reforms for the North such as the adoption of the

6 Though, in the book, Moon steers clear of making a case for a strong casual relationship between the events of 2010 and Lee's hardline policies, it has become a well-known position of Liberals that the sinking of the Cheonan and the Yeonpyeong island shelling were reactions to provocative South Korean policies and military posturing and not, as they are portrayed in conservative news media, entirely unprovoked acts.

Chinese and the developmental dictatorship model (p. 189). Moon's argument is that improved inter-Korean economic and social exchanges, followed by opening and reform, would bring about considerable positive spin-offs making unification a much more viable option (p. 190). Next, Moon lists the obstacles to unification by consensus, such as the Lee government discarding the incremental approach developed by two previous governments and North Korea's Juche ideology and inter-generational dynamics. Despite its appeal, Moon does not provide any practical ways to achieve the social and political breakthroughs. His unification model comes across as wishful thinking and not a viable policy solution.

Moon concludes his book by responding to conservative criticism of the Sunshine Policy, such as claims that it is nothing more than excessive and unilateral handouts, leads to an erosion of national security, strains US-ROK relations and ultimately fails to improve the conditions of average North Korean citizens, who suffer through gross human rights violations. Moon gives a reason for the Sunshine Policy not to be counted as excessive and unilateral handouts (peojugi) and states that it was based on the principle of social exchange reciprocity, which is based on a "give first, take later" philosophy. Moon also argues against the conservatives' views of the Kim Dae-jung administration as pro-North Korean leftists by claiming that the Kim Dae-jung government responded resolutely to North Korea in the two rounds of naval clashes in the West Sea, the so-called Battles of Yeonpyeong in 1999 and 2002 (p. 223). Again, Moon states that the second nuclear crisis in 2002 was primarily caused by flawed policies and missteps by the Bush administration (p. 226).

Conclusion: High on Hope but Short on Practicality

In summary, this book gives a thorough understanding of the Sunshine Policy and its impacts during Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun's administrations. Regardless of one's view on North Korea's intention, engaging with the North is critical because it encourages dialogue and political exchanges between two Koreas. Military tensions generate instability and security concern not only in the Korean Peninsula but also in the entire region. Further, as Moon highlights, the implementation of a containment policy and ceasing bilateral exchanges has only worsened inter-Korean relations. Then, the main key to successful engagement is the articulation of a clear and consistent North Korea policy in the South, with support from the other great powers, especially the United States and China. To reach this point, there should be more active communication and networking between hardliners and softliners to promote a consistent North

Korea policy so that the South's stance does not radically differ according to who is in power.

Unfortunately, the Sunshine Policy Moon so passionately defends does not provide a mechanism to reach consensus between opposing views in South Korea that could lead the implementation and eventual institutionalization of such a policy. Instead, Moon's book simply conveys the message that the South Korean government should readopt the Sunshine Policy—an admirable request, but failing to pass the threshold of practicality. Quixotic may not be the best word to describe Moon's evaluation of the Sunshine Policy, but it may be the first word that comes to the mind of the critical reader. **YJIS**