

Book Reviews

THOMAS H. JOHNSON, *Taliban Narratives. The Use and Power of Stories in the Afghanistan Conflict*. London: Hurst, 2018. 336 pages, £30.00. ISBN 978-1 8490-4843-9

Since the mid-1980s Thomas H. Johnson (National Security Affairs Department at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California) has made numerous trips to Afghanistan and in 2001 he was involved in the information operations campaign in preparation for the US invasion of the country. Research for this book – which belongs to the great number of conflict studies on Afghanistan, here with a special focus on information operations – was mainly conducted over the years 2004–2011, including field research in Southern and Eastern Afghanistan with special attention to Taliban messaging. Johnson was a Senior Political and Counterinsurgency Advisor to the Commander of Canadian Forces in Afghanistan in 2009 and held other political and military positions as well during these years. His research for the book was thus directly embedded in the military actions of the US army and its allies. This makes clear that the author does not even attempt to take a neutral position as one might expect in a study carried out in the fields of narratology and cultural studies. For this reason narratives of the Taliban may be called “enemy narratives” (p. 3) in this book, and it comes as no surprise that military operations of the US army and its allies are straightforwardly referred to as “our operations in Afghanistan” (p. xxv). Already in the foreword the central finding of the book is formulated in terms of a military dichotomy (winner vs. loser) when the author says that “the Taliban has won the information war” (p. xxxv).

The book is aimed at assessing the information operations and associated narratives and stories of the Taliban and other Afghan insurgent groups, namely of the Hezb-e Islami. The author tries to suggest “why the Taliban have been so much more efficient and effective in presenting messages that resonate with the Afghan population than have the United States, the Afghan government, and the allies” (p. 2). It argues that the efficiency of Taliban information operations can be explained by the fact that they are indigenous and rely on traditional tools like night letters (leaflets, flyers), chants, poems and a variety of other culturally effective artefacts (p. 15). These tools are introduced and discussed in detail in separate chapters.

With regard to the theoretical background of his research, Thomas H. Johnson refers variously to works by successful authors of literature, commu-

nication studies, studies in the field of propaganda and persuasion strategies, Aristotle's Rhetoric and Patrick Hogan's book *The Mind and its Stories* (pp. 4–7). Johnson defines narratives as a “system of cognitive standards within which ‘messages’ are interpreted” whereas “stories are always interpreted within a persistent structure of norms and beliefs (narratives) that will affect the ways that stories and messages are interpreted” (p. 9). What is lacking is some background information about the role, function and mechanisms of story-telling in Afghan society. Johnson uses the term “story” in a rather loose sense. Mostly it is understood as an easier-to-understand interpretation of a translated text segment (see pp. 75–76, 113–131 et al.) or as an equivalent to “narration” (see pp. 217, 222). However, in the Afghan tradition of story-telling a “story” (Pashto and Dari: *riwāyat*, *hikāyat*, or *qessa / kisa*) is always a meaningful (and mostly entertaining) narration. In other words: Every narration of this kind transmits a particular message which can be seen as the quintessence of the narration and which usually has a broader meaning than the reported events. Such stories are allegories and metaphors.

According to Johnson, the Taliban always focus and act in a rural context. Tools of narration such as night letters, the Internet, DVDs, cellphone and other videos, radio broadcasts, official announcements or graffiti are discussed in detail, as well as traditional genres like poetry and chants. A separate chapter is dedicated to the “Code of Conduct” issued regularly by the Taliban leadership for their cadre. To sum up, Johnson comes to the conclusion that the Taliban maintain simple objectives in their strategic communication with a finite messaging spectrum and narrative universe and are quite successful in doing so. The US military and the Afghan government were unable to present a competitive narrative because their stories and overall narrative failed to resonate with a vast majority of the Afghan population (pp. 265 ff.).

When studying narrations it is always important to take into consideration the means of distribution and ask how the narrations were perceived by the target audience. Otherwise it can happen that we thoroughly discuss a text or some other narration that, in fact, remained meaningless for the society because it was not distributed as assumed or because it was not noticed at all. Only little is said in this respect in the book. The author mentions the low level of literacy among rural Afghans more than once. Maybe this can also explain why many rules of the Taliban's “Code of Conduct” were not followed in practice as mentioned on p. 177. Perhaps some Taliban fighters were simply unable to read this document.

The book is based on material that was translated from Pashto and Dari by native speakers who mostly live in the US. From a methodological point of view, such an approach faces substantial limitations. Every translation is an interpretation as a matter of course. Hence when working with translated texts, it is not the primary source being analysed but an interpretation of it.

This can explain why some analytical details remained superficial, not to mention the instances of incorrect translations and numerous mistakes in the transliteration of Pashto words and names. Notwithstanding such (mostly linguistic-hermeneutical) details, the book will undoubtedly find a grateful audience, especially among persons who are interested in political and military studies. For those unfamiliar with military issues, the large number of military-specific abbreviations may be confusing.

Lutz Rzehak

SAMINA YASMEEN, *Jihad and Dawah. Evolving Narratives of Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jamat ud Dawah*. London: Hurst, 2017. 320 pages, £35.00. ISBN 978-1-8490-4710-4

With the jihad-focused spotlight of journalists, pundits and scholars shining brightly on the so-called “Islamic State”, interest in Pakistan has taken a back seat over the last few years. Samina Yasmeen’s new book, *Jihad and Dawah*, makes a compelling case for why it is fruitful to bring the country’s shifting jihadi landscape back into the realm of rigorous academic analysis. As Yasmeen rightly notes, existing studies have tended to exhaust themselves in mere descriptions of the terrorist activities and global linkages of Pakistan’s jihadi groups. Her goal, by contrast, is to dissect the ideological writings of one influential organisation, Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT, “Army of the Good”), and its political wing, Jamat ud Dawah (JuD, “Society for the Call to Islam”). In particular, the author wants to understand “how locally relevant narratives have been employed by jihadi groups in Pakistan to attract supporters” (p. 3).

To this end, Yasmeen has scrutinised a wide range of books, magazines and pamphlets that have been published in Urdu since the early 1990s. Her argument is straightforward: LeT initially considered the promotion of jihad as its main task. Proselytising (*da’wa*) was only a secondary consideration. Yet, this approach gradually – and mostly as a result of external shocks – gave way to a much more prominent role for religious preaching. As Yasmeen sees it, by carefully reshaping its message and postponing the call for armed struggle against the enemies of Islam, LeT managed to avoid government bans, broaden its societal base and secure additional sources of funding in the midst of a highly competitive “Islamic market”. Alongside this main argumentative arc runs the important notion that women’s agency within the organisation received a significant boost through this development, as well. Over the last three decades, female activists attached to LeT have made their voices increasingly heard. They hail “proper Muslim mothers” as crucial catalysts, both

within the domestic sphere and beyond, for the establishment of a society conducive to jihad.

Jihad and Dawa extends over six chapters plus an introduction and conclusion. The first two sections are perhaps the least impressive parts of the book. Chapter 1, “Islam in Pakistan”, merely provides a rehashing of the oft-repeated (but, sadly, less-frequently deconstructed) story of increasing Islamisation in the country since the 1970s, fuelled by religious influence stemming from Saudi Arabia. Chapter 2 introduces the LeT as originating within a particular South Asian Salafi tradition, known as Ahl-i Hadith (The People of the Prophet’s Sayings). This part of the book is somewhat weak on the historical and theological background of this sect but makes a highly convincing case for how certain factions within the Pakistani military had a major hand in the founding of LeT in February 1990.

The organisation was supposed to be a vehicle for channelling expertise in armed conflict, gained during the Afghan jihad, toward the support of an existing uprising in Indian-held Kashmir. The LeT leadership at this time argued that neither was a “perfect” Islamic state necessary to wage holy war against external enemies (such as India), nor was it required that those recruited for this task displayed complete purity in their doctrinal convictions (pp. 65–67). In this chapter, Yasmeen provides an excellent account of the elaborate training courses devised by LeT. She shows how the organisation made use of its annual conventions in order to drum up support, inter alia by having Osama bin Laden address the attendees via telephone in the mid-1990s.

Chapter 3 “The Kargil Crisis and MDI” very successfully argues that the border conflict with India in 1999 had serious repercussions for LeT. After the Indian army recaptured positions held by LeT fighters, the organisation scaled back its call for jihad and redirected its outreach activities toward alternative fields such as education. The author consequently detects an ideological shift in LeT publications that began to equate the role of the *mujahid* (one engaged in jihad) and the *da’i* (“preacher”): while the former shed his blood on the battlefield, the latter spilled his sweat on the pulpit. This way, LeT granted both essentially complementary roles, since their activities had the same aim – namely the propagation of God’s word (pp. 106–107).

Chapter 4 “From *Lashkar-e-Taiba* to *Jamat ud Dawah*” and Chapter 5 “JuD and the Mumbai Attacks” demonstrate how this reconfiguring of the organisation’s message gathered further momentum. LeT and JuD carefully adjusted their activities after events such as 9/11, the assault on the Indian parliament in October 2001 and the 2008 string of terrorist attacks in Mumbai. LeT responded to steadily increasing international pressure – especially since it was widely seen as being implicated in the context of Mumbai – by foregrounding the need for patience. Its leading thinkers reacted by stressing that first the correct understanding of God’s unicity (*tawhid*) needed to be in-

culcated in society before jihad could be waged (again). LeT emphasised that it would never fight the Pakistani state and embarked on alternative forms of activism such as spearheading protests against “anti-Islamic” messages emerging from the West or devoting itself to extensive welfare programmes for the wider Pakistani society. In this challenging climate, LeT magazines for women shifted the responsibility for keeping the flame of jihad burning to the group’s female members.

While Yasmeen manages to tell a persuasive story, the book’s readability is impacted by some structural issues. For long stretches, the author seems merely to relay the arguments she finds in her sources without embedding these into the context of wider Islamic thought or additional scholarship. This issue is particularly evident in her extensive discussion of a new “theory of jihad” post-9/11, which she ascribes to Hafez Saeed, one of the main ideologues of LeT. Yasmeen perceives echoes of the thought of Carl von Clausewitz and Sun Tzu in Saeed’s writings, without, however, being able to substantiate these claims (pp. 129–135). More troubling perhaps is the lack of engagement with recent literature on the conceptualisation of Pakistan as an Islamic state, such as the monographs by Naveeda Khan, Faisal Devji or Venkat Dhulipala, contributions on JuD such as Humeira Iqtidar’s book *Secularizing Islamists?*, or Andreas Rieck’s study of Shi’i Islam in Pakistan. Nevertheless, Yasmeen has done a great service to the field. She has skilfully engaged with LeT publications that have remained relatively inaccessible to many scholars and has deftly proven that jihadi writings need to be explored on their own terms. Her attention paid to female activists, in particular, is both innovative and highly fascinating. *Jihad and Dawah* is thus a trailblazing work in demonstrating the gendered dimensions of jihad in South Asia and beyond.

Simon Wolfgang Fuchs

STEPHANIE STOCKER, *Caste and Equality. Friendship Patterns among Young Academics in Urban India*. Bielefeld: transcript, 2017. 300 pages, €39.99. ISBN 978-3-8376-3885-1

The primary theme of this book is described in the subtitle, whereas the tension between the caste hierarchy and equality is dealt with in a more implicit manner. The notoriously difficult term “caste” is introduced all too cursorily, yet strangely enough, the word *Harijan*, unusable today, is used for the Dalits, and the error – often found in the literature – is repeated here, that the Indian government has abolished the caste system (p. 63), whereas only the practices of untouchability have been made illegal. Nevertheless, in her dissertation (in

Cultural Anthropology at the University of Tübingen) the author pursues the laudable approach of investigating practices that are connected with everyday life in a highly structured society and have the potential to change it. The notion of “modernization” alluded to here is critically examined in the first chapter, which also explains the choice of a university in Chennai (Madras), Tamil Nadu, as the location of the study.

The educational system opens new spaces for actors, in which they can form friendships characterised by greater equality, even when the participants come from unequal backgrounds (see also the comparative study by Barbara Riedel, *Orient und Okzident in Calicut. Muslimische Studenten und Studentinnen in Kerala, Südindien, im Spannungsfeld zwischen lokaler Verwurzelung und globalen Verflechtungen*. Heidelberg: Draupadi Verlag, 2014).

The author rightly points out that in anthropology, it is most often “kinship” that is investigated, even though “friendship” can be equally important. The meaning of friendship is naturally time- and culture-dependent and depends on the concrete relationships or on the particular context, such as the educational system or work. This latter point was recently thematised by Christian Strümpell (“*Wir arbeiten zusammen, wir essen zusammen*”. *Konvivialität und soziale Peripherie in einer indischen Werksiedlung*. Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2006), whose research Stocker explicitly cites, as it introduced the term conviviality (as opposed to commensality). Louis Dumont had argued that in India the hierarchical order was primary, while relations of equal rank were secondary. Stocker therefore poses the question of how far the forms of egalitarian interaction, lived in the special context of educational institutions, extend in their effects. She describes friendship relations on campus and in the domestic environment (Chapters 3 and 4).

The next four chapters illuminate the effects of these relations on that most sensitive topic in India, marriage. Desires for a partner are aligned with new ideas but remain within the established framework of the status system. Friends can play a role here up to a certain point, and they are valued guests, but in the end, the barriers remain. They help to organise the preparations for a wedding, but can scarcely participate in ritual activities. Despite a certain elasticity in implementation, adapted to the respective situation, the system of social rank thus remains largely intact, even if education is now an important aspect within it. The behaviour of the actors is oriented towards the context, which in fact requires a particular competence (p. 270). This can explain why some norms can be circumvented while others continue to have an effect. It would be interesting to investigate when and why people recognise this as an inconsistency. When does a greater social change find more open support?

Similarly, in a few sentences at the end of the book the author names several themes for further research. To this list could be added the need for a more precise distinction between kinship or caste ties (normative), friendship (emo-

tional) and contacts (instrumental), as mentioned in the work of Kathinka Frøystad (*Blended Boundaries. Caste, Class, and Shifting Faces of "Hindu-ness" in a North Indian Village*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 129ff.). The work of Minna Saavala (*Middle-Class Moralities. Everyday Struggle over Belonging and Prestige in India*. Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2010, pp. 74 ff.) could also contribute here. Stocker herself writes: "As part of a 'modern' sphere, 'university friends' assume an esteemed status. However, they exhibit a functional character, in contrast to emotional ties experienced between 'village friends'" (p. 121).

As we all know only all too well from our own societies, social inequality can persist despite legal equality. To the great credit of this book, it shows that – and how – status differences can persist and reproduce, even in the face of egalitarian relationships.

Gernot Saalman

B. D. CHATTOPADHYAYA, *The Concept of Bharatavarsha and Other Essays*. Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2017. 238 pages, Rs 795. ISBN 978-8-17824-516-4

Prof. B. D. Chattopadhyaya's new anthology is a significant and essential addition to his previous publications. In his first anthology – his magnum opus from 1994, *The Making of Medieval India* – and in his successive studies he validated the existence and identity of the Early Middle Ages as a distinctly post-classical period of Indian history. In order to verify its actuality it was not enough for him to contradict the Indian History Congress's tripartite periodisation of Indian history into Classical, Muslim and Modern Indian History (and its predecessor of colonial historiography – Hindu, Muslim and British History). He had primarily to detect political, social and cultural processes in the time of the post-Gupta and pre-Delhi Sultanate that verified "certain fundamental movements within the regional and local levels, and not in terms of the crisis of a pre-existent, pan-Indian social order" (1994: 17). In other words, he emphasised the "positive" elements that finally emerged in regional state formation and regional cultures, the landmarks of Early Medieval India, without, however, completely neglecting conflicts and antithetical ideas.

In view of more recent political developments Chattopadhyaya focuses in his new anthology, *The Concept of Bharatavarsha and Other Essays*, on contradictory aspects of socio-political and cultural developments and on controversial concepts of Hindu nationalist historiography. He has focused his critical discourse on two essential Hindu-nationalist topoi – the imagined age-old

territorial and cultural unity of India – elucidating his concerns in detail in the two most essential essays in the volume: the title piece “The Concept of Bhāratavarṣa and Its Historiographical Implications” and “Interrogating ‘Unity in Diversity’: Voices from India’s Ancient Texts”, his address as general president of the December 2014 session of the Indian History Congress. It was certainly a deliberate move to place these essays at the beginning and at the end of the volume. This review will thus concentrate on these two significant key articles, which deserve detailed presentations.

Since the Indian Constitution came into effect in 1950, India and Bharat have been the two official names of the Republic of India. Bharatavarsha, the “land of Bharata”, refers to a legendary king of central northern India, who is praised of as the forefather of the epic dynasties of the Mahabharata. Contemporary Indian and in particular nationalistic historiography projects the unitary state of contemporary Bharatavarsha into the distant past of ancient India. Thus it marginalises or even denies the existence of historically arising independent local and regional identities and state formation. It is this situation in which Chattopadhyaya’s critical screening of the history and historiography of the concept of Bharatavarsha becomes very necessary. He emphasises that the idea of Bharatavarsha was not static but underwent contradictory development stages. Thus he observes that in India’s earliest textual phase “the term Bharatavarsha, even in a geographical sense, did not appear at all”. The Rigvedic tribes (*janas*) were communities without fixed territories. In the subsequent Brahmana texts they were associated with their larger tribal settlements (*janapadas*). But these, too, were still only vaguely defined dwelling places situated in different areas of North India. The early Buddhist texts integrated the meanwhile vaguely known separate territories of the subcontinent into their cosmographic concept of Jambudvīpa. Although it was associated and even, if rarely, identified with India, Jambudvīpa did not correspond clearly with the geography of any specific country such as present-day India. It is the merit of the early medieval Purana texts, such as the “description of Bharatavarsha” (*Bhāratavarṣa-varṇanam*) of the Visnu Purana, that they present for the first time a depiction of Bharatavarsha. But, as Chattopadhyaya points out, they highlight Bharatavarsha’s nine divisions, their *janapadas* and distinct communities, as different and unequal segments that also do not pertain directly to the geography of India.

In order to lend further insight into the controversial history of currently relevant spatial, religious and ideological concepts such as Bharatavarsha, Chattopadhyaya includes into his considerations also Kalidasa’s poem *Rāghuvamśa* and Rajasekhara’s *Kāvya-mīmāṃsā*. Kalidasa’s famous fifth-century depiction of Raghu’s *dig-vijaya*, “the conquest of the four quarters”, depicts the convergence of the geography and the ideology of space. The space over which an early Indian monarch aspired to have unrivalled dominance was praised as

the “place of the world ruler” (*cakravarti-kṣetra*). The desire to “conquer the [four] directions” (*dig-jigīṣā*) and their kingdoms confirms concepts of classical Hindu and Buddhist kingship ideology of an imagined politically united Bharatavarsha. Chattopadhyaya questions whether Rajashekhara’s tenth-century Kavyamimamsa is an “Exercise in Synthesis”. It largely follows the Puranic concept of Bharatavarsha with its nine parts and their various *janapadas* and communities. But significantly innovative is Rajashekhara’s design of Āryāvarta (“abode of the noble ones”). Due to its central position in North India and its rigid enforcement of the Brahmanical social order it was praised as Bharatavarsha’s sacred region, and its capital Kanyakubja was the point of departure for defining the cardinal directions. It was indeed an ideally constructed concept of Bharatavarsha, but with little meaning for India’s political geography, however.

Chattopadhyaya then finally refers to several inscriptions from the tenth to fourteenth centuries that praise several *janapadas* and sacred centres as ornaments of Bharatavarsha. He is certainly right when he regards this as “a device for valorization by relating it to a universally recognized cosmographical landmark, much in a same way as a new royal lineage would seek to validate its status through affiliation with an epic-Puranic genealogy” (p. 25). In this way, Bharatavarsha was also used by the colonial administration as a device for the revaluation of “British India”, through an ancient Indian sacred concept, as a unified and centrally oriented state. This misconception of Bharatavarsha as a unified state was a definite misinterpretation of its historical meaning. But, as is well known, it was adopted by early twentieth-century nationalist historical writing. Chattopadhyaya summarises his historiographical study on the concept of Bharatavarsha with the remark: “The idea of India, identified with Bhāratavarṣa, created in the colonial period, is a burden that we are forced to carry and perhaps further embellish in our increasingly neo-nationalist age” (p. 23).

In his general president’s address on “Unity in Diversity”, Chattopadhyaya also critically scrutinises the historical background of this essential building block of contemporary Indian national identity “that we carry with us throughout our lives”. He emphasises that it is not his intention to question it in principle. But he points out that unity, rather than diversity, designates the main essence of this phrase in hundreds of schoolbooks and scholarly treatises and thus circumvents diversity as an equal essence of this composite unity. His main concern is therefore not only to trace diversities already in ancient texts. The overdue question is “if ‘diversities’ of a country (in whatever sense the term ‘diversity’ is used) are seen to have coalesced into a structure of unity, how do networks of diversities function within what is perceived as ‘unity?’” (p. 190).

In the Rigveda, the classical early example of binary opposites is the Dasyus. Because of their irreconcilably different culture lacking the four castes and

four stages of life, they were discriminated against and even had to be annihilated by the Aryas. Linguistic differences with various immigrant ethnic communities in the Northwest, such as the Yavanas and Sakas in the last centuries BCE, might initially have been less disjunctive. But these differences considerably elevated the rank of Aryan languages and created a linguistic and cultural hierarchisation on a significant scale. And as Chattopadhyaya has already pointed out in regard to the imagined unity of Bharatavarsha, the same sense of contrasting diversities and hierarchisation was caused by the dominant cultural position of Madhyadesa or Aryavarta in relation to other regions. In the Gupta and post-Gupta ages Aryavarta emerged as the holy land of Brahmanical learning, purity and ideal social order at the expense of outer regions, a development that has endured until today.

The same kind of diversification and hierarchisation emanated from normative texts such as the Manusmṛti as they accepted and justified disparate *dharmas* in politically and culturally separate and distinct spaces. Even Bharata's and Vatsyayana's famous "apolitical" texts, the *Natyasastra* and *Kamasutra*, also contain detailed depictions of the multifarious social and cultural differences of various regions and their manifold communities. They may even be considered as pre-modern anthropological studies. But they were mostly neither value-neutral nor even intended to be objective. For Chattopadhyaya it is particularly significant that "in almost all cases, characterizing differences also implied hierarchization and making value judgements in terms of perceived quality" (p. 201). And he even brought into consideration the fact that early texts usually do not point "in the direction of a consciousness of unity, but of mutually distrustful diversities" (p. 203). Moreover, he raises concerns about "the negative potentialities" of unity in the aftermath of "imperial" state formation. It "invariably implies select accommodation, marginalization, elimination or subordination" of local or sub-regional cultural identities. He therefore rightly asks again whether we then abandon the idea of unity altogether. But he cautiously contradicts his uneasiness with the ambiguous concession: "The most that I shall be prepared to speculate for the present is that the interactional process developed over time a reference point to which heterogeneous cultural elements and geographical spaces could relate" (p. 212).

The other six essays of this volume come off rather badly in comparison with the two more thoroughly discussed articles in this book review. Nonetheless, two further pieces supplement major issues of the volume in an exemplary manner. The second essay, "Festivals as Ritual: An Exploration into the Convergence of Rituals and the State in Early India", pertains to rituals as one of these reference points of heterogeneous elements. Since the early Middle Ages royally sponsored festivals have been significant in this regard. Orthodox Brahmanical texts prescribe royal adherence to orthodoxy in all ritual matters. But in reality, "the theorists and the monarchs, too, had, at the same

time, to reach out to the social, religious and ritual practices of public spheres and of ‘marginal’ communities which constituted the reality of the monarch’s domain” (p. 140). The strength of these ritual events was their wide social participation. Chattopadhyaya aptly calls them “ritual subversion”. And one can plainly agree with him to define these social ritual events as the result of the convergence of Brahmanical orthodoxy and popular tradition (*laukika*, derived from *loka*, “people”). This ritual convergence of orthodoxy and *laukika* indicates a successful facet of “Unity in Diversity”, although mostly only at the subregional level of early kingdoms. As a rare example at the regional level Chattopadhyaya refers to Puri’s famous Jagannath cult.

His seventh essay, “Accommodation and Negotiation in a Culture of Exclusionism. Some Early Indian Perspectives”, begins with a critical observation on the notion of “composite culture”, an expression conceived “in the context of a fast-paced growth of nationalist ideology”. According to Chattopadhyaya’s interpretation, this stands in direct contradiction to the early Indian, particularly Brahmanical, thinkers and their exclusivism. He reiterates the fact that notions such as the “fundamental unity of India” and “composite culture” are recent accomplishments. But he also emphasises the need to “understand how India as we observe it today, evolved with variations, contradictions and confrontations as a continuum” (p. 164). He concludes his essay with a statement that directly leads up to his address to the Indian History Congress. India’s cultural development was based not on “homogenization from a hegemonic source but [on] interpenetration in diversity and of emergence of symbols of universal recognition” (p. 182). This statement is of fundamental significance and paradigmatically represents the essence of this volume and its eight articles.

Hermann Kulke

KARL E. RYAVEC, *A Historical Atlas of Tibet*. Chicago / London: The University of Chicago Press, 2015. 202 pages, 49 maps, \$45.00. ISBN 978-0-226-73244-2

A Historical Atlas of Tibet by Karl Ryavec far exceeds expectations, in that it is not merely a set of maps depicting the geographical changes experienced by the Tibetan territories throughout different historical periods. On the contrary, the book presents a comprehensive analysis of the different eras that shaped the development of the region we now call Tibet, illustrating developments on the Tibetan Plateau since the first evidence of human activity, which can be traced back as far as 30,000 BC (Map 9) until the end of the 20th century, by

which time the majority of land inhabited by Tibetans had been incorporated into the People's Republic of China (Maps 47–49).

In his atlas, Karl Ryavec skilfully turns the available primary and secondary texts covering the historical development of Tibet into maps, tracing the significant events that influenced the creation of pastoral and farming societies, the establishment of local power entities, such as the individual Tibetan kingdoms, the spread of Buddhism and the changing power of the various Bonpo and Buddhist sects, as well as the cultural and political leverage of neighbouring ethnic groups, tribes and empires. The atlas clearly depicts the relations of the rise and fall of the Tibetan Kingdoms of Zhangzhung (Maps 10–11), Guge (Maps 17 and 30–31), Derge (Map 41) and Nangchen (Map 42), as well as the growth and decrease in influence of the Lhasa Ganden Podrang administration (Maps 33–37) to the spread of Bon and Buddhism (Maps 12, 15–16, 18–19 and 25–27) and the spread of influence of the Mongols (Map 25) and the Chinese (Map 28). The cultural and political shifts are demonstrated through the construction of temples and monasteries, trade centres, centres of administration, and forts and military garrisons.

The historical atlas is divided into four major parts, each focusing on a specific period of Tibetan history. In each part, a comprehensive summary of the main events from each period is accompanied by and visualised in a series of detailed maps, which also carefully depict the changes in urbanisation and demography and shifts in secular as well as religious power. The first part concerns the prehistoric and ancient periods up to 600 AD and maps not only important archaeological sites of evidence for human occupation of the Tibetan Plateau (Map 9), but also the establishment of the ancient cultural and political centre of Zhangzhung in Western Tibet, showing the locations of castles, fortresses and royal residences (Map 10). Part two depicts the imperial period of the Yarlung Kingdom and the shift of the political centre towards Central Tibet (Maps 11 and 12). The third part focuses on the period of disunion between 900 and 1642, specifically through the diffusion of Buddhism into different schools (Map 15) and the establishment of parallel centres of authority. It includes a closer look at the Tibetan Kingdom of Guge (Maps 17 and 18) in Western Tibet and the Tsongkha Kingdom in the East (Map 21). Maps 22–26 show important administrative changes in the Tibetan areas that followed the establishment of Mongol rule over certain parts of the Tibetan Plateau and Maps 28 and 29 depict the return to Tibetan administration under the Pakmodrupa rule. The final part, part four, then concentrates on the period of the rule of the Dalai Lamas and the Ganden Podrang in Lhasa.

The individual maps treat the historical developments on the Tibetan Plateau not only from a Lhasa-centred perspective. The atlas describes all four macroregions of Tibet, i.e., Ngari, U-Tsang, Amdo and Kham, “where population and agricultural resources historically concentrated in the river valleys”

(p. 14), and offers separate maps showing political and religious developments in these regions, which were themselves centres of Tibetan culture with their own administrative systems.

The well-elaborated maps clearly show the interrelationship between religious influence and economic and political power (Maps 13, 22–23, 25–28, 32 and 43–45) and are able to support or contradict claims of the territorial control of, for example, Mongol tribes or the Chinese imperial court (Maps 22 and 25). Moreover, the maps also help to illuminate the less clear links such as between the existence of functioning administrative networks and local political and religious authority and climate change (Map 18).

Presenting historical narratives in the form of maps allows us to view the historical events and their complex backgrounds from new perspectives. Providing unique perspectives from the viewpoint of the various Tibetan centres of political, religious and economic influence, the Historical Atlas of Tibet is a valuable tool for all those who seek to understand historical developments on the Tibetan Plateau and the complex interrelationship between Tibetans and their neighbouring regions.

Jarmila Ptackova

RAINER WERNING / HELGA PICHT (eds), *Brennpunkt Nordkorea: Wie gefährlich ist die Region? Berichte, Daten und Fakten*. Berlin: edition berolina, 2018. 192 pages, €9.99. ISBN 978-3-95841-088-6

In response to the latest nuclear and missile crises as well as the increase of media (and policy) attention to North Korea, Rainer Werning and Helga Picht have released a timely publication. The book at hand is an edited volume, consisting of essays by the editors and other authors. The range of authors runs parallel to the range of topics being discussed: from the latest crises to the Korean War, from cultural insights to travel reports and regional comparisons. Moreover, the annex (pp. 178–187) provides facts on the isolated state, such as geographic data, national holidays – which all have political meaning of some sort – and the structure of the political system. Such a list of objective facts is not trivial; the scarcity, dispersion and ambiguity concerning data on North Korea demand the continuous compilation of available and verified statistics.

The academic (and social) objective is explicit throughout the book. The editors aim to provide background information and shed light on often neglected aspects of the ongoing conflict. This objective of clarification has resulted in a book that focuses mainly on discussing actions taken by the US and

dynamics within South Korea. As counterintuitive as this might seem, Rainer Werning and Helga Picht employ these historical aspects to explain North Korea's threat perceptions and subsequent arms development, isolation and foreign policy behaviour. The book thereby fills two gaps in the existing literature: it offers key insights into North Korea and illustrates how internal narratives have served the stable dictatorship. Additionally, early events within South Korea are rarely discussed in English- or German-speaking circles – even in South Korea, many aspects of its authoritarian past and Washington's role remain underreflected.

With regard to the latest crisis in 2017, Arnold Schölzel (pp. 15–30) argues that it stemmed from Washington's policies since the end of the Cold War: guided by false assumptions – mainly the prevalence of democratic liberalism and the demise of communism – the US was unable (and unwilling) to resolve the conflict on the Korean Peninsula, focusing instead on preserving its superpower status. This depiction of US–North Korea policy simplifies the manifold dynamics, especially in the 1990s: from the decision to withdraw all tactical nuclear weapons from South Korea, to the first nuclear crisis and its successful bilateral resolution, as well as the number of missile talks and high-level visits, the Bush Sr. and Clinton administrations showed a willingness to engage North Korea and shape the relationship, the latter even considering a presidential summit. It is true, however, that all US administrations were biased by the presumption of a looming regime collapse in Pyongyang (pp. 16–17).

Rainer Werning continues with the denunciation of US actions on the Korean Peninsula. He rightly describes the Korean War (1950–53) as the first “hot” conflict of the Cold War and, moreover, as a welcomed opportunity for the US military to experiment with chemical and biological weaponry (p. 37). This argument of the Korean War as Washington's geopolitical endeavour is reinforced through the example of General MacArthur's plans to drop atomic weapons across Korea and Northern China (p. 57). The depiction of horrific US actions serves Rainer Werning's argument that North Korea's behaviour is merely a reaction to these (p. 82). As plausible as the justifications of the North's continued trauma (“bunker mentality”, p. 37) are, the regime in Pyongyang has craftily utilised the events endured by the country: the Sinchon Museum of American War Atrocities and similar, mandatory exhibition rooms in all schools are only small examples of how the North Korean population is constantly and consistently reminded of the evilness of Americans. Nevertheless, people in North Korea never learn that it was Kim Il Sung who initiated the Korean War with his very own strategic agenda in mind; this fact is also not mentioned in this book.

In one essay (pp. 116–134) Rainer Werning depicts the struggles of making a long-time foe into a possible friend: deep-seated mistrust and threat percep-

tions complicated Seoul's and Washington's attempts at engagement at the end of the 1990s, creating a zig-zag pattern in Pyongyang's foreign policy behaviour. An analysis of whether such behaviour is indeed unintended, or instead a bargaining tactic, would have been helpful here. Nevertheless, the question of overcoming suspicions of genuine offers of cooperation is now once again of the utmost importance.

As becomes clear in her contributions to the book, Helga Picht has a broad and deep knowledge of Korean history, language and culture in addition to having worked in Pyongyang for many years. Her insights from one of her first trips to North Korea in the early 1950s offer indispensable information about the country's internal state before Kim Il Sung's seizure of absolute power (p. 90). Helga Picht's profound knowledge of East Asian history and culture allows her to draw valuable comparisons and conclusions: she explains North Korea's constant aim of gaining political and ideological autonomy, especially with respect to China and the Soviet Union (p. 83). Nationalism and the determination to break free from the common Korean self-description as a shrimp among whales are driving Pyongyang's omnipresent narrative of self-determination. Helga Picht skilfully illustrates North Korea's internal struggle to create fitting philosophical underpinnings and emphasises how the enabling, socio-psychological circumstances have made it easy for the ideology of Tschuche and Tschuchesong to take root in the population (p. 106).

As there are (at least) two sides to a story, this book offers the other side of a commonly known narrative. The authors fulfil their stated objective of clarification, but tend to emphasise solely all the wrongdoings on the US and South Korean side. Despite the refreshing counter-narrative, many depictions and arguments run short, as they fail to reflect on North Korea's own actions and instrumentalisation for the sake of the stability of the regime. It should be noted that for a complete and comprehensive discussion of the conflict concerning North Korea, this book is certainly to be recommended, but only in conjunction with the existing literature.

Elisabeth Suh

SCOTT A. SNYDER, *South Korea at the Crossroads. Autonomy and Alliance in an Era of Rival Powers*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2018. 355 pages, \$35.00. ISBN 978-0-23118-548-6

Scott A. Snyder is Senior Fellow for Korea Studies and Director of the Program on US-Korea Policy at the Council of Foreign Relations (CFR), a renowned US think tank, and has widely published on the Korean peninsula.

Snyder's aim with this book is to explain the necessity of South Korea's past, present and future alliance with the US despite the increasing influence of a growing China in the East Asian region: "I contend that despite growing international pressure and intensifying domestic debates, South Korea's only viable strategic option for the foreseeable future is continued cultivation and strengthening of the alliance with the United States" (p. 15). To make this argument, the book is organised into two parts. In the first half of the book Snyder recapitulates the foreign policy orientation of all administrations (up to Park Geun-hye, 2016) since the foundation of South Korea in 1948. Based on this retrospective analysis, in the second part he discusses the future of South Korea's foreign policy and its alliance with the US with regard to its role as a middle power, Korea's position between the US and a rising China, the unification of the Korean peninsula, and Korea's alliance with the US.

In the introductory chapter, Snyder puts forward a "Framework for Understanding South Korea's Foreign Policy" (p. 7), and brings in additional factors that affect the course of this policy (pp. 10–14). The framework resembles a classic model with two coordinated axes representing, vertically, the spectrum between an outwardly-oriented (international) foreign policy orientation and an inwardly-oriented (parochial) foreign policy orientation, and, horizontally, the spectrum between an orientation towards alliance and an orientation towards autonomy. He adds three important factors that have to be considered when making sense of shifts in South Korea's foreign policy orientation: its geopolitical environment, its growing capacity and its changing domestic politics. Geopolitics is known to be one of the most crucial factors that has influenced South Korea in various ways, not only since the end of World War II but from long before. However, the division of the Korean peninsula under the conditions of the Cold War, and the ensuing hot Korean War (1950–53) hardened a constellation of power competition in Northeast Asia within which South Korea's only reliable ally has been the US. Changes in the geopolitical situation, such as the warming up of the Cold War and the development of global markets, represent opportunities and risks that have to be taken into account when explaining South Korea's foreign policy orientation. This is closely related to the second factor put forward by Snyder: South Korea's economic, military and developmental capacity in relation to that of its neighbours. In other words, the less dependent it is on the US, the more South Korea is able to pursue a more autonomous foreign policy vis-à-vis neighbouring countries such as North Korea, China, Japan and Russia – as well as the US, of course. The third factor is the continuing democratisation since the late 1980s, which produced a stronger demos with an increasing say in politics as well as strong interest groups, such as the large conglomerates (*chaebol*), with strong leverage on state affairs.

Using these conceptualizations Snyder runs through South Korea's contemporary history and discusses the succeeding administrations and their respective foreign policy orientations – always torn between the desire for autonomy from and the need for alliance with the US (pp. 20–191). The author comes to discover an evolving pattern of increasingly internationalisation-orientated alignments as time goes by and administrations follow each other, while the tendency of aligning with America as an ally remains stable. According to Snyder's observation, the foreign policy orientation of South Korea during the authoritarian era (1948–1987) of the first three presidents – Rhee Syngman, Park Chung-hee and Chun Doo-hwan – can be chronologically traced from a strong dependence on the parochial alliance with the US moving increasingly towards more internationalism. Rhee Syngman (1948–1960) pursued a hostile North Korea policy based on fundamental economic and military support from the US, but his ultimate aim was to unify the Korean peninsula by invading the North. Park Chung-hee (1961–1979) attempted a more independent approach, but soon realised that he, too, was constrained by the need for US support. When the *détente* set in at the end of the 1960s, Park approached North Korea to settle matters on the peninsula, and even started an open-door policy towards China and the Soviet Union; later he attempted to develop a nuclear bomb to lessen South Korea's dependency on the US – a strategy also pursued by his successor Chun Doo-hwan (1979–1987), who, however, was ultimately convinced by the Reagan administration to scrap the programme.

After the transition to democracy in 1987, the Roh Tae-woo administration (1987–1993) realigned its foreign policy to an even more internationally oriented approach, better known as *Nordpolitik*, which was mostly spurred by shifts in the liberalising global environment, South Korea's growing economic capacities and the influence of domestic actors. These changes towards an alliance-enabled internationalist foreign policy orientation continuously increased with each of the succeeding presidents, known respectively as the "Sunshine Policy" under Kim Dae-jung (1998–2003), "Balancer Policy" under Roh Moo-hyun (2003–2008), "Global Korea Policy" under Lee Myung-bak (2008–2013) and "Asian Paradox" under Park Geun-hye (2013–2016).

In the second part of the book Snyder draws on these patterns to discuss the outlook of South Korea's options and possible choices. In his view, South Korea will be trapped for the foreseeable future in its dilemma of striving for a more autonomous foreign policy while still remaining too dependent on its US alliance (pp. 192–211) – even in the face of a rising China next door (pp. 212–236) and also with regard to a possible unification on the Korean peninsula (pp. 237–261) – unless the country develops the necessary capacity.

The selected source documents detailed in 60 pages at the end of the book come in quite handy for those who want to review the major historic agreements and declarations of South Korea, the US and North Korea. Also, the

chronology of important events in South Korean strategic history (pp. 293–307) is a helpful guide for following the book’s argumentation. The relatively detailed index is useful, as well. All in all, Snyder presents a somewhat simple but at the same time tidy observation of South Korea’s foreign policy developments, and helps the reader who is not familiar with the history of the Korean peninsula to understand the dynamics that have shaped the region, and how they might do so in the future. The flow of the book is somewhat hampered by the reiterations of facts and arguments throughout the chapters and subsections, which might owe to a certain style of writing for an audience such as “government officials, business executives, journalists, educators and students, civic and religious leaders, and other interested citizens” (front matter). Nevertheless, overall *South Korea at the Crossroads* is indeed a fine source book on the recent history of South Korea’s foreign policy strategy, and will be a solid reference for scholars of comparative foreign policy interested in the East Asian region.

Hannes B. Mosler

FRANK JAKOB, *Tsushima 1905. Ostasiens Trafalgar*. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2017. 217 pages, €29.90. ISBN 978-3-506-78140-6

The global political significance of the naval battle between the Russian Baltic Fleet and the Japanese at Tsushima, a Japanese island in the Korean Strait, on 27/28 May 1905 can hardly be compared with that of the victory of the English admiral Nelson over the Franco-Spanish fleet at Trafalgar – only in the extent of the respective defeat. Russia lost nearly all of its heavy units, battleships, cruisers and destroyers, and lamented the death of about 5,000 men. On the Japanese side, however, only three torpedo boats were lost, and only 127 seamen were killed. Similarly, the French fleet was almost completely destroyed in 1805, leaving France to remain a land power, much like Imperial Russia after 1905.

The author rightly concentrates, therefore, on the multi-layered political dimensions of the sea battle, its historical background and consequences, both for international politics as well as for the internal development of Russia and Japan. In doing so, he somewhat neglects the military events, which are dealt with on only 14 pages. Still, the defeat of the Russian Baltic Fleet, which was almost as strong as that of the Japanese, was determined as much by the inability of Russian policy to accept Japan as an equal power in East Asia, as by military factors.

After the first Russian defeats on land at Yalu and in southern Manchuria, as well as futile fleet advances of the Russian Pacific units from Vladivostok and the Russian naval port of Port Arthur, the Baltic Fleet was despatched from Libau to East Asia on 15 October 1904. Under the critical eyes of world public opinion – for the first time in a war both civilian reporters and military observers were on site – the Russians made headlines again and again due to the seafaring incompetence and poor discipline (drunkenness) of crews and officers. As news reports revealed sailors tormenting monkeys with champagne while waiting off of Madagascar, Russian prospects of victory faded further in the eyes of observers. The commanding admiral, Rozhstvensky, was in no way equal to his task. He had long since lost any confidence in a possible victory, and after the capitulation of Port Arthur (1 January 1905) finally steered to the only destination remaining to him, the safe haven of Vladivostok. Against a fleet like this, the Japanese Navy, built up in the English model, with ships constructed in Glasgow, had an easy time of it. Shot to pieces, the remaining Russian units were to capitulate on 28 May – uncommon conduct in naval warfare.

The repercussions of the Russian defeats on land and at sea in East Asia for the revolutionary events in 1905 in the tsarist empire itself are well known; what is less well known are the contacts of the Japanese military with the national movements in Finland and Poland. The author, a recognised expert on Poland, describes in detail Japan's efforts to revolutionise Congress Poland, which was under the Russian yoke. Finally, the two leading heads of the Polish national movement, Piłsudski and Dmowski, arrived in Tokyo to conclude an agreement. But more decisive for the Japanese side was the financial aid from the Jewish bank Loeb und Co. in New York, whose banker Jacob Schiff, with a loan of 400 million dollars, wanted to send a clear signal against the Russian policy of permanent pogroms against Russian Jewry, who were completely without rights. The later Jewish policy of Japan, even during the war-time alliance with Hitler's Germany, was always determined by this generous Jewish help for the Japanese victory. The war was also to have an impact on the Zionist movement and the still sparse emigration of Jews to Palestine. For the first time in the Russian army, Jewish soldiers and Jewish military physicians were drafted. Jewish self-protection in Palestine was then largely recruited from former tsarist soldiers.

The Russo-Japanese war, which some historians refer to as "World War Zero", had devastating consequences for the coming Great War. The Japanese army was coerced by the German military advisor Jacob Meckel into a closed frontal attack, with which they finally succeeded in storming Port Arthur, but at the cost of 60,000 lives. This strategy also determined Germany's offensive approach in the west, with no regard for losses. Whether the Schlieffen Plan

was also an outcome of this suicidal strategy, as the author claims, seems doubtful, however.

Last, but not least, although the war may have resulted in the peace of Portsmouth under the mediation of President Theodore Roosevelt, it also helped the United States to a dominant position in the Pacific. The dualism of the sea, contested by both the United States and Japan, and the various US “open door” imperial strategies towards an East Asia ostensibly to be freed from colonialism, began in 1905 and ended 40 years later with the total defeat of Japan.

The book is convincing as a scientific achievement that carefully touches upon many aspects.

Bernd Martin