Guns, Guerillas, and the Great Leader: North Korea and the Third World. Benjamin R. Young. Stanford: Stanford University Press. 2021. 232 pp. $28. Paperback ISBN-13: 9781503627635.

Today, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), or North Korea, is widely viewed as a dangerous rogue state that is irrationally pursuing nuclear weapons despite international condemnation and the crushing poverty of its own people. Reclusive and dangerous, the Stalinist dictatorship is frequently used as the exotic backdrop for movies such as *Team America* (2004) or *The Interview* (2014) and has become one of the leading destinations of the dark tourism industry. However, Benjamin Young's *Guns, Guerillas, and the Great Leader* turns this picture on its head by taking the reader back to a time when North Korea was competing with the world's superpowers by presenting itself as an alternative model of development for Third World audiences.

Rather than a static and impoverished backwater, the North Korea that emerges from Young's re-telling is a young postcolonial state eager to promote its developmental model to the world and a fierce participant in the international struggle against imperialism. North Korea was also driven by competition with the South, which made it eager to gain the diplomatic recognition and support of newly decolonized countries with membership in the United Nations. This story is presented in a loose chronological narrative tracing North Korea's initial commitment to Third Worldism (1956-1957), its often ludicrous attempts to promote the personality cult of Kim Il Sung (1960s to1970s), its more successful promotion of Juche (1972-1979), the increasingly violent anti-South Korean and anti-United States campaigns overseen by Kim Jong Il (1980s), and ends by describing North Korea's Africa policy and its expensive but futile attempt to compete with South Korea's rapidly growing soft power by hosting the 1989 World Festival of Youth and Students.

The DPRK was a confident and relatively successful state in the early Cold War, which many Third World intellectuals saw as "disciplined, highly organized, and efficient" (7). However, the country's diplomatic and political outreach frequently fell short of its ambitious goals, even though its expenditure on overseas propaganda was relatively greater than that of many other Communist states (54). Young presents several reasons for the North Korean failure. First, the highly autocratic nature of the regime and the lack of an independent civil society undermined its public diplomacy outreach (49). Indeed, visitors to the DPRK could not help but notice the harsh system of surveillance that pervaded the country and the ignorance of its citizens. This was starkly illustrated by the case of the racist attack on the Cuban ambassador and his wife by a crowd in Pyongyang in 1965. Second, local audiences were often attracted by the wealth being thrown around by North Korean diplomats but less enamored with the regime's bizarre ideological concepts: "Members of North Korean friendship societies…were usually far more interested in the free goods and paychecks from Pyongyang than in discussing the works of Kim Il Sung" (68). Ultimately, despite some attempts to make its messages tactically relevant to local audiences and the popularity of the concept of self-reliance, North Korea's Third World policy was frequently out-of-sync with local needs and aspirations.

As the Cold War continued, North Korea's foreign policy became increasingly disruptive; the beginnings of a tumultuous path that eventually led to the country's status as an international pariah. At first, though, the DPRK's aggressive participation in the anti-colonial movement gave it a global network of allies. For example, North Korea developed a close relationship with Cuba, sent pilots to North Vietnam and Egypt, provided tank drivers to Syria, and even developed a close relationship with numerous non-state liberation movements, including the Palestinian Liberation Organization. However, according to Young, North Korea's behavior gradually became more mercenary and self-interested, exemplified by its instrumental pursuit of membership in the Nonaligned Movement (NAM) to create support for Korean reunification. Moreover, the country started to become more violent in the late 1970s, a shift alternatively blamed on North Korea's stagnating economy, South Korea's growing international prestige, or the growing role of Kim Jong Il in policymaking. This culminated in the attempt to kill the South Korean president Chun-Doo Hwan in a bomb attack in Rangoon in 1983, which alienated many Third World governments and has clear parallels with the more recent assassination of Kim Jong Nam in Malaysia in 2017.

This rich and complex story of North Korea's Third World policies is based upon the author's extensive archival research, including government documents and newspapers from the West, the East, and the Third World. The result is a detailed and accessible but often episodic narrative of the ups and downs of North Korea's attempts to brand itself as an alternative model of modernity. Although this account is largely a picture of North Korea as seen by outsiders—an important if inescapable limitation of most studies about the DPRK—the diversity of the outsiders' voices is noteworthy, including Communist diplomats and former Third World participants in North Korean diplomatic outreach programs. Moreover, Young's focus on the Third World is a refreshing contribution to the historiography of the Cold War, which has traditionally focused on superpowers and neglected the agency of developing countries. All these factors make this book a must-read for scholars of North Korea and the Cold War as well as undergraduate and graduate students interested in the field.

Its valuable contributions notwithstanding, this book may potentially fall short of a specialist reader's expectations in several ways. First, the episodic nature of the evidence sits uneasily with the author's overall chronological approach and leaves many questions unanswered; key moments of change in North Korean policy are not always clearly identified or convincingly demonstrated. For example, Young suggests that "from the mid- to late 1970s, political mission and self-interest stood at the heart of North Korea's Third World diplomacy" (73), but many of the DPRK activities he describes in this period, such as military and developmental aid to newly independent countries, are not substantially different from the support given to liberation movements in the 1960s. Indeed, the 1970s are also described as a successful period for the promotion of Juche philosophy because it better fit the aspirations and needs of Third World countries than earlier attempts to export Kim Il Sung's personality cult. Therefore, can we say that self-interest was more prominent in North Korean diplomacy in the 1970s than in the 1960s? Similarly, the suggestion that the Rangoon bombing was a watershed

moment that irrevocably "doomed" North Korea's reputation in the Third World (113), does not fit with the text just a few pages earlier that describes North Korea's successful export of its mass games into Africa well into the 1990s (106-108). Part of the problem may stem from the fact that the author treats the Third World as a singular object rather than a kaleidoscope of different nations with varying perspectives of North Korea that evolved at different speeds.

Another issue is that inter-Korean competition for recognition, cited as one of the key themes of the book, is not really described in detail until Chapter 3 but probably should have been used to structure each chapter. Indeed, it is doubtful if we can really understand North Korean policy in the Third World without understanding how it interacted and evolved alongside the diplomacy of its South Korean rival. Who had the initiative? How much borrowing occurred? How did local partners understand or exploit these inter-Korean struggles for legitimacy? There are glimmers of answers to many of these questions in various episodes contained in this book, but one cannot help but feel that there is still more of this story to be told. Hopefully future research can tackle these questions more systematically.

To conclude, it is important to place the North Korean experience as a donor of developmental and military aid in international perspective. There is sometimes a tendency in the study of North Korea to fetishize the country and accentuate its uniqueness, and this book certainly highlights several bizarre aspects of the DPRK's approach to public diplomacy. For example, foreign visitors were submitted to health checks before meeting Kim Il Sung because his presence was expected to overpower them (64). However, in its broad contours, this book also normalizes the country by describing a series of North Korean interventions in the Third World that were cloaked in well-meaning words but driven by self-interest, and thus wasteful, ineffectual, and ignorant of local needs and aspirations. In essence, this story is not really that different from many Cold War interventions by the United States and the USSR or their allies. In the end, perhaps the real tragedy is that North Korea's interactions with the Third World were more ordinary than we would like to think.

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