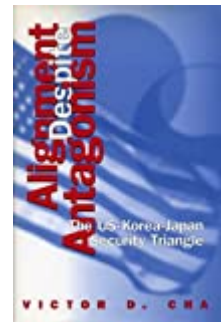




Victor D. Cha. *Alignment Despite Antagonism: The US-Korea-Japan Security Triangle.* Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999. xviii + 373 pp. \$49.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8047-3191-1.



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A Novel Theoretical Framework for Comprehending ROK-Japan Relations

Victor Cha's *Alignment Despite Antagonism: The US-Korea-Japan Security Triangle*, as the name also implies, focuses on the security relations between the US, Korea, and Japan. Judging by the title alone, the reader might originally expect to find a Cold War account of diplomatic history between the US, Korea, and Japan. Yet the book does not provide the reader with diplomatic history alone, but goes one step further and introduces a novel theoretical framework for analyzing security relations between the three countries. In that sense, it is not only explanatory but also argumentative. This aspect renders the book useful not only for those interested in area studies, but also for those involved in theorizing on international security.

The book consists of eight chapters in total, including one introductory and one concluding chapter. In the Introduction, the author draws attention to the rather problematic relations between the Republic of Korea (ROK) and Japan during the Cold War. He perceives such problem-ridden relations to be a bewildering enigma for Realism, "according to which states with common allies

and common enemies should be friendly" (p. 2). The Introduction is also where Cha develops the concept of a *quasi alliance*, which he defines as "one in which two states remain unallied but share a third party as a common ally" (p. 3). Chapter One introduces the reader to a chronology of bilateral relations, and reasserts that this "reveals a stark dichotomy between *Realism* and the *reality* of Japan-Korea relations" (p. 17). Chapter Two is where the new theoretical framework, the *quasi-alliance model*, is introduced. The author borrows the notions of *abandonment* and *entrapment* >from the work of Glenn Snyder, which are defined respectively as "the fear that the ally may leave the alliance or may not fulfill obligations to it" (p. 38) and "being dragged over an ally's interests that one does not share, or shares only partially" (p. 38). Employing these notions, the author arrives at two propositions: 1- a state fearing abandonment will exhibit a more resolute approach to the alliance, expecting the ally to reciprocate; and 2- "When a state fears entrapment, it will show a weaker commitment to the ally to prevent the ally >from being intransigent toward the adversary" (p. 45). In turn, these propositions lead the

author to two interrelated hypotheses: first, friction will ensue in bilateral relations out of asymmetrical concerns, i.e. if one state is fearing abandonment while the other is apprehensive of entrapment; second, cooperation should be the outcome of symmetrical abandonment concerns in bilateral relations, either as regards one another, or as regards a third party.

Chapters Three, Four, Five, and Six are the meat of the book, and it is in those chapters that Cha tests his theoretical propositions and hypotheses against empirical data. In Chapter Three, the author focuses on the period between 1969 and 1971, and holds that the cooperation observed in ROK-Japanese relations in those years was largely attributable to the fact that the United States under President Nixon wished to withdraw from the Asian setting. In his view, the desire to reduce the U.S. presence and role in the Asian theater, as elucidated in the Nixon Doctrine, brought about cooperation between the ROK and Japan in security relations, as both countries experienced a high degree of fear of abandonment by their common ally. The following chapter concentrates on the detente period between the years 1972 and 1974, and the author maintains that while Japan became less concerned about U.S. abandonment, no significant changes in South Korean fears of U.S. abandonment took place. This, the author reasons, gave rise to obstacles against amicable relations between the ROK and Japan. In Chapter Five, the author turns to the 1975-1979 era, and maintains that President Carter's policy for complete U.S. disengagement from the Korean peninsula led to renewed ROK-Japan cooperation. Chapter Six centers on the 1980s and the Reagan period. The author contends that unlike what is widely believed, the 1980s were no period of collaboration in ROK-Japan relations, but discord instead. Finally, in the Conclusion, the author hints that the future of ROK-Japan bilateral relations will hinge on U.S. policies, and argues for a gradual disengagement of U.S. forces from the region over a long period of time, which, in his view, "might foster greater bilateral cooperation [between Japan and the ROK]" (p. 213).

Cha's arguments appear plausible in general. However, his account of ROK-Japan relations throughout the detente period looks somewhat problematic. I had a hard time comprehending why "Japanese concerns about U.S. abandonment became less salient relative to the 1969-71 period, while ROK fears of U.S. abandonment remained unaltered by the tension-reducing effects of detente" (p. 100). To be sure, Cha does provide the reader with rationales, yet these remain rather unconvincing and half-baked. The author appears to have turned a

blind eye to the gravity of certain domestic developments (such as the Yusin period in the ROK) for the sake of verifying his quasi-alliance theory, and as a consequence, his claim that "the asymmetry in the two states' abandonment and entrapment concerns lay at the core of a severe breakdown in relations" (p. 115) seems rather far-fetched.

The quasi-alliance model is the theory advanced within the book, yet the author employs basic Realist premises and makes not the slightest attempt to transcend the Realist framework, which has become increasingly unsettled and disputable with the advancement of post-positivistic theories of International Relations. Positivist epistemological/ontological/methodological assumptions advanced mainly by Realism in IR theory are sustained, with the end result being that the author has not refrained from striving to reach crude generalizations, forced predictions, or strained assessments. A case in point is where the author remarks "In short, a settlement would have been reached during this period in spite of historical animosity and regardless of whether the leadership held acutely negative or positive attitudes" (p. 34). It is my personal conviction that such comments in analyzing social phenomena fall well outside of scientific / academic margins.

As for the physical characteristics of the book, I am of the opinion that there are two problems. For one, I would have preferred to see the footnotes at the bottom of each page (and not bunched up all together at the end of the book), well aware as I am that this would have meant devoting roughly one-third of each page to footnotes alone. Amassing footnotes at the end of the book, in my personal view, places too much extra burden on the reader, who can easily lose concentration thumbing through pages looking for the relevant footnote. Secondly, there are plenty of printing errors scattered throughout the book, and at times these truly manage to divert one's attention.

Notwithstanding the flaws, Victor Cha's book, being both informative and argumentative, is still suggested reading for those seeking to lend an ear to different ideas in understanding South Korean-Japanese ties, as well as newcomers to the field of area studies interested in an introduction to ROK-Japan-United States relations.

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