

Book Notes

Narratives of Civic Duty: How National Stories Shape Democracy in Asia by Aram Hur. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2022. i–xv, 188 pp.

Aram Hur thinks South Korea has something to teach the world about the relationship between nationalism and democracy. While nationalism finds itself associated with baser, reactionary movements around the world, in South Korea nationalism has made people better participants in democracy. Patriotic self-understandings, acquired through collective experiences of fighting against dictatorship, drive Koreans to contribute to their country. South Korea's recent experience, though, is no one-off; to the contrary, it reveals a truth with broader relevance.

This story, told in Hur's recent book, *Narratives of Civic Duty: How National Stories Shape Democracy in Asia*, offers a refreshing reversal of the usual mode of linking East Asian places to generalized knowledge about political affairs. Instead of taking ready-made theories, typically from Western contexts, and testing them with East Asian "cases," political scientist Hur begins in the region. She detects a pattern first in South Korea, then extends the claim to Taiwan, and then develops a broader argument. This approach to knowledge building turns the usual mode of comparative politics on its head: *Narratives of Civic Duty* takes *place* seriously and shows that East Asia can be a source of ideas. Readers unfamiliar with Korea will finish the book remembering Korea as a place where patriots are committed democrats. It will make them think about more familiar countries through the lens of Korea. For political science, this is progress toward globalized knowledge production.

The early chapters draw out the conceptual points and illustrate them with

material from South Korea and then Taiwan. Nationalism, Hur argues, imparts a sense of obligation to the community, and in democratic contexts, people with strong national attachments act in a civic way. Stories of national identity are especially important for fostering this civic-minded form of nationalism. The book draws on collections of individual stories from South Korea and Taiwan in order to make these linkages. Using the stories as well as surveys, Hur finds that a primary form of nationalism (as with Taiwanese identity) does not induce civic engagement. The reason has to do with the historical versions of national imagining that emerged and how those stories treat the state.

The latter chapters extend the argument beyond East Asia. A chapter is devoted to Germany. Here Hur has done impressive first-hand research on another continent, and she makes linkages back to Taiwan and South Korea. The book wraps up with an examination of worldwide surveys to establish that the argument might hold globally.

Chapters open with vignettes illustrating the meanings individuals attribute to their civic duties. These little stories situate the book's themes in context. The author's empathetic method is on full display in these anecdotes. She has listened to people in a particular place and done the hard work of finding a relatable story.

Students of Korea will have questions. The book uses the gold donation drive of 1997–1998—when housewives attempted to rescue the nation from economic crisis by giving their valuables to the state—to frame the story. That episode is presented as the typical case of national feeling informing civic behaviour. Yet the gold drive could also be interpreted as falling within a history of state-directed campaigns, even if this instance began outside the state. The habit of campaigns—an authoritarian habit—might have conditioned people to mobilize for a collective purpose. If it is *minjung* movement-inspired patriotism that drives civic participation, then this example is a questionable one.

Political science today struggles with place. As a piece of scholarly inquiry rooted in place, this book is done a disservice by the current habits of that discipline. Pains are taken in the book to make the arguments legible to political science. Two key indicators of civic duty used throughout the book, tax and conscription, can be readily transferred from South Korea to other contexts. Yet these would seem to be on the margins of the nationalism-democracy link in the South Korean context. More intuitive measures can surely be imagined, such as participation in meaningful protests or following political news and commentary. Koreans know that it is in those areas national feeling and democratic participation are tied. By encouraging superficial correlations because measures appear to travel, political science misses opportunities to find the correlations

that matter.

Political science, with its lack of interest in place, permits a lack of rigour on other counts. The book never explains whether Korean or Chinese or German sources were used. The bibliography contains only English-language references. Were interviews conducted in English or in a local language? Surely, this information is crucial in a book about collective identities and self-understanding.

The core claim of *Narratives of Civic Duty*, though, is sensible for South Korea. Further arguments could be advanced as to the ways that nationalism shapes and improves the country's democracy. And it is exciting to think about the claim's relevance elsewhere. If this argument is to be explored beyond Korea, then key questions relate to how far the claim can be taken in other contexts. Where would we expect it to be relevant? (Or, what are the "scope conditions"?) How does the claim need to be tweaked or adjusted in another context? Presumably, the conditions of postcolonialism, anti-authoritarian struggle, and relationship with a superpower have shaped the nationalism-civic linkage in contemporary South Korea. Some societies have similar conditions; not all do.

The latter parts of *Narratives of Civic Duty* plough directly into an expansive argument, without pausing to reflect on these questions. Instead of a discussion of varieties of nationalism or the contextual nature of nationalism—which is where the book started, cautiously, and with nuance—South Korea has by the end become a "normal" case from which universal knowledge can be derived. The book brings out the limits of a discipline uninterested in place, even as the author's sensitivity to her subjects and their societies highlights how really interesting political knowledge can be gained from taking context seriously.

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Flower of Capitalism: South Korean Advertising at a Crossroads by

Olga Fedorenko. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2022. 298 pp.

Years ago, when I started my PhD, my supervisor, who was British, handed me a scrap of an advert for my reference. It was a largish newspaper ad for Hyundai Motor Company (hereafter Hyundai) from 1991 published in *The Korea Economic Weekly*. The ad shows an illustration of the Korean Peninsula, in