

### Book review: Frank Jakob: Tsushima 1905 - Ostasiens Trafalgar; Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh 2017, ISBN 978-3-506-78140-6

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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, battle-ships, 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*