

**Kornel Chang.** *A Fractured Liberation: Korea Under US Occupation.* Belknap for Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2025. pp. 304, 31 photos, 3 maps, £24.95. ISBN 9780674258433

This is the story of lost opportunities, the three short years after victory over Japan in the Pacific War, a period when every bad decision taken south of the 38th parallel was followed by worse. The euphoria among Koreans at liberation from a lifetime of colonialism was quickly curtailed once US troops got their boots on the ground and dogmatic American advisors were sat firmly in the political saddle. The Japanese Emperor's early surrender, under the shadows of the mushroom clouds of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, left a vacuum on the Korean Peninsula. The Soviets, only days into the war with Japan, were making such easy progress against demoralised Japanese troops in Manchuria that they could easily have taken the whole of Korea before US troops arrived.

Instead, Stalin recklessly agreed to an American proposal to cleave the country in two along the 38th parallel, conveniently gifting Washington the capital city. 'Liberation' was a true liberation. Across the country there was what today would be called a magnolia revolution, with the spontaneous creation of People's Committees. Factories were put under workers' self-management, quislings were arrested, and land redistribution was on the table. But then General MacArthur ordered the US Army's XXIV Corps, veterans of the battle for Okinawa, to take control of the south. The corps was led by Lieutenant-General John Hodge, a courageous soldier decorated in battle but a craven governor. He would lead the country to misery.

*A Fractured Liberation* takes no prisoners. Hodge's arrival, accompanied by an ingrained anti-communism, was followed by his swift surrender to political advisers and their Korean cronies. These men – almost without exception – were, by gift of wealth and education, the same people whom the public wanted punished: the landlords, the village chiefs and the police who had colluded with, and performed the dirty work of, the Japanese occupiers. Politics was slammed into reverse. The People's Committees were largely gone by the middle of 1946 along with the practices of workers' control. Neither went quietly, with farmers and workers fighting back in brutally suppressed local uprisings. The semi-permeable membrane that was the 38th parallel, dividing the Soviet-occupied North from America's South, further polarised the country with reactionary landowners and the wealthy slipping

south while intellectuals and progressives were driven in the opposite direction.

Elections were planned for November 1946. It was to be a 'guided democracy' under America's heavy hand. Voters were to elect 45 members of the South Korean Interim Legislative Assembly while Hodge and his advisers selected a second 45. Even then, the general wanted to play safe and tilt the table to the right. Despite protests from progressives that elections were impossible with labour organisers in jail, trade unions barred from politics, and police terror stalking the streets, Hodge was unmoved. The result should have made him a laughing stock, but it was all too serious. He had over egged the pudding. America's out of control mirror to Kim Il Sung, Syngman Rhee, won 40 out of 45 seats with the left winning a paltry two, both on Jeju Island. Repression had worked. Hodge had long known what he should have done to save the South from dictatorship – jail Rhee – but he never plucked up the courage to act. Soon, the South had more political prisoners than had been incarcerated by the Japanese at their harshest.

The fear of communism translated into a fear of democracy. The people, it seemed, were not to be trusted. If anything, the political situation just got worse. In May 1948, the electorate were given a second chance. Most understood what they 'had to do', this time giving Rhee's coalition an unhealthy majority. On Jeju, an organised boycott produced the 'wrong' result and the island's elections were annulled. The attempt to suppress the opposition before the second round of voting triggered a two-year long insurrection, in which around 30,000 people – 10 per cent of the island's population – were arbitrarily killed. As Chang concludes, it was the ultimate irony that the end of the Pacific War gave Japan, which had started it all, democracy, while its Korean victims received half a century of oppression. As Chang notes, one American advisor subsequently accepted "all basic decisions on Korea were not thought through." "The Koreans are not responsible for the artificial division of their country into two states, we are."

**Glyn Ford** is a former Member of the European Parliament and now Director of the Brussels-based NGO Track2Asia. He is the author of *Talking to North Korea: ending the nuclear standoff* (2018) and *Picturing the DPRK* (2023).

**ORCID**

Glyn Ford  <http://orcid.org/0009-0007-6797-903X>

© 2025 The Author(s)

<https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2025.2576423>

**Paul P. Mariani.** *China's Church Divided: Bishop Louis Jin and the Post-Mao Catholic Revival.* Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2025. pp. 334. 23 Photos. Notes. Index. \$49.95 / £39.96. ISBN 9780 674297654

During the Cultural Revolution, the Vatican had no idea whether the Catholic Church in China was alive or dead. All foreign clergy had been evicted in the 1950s, persecution was severe for three decades, and hundreds of local priests suffered in jails and labour camps. Had enough clergy managed to evade the Communist Party of China (CPC), delivering the sacraments in secret? This is the question Jesuit author Paul Mariani answers here. It is a *tour-de-force* of detailed research on the emergence in 1980s Shanghai of a Catholic Church split between Beijing and Rome, between collusion with the CPC and radical defiance of state authority.

The Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping introduced a more sophisticated approach toward religion: instead of trying to crush Christianity, the CPC decided worship was acceptable – within a state-sanctioned framework, under party supervision and minus foreign engagement. This policy was enshrined in ‘Document 19’ announced by Politburo member (and father of Xi Jinping) Xi Zhongxun. These new conditions led to flourishing – albeit routinely harassed – indigenous Protestant communities but they tore the Catholic Church apart. How could believers reject the primacy of the Pope, Christ’s vicar on earth, or accept bishops spawned by the CPC without papal mandate? Many Catholic clergy went ‘underground’ to practice an untainted faith, a tactic made possible by special powers granted to their bishops by the Vatican.

Shanghai is the author’s focus because it was a pre-Communist Catholic stronghold and it was there that the CPC persuaded a talented, European-trained Chinese Jesuit, Louis Jin Luxian, to accept the poison chalice of party fealty. Despite enduring over 25 years of prison and