

# The Journal of Northeast Asian History

Volume 14 Number 2  
Winter 2017



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*The Journal of Northeast Asian History* (ISSN 1976-3735), sponsored by the Northeast Asian History Foundation, is published biannually, in June and December, by the Institute of International Affairs at the Graduate School of International Studies, Seoul National University, 1 Kwanak-ro, Kwanak-gu, Seoul, 08826, Korea. A one-year subscription is US\$25 plus shipping for individuals, including students. Please send your subscription order and payment directly to the publisher.

## A word from the chief editors

The Journal of Northeast Asian History is under new management, with publication entrusted to the Institute of International Affairs at the Graduate School of International Studies, Seoul National University. Professors Tae Gyun Park, Erik Mobernd, JeongHun Jan, and Jaewoo Choo are the Journal's chief editors.

The Journal has published academic articles dealing with a diverse array of vibrant debates and controversies covering topics and issues related to Northeast Asian History. Such works have spanned the ancient to the modern period and covered myriad topics, encompassing the controversies over the perception or interpretation of history and territorial disputes. The Journal has thus facilitated academic discussion regarding various Northeast Asian historical issues.

Therein, the Northeast Asian History Foundation has played a critical role. The foundation has endeavored to raise awareness of Northeast Asian historical and territorial issues in publishing a scholarly journal in English. As a consequence, readers outside the Northeast Asian region have come to be interested in those topics important in Northeast Asia. Readers inside the region have improved their understanding of those issues.

Along with the foundation, the chief editors are committed to continuing and enhancing such efforts. If such an endeavor can be said to have been in its initial stages up until now, then the time has come to elevate the discussion of such issues and topics to a higher level. Moving beyond the task of merely fostering interest in topics and issues related to Northeast Asian history, the aim now is to invigorate relevant scholarly debate.

With this task in mind and sponsored by the Northeast Asian History Foundation, the chief editors commit to renewing publication of the Journal. Accordingly, in addition to increasing the ample supply of scholarly articles and book reviews, we intend to seek out the greater participation of those who are specialists in their fields. This means including not only more articles and book reviews, but also introducing the newest documents, unfolding debates and most recent currents in academia. Furthermore, we plan to expand the scope of research comparing issues in Northeast Asia with those of other regions. We shall also strive to convey the latest information in this regard, introducing, attending and organizing various academic conferences and events in other regions.

We sincerely hope that readers continue to view the Journal of Northeast Asian History with interest and anticipation.

Tae Gyun Park, Erik Mobernd, JeongHun Han, and Jaewoo Choo  
Chief Editors, The Journal of Northeast Asian History

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*ABOUT THE JOURNAL OF NORTHEAST ASIAN HISTORY*

*The Journal of Northeast Asian History* (JNAH) is a peer-reviewed biannual journal published by the Institute of International Affairs at the Graduate School of International Studies, Seoul National University. JNAH seeks challenging research focusing on regional and trans-national issues within the context of historical Northeast Asia. The Journal concentrates on interdisciplinary, comparative, and cross-cultural approaches to issues such as borders, identity, international relations, history issues, history education, historiography, and other relevant themes within the humanities and the social sciences. In addition to this thematic diversity, the Journal's geographical scope extends to other areas of Asia and beyond, thus inviting scholarly engagement in rethinking globalism and localism in world history. For detailed information about the submission of manuscripts, please contact the Journal at [journal.jnah@snu.ac.kr](mailto:journal.jnah@snu.ac.kr).

# Articles



# America's Nationalist Turn and Territorial Revisionism in the Asia-Pacific

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University of California, Irvine

*The Journal of Northeast Asian History*

**Volume 14 Number 2 (Winter 2017), 9-34**

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## America's Nationalist Turn and Territorial Revisionism in the Asia-Pacific

The U.S.-led liberal international order is eroding, a process only exacerbated by the election of Donald Trump. Meanwhile, China has solidified its regional posture and signaled its global economic and military aspirations. This article details changes in the balance of power driven by China's rise and the nationalist turn in America's foreign policy that has accelerated the erosion of legitimacy of the international order. It then discusses Chinese, Japanese, and North Korean revisionist aspirations with respect to the East Asian security environment as a whole. China's revisionist territorial claims in the East China Sea are moving it toward a collision specifically with Japan, which also claims vast maritime sovereignty. Tokyo's revisionist claims are also likely to undermine trilateral U.S.-ROK-Japan cooperation absent the checks and security guarantees of institutions like the E.U. or NATO. Finally, North Korea's provocations aim to capitalize on the vulnerability of the United States' extended-deterrence commitments.

**Keywords:** balance of power; China's rise; East Asia; liberal international order; territorial conflict

# America's Nationalist Turn and Territorial Revisionism in the Asia-Pacific

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## I. Introduction

The crisis over North Korea's nuclear and Intercontinental Ballistic Missile tests comes at a time when the liberal international order—broadly understood as the framework of global governance that includes economic and financial globalization, sovereignty and human rights protections, democracy promotion, and commitment to international law—has come under threat both by the changes in the global balance of power that had underlined it and by a widespread populist reaction to its legitimacy.<sup>1</sup> Since the early 2000s, China's economic and military rise and Russia's military interventions in Georgia, Ukraine and Syria seemingly ended America's "unipolar moment" enjoyed after the Soviet Union's disintegration and the end of the U.S.-Soviet two-way competition for power in the international system. So did the rise of militant national and transnational "jihadism" in the Middle East, North

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Haass, *A World in Disarray: American Foreign Policy and the Crisis of the Old Order* (New York: Penguin Books, 2017); Michael J. Mazarr et al., *Measuring the Health of International Order* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2017).

Africa, and South Asia, and the growth of the influence of Iran in the Persian Gulf area. As America's nearly two-decades-long military involvements in South Asia and the Middle East weakened rather than strengthened its global influence, China in particular, with its uninterrupted economic and military buildup, solidified its regional posture, intensified pressures on the states in its geographic vicinity, and perhaps sooner than expected by most, signaled its economic and military aspirations extending beyond East Asia.

Erosion of legitimacy of the international order and its institutional structures largely coincided with this observed shift in the global balance of power. It may have started already in the course of the 1997 Asian economic crisis, which revealed limitations of the International Monetary Fund and other global financial institutions.<sup>2</sup> This was followed in the early 2000s with the abrupt end of the “third way of democratization” and the subsequent “democratic recession.”<sup>3</sup> Further weaknesses of international order were demonstrated in the populist movements against neoliberal economic policies that followed the global recession of the late 2000s: first in the course of the 2010-2011 Arab uprisings, and then with the 2011 protests in Israel, Spain, Italy, Greece, and the U.S. (Occupy Wall Street).<sup>4</sup> As to the protection of sovereignty and commitment to international law, the 2014 proclamation of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria threatened to undermine the relevance of the system of nation-states in the Middle East, while the Russian annexation of Crimea posed challenges to the principle of inviolability of borders in

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Hale, David Held, and Kevin Young, *Gridlock: Why Global Cooperation is Failing when We Need It Most* (Cambridge, MA: Polity, 2013); Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Larry Diamond, “Facing up to democratic recession,” *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 1 (2015): 141-55.

<sup>4</sup> Marion Dixon, “An Arab Spring,” *Review of African Political Economy* 38, no. 128 (2011): 309-316; James Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East: A History*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

Europe. While the 2009 debt crisis in the European Union demonstrated flaws in its monetary integration (of the “Euro-Zone”), the lack of coordinated response of Brussels to the 2015 refugee crisis revealed the E.U.’s political weaknesses. Then the 2016 British vote to leave the E.U. (“Brexit”) and the near electoral victory of Euroskeptics in France and the Netherlands demonstrated the popular backlash against economic and financial globalization in Europe, and threatened to dismantle the E.U., one of the institutional pillars of liberal international order over the last several decades.

Following the “Brexit” vote, Donald Trump’s 2016 victory in the U.S. presidential elections not only confirmed the broader trend of erosion of legitimacy of the international order but in effect intensified it. President Trump’s announced turn to nationalist foreign policy, aimed at restoring America’s primacy in the international system, questioned the necessity of any international order altogether and not simply its specific components. The Trump administration has not gone as far as to dismantle America’s multilateral and bilateral commitments as candidate Trump’s bid for the presidency had called for. But it has clearly challenged the concept of liberal international order (pursued by successive U.S. administrations since 1945), and implicitly accepted the idea of “selective engagement” where America, instead of assuming a leadership role in actively promoting liberal international order, opts to settle for the protection of the *status quo* as necessary and in an *ad hoc* manner, but with little regard for free trade and seemingly no concern for human rights protections or democracy promotion. This new case-by-case transactional approach to America’s foreign policy caused significant disruptions, disarray, and uncertainty among American allies and strategic partners the world over, not the least in East Asia. Despite the absence of noticeable changes in U.S. military posture and alliance commitments in the region, the future direction of America’s foreign and defense policies lacks clarity and leaves specifically Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK) guessing, encouraging each to reconsider their

own policy options.

There is no shortage of literature discussing alternative scenarios of future international relations in East Asia based on significant changes in China's material (especially military) capabilities and the dangers its rise poses to peace and the balance of power in the region. The consequences of the much less tangible of the two changes in liberal international order described above, namely erosion of legitimacy of that very order, has received considerably less attention by scholars. Despite the economic benefits that Japan, the ROK, and China all obtained from liberal international order underwritten by the U.S. since 1945, historical memories of the decades preceding the end of World War II in each are still vivid. As legitimacy of that order seemingly fades away, historical memories of perceived injustices in the region that preceded Pax Americana are likely to play a greater role in shaping the preferences of individual states in the region. Successful overcoming of historical enmities in international politics is rare, with Anglo-American and Franco-German rapprochement as two notable examples. Shared liberal democratic values may have played a role in each of those two exceptional cases, as the democratic peace theory of international relations would predict. But perhaps more importantly a long history of shared economic and political interests, as well as cultural values, over an extended period of time played a role in the case of U.K.-U.S. rapprochement, while German participation in the European Union and NATO may have helped moderate its historical rivalry with France.

Similar pacifying tendencies and institutional mechanisms are remarkably lacking in East Asia. Even prior to the election of Donald Trump, regional changes in the balance of power and the weakening of the legitimacy of the international order in East Asia created a window of opportunity for both China and Japan to voice their revisionist claims. The twin processes have also encouraged North Korea's hopes about eventually decoupling the ROK from U.S. extended deterrence and keeping alive its offensive designs on the Korean peninsula. Although

China and Japan both presently share commitment to the regional order in East and Southeast Asia and have well-developed economic ties, the two are also locked in a geostrategic rivalry over natural resources in the East China Sea that involves claims and counter-claims and is likely to intensify with the passage of time. Japan's revisionist claims, its recent improvements of military capabilities, and the constitutional amendments to remove pacifist constraints on its military, all aimed primarily to address the threats from China and North Korea, also directly threaten the ROK. Despite its participation in trilateral cooperation with Japan and the U.S., the ROK is wary of Tokyo's long-term objectives and refuses to treat it as a military ally.

This article argues that China's revisionist territorial claims in the East China Sea are going to place it on a collision course specifically with Japan's claim to vast maritime sovereignty. Absent institutional mechanisms equivalent to the E.U. or NATO to provide security guarantees to the ROK and keep Japan's territorial aspirations vis-à-vis Seoul in check, Tokyo's revisionist claims are likely to undermine the management of trilateral US-ROK-Japan cooperation. The article first details the changes in the balance of power driven by China's rise and the nationalist turn in America's foreign policy that accelerated the erosion of legitimacy of the international order. It then discusses separately the Chinese, Japanese, and North Korean revisionist aspirations and draws conclusions for the security environment of East Asia as a whole.

## **II. China's Economic Rise and Improved Military Capabilities**

As the U.S. coped with the financial and economic consequences of the 2008-2009 "great recession" and the costly military and economic efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, China's manufacturing sector and international trade grew steadily. Over the first decade and a half of the twenty-first century, China became the world's biggest exporter of manufactured

goods and the largest trading partner of more than one hundred countries around the world (including Japan, South Korea, and the U.S.). Its share of global GDP rose from less than five percent in 1980 to 14.9 percent in 2017.<sup>5</sup> In addition, China has made significant progress in robotics, aerospace, new-energy vehicles, and advanced medical products. As it further develops research on information technology and artificial intelligence, it aims at attracting the world's cutting-edge scientists and innovators to China. It emerged as the principal regional economic power in East Asia, but its economic influence now spreads to Southeast and Central Asia, turning Beijing into a dominant actor in the global economy.

China's economic ambitions now extend to other regions where it has pledged to invest more than one trillion dollars for two separate initiatives designed to restructure the Eurasian economy: the silk-road economic belt (infrastructure and trade investments projected to stretch from Bangkok to Budapest) and the twenty-first-century maritime silk road (a program focused on the waterways between the South China Sea and the Mediterranean). The two initiatives combined involve infrastructure development projects in more than sixty countries and include building high-speed railroads and nuclear reactors. Over the last decade and a half, China has made additional big scale investments in Africa, North and South America, Europe, Russia's far east, and the Middle East. Beijing is also making progress with a free trade agreement that will include the major Asian economies plus Australia and New Zealand. In sum, China's capability driven behavior has over time brought about slight but steady changes in the distribution of economic power both in the region and globally.

Although China's remarkable economic growth benefited from

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<sup>5</sup> International Monetary Fund, "Seeking Sustainable growth: Short-Term Recovery, Long-term Challenges," *World Economic Outlook* (October 2017).

U.S. hegemonic naval power in the Asia-Pacific region, Beijing's growing economic capabilities could allow it in the future to challenge militarily that very hegemony should it choose so. China's defense forces are currently limited to reducing the ability of the American navy to operate close to its own littoral. Specifically, the Chinese military seeks to deny America's ability to come to Taiwan's aid in case of a Sino-Taiwanese confrontation. Over the last twenty-five years, China has notably improved its ability to restrict hostile access in the air and waters off its coast. But most agree that its longer-term objective is to reduce the U.S. security role in Asia, and eventually become a regional hegemon itself.<sup>6</sup> Many in the U.S. now believe that China's "A2/AD" ("antiaccess, area denial," a phrase coined by the U.S. military) capability will eventually be highly effective in excluding the U.S. from parts of the Western Pacific, an area the latter has traditionally controlled.<sup>7</sup>

Some even believe that China will ultimately be able to extend its zone of exclusion to the so-called "Second Island Chain"—a line that connects Japan, Guam, and Papua-New Guinea, some 3,000 kilometers away from China's coast. Although most still see China's current arsenal of weapons as limited and U.S. naval and air superiority over the Pacific unchallenged, the trajectory of technical and acquisition trends suggest that in the medium to long term, China could develop such capabilities.<sup>8</sup> The People's Liberation Army (PLA) has recently bolstered China's position in the South China Sea where Beijing is also growing its civilian and paramilitary capability. The PLA is manifestly developing the capacity to project military power into the Western Pacific and Indian Ocean. It has improved its ability to protect its oil imports by patrolling

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Blackwill and Ashley Tellis, *Revising U.S. Grand Strategy Toward China* (U.S.A.: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> "China's military rise: The dragon's new teeth," *The Economist*, 2012. [www.economist.com/node/21552193](http://www.economist.com/node/21552193). Accessed on November 17, 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

the choke points for accessing the Indian Ocean and by building its first overseas military base in Djibouti.<sup>9</sup> And it projects further expansions in the near future as China's military budget is estimated to reach \$233 billion by 2020, more than all E.U. countries combined, and double the figure from 2010.<sup>10</sup>

China improves its military capabilities in tandem with diplomatic efforts to assert more effectively its interests in global international organizations (IGOs). It has now become the second largest contributor to the United Nations budget for peacekeeping operations. Moreover, China has recently increased its voting shares at the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and added its currency to the IMF's Special Drawing Rights list. In other global IGOs, China seeks to get an upper hand in agenda setting, and generally to develop a positive global image of itself (particularly in developing countries in which it invests). Additionally, it has already started building alternative regional institutions where it uses its own financial power to gain political and diplomatic influence (e.g. China's Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership). China is interested in promoting multilateralism, often in opposition to U.S. unilateralist tendencies, but it avoids direct confrontation with Washington. It seemingly prepares favorable conditions for itself to shape an emerging world order in the long term.

### III. America's Break with its Commitment to “ Liberal Hegemony”

American unilateralism in international politics endorsed by the Trump

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<sup>9</sup> “Chapter 6: Asia,” *The Military Balance* 117, no. 1 (2017): 237. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/04597222.2017.1271212>. Accessed on November 17, 2017.

<sup>10</sup> “IHS Jane's: China defense budget may skyrocket in 2020,” *International Reports/International Media Reports on China*, December 14, 2016.

presidency is not new. While the U.S. played a decisive role in shaping the contemporary international order, it has also been, as Henry Kissinger noted, a most ambiguous participant in that very order.<sup>11</sup> Given the reservations of many about placing America's sovereignty under constraints of international laws and global governing institutions, the U.S. has opportunistically adopted unilateral policies in international affairs. More recently, America's unilateralist tendencies prevailed during President George W. Bush's first term (2001-2005), as the U.S. backed away from multilateral agreements such as the Kyoto Protocol and the Rome Treaty that established the International Criminal Court, and went ahead with the invasion of Iraq in 2003 over public objections of the political leaders of France and Germany, two of America's key European allies. Moreover, by practicing "enhanced interrogation techniques" in its offshore military bases in Guantanamo Bay (Cuba), Bagram (Afghanistan) and Abu Ghraib (Iraq), the U.S. was in violation of provisions of international humanitarian law, the law that it itself played a key role in developing since 1945.<sup>12</sup>

Nor are President Trump's criticisms of America's costly military over-commitments abroad anything new; such criticisms were frequently voiced by earlier administrations. What is new with the Trump presidency is the outright rejection of the notion of multilateral arrangements as a way of advancing U.S. national interest and the disdain for international organizations, military alliances, and international law, all perceived as restraining the U.S. by limiting its policy options. President Trump's "America First" policy reflected a new nationalist sentiment. While still campaigning for the presidency, Trump questioned the value of military alliances, and promised to abandon some of the country's longest-standing trade agreements. According to the new perspective in the

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<sup>11</sup> Henry Kissinger, *World Order* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014).

<sup>12</sup> Philippe Sands, *Lawless World* (New York: Viking, 2006).

White House, the U.S. was to conduct foreign policy by relying on its military and economic capabilities and re-evaluate its long-term commitments to alliances and strategic partnerships according to its needs. It would accordingly remain a party to the international agreements that it clearly benefits from and use its military force only when and where directly challenged.

Some of the initial policy decisions of the new administration clearly broke with the practices that defined U.S. global strategy since at least the end World War II. Shortly after coming to office, President Trump ended Washington's strong bipartisan consensus on Asia policy by signing the executive order to withdraw the U.S. from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the largest free-trade agreement in history that brought together a dozen Pacific Rim nations, including Australia, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, and Vietnam. President Trump further pulled the U.S. from the 2015 Paris climate change agreement (signed by more than 190 other nations), sent mixed signals about America's commitment to its allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and East Asia (Japan and South Korea), and made cuts in U.S. funding to international institutions. Meanwhile, some of the punitive measures that the Trump administration threatened Mexico with in renegotiating the North America Free Trade Agreement are likely to violate the laws of the World Trade Organization. If so, the U.S. might opt to ignore the rulings of this organization and perhaps even pull out of it altogether.<sup>13</sup> Since the Trump administration holds a view that the costs of maintaining the rules-based international order outweigh its benefits, the U.S. was to significantly reduce the role for American diplomacy and its global programs. It plans to downsize America's diplomatic representation abroad, suspend the hiring of new Foreign Service officers, and substantially reduce

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<sup>13</sup> "Top US business group says Trump's Nafta stance 'dangerous.'" <https://www.ft.com/content/97179336-aab2-11e7-ab55-27219df83c97>. Accessed on November 17, 2017.

America's commitment to international organizations such as the United Nations and its specialized agencies. While pushing budget cuts in diplomacy, the administration proposed an increase in defense spending roughly equal to the entire budget of the State Department.

Even before Donald Trump was elected U.S. President, the liberal international order had already been under significant strain.<sup>14</sup> Although President Trump's anti-multilateralism, since moving into office, turned out to be selective and America's retrenchment from its global obligations partial, the credibility and commitment of the U.S. have been openly questioned by its allies and strategic partners in Europe, Southeast and East Asia, and the Middle East. Some have signaled their willingness to fill in on their own what they perceive as potential power vacuums. Germany's Chancellor Merkel, for example, declared the need for Europe to "chart its own course" and began efforts to set up a European Army under its own control.<sup>15</sup> Alarmed by the prospects of America's withdrawal from its military commitments, India, Japan and Saudi Arabia all called for sustained U.S. presence in their respective regions to help keep in check their principle regional rivals. To the countries in Southeast Asia, the U.S. withdrawal from the TPP marked the abandonment of America's leadership role in the region. President Trump's policies have thus initiated fears about power vacuums and raised concerns over the rise of protectionism globally. At the same time the administration pushed for militarization of U.S. global policies.

Although not yet fundamentally altering the values that have for decades underlined international arrangement and that America helped build and defend, the new U.S. administration seems to have suspended them. The new nationalist America refrains from spreading its values to other countries and opts out of multilateral arrangements; it challenges

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<sup>14</sup> Mazarr, *Measuring the health of international order*.

<sup>15</sup> "Merkel: Europe 'can no longer rely on allies' after Trump and Brexit," *BBC News*, May 28, 2017. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-40078183>.

the ideological foundation of the international order from above. Even if partial, this abandonment of America's leadership could lead to the collapse of much of the structures of rules, norms, and institutions that has defined international relations for decades. Most importantly, it could end a degree of ideological agreement among the main sponsoring powers and encourage aspirations for alternative concepts of legitimacy.

It is against this background that territorial revisionism since 2010 in the East China Sea, Yellow Sea, Japan Sea, South China Sea, and the Korean Peninsula should be observed. Global erosion of the international order invoked memories of the earlier history of the region and settlements created under a substantially different regional distribution of power than the current one. The next three sections detail the efforts of China, Japan, and North Korea to adjust to those new conditions and probe pushing the boundaries of the regional *status quo*.

#### **IV. China's Territorial Revisions in the South and East China Seas**

Claiming to be a legal successor to the Kuomintang government of the Republic of China and alleging the latter's sovereignty over the South China Sea, Beijing is involved in taking possession of islands and reefs of this maritime area in order to lay claim to the waters and seabed in between (i.e. "internal waters."). Although claiming its "historic right" to do so, China in effect violates the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) according to which this maritime area should be apportioned among all the littoral states. Predictably, Brunei, Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines have all vigorously protested China's claims and favor a diplomatic solution, but the Chinese continue to act unilaterally instead. In the area known as the "nine-dash line" that includes the Paracel, Spratly and Pratas Islands, the Macclesfield Bank and the Scarborough Shoal, China is building artificial islands, equipping them with advanced listening devices, and constructing runways and

hangars that could reportedly be converted to military use. Five of the artificial islands have been built on previously submerged features, which, under the UNCLOS, do not grant entitlement to the twelve-mile territorial waters. Despite its proclamations about the freedom of navigation operations to maintain UNCLOS, the U.S. does not seem willing to press China to reverse its course.

In the past, China had used low-intensity coercion to establish maritime rights by carrying out invasive patrols, encroaching on other claimants' waters, and denying littoral countries (e.g. Vietnam) the rights to drill the seabed. In 1974 and 1988 it attacked Vietnamese positions in the Paracel and Spratly Islands, respectively. Both incidents ended with casualties on the Vietnamese side and Chinese territorial gains. More recently, Chinese boats have attacked Vietnamese vessels, and threatened military action against Vietnamese bases in the South China Sea (some twenty-eight outposts in the Spratly Islands). In 2016, the Chinese government objected to the ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration that denied Beijing the right to extend its exclusive economic zone over the Spratly Islands at the expense of the Philippines by disputing the panel's jurisdiction over this matter. Despite its legal victory, the government of the Philippines, reportedly intimidated by China, abandoned the project of exploring the seabed natural gas reserves off its coast and agreed to China's offer for joint explorations of energy resources, which seems to imply Beijing's version of "shared" ownership based on its own determination of who can exploit which resources.

Many scholars agree that China aspires to restore its status as a regional hegemon that it lost almost two centuries ago and inevitably seek further adjustments to the current international order as part of what President Xi Jinping called the "China Dream" of national rejuvenation.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017); Howard French, *Everything Under the Heavens: How the Past Helps Shape China's Push for Global Power* (New York: Alfred A.

As China's military capabilities continue to grow, it may decide to deny territorial arrangements created by others and especially those features of the existing order that were put in place while China was economically and militarily weak. China, of course, could decide to impose reunification on Taiwan. But it could also decide to challenge the maritime regime created by the 1982 UNCLOS that entitled Japan to vast maritime areas (very high proportionate to the length of its coastline). Citing UNCLOS, Japan claims that it established sovereignty over what it calls the Senkaku islands (uninhabited islets) in East China in the late nineteenth century based on the *terra nullius* principle of maritime international law.

The Japanese government regards the islets to be “intrinsic to Japanese territory” (*ryodo*). Although China had not challenged Japan's sovereignty over the islets until 1970, it has since claimed its own commercial and diplomatic ties to the islands—what Beijing and Taiwan instead call the Diaoyu Islands—as part of China-Ryukyu relations under the East Asian tributary system that lasted about a millennium before the late nineteenth century Japanese conquests.<sup>17</sup> The islands lie well within 200 nautical miles of China's coast and are on the edge of its continental shelf that stretches all the way to the Okinawa trench. The two sides in 2008 agreed to respect an equidistant median line from each country effectively separating their respective EEZs and that they would conduct joint development of four different oil and gas fields spanning the line. The Japanese government later accused the Chinese of breaching the 2008 consensus by conducting field development alone.<sup>18</sup>

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Knopf, 2017); Henry Kissinger, *On China* (New York: Penguin, 2012).

<sup>17</sup> Gavan McCormack, “Troubled Seas: Japan's Pacific and East China Sea Domains (and Claims),” *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 10, no. 36 (August 28, 2012). <http://apjff.org/2012/10/36/Gavan-McCormack/3821/article.html>. Accessed on November 18, 2017.

<sup>18</sup> “Old Scores and New Grudges: Evolving Sino-Japanese Tensions,” *International Crisis Group*, July 24, 2014. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/north-east-asia/china/old-scores-and-new-grudges-evolving-sino-japanese-tensions>. Accessed on November 18, 2017.

In November 2013, China announced an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ), overlapping with that of Japan's and covering the disputed islands. It has since done some probing around the islands, perhaps signaling the gradual change in the regional maritime order. Sovereignty over the islands would allow the claim of Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) rights over a sector of the East China Sea believed to contain significant deposits of oil and natural gas. For China, this maritime area is also important from a geostrategic point of view. If China is indeed pursuing the goal of moving its line of naval defense from the first to the second chain of islands in the East China Sea, Japanese sovereignty over the Senkaku islands would be a significant barrier in its path.

## V. Japan's Revisionist History Movement and Claims

The changes in the regional balance of power and the uncertainty about America's commitments in East Asia encouraged Japan, the ROK and North Korea to pursue their respective national agendas more aggressively. Japan's concerns over its shrinking economic opportunities in East Asia and potential military threat, both resulting from China's increased economic power and influence, are understandable. China's recent resurgence has diminished Japan's economic stature particularly in Northeast Asia compared with what it was in the late 1980s and early 1990s when Japan was contributing up to fifteen percent of world GDP. Unable to use its economic influence as effectively as it did in the past, Japan is resorting to a new form of nationalism as a way of shaping and protecting its security interests. In 2014, the Japanese Foreign Ministry published a map (translated into twelve languages) that extends Japan's internationally recognized national borders. The map depicts Japan's *ryodo* (i.e. "inherent territory") that includes numerous islands that fall outside of Japan's current sovereignty such as the Liancourt Rocks and the Kuril islands claimed by its neighbors the ROK and Russia, respectively.

Part of Japan's territorial revision is economic in nature. In addition to challenging China regarding seventeen percent of the East China Sea area discussed above, Japan also claims portions of the seabed between Japan and the Korean Peninsula also believed to hold significant deposits of oil and natural gas, both of which Tokyo could use as substitutes for imports. But Japan's territorial revisionism is also strategic. The concept of *ryodo* implicitly dismisses as partial the terms of the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty, which formally ended World War II between Japan and the Allies. The 1951 agreement redrew Japan from the massive empire it had become during the war stretching from northern China to Guadalcanal. The concept of *ryodo* also deliberately circumvents the history of how Japan laid claim to these islands in the first place—through imperial wars with China and Russia, wars of conquest against Korea, and through the extermination or assimilation of indigenous peoples.<sup>19</sup>

This strategic revision raises questions about Japan's acquiescence to the status quo driven by the imperatives of its survival and long-term economic success. Still, the most recent U.S.-Japanese agreement (April 27, 2015) expanded the reach of Japan's military—now limited to its own defense—allowing it to act when the U.S. or countries American forces are defending are threatened. In 2016, the Japanese Diet amended Article 9 of the constitution that limited the country's use of offensive weapons to its territorial limits. Prime Minister Abe Shinzo and his supporters are likely to continue to eliminate constitutional barriers to an even greater international military role. At the same time, the Japanese Ministry of Defense has continued to receive steady budget increases of one to two percent a year since 2013, ostensibly breaking the pattern of

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<sup>19</sup> "The Shape of Japan to Come," *The New York Times*, January 16, 2015. [https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/17/opinion/the-shape-of-japan-to-come.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/17/opinion/the-shape-of-japan-to-come.html?_r=0). Accessed on November 18, 2017.

stagnant budgets over the previous decade.<sup>20</sup> The relaxation of national-security laws and increased defense spending allow the Japanese navy to co-operate much more closely with allies on a greater range of missions. Although Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force lacks power-projection, it is regarded as the fifth-best navy in the world capable of rapid response to threats anywhere in Japan and especially defending or retaking the remote southwestern islands facing China. Japan's apparent interference in the South China Sea disputes formed the background for renewed bilateral tensions with Beijing on the East China Sea.

Some have traced Japanese revisionism to the mid-1990s when several politicians voiced their objections to the publishing of junior high school history textbooks that made references to the Korean women enslaved by Japanese soldiers (i.e. "comfort women") and insisted that such a "masochistic" version of history teaching be abandoned and replaced by an alternative that will instead boost students' love for their country. Back in 1997, recently re-elected Prime Minister of Japan Abe was among the founders of the Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) Group of Young Diet Members for the Consideration of Japan's Future and History Education that promoted such changes until Japan's Education Ministry eventually forced publishers of middle-school textbooks to recast descriptions of historical events. In 2014, the Abe government tried unsuccessfully to get the U.N. to revise a 1996 human rights report on the women Japan forced into sex slavery. In 2015, the Prime Minister also initiated the "Japan House" project reportedly aimed at launching an international public relations campaign in support of Japanese claims for the islands falling outside its sovereignty. In addition, while Prime Minister Abe formally expressed remorse for the atrocities the Japanese forces committed during World War II and said he would honor Japan's past apologies for its aggression, he and his political allies from the

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<sup>20</sup> "Chapter 6: Asia," 337-350.

governing LDP continue to question history.<sup>21</sup>

## VI. North Korea's Revisionist Aspirations

North Korea clearly developed its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile systems to protect its regime as it perceives U.S.-ROK joint military exercises as rehearsals for an invasion. But its hostility towards the U.S. is not simply a matter of the regime's official propaganda to generate legitimacy and thus prolong it in perpetuity. While the U.S. government perceives its confrontation with North Korea as one involving a defiant and malevolent dictator, the North Korean leadership takes a longer historical perspective on the confrontation with the U.S.. Memories of the Korean War may not be vivid on the American side but they reportedly play a role in Pyongyang where the U.S. air force's massive onslaught of the Korean population during that time is still being commemorated.<sup>22</sup> The North Korean regime has seen itself resisting the U.S. ever since. But vivid memories in North Korea seemingly extend even farther into history as the regime continues to celebrate the beginning of the Korean guerilla struggle against the Japanese in Northeast China (officially dated to April 25, 1932). Furthermore, memories of Japan's brutal occupation of Korea (1910-1945), including atrocities and enslavement of thousands of women forced to work as sex slaves or "comfort women" in wartime brothels, are being kept alive.<sup>23</sup> The North Korean regime seems to believe that if it can get the U.S. out of the region, North Korea could prevail over South Korean forces and

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<sup>21</sup> Tomomi Yamaguchi, "The 'Japan Is Great!' Boom, Historical Revisionism, and the Government," *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, 15, is. 6, no. 3 (March 15, 2017). <http://apjif.org/2017/06/Yamaguchi.html>. Accessed on November 17, 2017.

<sup>22</sup> "Inside North Korea, and Feeling the Drums of War," *The New York Times*, October 5, 2017. [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/05/opinion/sunday/nuclear-north-korea.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/05/opinion/sunday/nuclear-north-korea.html?_r=0). Accessed on November 18, 2017.

<sup>23</sup> Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War: A History* (New York: The Modern Library, 2011).

unite the peninsula on its own terms.<sup>24</sup>

Military planners and foreign-service officials in the ROK and the U.S. stress that North Korea is developing a hydrogen bomb and ICBMs not to go to war with the U.S. but to prevent American forces from intervening in a possible armed confrontation on the Korean Peninsula. The day after North Korea tested its ballistic missile in the summer of 2016, Christopher Hill, a former U.S. ambassador to the Republic of Korea stated that North Korea believes it can militarily defeat the ROK if the U.S. is kept off the peninsula.<sup>25</sup> Some ROK officials fear that North Korea's possession of nuclear-tipped ICBMs could drive a wedge between Washington and Seoul by offering to freeze its nuclear program in return for the withdrawal of American troops from the ROK. In the worst-case scenario, they say, North Korea may attack the ROK and use its nuclear arsenal to deter the U.S. from intervening. Some have asked whether Washington will risk the destruction of an American city by intervening, for example, if the North attempts to occupy a border island, as its soldiers have practiced. North Korea's provocations against South Korea aim to capitalize on the vulnerability of the United States' extended-deterrence commitments.

## VII. Military Balancing in the Absence of an Agreed-upon Order

U.S. military strength and diplomacy helped keep the peace in much of Asia throughout the Cold War and over a decade that followed. The U.S.-led post-1945 international order brought unprecedented economic prosperity to a number of countries in East and Southeast Asia including

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<sup>24</sup> Evan Osnos, "The Risk of Nuclear War with North Korea," *The New Yorker*, September 18, 2017. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/09/18/the-risk-of-nuclear-war-with-north-korea>. Accessed on November 18, 2017.

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.cnbc.com/asia-squawk-box/>. Accessed on November 18, 2017.

Japan, the ROK, Singapore, Thailand, and Taiwan, and more recently China and Indonesia. It helped spread and consolidate democracy in the region, too. Regarding U.S. defense policy in East Asia, the Trump administration is left with little choice. American military commitment to the region has been structural since the early 2000s and is unlikely to change in the near to medium term. Since almost thirty percent of global maritime trade goes across the South China Sea, \$1.2 trillion of which is bound for America, safeguarding the freedom of the seas is of vital U.S. national interest.<sup>26</sup> The free flow of maritime trade in the South China Sea is equally vital to Japan and the ROK, two principal U.S. allies in the region. To protect its own interests and the interest of its allies, the U.S. has developed a complex web of military alliances surrounding China with countries buttressed by American security commitments (e.g. Australia, India, Singapore, and Vietnam). The “One Korea” policy that supports a unification of the Korean peninsula under the leadership of the ROK is the last component of America’s military commitment in the region.

While the U.S. military maintains the ability to deter conflict and coercion, its capacity to promote adherence to international law and standards has seemingly been impaired. Since Richard Nixon’s famous 1972 trip to China, successive U.S. presidents down to Barack Obama attempted to manage China’s rise by drawing it into the international order and engaging it to accept the rules of trade, navigation and other areas. With the gradual erosion of the legitimacy of that order, China has seemingly reached a point where it now aspires to a co-leadership role with the U.S., a relationship that its leader Xi Jinping described as one of mutual respect for “each country’s core interests.” Although not specified in this offer that China’s President first extended to Barack Obama in

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<sup>26</sup> “Offering to Aid Talks, U.S. Challenges China on Disputed Islands,” *The New York Times*, July 23, 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/24/world/asia/24dipl.html>. Accessed on November 18, 2017.

2014, Beijing’s “core interests” could potentially include territorial gains against U.S. core allies and strategic partners in the East and South China Seas.<sup>27</sup> In addition, China’s core interests would also include balanced relations between two Koreas, because from Beijing’s point of view, the U.S. One Korea policy poses an American challenge to the regional status quo.

Managing the U.S. dual but separate defense arrangements with Japan and the ROK would be no less challenging due to their territorial claims and counter-claims in the East China Sea. The U.S. provides extended deterrence to both Japan and the ROK based on two separate defense agreements. American attempts to strengthen trilateral cooperation with its two key allies in the region (beyond simply information sharing) is complicated by relations between Japan and the ROK. For historical reasons, many in the ROK are concerned about recent changes in Japan’s defense hardware and doctrine. One could also potentially attack the other over the disputed territory they both claim. Turning trilateral cooperation into a military alliance is unacceptable to the ROK as it could, besides making China wary, also pave the way for Japanese troops to enter the Korean peninsula. It is therefore in the ROK’s vital interest to complement its military alliance with the U.S. with strategic cooperation with China regarding North Korea.

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<sup>27</sup> “China’s ‘New Type’ of Ties Fails to Sway Obama,” *The New York Times*, November 9, 2014. [https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/10/world/asia/chinas-new-type-of-ties-fails-to-sway-obama.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/10/world/asia/chinas-new-type-of-ties-fails-to-sway-obama.html?_r=0). Accessed on November 19, 2017.

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# Persistent Conflicts between Confucianism and Democracy

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*The Journal of Northeast Asian History*

**Volume 14 Number 2 (Winter 2017), 35-60**

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## Persistent Conflicts between Confucianism and Democracy

There are a range of different relationships between Confucianism and democracy. This essay examines four models of the relationship between Confucianism and democracy: *conflictive*, *compatible*, *hybrid*, and *critical*. The article describes the background and key characteristics of each model and uses an empirical approach to test the claims of each model against reality. Empirically, the conflict model is much more accurate than the other models. It is largely true and relevant today, and it can even apply to the other three models, that is, all three models have some element of conflict or tension between Confucianism and democracy.

**Keywords:** Confucianism and Democracy; Conflict model; Compatibility model; Hybridity mode; Critical model

# Persistent Conflicts between Confucianism and Democracy

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## I. Introduction

Confucian societies are associated with a diversity of political regimes.<sup>1</sup> Liberal democracy has been established in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, where there are regular and fair elections, competing political parties, and independent judicial powers. Singapore has an illiberal democracy, while China, North Korea and Vietnam have maintained one-party domination. This suggests that there are a range of different relationships between Confucianism and democracy in the real world.

Moreover, there is a diversity of changing attitudes toward Confucianism in East Asia. In North Korea in 1953-55, Kim Il Sung developed his *juche* ideology after returning to the practical learning school of reformed Confucianism.<sup>2</sup> In the 1960s Park Chung Hee

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<sup>1</sup> Confucian societies are defined as those in which varieties of social rituals, clan and kinship, education, and family life are all influenced by, and exhibit strongly, Confucian characteristics. See Anna Sun, *Confucianism as a World Religion: Contested Histories and Contemporary Realities* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Alzo David-West, "Between Confucianism and Marxism-Leninism: Juche and the Case of Chong

promoted Confucianism in order to further economic development in South Korea.<sup>3</sup> In Taiwan, Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石) promoted Confucianism in the 1960s and 1970s, but in the late 1990s, Lee Deng Hui turned to Japanese culture. Confucianism had been associated with mainland culture, so when the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) came to power, it emphasized indigenous culture and deliberately played down Confucian culture. In Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew promoted Confucianism actively in the 1980s and 1990s, but the official promotion of Confucianism has since declined. Singapore had promoted the Confucian idea of the philosophical sage who is capable of ruling, but now Singapore follows market principles to recruit top political leaders by offering the highest salaries to public leaders. In China, Mao Zedong rejected Confucianism but today Confucianism has been blessed as “national essence” despite that Confucianism is not an official ideology. Vietnam also gave up Confucianism, and even abolished the Chinese characters under French colonization. Neo-Confucianism developed in Hong Kong in the 1960s-1970s, but now its followers are only few. Instead, the young generation is developing its own unique Hong Kong identity, which means de-emphasizing Confucianism, as it is associated with mainland culture.

Scholars have conceptualized four ideal-types of relationships between Confucianism and democracy, namely, *conflictive*, *compatible*, *hybrid*, and *critical*. In the past, debates have focused on whether Confucianism is in conflict or compatible with democracy. In recent years, there has been an attempt to *go beyond these conflict and compatible models* to explore alternative ways of thinking. Logically, a compatibility model implies a sort of hybridity. Indeed, Sungmoon Kim has moved the debate to a new question of “the particular mode of

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Tasan,” *Korean Studies* 35 (2011): 93-121.

<sup>3</sup> Tomasz Sleziaak, “The Role of Confucianism in Contemporary South Korean Society,” *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 66, no. 1 (2013): 27-46.

Confucian democracy” that is appropriate for East Asia.<sup>4</sup> This question leads to the normative consideration of a particular *hybrid* model and a subsequent question. If democracy and Confucianism can be blended, how can Confucianism improve and enhance democracy? Such a question leads to the *critical* model.

The hybrid model is contrary to both the conflict and compatibility models and occupies a middle position. It examines the complex institutional and behavioral practices of democratization in East Asia and holds that its practice is always a mix of Western and Confucian cultures. This model is used to describe the mixture of democracy and Confucianism in a variety of ways at different levels.

The critical model reverses conventional thinking, and turns the logic upside down. In both the conflict and compatibility models, democracy is the judge and final truth, while Confucianism is deemed passive: either it should be abandoned for the sake of democracy, or modified to make it compatible with democracy. Conversely, in the critical model, the Confucian point of view, rather than the Western one, is central. From the former viewpoint, Confucianism is regarded as the active arbiter of the political norm rather than as a beneficiary or passive listener. From a Confucian perspective, electoral democracy has many deficiencies and flaws, and deliberative democracy is a more acceptable form of government and decision-making.

This essay examines *the four models of thinking on the relationship between Confucianism and democracy*. It aims to test these four models against the empirical reality and to find out which model holds the most explanatory power (I will not engage in a normative justification here).

It should be noted that these four models apply different definitions and understandings of Confucianism. For example, the conflict model

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<sup>4</sup> Sungmoon Kim, *Confucian Democracy in East Asia: Theory and Practice* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, March 2014), 247.

focuses on the key questions of Confucian power values, power relations and power structures; the compatible model stresses Confucian perfectionist ideas, education and the examination system; the hybrid model looks at Confucian public reasoning and consultation or other elements; and the critical model returns to the Confucian ontology and an ideal of kingly-based political order. When scholars discuss the complex relationships between Confucianism and democracy, they sometimes talk to different aspects of Confucianism so that while they seem to engage in a debate, they in fact pass each other because they are not using corresponding definitions of Confucianism. However, it is impossible to impose one single definition of Confucianism on the scholarly debate as Confucian traditions are so rich that they defy any simplistic definition. Instead, I propose that we at least use the same research method. Here I use the empirical approach to test the claims of each model against the empirical reality, disregarding any differences in the applicable definitions of Confucianism.

The essay has two main sections. The first describes the background and key characteristics of each model, and introduces scholars who advocate different models with great variation. The second section is the empirical test of the four models.

## **II. The Four Models of the Relationship between Confucianism and Democracy**

### **1. The Conflict Model**

Scholars committed to the conflict model believe that all of the ideological structures of Confucianism and democracy are in conflict. In this model, Confucianism is seen as a product of an agricultural society which constructs a political order to meet its specific social and economic conditions, while liberal democracy is the political construct of an industrial society seeking to meet modern conditions such as the rise

of commerce and individual interests. Theorists who work from the conflict model hold that the original ideas of Confucius do not harmonize with liberal ideas.

According to Huntington, the core values of Confucianism, for example hierarchy, elitism, and sage-ruling, are incompatible with liberal democracy.<sup>5</sup> Such views stress the negative and inhibiting factors of Confucianism, including orientations of authoritarian statecraft, collectivist hierarchical behavioral traits, and the unequal distribution of power.

Three key concepts from Confucius's original doctrine—*Ren* (benevolence, or humaneness, or simply goodness), ritual, and the gentleman—indicate a political order in which the rule of the gentleman prevails, duty is central, political inequality is taken for granted, moral concern overrides the political bargaining process, and harmony prevails over conflict. This, it is argued, conflicts with a democratic order in which the rule of law prevails, rights are central, political equality is taken for granted, the political bargaining process overrides moral consensus, and conflict is seen as a normal condition of political life. The Confucian notion of the sage undermines the idea of equality. The Confucian idea of harmony undermines the necessity of conflicts. The Confucian ideal of *Ren* is incompatible with utilitarian calculation.<sup>6</sup>

In Confucian culture, the government has to proceed on the basis of harmony rather than conflict (which leads to suppression of dissidents and renders compromise morally repugnant); the interests of the collective must not be challenged by lesser groups and individuals (which is less favorable to the action of individual citizens); and, finally, rights must be treated as something granted by the state, not inherent in

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<sup>5</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, "Will More Countries Become Democratic?" *Political Science Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (1984): 193-218.

<sup>6</sup> Guy S. Alitto, *The Last Confucian: Liang Shuming and the Chinese Dilemma of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

the person (which is less favorable to the institutional protection of individual rights).

## 2. The Compatibility Model<sup>7</sup>

Those who adopt the compatibility model hold the view that some elements of Confucianism are compatible with democratic ideas and institutions.<sup>8</sup> Chinese scholars such as Liang Shuming, Yu Yingshi, Chung-ying Cheng, and Lin Yusheng have emphasized aspects of compatibility between Confucianism and liberalism.<sup>9</sup>

The Confucian idea of *Minben* and the idea of heaven in relation to the idea of people are seen as supporting democratic institutions. In particular, the principle of people can be used to support democratic ideas including votes, parliament, and parties. The tradition of local gentry (*shenshi* class) can be interpreted as a self-governing local community, a sort of local autonomy, and even a primitive form of local democracy. This idea of leaders coming from and representing the local community is argued to have facilitated the development of local-level

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<sup>7</sup> William Theodore de Bary, *The Liberal Tradition in China* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1983); Andrew Nathan, "The Place of Values in Cross-Cultural Studies: The Example of Democracy and China," in *Ideas across Cultures: Essays on Chinese Thought in Honor of Benjamin I. Schwartz*, ed. Paul Cohen and Merle Goldman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 293-314; Edward Friedman, "Democratization: Generalizing the East Asian Experience," in *Politics of Democratization: Generalizing the East Asian Experience*, ed. Edward Friedman (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 27-28; and Baogang He, "Dual Roles of Semi-Civil Society in Chinese Democracy," *Australian Journal of Political Science* 29, no. 1 (1994): 154-171.

<sup>8</sup> See Albert H. Y. Chen, "Is Confucianism Compatible with Liberal Constitutional Democracy?" *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 34, no. 2 (2007): 195-216.

<sup>9</sup> Chung-Ying Cheng, "Transforming Confucian Virtues into Human Rights," in *Confucianism and Human Rights*, ed. William Theodore de Bary and Tu Weiming (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 142-53; Lin Yusheng, *Zhongguo chuntong de chuanzaoxing zhuanhua* [The crisis of Chinese consciousness: Radical antitraditionalism in the May Fourth era] (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1988).

democracy in China.<sup>10</sup>

Other Confucian political institutions can also be transformed into something to support democratic development. The Confucian institution of *Xuetang* (学堂) is a public forum in which the intellectual elite discuss and debate moral, social, and political issues, which can be transformed into a modern civil society. The Confucian tradition of scholarly criticism could be transformed into a formal opposition force, if the practice of criticism were afforded genuine political significance. Confucian tolerance of plural religions could promote liberal toleration. As Daniel Bell argues, it would be possible to take the Confucian idea of gentry and institutionalize it as a Confucian chamber in a democratic assembly.<sup>11</sup> The balance-check system could be transformed into a modern power-check system, and the examination system could be developed into a system of equal access to public office and as a way of ensuring a meritocracy. Confucianism provides for equal opportunity for political positions, which are open to all scholars through an examination system. All these elements of Confucianism could be compatible with liberal democracy.

Fukuyama finds that the Confucian examination system, focus on education, fairly egalitarian income distribution, relative tolerance, tradition of dissent and protest, and tendency toward egalitarianism are not only compatible with, but also actually promote, liberal democracy.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> John Fincher, *Chinese Democracy: Statist Reform, the Self-Government Movement and Republican Revolution* (Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1989), 231.

<sup>11</sup> Daniel A. Bell, *Beyond Liberal Democracy: Political Thinking for an East Context* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> Francis Fukuyama, "Confucianism and Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 6, no. 2 (1995): 20-33.

### 3. The Hybrid Model

Each generation in different East Asian societies undertakes the imperative task of offering varying versions or proposals of why and how Confucianism should be combined with democracy in modern times and develops different ideas of political hybridity. To blend Confucianism and democracy, one easily can imagine the different combinations leading to Confucian communitarian democracy, Confucian elite democracy, Confucian consultative democracy, and Confucian electoral democracy, although this list is not exhaustive.

China has made persistent efforts to combine Confucianism with democratic values and systems throughout its history.<sup>13</sup> For example, Sun Yat-sen in the 1920s developed the idea of five divisions of power in his constitutional design, based on the Western idea of three divisions of power and drawing on Confucian traditions by adding the Examination Yuan, which is responsible for the nation's civil service system, and the Control Yuan, which is the highest watchdog organization of the state, exercising powers of impeachment, censure, and audit. Liang Shuming in the 1920s-1940s attempted to integrate democracy into the program of village reconstruction and advocated the neo-Confucian model of democracy. This model combined Western notions of rights and liberty with the Chinese emphasis on responsibility and ethical education, and Western majority rule with Chinese ethical rationality, while criticizing Western individualism and substituting it with advocacy of communitarianism.<sup>14</sup> In Hong Kong in the 1960-70s, Mou Zongsan, a new Confucian scholar, developed the doctrine of "Self-Generation of Democracy," which attempts to overcome the weakness of Confucian representation. According to Mou, *Ren* does not directly need sages or

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<sup>13</sup> Baogang He, *Rural Democracy in China* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 222-27.

<sup>14</sup> Hung-yok Ip, "Liang Shuming and the Idea of Democracy in Modern China," *Modern China* 17, no. 4 (1991): 481-487.

statesmen, but first institutionalizes itself through a constitution. This is an indirect way for neo-Confucianism to use its own internal logic to generate democracy.<sup>15</sup>

It is clear that within the last decade, the processes of Chinese local democratization and the development of village elections, the struggle for human rights, the establishment of deliberative forums, and the growing intra-party democracy reveal that there is, in practice, a mixing of Chinese traditions and new democratic institutions. This gives rise to the hybrid model for rethinking the relationship between democracy and Confucianism in contemporary China.

Sungmoon Kim has developed an idea of Confucian democracy which advocates “moral criticism and rectification of government” and is based upon a set of Confucian public reasons such as “filiality (*xiaoti* 孝悌), trustworthiness (*xin* 信), social harmony (*he* 和), respect of the elderly (*jinglao* 敬老), and respectful deference (*cirang* 辭讓).”<sup>16</sup>

In Singapore, Sor-hoon Tan blends the ideas of Confucius and Dewey, two great philosophers separated by more than 2,500 years. Tan injects Dewey’s ideas of government by the people, participation, and collective inquiry into Confucianism. Tan’s ideal Confucian democracy is a “harmonious community in which every member contributes, participates, and benefits according to his or her abilities and needs.”<sup>17</sup>

Chung-Ying Cheng outlines a Confucian way of democratization, that is, democratization via government for the people who are “ruled with their ends and needs satisfied by a ruler,” and a Confucian

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<sup>15</sup> Mou Zongsan, *Zhengdao yu zhidao* (政道与治道) [The law of politics and the law of governance] (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1974). Lin Anwei criticized Mou for failing to demonstrate how democracy could be developed out of Confucianism. See John Makeham, *Lost Soul: Confucianism in Contemporary Chinese Academic Discourse* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 179.

<sup>16</sup> Kim, *Confucian Democracy in East Asia*, 90, 284.

<sup>17</sup> Sor-Hoon Tan, *Confucian Democracy: A Deweyan Reconstruction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 201.

philosophy of virtue, which is seen as “a dynamic agency of democratization that is also bidirectional: virtues to become powers and powers to become virtues.”<sup>18</sup>

#### 4. The Critical Model

The last two decades have witnessed the development of critical Confucianism and this can be understood as a manifestation of a post-colonial discourse in East Asia.<sup>19</sup> With the revival of Confucianism in the 1990s<sup>20</sup> and the rise of China, some Chinese have become more confident in their Confucian traditions. They have criticized electoral democracy and developed a new critical model for rethinking the relationship between democracy and Confucianism.

Kang Xiaoguang (康晓光) questions the effectiveness and legitimacy of electoral democracy, and advocates benevolent government and Confucian mechanisms for the expression of public opinion.<sup>21</sup> Jiang Qing rejects the will of the people as the source of political legitimacy and seeks legitimacy “established on transcendent sacred origins” and “extolling unification” (*dayitong* 大一统).<sup>22</sup> Jiang Qiang advocates a nonelected body for Confucian scholars in Confucian constitutionalism.

The critical school takes a Confucian-centric approach and uses the criterion of Confucianism to judge and evaluate democracy. This

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<sup>18</sup> Chung-Ying Cheng, “Preface: The Inner and the Outer for Democracy and Confucian Tradition,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 34, no. 2 (2007): 152, 154.

<sup>19</sup> For a critical model, see Shu-Hsien Liu, “Democratic Idea and Practice: A Critical Reflection,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 34, no. 2 (2007): 257-275.

<sup>20</sup> Makeham, *Lost Soul*.

<sup>21</sup> Xiaoguang Kang, “Confucianization: A Future in the Tradition,” *Social Research* 73, no. 1 (2006): 86-94.

<sup>22</sup> Jiang Qing, *Zhengzhi ruxue: Dangdai ruxue de zhuanxiang, tezhi yu fazhan* [Political Confucianism: The development, characteristics, and reorientation of contemporary Confucians] (Beijing: Shalian, 2003).

approach takes varying attitudes toward democracy. It has at least three options: *abandoning* some democratic principles if they are not compatible with Confucianism; *absorbing or mixing* democratic elements if they are compatible; and *improving and enhancing democracy* through Confucianism.

Confucianism can offer a package of democracy reform programs including duty-based rights; communitarian care; the promotion of a public spirit; the introduction of a remonstrance system into parliament to improve the two-party system; and the promotion of scholarly rulings, which is relatively better than the ruling power of the wealthy.

Confucianism rejects the idea of the neutrality of the state. In liberal theory, states take a neutral position to set up rules and procedures and punish those who break those rules. Liberal states, however, have no right to impose a particular moral life on individuals. Asian countries challenge the idea of the neutrality of the state because the substantial concern about the good life is, for them, a moral issue, while substantial justice is a principle of how to organize a society. This argument allows and justifies the right to interfere in and to dictate the moral life of individuals, such as by imposing moral education. For instance, the department of education in Singapore organized and produced a textbook for the Confucian moral code. Zhejiang Province in China has a law to punish those who do not save the life of a person who is in danger. In China, the politics of example promotes good standards through the mass media, talking more about positives, such as how employees find a new job through self-effort, rather than the unemployment rate. The moralist approach to politics may improve the quality of politics, but in so doing, it may well constrict the bargaining power of politics, and thus repress negative liberty.

Confucianism challenges the liberal neutrality principle on the grounds that it does not allow for the moral significance of supererogation. Acts are said to be supererogatory if their performance is praiseworthy and yet it is not morally wrong to omit them. There is no

obligation to act in a supererogatory way in the framework of rights-based morality. As Joseph Chan asserts, rights constitute neither human virtues nor virtuous relations. In a healthy close relationship, parties should best ignore rights and focus on the norms of mutual caring and loving. It is better to repair problems in a relationship by refreshing the partner's commitments to the ideal of mutual caring, rather than by introducing or invoking rights.<sup>23</sup>

### III. Empirical Testing

#### 1. The Conflict Model

The conflict model has been confirmed by the histories of East Asia in different Confucian societies. Japan's moral culture was pre-eminently Confucian in 1890, when Tani Kanjo and Torio Koyata, conservative nationalists, argued that the constitution and the Imperial Diet would give rise to an unhealthy sense of individualism among the Japanese, making each of them think only of himself or herself. As a result, the development of Japanese parliamentary institutions was to some extent limited by these ultra-conservative attitudes.<sup>24</sup>

In modern China, Yuan Shikai (袁世凱) used Confucianism to suppress democratic movements in the 1910s and restored the imperial system. Chiang Kai-shek also employed Confucianism to contain the trend toward democratization in mainland China in the 1930s-1940s and in Taiwan in the 1970s.

In South Korea, Confucianism was actively promoted by military leaders such as Park Chung Hee. As Kim Kyong-dong demonstrates, two negative elements of Confucianism—orientations of authoritarian

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<sup>23</sup> Joseph Chan, "An Alternative View," *Journal of Democracy* 8 (1997): 35-48.

<sup>24</sup> R. H. Mason, *Japan's First General Election* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 122-123.

statecraft and collectivist hierarchical behavioral traits—have been used by the political elite in their effort to maintain authoritarian rule and arrest the process of democratization.<sup>25</sup> The East Asia Barometer Survey conducted in South Korea in February 2003 revealed that attachment to Confucian values makes it harder to reject authoritarian rule than to embrace democracy.<sup>26</sup>

The conflict model was further established in Singapore in the 1980s and 1990s when Confucianism was used to argue for Asian values and against Western democracy. Confucian respect for authority does not favor an opposition movement, which is interpreted in Singapore as an attempt to undermine authority. It is believed that Confucianism operates in politics as an overriding ideology and set of moral codes to regulate political behavior and ensure discipline and loyalty.

In contemporary China, the Confucian idea of *Ren* is openly used by Kang Xiaoguang to justify what he calls the Chinese “benevolent authoritarian polity.”<sup>27</sup> Chen Ming endorsed new authoritarianism in order to secure some sort of funding and political patronage for *ruxue*.<sup>28</sup> Xi Jinping has often used Confucian terms and phrases in his speeches. Confucianism has become a source of cultural conservatism and has played out the same “Beijing Opera” of inhibiting democratic movement in contemporary China.

Take the example of the Chinese Communist Party’s ban on “factional” activities. It denies the existence of any form of factionalism, because in elite politics Confucian philosophical reasoning is that politicians represent the interests of the whole community while factions

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<sup>25</sup> Kim Kyong-dong, “Social and Cultural Developments in the Republic of Korea,” in *Democracy and Development in East Asia*, ed. Thomas W. Robinson (Washington, DC: AEI Press, 1991), 137-154.

<sup>26</sup> Chong-Min Park and Doh Chull Shin, “Do Asian Values Deter Popular Support for Democracy in South Korea?” *Asian Survey* 46, no. 3 (2006): 341-361.

<sup>27</sup> Xiaoguang Kang, “Confucianization.”

<sup>28</sup> Makeham, *Lost Soul*, 197.

seek to articulate only their own narrow interests at the expense of the broader general interest. In addition, the Confucian-inspired aversion to competition makes the Chinese hierarchy even more distrustful of factionalism. It then attempts to remove the causes of factionalism, which leads to the inexorable destruction of liberty.

## 2. The Compatible Model

Democracy can be, and has been, established in Confucian societies. However, the success of democratic transition and consolidation in Confucian societies depends on the separation of Confucianism from politics (this means that Confucianism does not openly interfere in politics) and the mixing of Confucianism, Buddhism, Western Christianity, and democratic cultures in South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan. Successful democratization requires that there is an end to the official ideology of Confucianism and a change in the political structure by which Confucianism enjoys the privileged position.

The roles played by actual actors, and their associated cultures, in democratic transitions and consolidations in East Asia must be examined. In particular, one cannot overlook the role of Confucianism's counterpart, Christianity, otherwise we miss one of the most important set of real life developments. Christian actors and churches have played a greater role in pushing for, and demanding, democracy in Taiwan and South Korea. Many key leaders, such as Chiang Ching-kuo, Lee Teng-hui, and Kim Dae-jung, are Christians.

A new interpretation of this seeming compatibility reveals the complex and subtle relationship between democracy and Confucianism. At least three factors explain their apparent compatibility. First, Confucian society has undertaken a dramatic transformation. According to the 2005 census, only 0.2 percent of contemporary South Koreans identified as adherents of Confucianism, but 29.2 percent considered themselves Christian. During the democratic transition, Christian groups

were more active than the Confucian groups who were demanding democracy in the 1980s. Moreover, liberal intellectuals who pushed democratization in both South Korea and Taiwan received their education in the West.

Second, one significant, but less emphasized, transformation is the retreat of Confucianism as a state ideology. One of the reasons why contemporary Confucianism can co-exist with democracy in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan is that Confucianism has retreated from politics and become a doctrine of private life, as demonstrated by the Confucian heart-mind doctrine developed in Hong Kong and Taiwan in the 1980s. When the political value of Confucianism receded, a Confucian personal ethic and customs indeed helped to build democratic institutions. In this way, Confucianism does not conflict with liberal democracy directly and the transformation of Confucianism has converged toward democracy. Contemporary Confucianism constitutes less of an obstacle to democracy than Islam, for example, because the former retreated from politics, while the latter is still very much part of the political machinery.

Third, center-peripheral relations come into play. The South Korean and Japanese version of peripheral Confucianism was found to be much easier to adapt to and then adopt because of the cultural and political changes that had occurred, rather than because of some fit with Chinese indigenous Confucianism. In South Korea and Japan, Confucianism can be more easily given up and discarded because abandonment does not carry with it issues of national pride, Confucianism having been “borrowed” from China in the first place. Thus, Korea was the first to abandon the examination system in East Asia and now is taking the lead in synthesizing liberalism and Confucianism in East Asia. It was likewise easy for Japan to borrow democratic institutions from the West because some elements of Confucianism could be abandoned quickly, without a sense of intellectual guilt. It has been much harder and slower for indigenous and orthodox Confucianism in China to accommodate democratic institutions than it was for the peripheral Confucianism of

Korea and Japan.

### 3. The Hybrid Model

Within modern representative institutions, there are Nominated Members of Parliament (NMP) in Singapore, and nonelected functional representatives in Hong Kong and in China. In particular, the NMP system can be seen as a modern revised version of Confucian remonstrance crafted onto a modern parliamentary system. There is also hybridity in national and local politics. Bell articulates a Chinese model of Confucian democratic meritocracy, that is, “democracy at the local” and “meritocracy at the top.”<sup>29</sup> By contrast, in South Korea, national democracy co-exists with a strong local Confucian culture in Andong, which has been the center of Confucianism since the ascent of the Joseon Dynasty.

On the surface, the existence of a variety of hybrids in real life confirms the validity of the hybrid model. Yet a deeper examination shows the school of hybridity is not impressive. At the intellectual level, many writings have just repeated what has been said before, such as the major theme of the necessity and feasibility of hybridity. Very few have designed experiments to test which kinds of hybridity are workable or unworkable. What is required is to study how democracy and Confucianism are blended to promote hybrid vigor and to avoid hybrid degeneration.

The author has been personally involved in deliberative democracy experiments in China for the last twelve years, which has provided a unique opportunity to reflect on the role of Confucianism in the hybrid model of Confucian consultative or deliberative democracy. The development of Chinese deliberative democracy in the last decade has

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<sup>29</sup> Bell, *The China Model*, 168.

drawn heavily on the Confucian tradition of public consultation, blended with Western theories of deliberative democracy and social science methodology for deliberative polling.<sup>30</sup> Take the example of Wenling city, in which, from 1996 to 2000, more than 1,190 deliberative and consultative meetings were held at the village level, 190 at the township level, and 150 in governmental organizations, schools, and business sectors. From 2005 to 2009, Zeguo township of Wenling city, Zhejiang Province, held a series of public consultations, utilizing deliberative polling techniques, which were directly inputted into the township budgeting process.<sup>31</sup> Such meetings are called *kentan*, meaning “sincere heart-to-heart discussions,” imbued with a special local flavor drawn from Confucian tradition. In this mixed practice, Western deliberative democracy and Chinese Confucian elements make their own distinct and unique contributions. This practice of local deliberative democracy is neither purely a Chinese local phenomenon nor merely the result of Western influence.<sup>32</sup>

While it is a hybrid practice, the proportion of Confucian elements, however, is smaller. When the author helped the local officials to facilitate a deliberative forum on rural women’s demands for equal payment,<sup>33</sup> the author was struck by the absence of Confucian language, the domination of individualist thinking among citizens, and the language of rights and equality in the official document. Some would demand high compensation by using the language of rights, while refusing to pay their contribution. This led to the postponement of some

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<sup>30</sup> Chen Shengyong, “The Native Resources of Deliberative Politics in China,” in *The Search for Deliberative Democracy in China*, ed. Ethan Leib and Baogang He (New York: Palgrave, 2006).

<sup>31</sup> Baogang He, *Deliberative Democracy: Theory, Method and Practice* (Beijing: China’s Social Science Publishers, 2008).

<sup>32</sup> Baogang He, “Deliberative Culture and Politics: The Persistence of Authoritarian Deliberation in China,” *Political Theory* 42, no. 1 (February 2014): 58-81.

<sup>33</sup> Baogang He, “Deliberative Democracy and Deliberative Governance: Towards Constructing a Rational and Mature Civil Society,” *Open Times*, no. 4 (2012): 23-36.

public projects at the expense of others and made it difficult to make these embryonic democratic institutions viable. At the same time, however, the resolution mechanism through villages' elders, families, and close social relations is still implemented in traditional ways.

In Wenling, villages have promoted Confucian principles through a public display of Confucian values and stories. However, apart from the elders' forum or committee, most deliberative institutions are related to the socialist system. Confucian deliberative democracy has not been fully established as a form of institutional hybridity; this means that Confucianism has not played a significant role in the hybrid model.

#### 4. The Critical Model<sup>34</sup>

The empirical evidence that Confucianism plays a role in enhancing and improving democratic life is lacking or is not substantive in East Asia. The idea that Confucianism can improve democratic life is not new. Japanese Confucian scholars advocated such an idea when Japan introduced Western-style elections and parliament in 1890. Similarly, Taiwanese Confucian scholars held the same view in the 1980s when Taiwan embarked upon democratization. However, there is very little empirical evidence to support the claim that Confucianism has played a significant role in improving and enhancing democratic life. Ironically, with democratization aided by the independence movement, Confucianism has been marginalized and even regarded by some radical DPP members as belonging to the culture of outsiders.

Take another example of Sun Yatsen's theory of the five powers. To improve democratic institutions, Sun institutionalized the Confucian examination and control system in the modern democratic constitution. However, this mix of a Western division of powers with Confucian

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<sup>34</sup> Makeham, *Lost Soul*, 265; Jiang Qing, *Zhengzhi ruxue*.

practice did not pass the test of history. While the three divisions of power operate in Taiwan, the Examination Yuan and Control Yuan became less important and were marginalized. For example, in the wake of democratization, the appointment of the chief justice was approved by the Legislative Yuan rather than Control Yuan.

Perhaps the introduction of a Nominated Member of Parliament (NMP) in Singapore can be regarded as evidence to support the claim that Confucianism can improve democratic life, as the NMP proposed a nonpartisan nomination and purely deliberative debate. However, it is arguable whether this NMP institution can be considered a Confucian or modern practice, or whether an NMP helps to improve party politics empirically. A cynical view is that the NMP was first used by the ruling party in 1990 to deal with an embarrassing image problem, as very few opposition party members were elected (two in 1984, one in 1988, and four in 1991) and the government needed a modicum of opposition voice to show that Singaporean democracy was working.

Confucian democratic perfectionism and public reason Confucianism<sup>35</sup> must be institutionalized yet their institutional designs must pass the knavery test, that is, they can survive and operate successfully if everyone is assumed to be knavish.<sup>36</sup> Confucian perfectionism might overestimate the good aspects of human nature, and overlook bargaining and material exchange in real politics. So-called “public reason Confucianism” is merely an ideal version; in the practice of public consultation or deliberation in Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, and China, the traditional Confucian hierarchical culture inhibited the development of genuine deliberation, and the way in which ordinary

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<sup>35</sup> Joseph Chan, *Confucian Perfectionism: A Political Philosophy for Modern Times* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014); Sungmoon Kim, *Public Reason Confucianism: Democratic Perfectionism and Constitutionalism in East Asia* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

<sup>36</sup> Baogang He, “Knavery and Virtue in Human Institutional Design,” *Journal of Value Inquiry* 37, no. 4 (2003): 543-553.

people engage in public discussion is far from a normative prescription of Confucian public reasoning.

In the near future, there may be a test of whether the Confucian-centric approach might be a source of a “civilizational clash.” East Asia is comparatively better than Islamic countries at developing coexistence with Western civilization. Among many reasons, perhaps, one is the retreat of Confucianism from political life into private life. In addition, Confucianism does not pose a political challenge to the Western order. East Asia does not have any political party using the term Confucianism. In contrast, there are many parties using the adjectives “Islamic.” Without a political party, Confucianism has a limited role in political life. Moreover, unlike Iranian constitutionalism in which the religious leaders hold ultimate authority over the elected president, Confucianism does not enjoy a privileged place in any constitution in China, Taiwan, South Korea, or Japan. The hybrid model of Iranian democracy is a combination of spiritual authority with elected secular authority. Such a pattern of political hybridity does not exist in Northeast Asia. The hybrid model of Confucian democracy has different features and characteristics.

However, some Confucian activists might push the Confucian-centric approach into an extreme position, arguing that the refusal of democracy is necessary to defend a Confucian way of political life. If China not only promotes its self-realization and appreciation of Confucian civilization, but also promotes a new political order which is largely based upon a nonelected legislative body of Confucian scholars and upon the contested notion of Way (道) as an alternate source of legitimacy, this might constitute a new source of civilizational conflict. If this happens, it only will provide further evidence of the conflict model, rather than prove the validity of the critical model.

#### IV. Conclusion

Empirically, the conflict model is much more accurate than the other

models. It is largely true and relevant today, and it can even apply to the other three models, that is, all three models have some element of conflict or tension between Confucianism and democracy.

The compatibility argument does not disprove the conflict model. The co-existence of democracy and Confucian society in Taiwan and South Korea has depended on the condition that Confucianism has retreated into the private sphere. Under the seemingly smooth combination of democratic and Confucian elements, there are still subtle tensions. One may argue that the apparent compatibility is plausible simply because the core areas of conflict between democracy and Confucianism have been overcome by cultural transformation and the retreat of Confucianism into private life. Therefore, at a deeper level, the compatibility model supports key aspects of the conflict model.

Despite many scholars having pursued a variety of hybrids between Confucianism and democracy, most remain at the point of intellectual advocacy, many repeat what has been said earlier (the core argument is the same with variation of language, terms, source, argumentation, and style), and most have not engaged yet in political experiments. Moreover, the hybrid model lacks clarity with respect to what dominates in the mixed model and how different elements operate in practice. There is no strong empirical evidence of working mechanisms. Behind the hybrid, there are still tensions between democracy and Confucianism.

The critical model goes beyond the conflict and compatibility models. It offers a fresh perspective by reversing the conventional wisdom about the negative or secondary role of Confucianism and reconstructing Confucian democracy. The critical model can play dual and conflicting roles: on the one hand, it can develop and promote a desirable Confucian democracy, yet, on the other, it may be used to inhibit democracy if it is co-opted as a narrow definitive feature of Chinese nationalism. If the critical model were co-opted to suit the predilections of the authoritarian state, the validity of the conflict model would be enhanced.

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# Separation, Divorce or Harakiri? The “Crisis” of Asian Democracies in Comparative Perspective

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*The Journal of Northeast Asian History*

**Volume 14 Number 2 (Winter 2017), 61-94**

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## Separation, Divorce or Harakiri? The “Crisis” of Asian Democracies in Comparative Perspective

Democracy is currently considered to be in global crisis. This crisis is often specified as one of political parties. This article investigates whether this is true for Asia by comparing the state of Asian and European political parties. It finds that, first, despite some exceptions, Asian political parties are considered comparatively trustworthy and less corrupt. Second, a retreat of political parties into the state (i.e. “ostrich-like political parties”), as has occurred in Europe, is yet undetectable in Asia. Third, the maintained link between party and voter means parties’ active mobilization, which may explain Asia citizens’ sustained faith in electoral politics. Fourth, old continuous democracies (India, Israel, and Japan), affected by perceptions of corrupt parties, appear less consolidated and stable than new ones, the opposite of the case in Europe. Altogether, Asian political parties appear relatively healthy and embedded in society, suggesting a “global crisis” of democracy may be overblown.

**Keywords:** Asia; Democracy in crisis; Europe; political parties; scorned citizens

# Separation, Divorce or Harakiri? The “Crisis” of Asian Democracies in Comparative Perspective

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## I. Introduction

In a 2010 documentary titled *After Democracy: What is the New Political Model?* five well-known intellectuals (historian John Keane, journalists William Dobson and political scientists Fareed Zakaria, Hilary Wainwright and Cheng-Li) analyzed the state of democracy in the world. The conclusion they all reached was that, no matter the region, the classical model of democracy based on party government and parliamentary representation was facing its most severe crisis since the end of World War II in 1945, at least.

In a remarkable posthumously published book, Peter Mair (2013) linked the current crisis of representative democracy in Europe with the crisis of political parties (Casal Bértoa 2017a). According to him, “The age of party democracy has passed” (2013, 1) because of the divorce between the *demos* (i.e. citizens) and the *kratos* (i.e. parties/government).

The current article constitutes a first attempt to examine the extent to which this is the case in Asia. And, in particular, to see if the “pessimist current” that is now devastating Western European scholarship (e.g. Biezen *et al.* 2012; Webb *et al.* 2002)<sup>1</sup> can be also

applied to Asian—both old and new—democracies. In order to do so, the article will follow Mair’s thesis regarding the “hollowing out” of Western European democracy and see to what extent it can be applied to Asia. For that will be shown party and electoral data for twenty-three Asian democracies in various historical democratic periods covering the years from 1949, when the first free and fair elections took place in independent Israel, to December 2016.

## II. Has European “Pessimism” Travelled to Asia?

At the very beginning of his posthumous book, Mair (2013) summarizes the current state of affairs in Western European politics by stating that the golden age of party politics is forever gone. With such an unequivocal, although controversial, assertion he wants to suggest that while parties have not disappeared from the face of the earth, they are now in such a crisis that, paraphrasing Schattschneider (1942, 1), democracy is not “unthinkable save” in their terms anymore.

This is due to the mutual withdrawal of both citizens and political parties from the political arena. In a recent work published “in Mair’s honour” (Müller-Rommel and Casal Bértoa 2016), Müller-Rommel perfectly summarizes this idea in the following way:

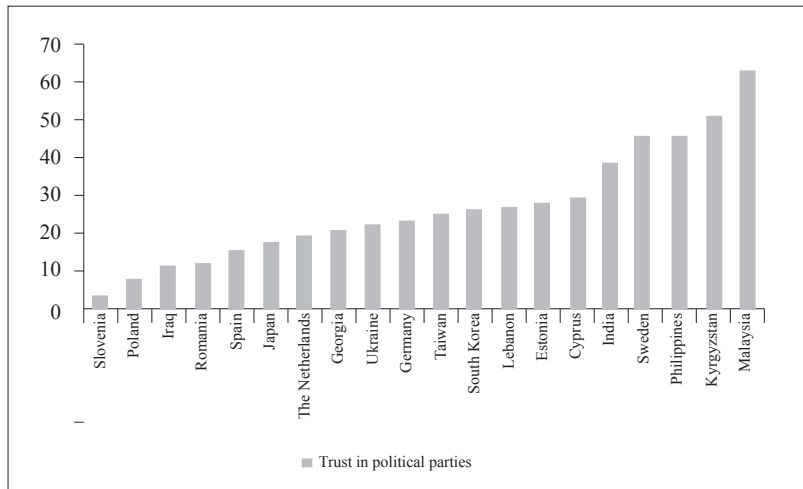
‘Popular democracy’ [has] become ‘hollowed out’.... Political parties are declining or even failing for at least two reasons. First, citizens are obviously withdrawing from conventional political participation. Several empirical studies have shown that... political parties are no longer able to mobilize ordinary citizens.... Citizens either retreat into private life or get involved in new forms of political participation and representation

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<sup>1</sup> According to Muller-Rommel, North American scholarship, mainly represented by Dalton *et al.* (2011), is much more optimistic (2016, 4).

with institutions that are clearly located outside the traditional spectrum of party politics. Second, political parties have become more dependent on public funding [as well as] subject to new party laws and regulations.... Former citizen-oriented voluntary party organizations (parties as social agents) turned into new ‘public service agencies’ with decreasing internal organizational autonomy. Finally... political parties have increasingly become ‘governing’ rather than ‘representing’ organizations. (2016, 4-5)

In other words, and at least in Europe, the crisis of democracy is seen as a crisis of political parties themselves. But is this also true for Asia? In order to see if that is the case, figure 1 displays data from the last wave of the World Values Survey (WVS) on the percentage of respondents who expressed their trust in political parties in twenty democracies in both Europe and Asia.

Figure 1. Trust in Asian and European political parties



Source WVS (2014)

As evident in the figure above, and with very few exceptions (i.e. Kyrgyzstan and Malaysia), the level of trust in political parties is rather low; specifically, it does not even reach fifty percent. Interestingly enough, however, the situation in Europe is far worse than in Asia. Thus, the average level of trust in political parties in Europe only reaches 20.7 percent, while in Asia the figure is 13.3 points higher. Moreover, in most European democracies not even a quarter of the respondents consider political parties trustworthy institutions. In post-communist countries like Slovenia, Poland or Romania the situation is certainly worrying. In clear contrast, most Asian countries are at the higher end of the rankings. Only Iraq—not surprisingly—and Japan—very surprisingly—present levels of trust below twenty-five percent.

The above-cited “better-off” situation of political parties in Asia than in Europe is also confirmed by data from Transparency International’s Global Corruption Barometer (GCB). According to figure 2, which displays in red all those countries where parties are considered to be the “most corrupted institution,” this is the case in all (surveyed) European democracies, with just one exception, namely, Denmark.

Figure 2. Institutions perceived to be among the most affected by corruption



Source GCB (2013)

In Asia the situation is once again a bit different. There, out of nineteen democracies surveyed, parties are considered to be more corrupt than other state institutions (e.g. police, military, parliament, judiciary, etc.) in not even half of them; in fact, only in eight, namely, India, Iraq, Israel, South Korea, Nepal, Taiwan, Thailand and Turkey.

All in all, one might wonder to what extent Asian political parties and, by extension, Asian democracies share the crisis of their European counterparts. In fact, also looking at the abovementioned surveys, one could conclude that Asian political parties are still in good shape or, at least, their health is stronger than European ones. Is this due to citizens' political engagement, parties' efforts to keep close to society, or both? In other words, is the process of mutual withdrawal observed by Mair in Europe absent in Asia?

### III. Dataset

In order to try to answer the previous questions, this paper employs a totally new database containing information about electoral behaviour and party system development in twenty-three Asian democratic states. The geographical scope stretches from the Black and Red Seas to the Pacific Ocean. One may understand as “democratic” all those countries displaying a score of six or more in the Polity IV index.

As a result, this new pan-Asian database covers all Asian democracies between 1948 and 2016: from post-independence Burma (currently Myanmar) and Ceylon (currently Sri Lanka) to the most recent post-Saddam Iraq, going well beyond any existing database in terms of the number of Asian countries considered.

The number of democratic periods (see table 1) is higher than the number of countries because some countries experienced democratic collapse (e.g. Bangladesh, Laos, Russia, Thailand) or interruption (e.g. Nepal, Pakistan). One of the most extreme cases is Sri Lanka, where civil war, unsuccessful cease-fires and repeated episodes of political violence

led to multiple democratic breakdowns across its history since independence in 1948. Bangladesh, Pakistan, Thailand and Turkey have also had a fragmented history, with different party systems and political parties developing after each coup d'état. Similarly, in Malaysia and Nepal racial and ideological strife, followed by dictatorship and/or civil war, gave way to different party systems.

Table 1. Democratic polities in Asia between 1948-2016 according to region

Country	Period	Country	Period
<i>Central Asia</i>		<i>Southeast Asia</i>	
Kyrgyzstan	2011-2016	East Timor	2002-2016
Russia	2000-2006	Indonesia	1999-2016
<i>South Asia</i>		Laos	1957-1959
Bangladesh I	1972-1973	Malaysia I	1957-1968
Bangladesh II	1991-2006	Malaysia II	2008-2013
India	1950-2016	Myanmar	1948-1961
Nepal I	1999-2001	Philippines	1987-2016
Nepal II	2006-2016	Thailand I	1992-2005
Pakistan I <sup>2</sup>	1973-1976	Thailand II	2011-2013
Pakistan II	1988-1998	<i>Middle East</i>	
Pakistan III	2010-2016	Iraq	2014-2016
Sri Lanka I	1948-1981	Israel	1949-2016
Sri Lanka II	2001-2002	Lebanon	2004-2016
Sri Lanka III	2006-2008	Syria	1954-1957
Sri Lanka IV	2015	Turkey I	1946-1953
<i>East Asia</i>		Turkey II	1961-1979
Japan	1952-2016	Turkey III	1983-2013
Mongolia	1992-2016		
South Korea	1988-2016		
Taiwan	1992-2016		

Source Polity IV (2017).

<sup>2</sup> No democratic elections took place in the period between 1956 and 1970.

Altogether the dataset comprises sixty-eight years,<sup>3</sup> thirty-four different historical party systems (see table 3),<sup>4</sup> and 164 elections.<sup>5</sup>

#### IV. Peter Mair Travels to Asia: Divorce or Just (Temporary) Separation?

As discussed above, there are two main problems with European political parties. The first involves “scorned” citizens’ increasing lack of involvement, the second refers to parties’ entrenchment in the state as if a protective fortress for their “ostrich-like” attitudes. Each of these problems will be examined in turn.

##### 1. “Scorned” Citizens

###### *Party Membership*

One of the first signs of such withdrawal from the political arena can be observed in the fact that citizens do not engage so closely with political parties as they once did, especially during the “golden age” of the “mass party” (Katz and Mair 1995; Casal Bértoa 2016). One of the clear main examples that this is the case is the low levels of party membership observed across Asia.

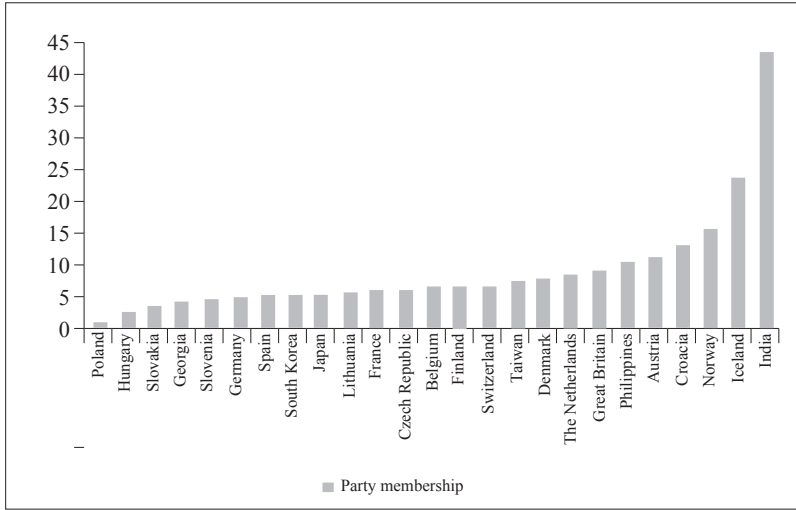
Indeed, as evident in figure 3 displaying data of the last wave (i.e. 2014) of the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) study of Citizenship on “participation in political parties,” just above fourteen percent of respondents in Asian democracies were members—either

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<sup>3</sup> The number of years per country taken into account varies between just two (Iraq and Laos) and almost seven decades (e.g. Myanmar and Sri Lanka).

<sup>4</sup> The number of historical party systems taken into account varies between just one (e.g. India, Israel, Japan) and four (Sri Lanka).

<sup>5</sup> The number of electoral cycles taken into account varies between just one (Iraq) and twenty-three (Japan).

Figure 3. Party membership in Twenty-five Asian and European democracies

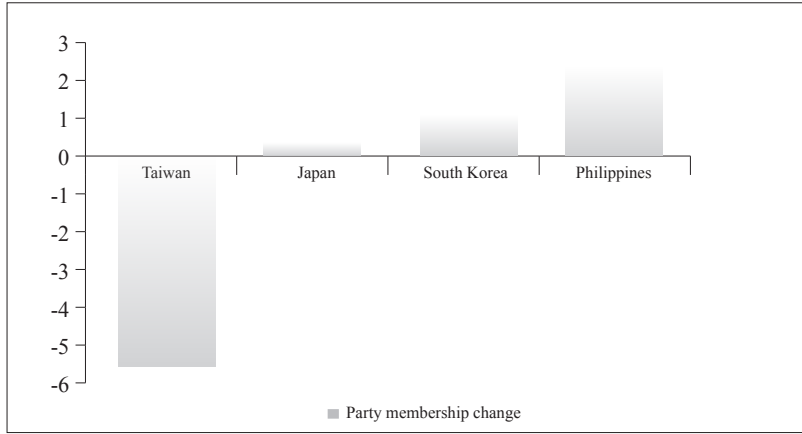


Source ISSP (2014)

active or passive—of a political party. Excluding India, a clear (world) outlier (see Whiteley 2011, 24) with more than forty-three percent of respondents stating they belong to a political party, the average party membership in Asian democracies for which data is available decreases to just 7.2 percent, very similar to the average party membership level observed in European democracies (i.e. 7.6). Even looking at only continuous Western European democracies, the percentage of respondents that declare to be members would be just 9.2 percent.

Although the average scores in figure 3 clearly conceal large variations across Asian democracies, it is surprising to see Japan, one of the most consolidated democracies in Asia, at the bottom of the scale with a bit more than five percent. Clearly, in marked contrast with what happens in Europe, where levels of party membership in new post-communist Eastern European democracies are almost half—on average—that of Western European countries, in Asia there does not seem to be a divide between old (i.e. Japan and India) and new (i.e.

Figure 4. Change in party membership in Asian democracies between 2004 and 2014



Source ISSP (2014)

Philippines, Taiwan and South Korea) democracies. In fact, in Philippines and Taiwan the level of party membership is, respectively, more than and almost double that of South Korea (see figure 3). More surprisingly, the former two, together with India, present higher levels of membership than in many Western European continuous democracies.

What is even more surprising is that, while on average the level of party membership between 2004 and 2014 declined in both European and Asian democracies,<sup>6</sup> the degree of decline in the latter was much lower (just half a point) than in the former (almost one point).<sup>7</sup> However, it is important to note that, as displayed in figure 4, much of that decrease comes from just one country (Taiwan), while in the other three party membership increased (e.g. South Korea and Philippines) or barely remained the same (e.g. Japan). This, together with the fact that Asian

<sup>6</sup> India excluded.

<sup>7</sup> Exactly two points if one considers only those European democracies for which data is available in both ISSP waves.

parties are much more rooted than many European ones, might lead one to think that even if in crisis, Asian political parties are coping better than European ones. Especially when taking into consideration that in Europe, out of sixteen countries surveyed both in 2004 and 2014, party membership only increased—on average—in three countries, namely, France (barely 1 point), Hungary (0.7) and Germany (0.1).

One might think the aforementioned findings are a result of a lack of data (i.e. only five countries surveyed by the ISSP). However, using a different dataset (e.g. WVS) would produce an outcome pretty much the same. Thus, following from figure A in the Appendix also portraying the level of respondents declaring to be party members, most Asian parties have a higher level of membership than European ones. With the exception of the above-cited South Korea and Japan as well as Iraq,<sup>8</sup> therefore, all Asian countries are situated above seventeen percent—ten points higher than the European average. Moreover, and what clearly confirms the findings, six of the nine Asian countries surveyed are at the top of the ranking.<sup>9</sup>

### *Electoral Turnout*

Is such a rosy picture also discernible at the electoral level in Asia? In other words, are Asian citizens still more willing to participate in electoral politics than European ones?

Table 2, which displays the level of voter turnout for all twenty-three Asian democracies under study with the exception of Syria,<sup>10</sup> shows that contrary to sixteen European continuous democracies,<sup>11</sup> where a

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<sup>8</sup> The very low levels of party membership in Iraq are clearly explained by post-authoritarian legacies (Rangwala 2005).

<sup>9</sup> Cyprus is the only (European) exception.

<sup>10</sup> Voter turnout data was available for the 1954 parliamentary elections in Syria and the 1946 general elections in Turkey.

<sup>11</sup> These are Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, The Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

Table 2. Voter turnout in twenty-three Asian democracies

Countries	1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s
<i>Bangladesh</i>				54.9			75	
<i>East Timor</i>							83.2	74.8
<i>India</i>		61.7	58.2	57.9	60.8	59.2	58.2	66.4
<i>Indonesia</i>						93.3	77.6	75.1
<i>Iraq</i>								60.5
<i>Israel</i>	86.9	79.9	82.8	78.9	79.1	78.5	65.4	70.1
<i>Japan</i>		75.9	71.8	71.1	68.8	66.7	64.3	56
<i>Kyrgyzstan</i>								56.6
<i>Laos</i>		78.9						
<i>Lebanon</i>							50.3	
<i>Malaysia</i>		78.1	76.3				76	84.8
<i>Mongolia</i>						92	79.5	69.4
<i>Myanmar</i>	49.8	35.4	66					
<i>Nepal</i>						65.8	63.3	78.3
<i>Pakistan</i>				63	43.1	40.3	44.6	53.6
<i>Philippines</i>					90	73.4	73.9	78.1
<i>Russia</i>						62.3	55.7	
<i>South Korea</i>					75.7	67.9	54.4	56.2
<i>Sri Lanka</i>	55.8	69.9	78.2	85.8			68.7	77.7
<i>Syria</i>		n/a						
<i>Taiwan</i>						69.3	61.3	70.5
<i>Thailand</i>						62	72.6	75
<i>Turkey</i>	n/a	87.8	72.4	68.6	92.8	85.4	81.8	87.6
<i>Asian average (continuous)*</i>	64.2 (86.9)	71 (72.5)	72.2 (70.9)	68.6 (69.3)	72.9 (69.6)	70.5 (68.1)	67 (62.6)	70 (64.2)
<i>European average</i>	82.2	84	85.3	84.6	82.6	78.6	76.5	75.4

\* “Continuous” Asian democracies are India, Israel and Japan.

Source IDEA (2017a)

Table 3. Patterns of turnout

Record levels of abstention		Frequency of record high abstention		
Country	Years	Period	% (Asia)	% (Europe)
Old democracies				
India	1971, 1962, 1991	1960s	10	6.1
Israel	2006, 2009, 2012, 2003	1970s	10	2
Japan	2014, 2012, 1996	1980s	0	2
		1990s	20	24.5
		2000s	30	40.8
		2010s	30	24.5
		<i>Total</i>	100	100
New democracies				
Indonesia	2004, 2009, 2014	1980s	8.3	
Mongolia	2012, 2016, 2008	1990s	33.3	
Pakistan	1997, 1993, 1998	2000s	37.5	
Philippines	2007, 1992, 1995	2010s	20.8	
South Korea	2008, 2012, 2000	<i>Total</i>	100	
Taiwan	2008, 2004, 2001			
Thailand	1992, 1995, 1996			
Turkey III	1987, 1983, 2011			

Source IDEA (2017a)

steady decline in levels of electoral turnout can clearly be observed since the 1960s, culminating in 75.4 in the 2010-16 period, in Asia—on average—there is no such trend. Thus, while the 2000s present a particularly low level of voter turnout with just sixty-seven percent, just three more than in the 1940s, electoral participation in the last seven years has increased three points on average. In fact, looking at the average level of turnout in each country, one can see that with very few exceptions (i.e. East Timor, Indonesia and Mongolia), the level of electoral participation in 2016 was higher in most Asian democracies. In countries like India, Malaysia, Nepal, Taiwan, and Thailand as well as—

to a lesser extent—Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Turkey, citizens did not vote in legislative elections as they do now.<sup>12</sup> This is in clear contrast with what can be observed in almost every single European country (Casal Bértoa and Rama 2017; Mair 2013).

But this contrast in the extent to which electoral participation differs in both Asia and Europe can also be observed by looking at patterns of abstention, rather than general trends. Table 3 looks at the three elections with record abstention levels in both old and new Asian democracies and compares them with the patterns observed in Europe. The result could not be clearer. While in European continuous democracies the number of elections with very low turnout has exponentially increased over time—concentrating mostly in the last sixteen years—in the three Asian continuous democracies the increase is not so remarkable. Moreover, only in Japan were the most recent parliamentary elections the most sparsely attended since the beginning of democracy at the end of World War II, confirming a critical trend (Kraus et al. 2017) already visible in the previous sub-section (i.e. very low party membership). In India, for example, none of the record abstention elections have taken place during the last quarter of a century. An analysis of voter turnout patterns in new Asian democracies simply confirms what has just been said, namely, Asia citizens have not abandoned the electoral arena to the extent that European voters have. And this can also be observed in four out of five Asian regions: the only exception is East Asia (see table A in the Appendix).

### *Electoral Volatility*

However, the fact that citizens continue to go to the polls every four/five years and cast their votes does not mean that they do so for the same

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<sup>12</sup> Even comparing only Asian and European continuous democracies, the decreasing trend in the latter is not so clearly visible in the former.

Table 4. Electoral volatility in eighteen Asian democracies<sup>13</sup>

Countries	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s
<i>East Timor</i>						38.4	23.1
<i>India</i>	15.2	18.4	20.3	18.5	15.3	9.1	22.4
<i>Indonesia</i>						21.6	27.6
<i>Israel</i>	15.2	6.1	20.7	17.1	19.7	23.2	24.6
<i>Japan</i>	7.6	6.2	3.6	3.9	16.1	10.4	22.4
<i>Kyrgyzstan</i>							37.7
<i>Malaysia</i>	37.4	22.7					5.2
<i>Mongolia</i>					19.9	14.3	13.4
<i>Myanmar</i>		14.7					
<i>Nepal</i>							19.2
<i>Pakistan</i>					17.5		28.9
<i>Philippines</i>					46.9	55.4	41
<i>Russia</i>						27.2	
<i>South Korea</i>					29	26.5	21.3
<i>Sri Lanka</i>	26.4	13.1	11.7				
<i>Taiwan</i>					9	11.5	19.4
<i>Thailand</i>					21.8	34.2	
<i>Turkey</i>	46.4	17.4	16.5	38.5	20	33	11
<i>Asian average (continuous)*</i>	24.7 (12.7)	14.1 (10.2)	14.6 (14.9)	19.5 (13.2)	21.5 (17)	25.4 (14.2)	23.4 (23.1)
<i>European average</i>	6.9	7.1	8.7	8.4	12	11	16.6

Source Casal Bértoa (2017b).

political party. In fact, and as it has been pointed out by most “party system change” scholarship (Casal Bértoa and Rama 2017; Chiaramonte and Emanuele 2016; Mair 2013), the degree to which European voters change their partisan preferences from one election to the next has exponentially increased in the last decades.

<sup>13</sup> Electoral volatility could not be calculated for Bangladesh, Iraq, Laos, Lebanon and Syria due to the lack of two consecutive democratic elections.

Thus, as evident in the above table displaying levels of electoral volatility calculated according to Pedersen (1979)<sup>14</sup> since the 1950s, one can observe that the average level of electoral instability in Europe's continuous democracies doubled in the last three decades and almost tripled since the 1950s. This is in clear contrast to the average levels of volatility in Asia, which, even if seven points higher than in Europe, have experienced a small decrease in the 2010-16 period. Electoral volatility in East Timor, Malaysia, Mongolia, Philippines, South Korea and Turkey exhibited lower levels of volatility in 2016 than any other time in their histories.

Interestingly enough, however, unstable politics—at least at the electoral level—seems to be the norm in more consolidated Asian democracies like Israel, India and Japan. In all three countries volatility has increased during the last decade, especially in the latter two, where it has more than doubled. Still, when one looks at the average trend over time, the story is not so straightforward, nor can a general (increasing) trend be detected (see scores in brackets in table 4).<sup>15</sup>

Once again an examination of the patterns of electoral volatility in both Asia and Europe, and in particular the number of elections with record volatility levels, makes clear the differentiation between the two continents. Thus, while elections have become more and more unpredictable in Europe, especially in the last two decades when more than half of the most unstable elections have taken place, in Asian old democracies electoral volatility has reached record levels only very recently, i.e. the last elections in Israel and India and the last two in Japan. This is in clear contrast with Asian newer democracies, where

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<sup>14</sup>  $TEV = \sum |V_{i,t} - V_{i,t-1}|$ , in which TEV stands for 'total electoral volatility',  $V_{i,t}$  is the vote share for a party  $i$ th at a given election ( $t$ ) and  $V_{i,t-1}$  is the vote share of the same party  $i$ th at the previous elections ( $t-1$ ).

<sup>15</sup> Perhaps with the exception of Japan, characterized by rather stable electoral politics at least until very recently (Mair and Sakano 1998), the story of Asian continuous democracies seems to be one of continuous re-alignment.

Table 5. Patterns of volatility

Record levels of abstention		Frequency of record high abstention		
Country	Years	Period	% (Asia)	% (Europe)
Old democracies				
India	1980, 2014, 1962	1960s	11.1	2.9
Israel	2012, 1977, 2003	1970s	11.1	17.6
Japan	1996, 2012, 2014	1980s	11.1	8.8
		1990s	11.1	17.6
		2000s	11.1	23.5
		2010s	44.4	29.4
			100	100
New democracies				
Mongolia	2000, 2016, 1996	1980s	4.8	
Pakistan	2013, 1997, 1990	1990s	28.6	
Philippines	2001, 1992, 2010	2000s	38.1	
South Korea	2008, 1992, 2012	2010s	28.6	
Taiwan	2016, 2012, 2008		100	
Thailand	2001, 1996, 2005			
Turkey III	2002, 1987, 2007			

Source: Adeney (2017), Casal Bértoa and Rama (2017), Lee and Casal Bértoa (2017).

“earthquake elections” tended to accumulate during the 2000s.

In terms of the different Asian regions, one can see once again that there is no clear trend (table A in the Appendix). While in Southeast Asia and the Middle East volatility has decreased on average, it has increased exponentially in both South Asia and Central Asia, and remained more or less the same since the 1990s in East Asia. Clearly, the post-communist legacy of Central Asian countries (Epperly 2011) makes their politics the most volatile in Asia.

### *Electoral Fragmentation*

In Europe, as already mentioned, a great part of the volatility has been due to the appearance of new parties on the political scene (Chiaromonte

Table 6. Electoral fragmentation in twenty-three Asian democracies

Countries	1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s
<i>Bangladesh</i>				1.8			2.9	
<i>East Timor</i>							4.1	4.2
<i>India</i>		3.6	4.5	3.9	4.2	6	7.7	6.8
<i>Indonesia</i>						5.1	9.1	8.9
<i>Iraq</i>								n/a
<i>Israel</i>	5.4	5.5	4.7	4.4	4.3	7.1	7.8	8.2
<i>Japan</i>		3.6	2.9	3.8	3.5	4.3	3.6	4.5
<i>Kyrgyzstan</i>								7.7
<i>Laos</i>		n/a						
<i>Lebanon</i>							n/a	
<i>Malaysia</i>		3.6	4.1				5.6	5.5
<i>Mongolia</i>						2.7	2.6	3.4
<i>Myanmar</i>		3.1	2.4					
<i>Nepal</i>						3.9	5.3	5.7
<i>Pakistan</i>				4.8	3.6	3.4	4.7	5.5
<i>Philippines</i>					7.6	4.2		4.6
<i>Russia</i>						11.2	6.6	
<i>South Korea</i>					4.2	3.9	3.7	3.5
<i>Sri Lanka</i>	3.8	3.8	4.4	3.1			2.8	2.6
<i>Syria</i>		3.8						
<i>Taiwan</i>						2.8	3.1	3
<i>Thailand</i>						6	3	2.8
<i>Turkey</i>	1.3	2.2	3.1	3.7	3.5	5.9	4.5	3
<i>Asian average (continuous)</i>	3.5 (5.4)	3.7 (4.2)	3.7 (4)	3.6 (4)	4.4 (4)	5.1 (5.8)	4.8 (6.4)	5 (6.5)
<i>European average</i>	3.9	3.8	3.8	4.2	4.4	5.1	4.8	5.5

Source Casal Bértoa (2017b).

Table 7. Patterns of fragmentation

Record levels of abstention		Frequency of record high abstention		
Country	Years	Period	% (Asia)	% (Europe)
Old democracies				
India	2009, 2004, 2014	1960s	0	5.5
Israel	1999, 2006, 2012	1970s	0	7.5
Japan	1993, 2012, 2000	1980s	0	10
		1990s	22.2	27.5
		2000s	44.4	12.5
		2010s	33.3	37.5
			100	100
New democracies				
Indonesia	2009, 2014, 2004	1980s	4	
Mongolia	2012, 2000, 2016	1990s	28	
Pakistan	2013, 2008, 1997	2000s	44	
Philippines	2004, 2007, 1992, 2013	2010s	24	
South Korea	1988, 2006, 2008		100	
Taiwan	2001, 2004, 2016			
Thailand	1995, 1992, 1996			
Turkey III	1999, 1995, 2002			

Source Lee and Casal Bértoa (2017), Casal Bértoa and Rama (2017).

and Emanuele 2015; Mainwaring et al. 2016), which have been “smart” enough to occupy the space left by colluding traditional parties (Katz and Mair 2009) and capture voters’ grievances (Hernández and Kriesi 2016).

The table above displays the levels of electoral fragmentation in both Asia and Europe. Using Laakso and Taagepera’s (1979) index,<sup>16</sup> one may observe that the “effective” number of parties (ENP) in the electoral arena has steadily increased on average in Europe since the end of World War II. A similar picture can be observed in Asia, especially until the 1990s when the ENP stabilized around five. Interestingly enough, the

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<sup>16</sup> ENPP=1/Σvi<sup>2</sup>, where vi is the proportion of seats of the ith party.

only country where electoral fragmentation during the last seven years has substantially decreased is India.

A very similar picture follows from table 7. The percentage of elections with a record high number of parties increases in both old and new democracies until the 2010s, in clear contrast with European democracies where the increase is almost linear—with the 2000s as the only exception. Still, and looking at table A in the Appendix showing how electoral fragmentation has increased in almost all Asian regions, it is possible to conclude that, like in Europe, fragmented politics is the future.

### *Electoral Turnover*

The problem, however, is not so much that new parties are being formed in both Europe and Asia. The formation of new parties can be considered to be a healthy regenerative process (Lane and Ersson 2007). What can be considered to have a negative impact portraying to what extent traditional political parties are in crisis on both continents is the exponential and steady increase in the percentage of votes for new parties. In fact, when one compares continuous Asian and European democracies (table 8) the trend is very clear. What differentiates both continents, however, is the degree of change, especially in the last decade. Thus, while in European consolidated democracies the average support for new parties, understood as those which first began to contest elections no earlier than 1960, has increased on average between six and nine points every decade since 1970, in Asian continuous democracies such an incremental trend (i.e. around nine points) stopped in 2009. Indeed, as can be observed in the last column of the table below, electoral support for “new parties” barely increased in Japan, while it even decreased (by 2.3 points) in Israel.

Interestingly, using a different poll of countries and a different time period does not change the findings whatsoever. Thus, even considering “new parties” only those starting to contest elections no earlier than 1990

Table 8. Percentage of vote for “new parties” in eight Asian democracies

Countries	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s
<i>Bangladesh</i>		19.9				
<i>India</i>	4.6	31.1	43.8	54	52.8	60.8
<i>Israel</i>	55.4	82.5	87.7	91.6	92.7	90.4
<i>Japan</i>	11.9	18.8	18.7	32.3	58.5	59.8
<i>Malaysia</i>	12.6					
<i>Myanmar</i>	4					
<i>Pakistan</i>	40.2					
<i>Sri Lanka</i>	1.1	3.4				
<i>Asian average (continuous)</i>	18.5 (24)	31.1 (44.1)	50.1	59.3	68	70.3
<i>European average</i>	4.4	9.1	14.4	22.4	29.3	37.5

Note ““New parties” are here defined as those that, polling at least one percent of the vote, first began to contest elections no earlier than 1960.

Source Casal Bértoa (2017b) and Gallagher et al. (2011).

(see table B in the Appendix), the percentage of vote for new political forces has increased in Asia, like in Europe, over time (some seven/eight points per decade), no matter the region taken into consideration (see also table A in the Appendix).

## 2. “Ostrich-like” Parties

As evident in the previous sub-section, and notwithstanding the divorce between voters and parties in particular countries (e.g. Japan, Pakistan), representative democracy in Asia seems not to have experienced the type of steady decline observed in most European consolidated democracies. On average, abstention, volatility, and votes for “new” parties are still higher, which is unsurprising given the fact that most Asian countries have either democratized very recently (e.g. Indonesia, South Korea, Taiwan) or suffered from frequent authoritarian interruptions (e.g. Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Thailand). But democracies in Asia have certainly caught up in terms of systemic fragmentation and party membership, to

the point that a certain convergence with European continuous democracies seems to have taken place.

Does this mean that Asian citizens/voters are different from European ones? Or is the state of democracies in Asia perhaps due to the fact that political parties have not (yet) withdrawn from the electoral arena as European parties have (see section one)? Have Asian parties followed their European counterparts' example to the point of becoming "public utilities" (Biezen 2004) or do they still depend on the financial support and legitimacy of their followers?

Unfortunately data regarding party (funding) regulation in Asia and party patronage practices is very still very scarce.<sup>17</sup> However, using data compiled from the International IDEA's dataset, the Comparative Constitutions Project (CCP) and the GCB, one may try to examine the extent to which Asian political parties have become entrenched in the state to find refuge from citizens' "disloyalty".

#### *State Finance*

One of the main instruments used by political parties to cope with citizens' increasing tendency (at least in Europe) to withdraw from politics is public subsidies. This allows parties financial independence from citizens and guarantees a minimum annual amount of resources for their political functioning. The result, at least in Europe (Casal Bértoa and Rama 2017), is a very high financial dependency on the state discouraging political parties to search for new members and encourage the political involvement of citizens. In fact, out of all twenty-eight European Union democracies, only three (i.e. Italy, Malta and Switzerland)<sup>18</sup> do not guarantee state aid to political parties achieving a certain minimum level of electoral support.

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<sup>17</sup> For example, the largest survey on party patronage up to date (i.e. Kopecký et al. 2016) does not contain any Asian democracy.

<sup>18</sup> Italy only since January 2017.

Table 9. Party management/colonization by/of the state in twenty-three Asian democracies

Country	Management		Colonization
	Public finance	Constitutionalization	Corruption
<i>Bangladesh</i>	No	Yes	3.4
<i>East Timor</i>	Yes	Yes	n/a
<i>India</i>	No	Yes	4.4
<i>Indonesia</i>	Yes	Yes	4.3
<i>Iraq</i>	No	Yes	3.4
<i>Israel</i>	Yes	Yes	4.2
<i>Japan</i>	Yes	No	4.2
<i>Kyrgyzstan</i>	No	Yes	4.2
<i>Laos</i>	n/a	No	n/a
<i>Lebanon</i>	No	No	3.8
<i>Malaysia</i>	No	No	3.8
<i>Mongolia</i>	Yes	Yes	3.7
<i>Myanmar</i>	No	Yes	n/a
<i>Nepal</i>	No	Yes	4.6
<i>Pakistan</i>	No	Yes	4.2
<i>Philippines</i>	No	Yes	3.7
<i>Russia</i>	Yes	No	4.2
<i>South Korea</i>	Yes	Yes	3.9
<i>Sri Lanka</i>	Yes	Yes	3.4
<i>Syria</i>	No	No	n/a
<i>Taiwan</i>	Yes	Yes	4.1
<i>Thailand</i>	Yes	Yes	4
<i>Turkey</i>	Yes	Yes	3.9
Total (%) Average	11 (47.8%)	17 (73.9)	4

Source IDEA (2017b), CCP (2017) and GCB (2013)

In clear contrast to European political parties, most Asian political parties still rely on the financial help of their supporters. Thus only eleven Asian democracies—i.e. less than half—guarantee public subsidies to political parties. In other words, and in clear contrast to what

happens in Europe, Asian political parties are encouraged to increase their followers so as not to become financially bankrupt and disappear.

### *Party Constitutionalization*

Another way in which European political parties have managed to protect themselves against the crisis of social engagement is by legally guaranteeing their place at the political table. Thus, most European constitutions guarantee the “essential role” of political parties for the healthy functioning of democracy (Biezen 2012). Thus, and with just four exceptions (i.e. Belgium, Denmark, Ireland and the Netherlands), all EU countries have incorporated a reference to political parties in their constitutions.

This is in clear contrast to what can be observed in Asia where, despite the fact that political parties have become more and more constitutionalized, especially after the “Third Wave” of democratization (Möbrant 2017), there are still various countries where political parties remain outside constitutional protection. Japan, with one of the oldest constitutions in Asia, is perhaps the most paradigmatic example. Other examples are Laos, Lebanon, Malaysia, Russia and Syria.<sup>19</sup>

All in all, while 83.7 percent of EU countries’ constitutions regulate (and protect) political parties, less than three-quarters do the same in Asia. This means that most Asian political parties still need to attract citizens’ support on a daily basis and cannot rely on the legal protection and legitimacy guaranteed by the process of party constitutionalization observed in Europe.

### *Party Colonization*

Another implication of parties’ withdrawal from the electoral arena to the

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<sup>19</sup> The Laos Constitution, though, contains mentions of the “Party” (i.e. Lao People’s Revolutionary Party). Meanwhile, the Russian Constitution mentions (once) the “multi party system.”

state has been their colonization of the latter. Following Kopecký and Spirova (2011), a proxy may be used (i.e. the extent to which parties are perceived to be affected by corruption) to try to measure the extent to which Asian states have been colonized by political parties, and if this degree of colonization is greater than that seen in Europe.

The last column in table 9 clearly shows that with most values around four (of a maximum of five), Asian parties are considered to be highly corrupt. Furthermore, and more interestingly, they seem to be uniformly corrupt: the only exceptions are Bangladesh, Iraq<sup>20</sup> and Sri Lanka. This contrasts with the trend in continuous European democracies, where even if the average is very close (3.7), there are important differences: Danish parties, at 2.9, are perceived to be the least corrupt, while Italian ones, at 4.5, are considered the most.<sup>21</sup>

Notwithstanding the fact that this is just a proxy, as the aforementioned scores only capture public perceptions—rather than actual corruption—it seems that Asian parties have been quick learners in terms of state colonization, perhaps influenced by the authoritarian legacies of their recent pasts (Hicken and Kuchonta 2014).

## V. Conclusions

This article began with the assumption of a crisis of democracy in general and of political parties in particular. Departing from the European experience, encompassing the higher number of consolidated continuous democracies in the world, it was examined to what extent democracy is also “hollowing out” in Asia. The following is a summary of the findings.

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<sup>20</sup> However, the survey took place only at the time of transition (before 2013), and certainly before Iraq could be considered to be a democratic country (2014 according to Polity IV).

<sup>21</sup> The average level for post-communist EU democracies is also very similar to Asian ones, namely, uniformly around four.

First of all, and notwithstanding the deep democratic crisis in some Asian countries, both old (e.g. Japan) and new (e.g. Iraq), most Asian political parties seem to be in a better shape than their European counterparts. Not only on average are they trusted more, in most countries other state institutions are considered to be less corrupt. This is certainly surprising given that most models and empirical tests of the relationship between trust/corruption and democracy assume that the former rises/falls as a democracy matures (Treisman 2000).

Secondly, even if in absolute terms Asian democracies are on average still less consolidated (e.g. lower turnout) and stable (e.g. higher volatility and votes for “new parties”) than European ones, the general tendency observed in the latter regarding a clear divorce between citizens and political parties is still not visible. Thus, not only has voter turnout not decreased in the last decade, but the instability in the patterns of competition at the electoral level have remained more or less the same. Moreover, and in clear contrast to Western European democracies, most record elections in terms of abstention or volatility occurred in previous decades. Not even the vote for “new parties,” although still high, has increased so exponentially as in Europe. The only exception to this rosier picture is fragmentation: Asian party systems continue to be increasingly open decade after decade to newly emerging political forces. Although, and for the first time since the early 1980s, this is only so to a lesser extent than in European democracies.

Thirdly, one of the reasons for Asian citizens continuous faith in electoral politics seems to be Asian parties’ unbroken commitment to mobilization. In particular, these parties seem not to have followed European parties’ “Ostrich strategy” of taking refuge in the state. In most cases, then, they have maintained their legitimacy and, especially, financial links with their followers.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> However, in terms of representation, and as follows from the GCB’s scores, they seem to have

Fourthly, and in clear contrast to what can be observed on the European continent where old continuous democracies continue to be more consolidated and stable than new ones (Enyedi and Casal Bértoa, forthcoming), the three continuous Asian democracies—and especially Japan—have been affected by their citizens' disloyalty towards what are considered to be very corrupt parties.

All in all, and despite being an Asian tradition, it seems that most Asian political parties are not for committing any Harakiri. Nor are they for divorcing society and marrying the state, such has been the case in most European democracies. Conversely, it seems that for the time being they will have to tolerate the initial separation characterizing post-authoritarian democracies, in the hope that this will only be temporary.

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pursued their own interests more than those of their voters.

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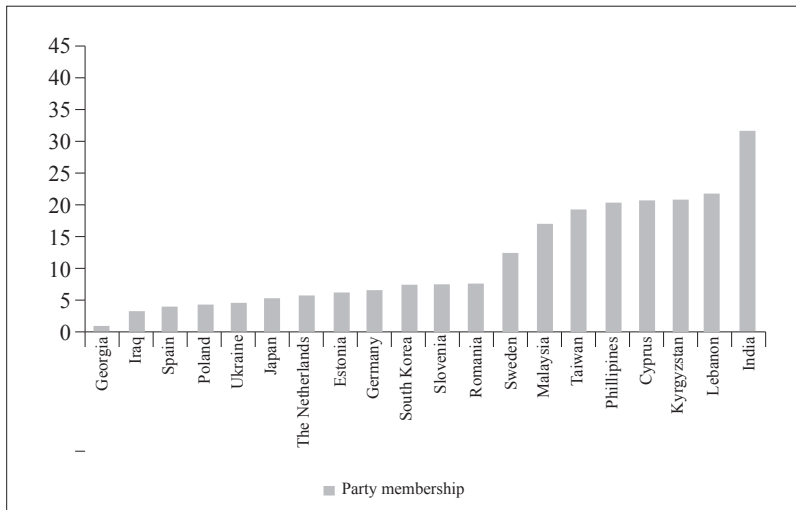
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## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Jose Rama Caamaño, Don Lee, Filippo Boni, Dishil Shrimankar and May Pei for their invaluable assistance as well as the attendees of the workshop on “Democracy in East Asia in Regional and Historical Perspective” held at Seoul National University (South Korea) for their comments on a previous version of the article.

## Appendix

Figure A. Party membership in twenty Asian and European democracies



Source WVS (2014)

Table A. Voter turnout, electoral volatility, electoral fragmentation and percentage of vote for “new parties” in five different Asian regions<sup>23</sup>

Countries(N)	1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s
<i>Voter turnout</i>								
<i>Central Asia (2)</i>						62.3	55.7	56.6
<i>South Asia (7)</i>	55.8	65.8	68.2	65.4	52	55.1	62	69
<i>Southeast Asia (5)</i>	49.8	64.1	71.2		90	76.2	76.7	77.6
<i>East Asia (4)</i>		75.9	71.8	71.1	72.3	74	64.9	63
<i>Middle East (5)</i>	86.9	83.4	77.6	73.4	86	82	65.8	72.7
<i>Electoral volatility</i>								
<i>Central Asia (2)</i>							27.2	37.7
<i>South Asia (7)</i>		20.8	15.8	16	18.5	16.4	9.1	26.8
<i>Southeast Asia (5)</i>		37.4	18.7			34.4	37.4	24.2
<i>East Asia (4)</i>		7.6	6.2	3.6	3.9	18.5	15.7	19.1
<i>Middle East (5)</i>		30.8	11.8	18.6	27.8	19.9	28.1	17.8
<i>Electoral fragmentation</i>								
<i>Central Asia (2)</i>						11.2	6.6	7.7
<i>South Asia (7)</i>	3.8	3.7	4.5	3.4	3.9	4.4	4.7	5.2
<i>Southeast Asia (5)</i>		3.4	3.3		7.6	5.1	5.5	6.2
<i>East Asia (4)</i>		3.6	2.9	3.8	3.9	3.4	3.3	3.6
<i>Middle East (5)</i>	3.4	3.8	3.9	4.1	3.9	6.5	6.2	5.6
<i>Percentage of vote for “new parties”*</i>								
<i>Central Asia (2)</i>						88.7	90	91.1
<i>South Asia (7)</i>						33.3	37	56.2
<i>Southeast Asia (5)</i>						52.2	57.4	57.5
<i>East Asia (4)</i>						41.4	54	57.5
<i>Middle East (5)</i>						29.3	52.1	53.9

\* “New parties” are here defined as those that, polling at least one percent of the vote, first began to contest elections no earlier than 1990.

<sup>23</sup> Central Asia includes Russia and Kyrgyzstan; South Asia is comprised of Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka; Southeast Asia refers to East Timor, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines and Thailand; East Asia is composed of Japan, Mongolia, South Korea and Taiwan. Finally, Iraq, Israel, Lebanon, Syria and Turkey are clustered in the Middle East.

Table B. Percentage of vote for “new parties” in twenty Asian democracies<sup>24</sup>

Countries	1990s	2000s	2010s
<i>Bangladesh</i>		7.3	
<i>East Timor</i>		51.5	63.3
<i>India</i>	9.8	15.5	18.7
<i>Indonesia</i>	57.7	67.4	77.9
<i>Iraq</i>			n/a
<i>Israel</i>	49.9	52	56.5
<i>Japan</i>	24.1	58.5	59.8
<i>Kyrgyzstan</i>			91.1
<i>Lebanon</i>		n/a	
<i>Malaysia</i>		19	20.4
<i>Mongolia</i>	45.5	44.2	53.4
<i>Nepal</i>	51.1	67.5	55.9
<i>Pakistan</i>	38.1	45	52.7
<i>Philippines</i>	58.3	85.5	63.8
<i>Russia</i>	88.7	90	
<i>South Korea</i>	87.1	92.8	94.7
<i>Sri Lanka</i>		49.8	97.6
<i>Taiwan</i>	9	20.6	22
<i>Thailand</i>	40.6	63.5	62
<i>Turkey</i>	8.6	52.2	51.3
<i>Asian average</i>	43.7	51.9	58.8

Note “New parties” are here defined as those that, polling at least one percent of the vote, first began to contest elections no earlier than 1990.

Source Casal Bértoa (2017b)

<sup>24</sup> Laos (1957-1959), Myanmar (1948-1961) and Syria (1954-1957) are excluded.

# Pathways to Buraku Liberation: Competing Images of Freedom in Early Postwar Japan

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*The Journal of Northeast Asian History*

**Volume 14 Number 2 (Winter 2017), 95-118**

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## Pathways to Buraku Liberation: Competing Images of Freedom in Early Postwar Japan

This paper explores Japanese Buraku liberation from 1946-1960. While previous scholarship mainly focuses on this period to explain later movement tensions, this paper seeks to explain why cooperation across the political spectrum was maintained in the early postwar period despite leftist dominance. This cooperation originated in ties formed between activists during wartime mobilization and was strengthened in the immediate postwar period by the shared desire to overcome the past and contribute to democratic development. Growing scepticism about the postwar order, the United States, and economic recovery, however, eventually exacerbated political tensions. Pronounced growth of the economy beginning in 1955 led some to openly advocate a non-revolutionary path to liberation through economic modernization. The first conservative Buraku organization was established amid increasing struggles on the political left to maintain a united front on the question of how to interpret the nature of Buraku liberation within a rapidly changing environment.

**Keywords:** Buraku liberation; cooperation; early postwar period; Japan; wartime mobilization

# Pathways to Buraku Liberation: Competing Images of Freedom in Early Postwar Japan

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## I. Introduction

In the year leading up to the passing of the *Law for the Promotion of the Elimination of Discrimination Against Burakumin* in December 2016, many old academic debates resurfaced about the realities of Buraku discrimination in present day Japan, highlighting the serious differences liberation organizations and political parties still have in forging a shared understanding of the problem.<sup>1</sup> The “Buraku problem” refers to where mainstream Japanese society socially discriminates against people for complex reasons including ancestry, occupation, and place of residence,

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<sup>1</sup> On December 7, 2016, Keiji Kokuta (1947-), Central Committee member of the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) and Chair of the JCP Diet Affairs Committee, held a press conference in Tokyo concerning the Bill for the Promotion of the Elimination of Buraku Discrimination. He argued that the bill would “cement” and “perpetuate” Buraku discrimination and called for its immediate withdrawal. Such strong resistance on the part of the JCP and JCP-affiliated activist groups to this law has its roots in earlier interpretative conflicts about the Buraku problem, particularly centering on understandings of the nature of discrimination and the desirability of state intervention and administrative guidance to help alleviate suffering. I am currently preparing an article for publication on the background to the passing of this law entitled “Contested Liberation: The JCP, Human Rights Groups, and the New Law.”

and it has been usefully compared to the Dalit (India) and Paekchong (Korea) problems.<sup>2</sup> While the overwhelming tendency in Japanese scholarship has been to focus on the complex histories behind the unraveling of a seemingly united postwar liberation movement, this paper attempts to approach the subject from the opposite direction.<sup>3</sup> A focus on later tensions and movement splits can arguably be said to conceal one of the most striking features of early postwar Buraku liberation politics: the postwar maintenance of cross-party unity for a sustained period that was actually marked by acrimonious domestic political disputes and political splintering in relation to other issues.

Cooperation right across the political spectrum occurred in the early postwar Buraku liberation movement despite the clearly dominant position of Marxist historians and Japanese Communist Party (JCP) supporters within the National Committee for Buraku Liberation (*Buraku Kaihō Zenkoku I'inkai*, hereafter NCBL) founded in 1946, an organization which changed its name to the Buraku Liberation League (*Buraku Kaihō Dōmei*, hereafter BLL) in 1955. JCP-affiliated scholars and activists also dominated the research arm of the NCBL, the Research Institute for the Buraku Problem (*Buraku Mondai Kenkyūjo*, hereafter RICP), and their early publications reveal considerable combativeness towards “harmful opinions” thought on the political left to compromise the integrity of the liberation movement within a context of revolutionary struggle. Nonetheless, political conservatives, despite at times

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<sup>2</sup> Timothy D. Amos, *Embodying Difference: The Making of Burakumin in Modern Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011), 166; Joseph D. Hankins, *Working Skin: Making Leather, Making a Multicultural Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014); Ian Neary, “The Paekjong and the Hyongpyongsa: The Untouchables of Korea and Their Struggle for Liberation,” *Immigrants and Minorities* 6, no. 2 (1987): 117-150; Ian Neary, *The Buraku Issue and Modern Japan: The Career of Matsumoto Jiichirō* (London: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Sukeyuki Morooka, *Sengo Buraku Kaihō Ronsōshi* [History of Postwar Buraku Liberation Debates], vol. 1 (Tokyo: Tsuge Shobō, 1980); Fudesaka Hideyo, Miyazaki Manabu, and Ningen Shuppan Henshūbu, *Nihon Kyōsantō vs Buraku Kaihō Dōmei* [The Japanese Communist Party vs The Buraku Liberation League], (Tokyo: Ningen Shuppan, 2010).

considerable reservations that in some cases lead to the creation of breakaway factions and the establishment of different organizations, appeared willing to formally join the struggle for Buraku liberation with fellow NCBL members and maintain an ongoing affiliation, albeit while maintaining a clear preference for and vision of national integration over democratic socialist revolution. While the alliances forged between members of the NCBL/BLL with fundamentally different political views were unsteady and in some cases volatile, the multiparty arrangement within the NCBL/BLL lasted for close to fifteen years, until the breakaway formation of the conservative Japanese Assimilation Association (*Zen Nihon Dōwakai*) from the BLL in 1960.

The origins of this cooperation, the paper argues, can be located in the allegiances forged during Japan's period of wartime mobilization, often under state persecution. They were ties that were strengthened in the early postwar period by a mutual desire to forget the war and foster a common commitment to liberation as part of a broader process of Japanese democratic development. And they were ties that unraveled, albeit slowly, due to a shared general skepticism about the emerging postwar order, the role of the United States, and the likelihood and nature of economic recovery. Tensions on the political left, along with a series of rapid economic growth spurts from around 1955 brought incompatibilities and contradictions to the surface, suggesting to some the possibility of a non-revolutionary path to Buraku liberation through a process of economic modernization. It was within the context of the political left struggling within the NCBL to maintain a united front on the question of how to interpret the nature of Buraku liberation within this changing environment that the first conservative faction broke away.

## II. Wartime Mobilization and its Immediate Legacy

The Zenkoku Suiheisha (National Leveler's Movement; hereafter Suiheisha) was an organization formed in 1922 by members of Buraku

communities throughout Japan who shared views about the need for direct action against the discrimination they faced in order to eradicate glaring, historically-generated inequalities. The Suiheisha itself was subject to considerable factionalism, a fact most clearly evident in the 1933 suggestion by one of the more radical leftwing factions within the movement to dissolve itself and merge into the peasant and proletarian labor movements.<sup>4</sup> The Suiheisha also faced considerable competition from other state-backed and privately funded movements which promoted the idea of *yūwa* (harmony or conciliation) and the need to address the problems that rendered these people unable to successfully contribute to Japan's social, national, and imperial stability.<sup>5</sup> Suiheisha policy to "liberate" (*kaihō*) Burakumin began to change by the mid-1930s, however, beginning to more proactively engage with the assimilationist activities and ideals of organizations such as the Chūō Yūwa Jigyō Kyōkai (Central Conciliation Projects Council).<sup>6</sup>

Mobilization of self-identifying Burakumin around nationalist causes should be understood at one level as a reluctant transition that took place within the context of real state oppression and political persecution.<sup>7</sup> As noted by Asaji Takeshi, a serious crackdown on important organizational figures suspected of engaging in anti-fascist struggle in 1937 led to real concerns over the future of the Suiheisha movement. Within this context, while conservatives such as Izumino Rikizō began to urge for the removal of leftwing elements from the group in response to these clampdowns, Kitahara Taisaku, a key figure in the Suiheisha and postwar liberation movement, moved to resist such

<sup>4</sup> Nobuaki Teraki and Midori Kurokawa, *Nyūmon Hisabetsu Buraku No Rekishi* [An Introduction to Buraku History] (Ōsaka-shi: Kaihō Shuppansha, 2016), 228-29.

<sup>5</sup> Jeffrey Paul Bayliss, *On the Margins of Empire: Buraku and Korean Identity in Prewar and Wartime Japan* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Asia Center, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> Nobuaki Teraki and Midori Kurokawa, *Nyūmon Hisabetsu Buraku No Rekishi*, 230.

<sup>7</sup> Neary, *The Buraku Issue and Modern Japan*, 101.

attempts, only to be urged to maintain silence by other group members.<sup>8</sup> This incident came on the heels, however, of Kitahara's imprisonment in 1934-35, a period of incarceration that ended with considerable deterioration to his health and an issuance of a "rightwing conversion" (*tenkō*) statement.<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that liberals were also increasingly targeted by the state at this time; some lost their jobs and others on occasion were arrested and jailed alongside communist sympathizers for speaking out against growing state oppression in relation to academic and other freedoms.<sup>10</sup>

Ideological compromise and capitulation were also clearly a part of the 1930s story of the unraveling of the Suiheisha, however. As Asaji has noted, Matsumoto Ji'ichirō maintained strong relationships with some of the early founders of the Suiheisha movement such as Saikō Mankichi despite their much earlier "rightwing conversions."<sup>11</sup> From 1937, moreover, Matsumoto himself began to publicly express support for the National Unity Government, and by 1939, he was increasingly participating in activities that involved *yūwa* leaders.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, branches of the Suiheisha began to build locally-based, non-partisan bodies preaching a national integration more in line with the National Spiritual Mobilization Movement. From around this time, Kitahara also left the Suiheisha to join the state socialist group "Greater Japan Young People's Party" (*Dai Nippon Seinentō*).<sup>13</sup> Suiheisha and *yūwa* movement

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<sup>8</sup> Takeshi Asaji, *Ajia/Taiheiyō Sensō to Zenkoku Suiheisha* [The Asia Pacific War and the National Leveler's Movement] (Osaka: Kaiho Shuppansha, 2008), 89-90.

<sup>9</sup> Neary, *The Buraku Issue and Modern Japan*, 127-28.

<sup>10</sup> Kazuteru Okiura, "Burakushi" *Ronsō Wo Yomitoku: Sengo Shisō No Nagare No Naka De* [Deciphering the Buraku History Wars: Within the Current of Postwar Thought] (Osaka: Kaihō Shuppansha, 2000), 38.

<sup>11</sup> Takeshi Asaji, *Ajia/Taiheiyō Sensō to Zenkoku Suiheisha*, 91-97, 101-03.

<sup>12</sup> Neary, *The Buraku Issue and Modern Japan*, 105, 10.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 107; Takeshi Asaji, *Ajia/Taiheiyō Sensō to Zenkoku Suiheisha*, 91-97, 101-03. Asaji notes that this party began to suck life out of the Suiheisha movement in a way previously

participants also began to further strengthen ties with each other under these trying circumstances. Kitahara and Yamamoto Masao, a key figure in the national integration movement, for example, developed a relationship leading up to the war that involved at the very least Kitahara's tacit support for some of Yamamoto's ideas rooted in developing fixed year plans aimed at national integration.<sup>14</sup> In 1939, Kitahara agreed with Yamamoto and one other former *yūwa* movement leader to establish the "Greater Harmony Organization" (*Daiwakai*).<sup>15</sup> The following year, Kitahara along with Asada further proposed the formation of the "Buraku Welfare Citizens Movement" (*Buraku Kōsei Kōmin Undō*), which would bring an even wider range of people of differing political trajectories and convictions together.<sup>16</sup>

Prewar and wartime ties between activists of different political persuasions were forged in the crucible of state coercion and strategic political realignment on the part of the Suiheisha leaders as well as individual activists. An examination of the immediate prewar activities of Buraku liberation advocates and leaders reveals a process of both strong state opposition and persecution and the "rightwing conversion" of Suiheisha activists.<sup>17</sup> During the war, a good number joined the government organization *Dōwa Hōkōkai* (Harmonization Public Service Society) after the Suiheisha's dissolution in 1942.<sup>18</sup> And as Ian Neary notes, when focusing on the question of wartime activities of former Suiheisha members, particularly those at the leadership level like

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unimaginable.

<sup>14</sup> Yamamoto Masao, *Yamamoto Masao Chosakushū* [Collected Writings of Yamamoto Masao] (Osaka Jinken Hakubutsukan: Kaihō Shuppansha, 2008), 5.

<sup>15</sup> Neary, *The Buraku Issue and Modern Japan*, 108.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>17</sup> Kazuteru Okiura, "Burakushi" *Ronsō Wo Yomitoku*, 42; Neary, *The Buraku Issue and Modern Japan*, 107.

<sup>18</sup> Nobuaki Teraki and Midori Kurokawa, *Nyūmon Hisabetsu Buraku No Rekishi*, 239.

Matsumoto who worked as politicians, it is difficult to know what to make of their actions particularly in light of the criticism that there appears to be little significant attempt at opposition.<sup>19</sup>

The National Committee for Buraku Liberation (NCBL), established in 1946 by Matsumoto, Kitahara, and Yamamoto (among others), three prewar Suiheisha and state *yūwa* program officials who respectively had affiliations with the Socialist, Communist, and Liberal parties, rode the surging wave of calls for postwar emancipation. After considerable debate about what their new organization should be called and who should be invited to participate, the decision was made to create an organization different in both name and focus from the prewar Suiheisha. The NCBL was thereafter established for the purpose of “the complete liberation of the Buraku masses,” welcoming all prewar Buraku organizational members regardless of political affiliation and offering full membership to Buraku and non-Buraku people alike.<sup>20</sup> A group of politicians from diverse political backgrounds attended the Buraku Liberation People’s Conference held in Kyoto the day following the NCBL’s inaugural meeting under the slogan “Liberation of oppressed people through the completion of democratic revolution.”<sup>21</sup> Representatives from both the eastern and western branches of the Honganji temple who had also participated in prewar *yūwa* movements were likewise present. Speakers at the Buraku Liberation People’s Conference included key figures from the Kyoto Municipal Office, the Communist Party, the Liberal Party, the Progressive Party, and the Socialist Party. As Morooka Sukeyuki notes, the postwar point of departure for Buraku liberation was patently non-partisan, facilitated by the fact that representatives from both the earlier Suiheisha and the

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<sup>19</sup> Neary, *The Buraku Issue and Modern Japan*, 119-27.

<sup>20</sup> Sukeyuki Morooka, *Sengo Buraku Kaihō Ronsōshi*, vol. 1, 26.

<sup>21</sup> Buraku Kaikō Kenkyūjō, ed., *Zenkoku Taikai Undō Hōshin* [National Committee Conference Campaign Policy], vol.1 (Osaka: Kaihō Shuppansha, 1980), 2-3.

government-sponsored *yūwa* movements were present.<sup>22</sup>

This striking, non-partisan alignment was closely related to the way in which the desirability of Buraku liberation was able to serve as a rallying point of ideological agreement in an era witnessing the pendulum of state-sanctioned political ideals move from state militarism to liberal democracy (albeit under tight Occupational controls).<sup>23</sup> This reality is perhaps best captured in the 1946 speech by Yamamoto to the audience at the NCBL's inaugural meeting where he made multiple references to a “hungering” on the part of the Japanese people for democracy and situated “Buraku activism” (*Burakuminteki katsudō*) as a central means of achieving a united front against the oppressive policies of the Shidehara cabinet.<sup>24</sup> It is likely that such a belief was also more widely shared among NCBL founders. A history of the RIBP also records an “emancipatory feel” among those working in relation to this closely affiliated institution, with little or no distinction being made between “Buraku” and “non-Buraku” activists working together to address the Buraku problem.<sup>25</sup>

Based on the founding statements of the NCBL it seems reasonable to conclude that Committee members were primarily intent on framing their postwar struggle as a tireless, persistent battle against state oppression, despite the troubled factual basis of such an interpretation.<sup>26</sup> Earlier support for Japan's war effort and a disinclination to address the recent past in any meaningful way, as well as a strong mutual desire to put serious distance between their own wartime activities and the future of the liberation movement, provided a firm basis for mutual collaboration in

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<sup>22</sup> Sukeyuki Morooka, *Sengo Buraku Kaihō Ronsōshi*, vol. 1, 25.

<sup>23</sup> Nobuaki Teraki and Midori Kurokawa, *Nyūmon Hisabetsu Buraku No Rekishi*, 243-44.

<sup>24</sup> Yamamoto Masao, *Yamamoto Masao Chosakushū*, 629, 31.

<sup>25</sup> Buraku Mondai Kenkyūjo, ed., *Buraku mondai kenkyūjo: 50 nen no ayumi* [Research Institute for the Buraku Problem: 50 years of history] (Kyoto: Buraku Mondai Kenkyūjo, 1998), 6-7.

<sup>26</sup> Sukeyuki Morooka, *Sengo Buraku Kaihō Ronsōshi*, vol. 1, 34-35.

the early postwar years. Also important was the continuing reality of Buraku discrimination in a Japan which was struggling to deal with its loss in the war and the accompanying devastation. The persistence of discrimination against members of Buraku communities and a shared desire to eradicate it provided even greater impetus for the immediate recommencement of the Buraku liberation movement, as well as an opportunity for the building of national cohesion across ideological and political lines in a society that increasingly appeared as irretrievably fractured.<sup>27</sup>

### III. Postwar Democracy and the Nascent Buraku Liberation Movement

The mantra of “liberation” (*kaihō*) in the early years of the postwar Buraku liberation movement was repeated by virtually all persons in the NCBL, although it held different meanings depending upon one’s political affiliation and evolving understanding of postwar conditions. The idea of liberation was successful in the early postwar years in binding radicals and conservatives with opposing ideas of how to conceive of and devise policy for the liberation movement. By appealing to the necessity of the transcendental act of overcoming feudal and prewar antidemocratic forces and the excesses of US-led Occupation (if not the actual reality of Occupation itself), it was possible to disguise the diversity which existed among activists and intellectuals involved in one capacity or another with the Buraku liberation movement about who exactly should become the target of liberation and what actually needed to be overcome. In his 1946 speech at the NCBL’s inaugural meeting, for example, while labelling himself a “liberal,” “anti-militarist,” and

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<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Okiura’s vivid recounting of early postwar political activism, including the Osaka gathering on the day political prisoners were released from prison on October 10, 1945. Kazuteru Okiura, “Burakushi” *Ronsō Wo Yomitoku*, Chapter 2, especially 49-55.

“democrat,” Yamamoto fiercely defended Matsumoto in the face of calls for him to step down over his wartime activities. Yamamoto appealed to the audience to offer him their full support, describing Matsumoto as someone who threw his whole being into fighting for “the liberation of oppressed Burakumin.”<sup>28</sup>

NCBL policies outlining what Buraku liberation entailed began to be drafted from 1947 and they initially contained several interesting strategies related to increased Buraku involvement in traditional industries like tanning, as well as advocacy of a range of welfare options to improve the physical and mental wellbeing of Buraku residents.<sup>29</sup> The following year the Committee issued two new reports clarifying the movement’s basis: “The Current Status of the Buraku Liberation Movement” and “The True Nature of the Buraku Problem.”<sup>30</sup> Very soon after issuing these documents, however, the Committee met with a panel of leading academics, including the well-known Marxist scholar Hani Gorō. The RIBP was established several months later.<sup>31</sup>

While the RIBP was initially a research institute for Buraku liberation where some interpretative diversity could exist among its members, the RIBP Charter clearly designated Burakumin a “remnant of the feudal system of social status,” situating the Institute very firmly within the interpretative framework of the prewar school mainstream *kōzaha* Marxism.<sup>32</sup> Why this kind of wording or perspective did not work

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<sup>28</sup> Yamamoto Masao, *Yamamoto Masao Chosakushū*, 632.

<sup>29</sup> Buraku Kaikō Kenkyūjo, *Zenkoku Taikai Undō Hōshin*, vol. 1, 6-10.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-21.

<sup>31</sup> Buraku Mondai Kenkyūjo, *Buraku mondai kenkyūjo*, 101.

<sup>32</sup> In the 1920s, a debate emerged between two Marxist factions in Japan—the *kōzaha* (lecture faction) and the *rōnōha* (farmer’s faction)—over the nature of Japanese capitalism. The former faction argued that Japanese capitalism was semi-feudal and required a subsequent revolution apart from the one at the time of Meiji, whereas the latter faction argued that a bourgeois revolution had in fact taken place at the time of Meiji. It was the *kōzaha* factional view of history that dominated much of post-war Japanese Marxian historiography. The contemporary Buraku minority were seen from this perspective as a feudal remnant, only able to be liberated from

to more fully alienate conservatives such as Yamamoto currently remains a question difficult to answer due to a paucity of available sources. Whatever the case, the RIBP was initially created in Asada's lounge room in 1948, and in its early years had an intimate relationship with the NCBL in terms of management, research, and book/journal publication and sales.<sup>33</sup>

The main body of work published within the RIBP in the early postwar period consisted of studies that attempted to clarify the importance of the Buraku problem within the larger context of a struggle for Socialist Democracy. In other words, much of the early postwar research published by the RIBP was dedicated to defining and positioning Buraku liberation within a larger framework of proletarian struggle for democratic revolution. The first book published by the RIBP was Kitahara's 1950 work *Kutsujoku to Kaihō no Rekishi* (A History of Humiliation and Liberation), which both acknowledged a debt to the Marxist historian Inoue Kiyoshi in the preface and included a foreword by the Marxist historian Hani Gorō.<sup>34</sup> Kitahara's book discussed Burakumin as a group in society that should have disappeared, but remained the subject of discrimination because Japanese capitalism had preserved parts of feudal Japanese society such as the Emperor system and backward ways of thinking about human social relations, as well as created new problems for the Burakumin by breaking their monopoly on traditional Buraku industries. The path to freedom for the Burakumin, in Kitahara's view, lay in the scholarly clarification and removal of those backward feudal institutions which were restricting the Buraku from

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discrimination through a future unification of the proletariat. Sukeyuki Morooka, *Sengo Buraku Kaihō Ronsōshi*, vol. 1, 128, 31.

<sup>33</sup> Asada Zennosuke, *Asada Zennosuke Zenkiroku: Sabetsu to Tatakaisuzukete* [The Complete Records of Asada Zennosuke: Continuing to Fight Discrimination], vol. 22 (Kyoto: Asada Kyōiku Zaidan, 1995), 59.

<sup>34</sup> Sukeyuki Morooka, *Sengo Buraku Kaihō Ronsōshi*, 1, 121.

becoming one with the rest of the Japanese proletariat.

Kitahara's 1950 volume sparked off an important debate dealt with in detail elsewhere.<sup>35</sup> In short, Takakuwa Suehide, a journalist and academic, challenged Kitahara on an issue of how best to interpret Buraku discrimination and Inoue Kiyoshi intervened in the debate, developing his famous "trinity" liberation theory in 1950, a theory that succeeded in both explaining the reasons for the historical emergence of the Buraku problem as well as linking it to the need for contemporary class struggle.<sup>36</sup> Inoue isolated the root causes of Buraku discrimination in what he termed "social status discrimination" (*mibun sabetsu*), which allegedly originated with the first sign of class difference in Japan in the ancient period. He further argued that it was only after the appearance of "social status distinctions" that "outcaste occupations" materialized, and that this discrimination had not disappeared because status distinctions prevented Burakumin from joining the proletariat on an equal footing to concentrate on class struggle.<sup>37</sup> Inoue also intimated that historical restrictions on residency and occupation had combined with the problem of status to create the Buraku problem and therefore their removal was the first concrete step towards Buraku liberation.

Inoue was subsequently appointed to the Central Committee of the NCBL in 1951 and was commissioned with the responsibility of drafting policy for the Buraku liberation movement, a position he held until 1963. In the same year that Inoue was appointed to this position, Asada Zennosuke led a group of activists in the NCBL on perhaps the most real "denunciation" (*kyūdan*) campaign of the postwar period—the "All

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<sup>35</sup> Amos, *Embodying Difference*, 153-57.

<sup>36</sup> Asada Zennosuke *et al.*, "Sengo buraku kaihō undō no riron" [Postwar Buraku Liberation Movement Theory], *Buraku kaihō*, no. 100 (April 1977): 23-24.

<sup>37</sup> Inoue Kiyoshi, "Buraku kaihō riron to burakushi no kadai" [Buraku Liberation Theory and Issues in Buraku History], in *Sengo buraku mondai ronshū: kaihō riron I* [An Anthology of Writings on the Postwar Buraku Problem, vol. 1], ed. Buraku Mondai Kenkyūjo. (Kyoto: Buraku Mondai Kenkyūjo, 1998), 76-85; Amos, *Embodying Difference*, 153-57.

Romance Incident.”<sup>38</sup> Denunciation was a continuation of the prewar tactic of directly and very publicly protesting acts of discrimination until the people perceived to be responsible acknowledged their actions and made some gesture towards changing their behavior. In this case, the NCBL responded to a story published in the magazine *All Romance* called “Special Buraku,” written by a Kyoto public servant, where a Kyoto Buraku area was described as a place of poverty and crime. This led Asada to instigate a hard-hitting denunciation campaign against the author and publisher for this “discriminatory story,” an action immediately followed by a campaign against the Kyoto Municipal Government for their role in the “reproduction... of discriminatory ideas about the Buraku” through “administrative stagnation.”<sup>39</sup>

It is clear from Asada’s comments at the time that Inoue’s theory of Buraku liberation centering on the removal of material differences in residence and occupation in Buraku areas had given him an important conceptual impetus for envisaging his own strategy of Buraku liberation. Drawing on Inoue’s theoretical offerings, Asada began to stress the importance of viewing Buraku discrimination through the realities of economic and social inequalities evidenced in poor living conditions. From this perspective, the only effective form of liberation came through political struggle by Burakumin themselves to achieve parity in Japanese society. Asada was clearly interested only in a theory of liberation that would support his actual struggles against local, prefectural, and national governments for concrete policies that would improve the living standards of people living in Buraku areas. Asada, moreover, building on Inoue’s theories, claimed that “the everyday economic demands of Burakumin themselves are a struggle against feudal social status

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<sup>38</sup> Hankins, *Working Skin*, 137-39.

<sup>39</sup> Asada Zennosuke, *Sabetsu to tatakaisuzukete*, 167.

relations.”<sup>40</sup>

Inoue’s production of a theory of Buraku liberation theory that was both able to explain in an intellectually sophisticated manner the root causes of the Buraku problem but which also supported concrete plans for Buraku liberation through demands for material improvement in Buraku communities provided a template for future NCBL activism. Inoue’s emphasis on a Buraku problem that was eventually going to be dissolved into class, however, also created a perplexing dilemma for the Buraku liberation movement. For those like Asada committed to the maintenance of a strong Buraku identity, “class” seemed to disguise the true realities of Buraku discrimination which were economic and political inequality targeting a minority. For those on the political right, moreover, the idea of class struggle appeared divisive, and essentially moved the focus away from Buraku liberation as a struggle against a false status designation that was unconstitutional to one which required strong class identification and a structural alteration of the postwar democratic system. These were tensions that would eventually drive deep wedges between the Communist and Socialist factions within the BLL on the one hand, and progressives and conservatives on the other.

#### **IV. Conservative Pushback and Movement Splintering**

The developments discussed in the previous section worked to alienate members of the NCBL who identified more with political liberal or conservative ideals and who began to balk at the kinds of argumentation and activism being promoted by Inoue and Asada. From their earliest days, both the NCBL and RIBP had clearly not awarded leadership positions with the Central Committee to conservative figures and

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 167-68.

activists, a fact easily clarified through a survey of organizational composition and membership. The shift in focus during the Kitahara-Takakuwa-Inoue debate to class struggle likely proved a worrying development for some NCBL members and supporters, and signaled a considerable narrowing in scope in the early 1950s about how to conceptualize possible pathways to Buraku liberation. While these tensions did not necessarily reveal themselves in the records and minutes of the NCBL and RIBP, they certainly appeared at the regional chapter level, particularly in relation to organizational structures and debates over the handling of localized conflicts, although available sources offer only the most superficial albeit tantalizing of glimpses.

In Yamaguchi prefecture, for example, the local chapter of the NCBL was established in Ogori in 1949 with Yanai Masao, the uncle of Uniqlo's Yanai Tadashi, as its head. The local chapter engaged in some significant struggles against discrimination towards Buraku between 1950 and 1952, leading to at least two significant policy changes on the part of the prefectural government. Yanai's alleged apparent tendency to prefer to deal behind the scenes with government officials instead of through the local chapter, however, generated conflict between committee members. The local chapter split into two competing groups in 1953, one run out of Yanai's house and the other out of the Mantokuji Temple led by the key figures of Kanemoto Kenji and Yamamoto Rihei. Kanemoto and Yamamoto worked to have Yanai's membership of the NCBL revoked later in the same year and this was confirmed when Yanai decided to back a local Liberal Party candidate in an election. Yanai quickly established a new liberation organization called the Yamaguchi Prefecture Buraku Liberation Association (*Yamaguchi-ken Buraku Kaihō Rengōkai*). Yet the two organizations reconciled and merged in late 1954 with the help of a local prefectural bureaucrat under the new chapter name of Yamaguchi Prefecture Buraku Federation (*Yamaguchi-ken Buraku Renmei*). A new organizational system was also put in place to ensure that the leaders from both splinter groups would have equal

representation within the revamped chapter. Tensions soon resurfaced between the two former factions, however, even as the name of the organization was changed to the Yamaguchi Chapter of the Buraku Liberation League (*Buraku Kaihō Dōmei Yamaguchi-ken Rengōkai*) in 1955 to reflect the official change of the NCBL's name to the Buraku Liberation League (BLL). Yanai came to head the newly founded Japanese Assimilation Association in 1960.<sup>41</sup>

Turning to Wakayama Prefecture, the Liberal New Life League (*Jiyū Shinsei Dōmei*) was formed in 1946 with the participation of Tanaka Orinosuke, a member of the Japan Socialist Party. The organization saw itself as a “promotional force” for the construction of a new society and saw its role as elevating social consciousness in a way that discrimination would be considered by locals to be “unconstitutional.”<sup>42</sup> This Buraku liberation organization attempted to build upon the prewar *yūwa* movement but disbanded in 1948 after experiencing a considerable period of inertia. The same year the local chapter of the NCBL was formed with Tanaka as its head.<sup>43</sup> Various incidents of discrimination in 1949 and 1950 led to changes in local government policies particularly in the area of education, although differences in policy and approach can be observed between the northern and southern parts of the prefecture. A further large-scale incident in 1952, following directly on the heels of the

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<sup>41</sup> Buraku Kaihō Dōmei Yamaguchi-ken Rengōkai, *Yamaguchi-ken no Buraku Mondai ni tsuite* [About the Buraku Problem in Yamaguchi Prefecture]. Available at <http://y-kaihou.jp/burakumondai.html>. Accessed September 27, 2017; Matsuura Kenji, “Yamaguchi-ken” [Yamaguchi Prefecture]. Available at <http://www.blhri.org/old/jiten/index.php?%A1%F6%BB%B3%B8%FD%B8%A9>.

<sup>42</sup> Wakayama no Burakushi Hensankai, ed., *Wakayama No Burakushi: Shiryōhen Kingendai I* [Wakayama Buraku History: Modern/Contemporary Sources] (Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, 2010), 580 (document 7).

<sup>43</sup> Shigekatsu Nishi, “Sengo Dōwa Kyōiku Undoshi No Tame No Jyakkan No Kōsatsu [A Few Notes Pertaining to Postwar Buraku Education Movement History],” *Kyōikugaku Kenkyū* 38, no. 3 (1971); Ikeda Seirō, “Wakayama.” Available at <http://www.blhri.org/old/jiten/index.php?%A1%F6%CF%C2%B2%CE%BB%B3%B8%A9>.

aforementioned “All Romance Incident,” led to a successful push to have a local assemblyman ousted from office for discriminating against another local Buraku lawmaker.<sup>44</sup>

The Shingu Buraku community later made famous by Nakagami Kenji’s novels apparently did not establish a chapter of the NCBL until 1955, the year that the organization changed its name to the Buraku Liberation League.<sup>45</sup> Just a few months later, the NCBL came under heavy criticism from a new organization called the Democratic Brotherhood (*Minshū Dōshikai*). This organization advocated for the “protection of Buraku peace and mutual human rights based on the respect of religion and morality” emphasizing the principle of *yūwa*.<sup>46</sup> In light of the later struggles in the realm of education that Wakayama prefecture was to experience in the period 1957-59 through the introduction of the Teacher’s Efficiency Rating System (*Kinmu Hyōtei*), and the central role of the BLL in much of that activism, it is likely that conservative advocates of Buraku liberation were becoming increasingly concerned about the growing dominance of the idea of “class struggle” within localized processes of democratic agitation and the perceived destructiveness of such a view to regional and national unity. Yamamoto Masao, at the bequest of the Liberal Democratic Party, was sent to Wakayama in 1959, an action that he acknowledged later in life to be for the purpose of “inspection.”<sup>47</sup>

From the above it is clear that the splintering away of conservative factions from the NCBL in the mid-1950s was witnessed at the local

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<sup>44</sup> Ikeda Seirō, “Wakayama No Buraku Kaihō Undō: Suiheisha Sōritsu Kara 80 Nen” [Wakayama’s Buraku Liberation Movement: Eighty Years After the Suiheisha’s Establishment]. Available at [http://www.blhri.org/old/info/koza/koza\\_0124.htm](http://www.blhri.org/old/info/koza/koza_0124.htm).

<sup>45</sup> Wakayama no Burakushi Hensankai, *Wakayama No Burakushi*, 591 (document 32).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 591 (document 33).

<sup>47</sup> Shigekatsu Nishi, “Sengo Dōwa Kyōiku Undoshi No Tame No Jyakkan No Kōsatsu,” 169-70; Sukeyuki Morooka, *Sengo Buraku Kaihō Ronsōshi* [History of Postwar Buraku Liberation Debates], vol. 3 (Tokyo: Tsuge Shobō, 1982), 292.

level both in Yamaguchi and Wakayama. While still much needs to be done to flesh out the various activities of the NCBL at both the national and local levels, this preliminary focus on chapters within two key prefectures with large Buraku populations is nonetheless both instructive and perhaps even symptomatic of broader trends. Despite the clear tensions in both regions over issues of how to address discrimination, activism again it, and education designed to eliminate it at the local level, liberals and conservatives affiliated with the NCBL such as Yanai and Yamamoto continued to maintain connections to the organization, which came to be virtually non-existent in any meaningful sense from around the middle of the 1950s. Yet despite this conflict at the local chapter level in some regions, the NCBL remained the only Buraku liberation organization until 1960 and open hostility of members and affiliates towards each other remained scarce. Indeed it appears to have been only in 1960, for example, that Kitahara first openly targeted Yamamoto for sustained public criticism. Even then, Kitahara continued to work closely with Yamamoto during the 1960s as both were members of the government-appointed working committee on the Buraku problem that eventually lead to the passing of the Special Measures Law in 1969.

## V. Conclusion

The early years of wrestling with the nature of Buraku discrimination in the new conditions of the postwar period likely deferred some on the underlying tensions felt by liberation activists on the political right, who were themselves wrestling with the implications of Japan's new constitution and what that meant for the discriminated individual within a modern liberal democracy. That Japan needed democratic revolution was clear to all at the time of the establishment of the NCBL, but whether that meant a change in political system or simply an enforcement of postwar principles enshrined in the new Japanese constitution was for the longest time treated as an intramural issue, at least in relation to the

Buraku issue. More research, however, particularly at the local level in relation to the day-to-day operations of the NCBL, will be required to reveal some of the deeper tensions and contradictions that were simmering beneath the surface.

Given the nationalist impulse present in both the political left and right in the 1950s, the Buraku problem can perhaps be said to have served as the ideal focal point for cross-party agreement. That the Buraku problem was a potential source of national embarrassment that needed to be overcome as Japan mobilized itself again for national peace was something that could basically be agreed upon by people from all different political persuasions. Wartime mobilization had enabled formidable ties to be forged across movements with very different ideological agendas and visions of how to achieve freedom from discrimination for Burakumin and these experiences and bonds enabled the NCBL to maintain a unified front at the national level well into the 1950s. Yet with Japan's "economic miracle" arriving as important evidence of the possible viability of modernization theory in the late 1950s, conservatives within the BLL such as Yamamoto took heart that their vision for Buraku liberation rooted in integrating former outcaste communities into the national body through strategic investment of public funds and encouragement of private industry was a viable alternative to faltering visions of democratic revolution on the political left.

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# How Museums in the Republic of Korea Narrate National History

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*The Journal of Northeast Asian History*

**Volume 14 Number 2 (Winter 2017), 119-188**

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## How Museums in the Republic of Korea Narrate National History

Museums are important purveyors of popular historical memory and a gauge of how national history is recounted. Compared with those in other liberal democracies, how do museums, especially national museums, in the Republic of Korea recount the past? Do they consistently put forth patriotic narratives that conveniently overlook unedifying details that might undermine the nationalistic message? This article compares and contrasts historical narratives in Korean museums and also museums in Japan. It finds that museums in Korea are about as good (or bad) as those in other liberal democracies when it comes to national history; they reflect the pluralistic viewpoints one would expect from a nation of fifty million. Museums that receive public money tend to present official history, although some national museums established in post-democratized Korea present surprisingly blunt indictments of post-liberation authoritarian regimes.

**Keywords:** National Museum of Korean Contemporary History; Independence Hall of Korea; War Memorial of Korea; Seodaemun Prison History Hall; Jeju April 3 Peace Memorial Hall

# How Museums in the Republic of Korea Narrate National History\*

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## I. Introduction

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\* I am grateful to the following organizations and individuals who facilitated my research (names written as they appear on business cards). The project began with a grant from the Northeast Asian History Foundation that supported fieldwork in 2013. Woon Do Choi and Woo Sung-Min of the Northeast Asian History Foundation have been kind and helpful hosts during my most recent four visits to Korea. The Friends of History at Portland State University also supported the research, and Andrea Janda helped with various technology issues. Kim Wang Sik, director of the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History, and Curators Kook Sungha, Nam Hee-sook, and Kim Jiyoung, were helpful and also frank when they hosted me for a visit in September 2015. Professor Kim Bong Joong of Chonnam University supported the project and hosted me for a visit in Gwangju. Dr. Kim also read and gave valuable feedback about an earlier version of the essay. Kim Jeon Eun, also of Chonnam University, kindly took the time to facilitate my visit to the May 18 National Cemetery. Hwang Sun-Ik has helped me on multiple research trips to Korea. Alexis Dudden of Connecticut University read and gave helpful feedback about an earlier version of the essay, leading to important revisions. Tessa-Morris Suzuki of Australia National University and Mark Selden of Binghamton University provided valuable feedback about the essay too, resulting in revisions that improved the final version. An earlier, shorter version of this essay was presented, in two parts, at the Conference “Rethinking of the Historical Consciousness Problem in East Asia—The Case between Japan and Korea” held at the International House of Japan (Tokyo), March 17-18, 2015, and organized by Professor Furuya Jun of the Hokkai School of Commerce. Extensive and thoughtful feedback by participants in that conference shaped this essay significantly, and it is my pleasure to acknowledge their assistance as well. The article was translated into Korean and published as a three part series in *Noksaek pyeongnon* (Green Review) 151-153 (November 2016 – April 2017) under the title, “Hangug ui bangmulgwan deul eun yeoksa reul eodeokke seosul hago inneun ga (1) – (3)” (How Korean museums narrate history 1-3).

If someone were to conclude, after visits to the Independence Hall of Korea (Cheonan; opened in 1987),<sup>1</sup> the War Memorial of Korea (Seoul; opened in 1994),<sup>2</sup> and even the Seodaemun Prison History Hall (Seoul; opened as museum in 1998),<sup>3</sup> that the only period in the long history of Korea when torture took place was during the thirty-five years that Korea was under Japanese colonial rule (1910-1945), one could hardly fault this person for that misinterpretation. The finessing of the national history by these three museums raises a question. Does the Republic of Korea do any better than other liberal democracies in confronting the country's dark chapters, including in reference to when the nation was independent

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<sup>1</sup> Previous studies of the Independence Hall include Daniel Sneider, "Interrupted Memories: The Debate over Wartime Memory in Northeast Asia," in *Confronting Memories of World War II: European and Asian Legacies*, ed. Daniel Chirof, Gi-Wook Shin, and Daniel Sneider (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014), 45-76; and Guy Podoler, *Monuments, Memory, and Identity: Constructing the Colonial Past in South Korea* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011). For an overview of Independence Hall, see *The Independence Hall of Korea*, The Independence Hall of Korea (Cheonan, Republic of Korea, The Independence Hall of Korea, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Previous scholarship on the War Memorial includes Daniel Y. Kim, "Nationalist Technologies of Cultural Memory and the Korean War: Militarism and Neo-Liberalism in *The Price of Freedom and the War Memorial of Korea*," *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review*, E-Journal no. 14 (March 2015); Tessa Morris-Suzuki, "Remembering the unfinished conflict: Museums and the contested memory of the Korean War," in *East Asia Beyond the History Wars*, ed. Tessa Morris-Suzuki, Morris Low, Leonid Petrov, and Timothy Y. Tsu (Hoboken, New Jersey: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 128-151; Podoler, *Monuments, Memory, and Identity*; Hong Kal, "The Aesthetic Construction of Ethnic Nationalism: War memorial museums in Korea and Japan," in *Rethinking Historical Injustice and Reconciliation in Northeast Asia*, ed. Gi-Wook Shin, Soon-Won Park, and Daqing Yang (New York: Routledge, 2006), 133-153; Hong Kal, *Aesthetic Constructions of Korean Nationalism* (New York: Routledge, 2011), in which a slightly revised version of the chapter cited above was included; and Sheila Miyoshi Jager, *Narratives of Nation Building in Korea* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), esp. Ch. 7, 117-140. For an overview of the War Memorial, see the War Memorial of Korea, *The War Memorial of Korea* (Seoul: Seokwang Printing, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Previous studies of the Seodaemun Prison Hall Complex include Podoler, *Monuments, Memory, and Identity*; Noriko Sato, "Paying a visit to Seodaemun Prison History Hall," *Journal of the Association of Northeast Asia Cultures* 27 (2011): 169-86; and Guy Podoler, "The Effect of Japanese Colonial Brutality on Shaping Korean Identity: An Analysis of a Prison Turned Memorial Site in Seoul," in *War and Militarism in Modern Japan*, ed. Podoler (Folkstone, England: Global Oriental, 2009), 199-214.

rather than subjugated by outsiders, even as it celebrates the national glories?

The October 2015 decision by then-President Park Geun-hye's (b. 1953; president, 2013-17) administration to require public schools, beginning in 2017, to teach history to middle and high school students only with government-issued textbooks (as is already the case for elementary school students) does not inspire confidence in this area. At the time that this essay goes to press, it looks increasingly unlikely that this proposal will be realized under the new administration of President Moon Jae-in (b. 1953; president, 2017-present). Nonetheless, the fact that the previous administration sought to control the teaching of history in such a manner provides an important clue that the Republic of Korea struggles as much as other liberal democracies to confront the full complexity of national history.

How do museums, especially national museums, in the Republic of Korea recount the past? Do they consistently put forth patriotic narratives that conveniently overlook unedifying details that might undermine the nationalistic message? Museums are important purveyors of popular historical memory in this age of mobility, and one gauge of how the national history is recounted. Their narratives are consumed by a wide variety of visitors, ranging from senior citizens to children escorted there on school field trips. During my fieldwork in Korea, I frequently intersected with field trips. The photo below shows a group of school children entering the Seodaemun Prison History Hall. Most museums in Korea accommodate foreigners by providing translated descriptions of the exhibits, most commonly in English but sometimes in additional languages too.

In the case of the Republic of Korea, whether the narrative presented is a simplistically nationalistic one or a nuanced account depends not only on the museum, but also the topic. This essay compares and contrasts narratives offered (or not offered) at the new National Museum of Korean Contemporary History (NMKCH), which opened in



December 2012,<sup>4</sup> with those of the three museums mentioned above, additional museums in the Republic of Korea, and also museums in Japan. Additional museums in Korea addressed include the National Museum of Korea (Seoul; established in 1945),<sup>5</sup> National Folk Museum (Seoul; established in 1946),<sup>6</sup> the Seoul Museum of History (opened in

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<sup>4</sup> My analysis of the NMKCH is based on two separate stints of fieldwork, one in September 2013 and another in September 2015. Analysis of the May 18 Memorial of Chonnam University, the May 18 National Cemetery, and the Jeju April 3 Peace Memorial Hall is based on visits in September 2015. Analysis of the War Memorial, Independence Hall, Seodaemun Prison History Hall, National Museum of Korea, National Folk Museum, and Ahn Jung Geun Memorial Hall is based on visits in September 2013. My analysis of the Seoul Museum of History, a minor part of this essay, dates from 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Previous scholarship about the version of national identity put forth at the National Museum of Korea includes Kyung Hyo Chun, “Postcolonial Aspirations and Contestation: Politics and Poetics of Nationalist Discourses in Two National Museums of Korea,” Ph.D. Dissertation, the University of British Columbia, 2012; and Sunghee Choi, “Re-thinking Korean Cultural Identities at the National Museum of Korea,” in *National Museums: New Studies from around the World*, ed. Simon J. Knell *et al.* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 290-301.

<sup>6</sup> Scholarship about National Folk Museum includes Kyung Hyo Chun, “Postcolonial Aspirations and Contestation”; and Laurel Kendall, “Peoples Under Glass: A Tale of Two Museums,” in *Consuming Ethnicity and Nationalism: Asian Experiences*, ed. Kosaku Yoshino (University of

1985, the museum later underwent extensive renovations completed in 2002), the Ahn Jung Geun Memorial Hall (Seoul; originally opened in 1970, a new memorial hall was constructed and reopened in 2010), the 5.18 Memorial of Chonnam University (Gwangju; opened in 2005), the 5.18 Memorial that is the museum component of the May 18 National Cemetery (Gwangju; opened in 1997),<sup>7</sup> and the Jeju April 3 Memorial Hall, the museum component of the Jeju April 3 Peace Park<sup>8</sup> (Jeju City; opened in 2008).

The 5.18 Memorial of Chonnam University is a small museum on the campus of this university that played an important role in the pro-democracy movement. May 18 refers to the Gwangju Democratization Movement that began to be violently repressed by the government on that day in 1980. Both the May 18 National Cemetery and the Jeju April 3 Peace Park are national heritage sites that resulted from official redress movements, and they can fairly be interpreted as symbolizing official recognition by the central government of past misdeeds. The April 3 Incident refers to an uprising against overbearing governmental authorities on the island of Jeju that began on that day in 1948 (but with an extensive prologue) and sparked a six-year governmental response so

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Hawaii Press: Honolulu, 1999), 111-132. For a basic overview of the museum, see National Folk Museum of Korea, ed., *National Folk Museum of Korea* (Seoul: Tenmoon, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> Scholarship on the May 18 National Cemetery includes Sallie Yea, "Rewriting Rebellion and Mapping Memory in South Korea: The (Re)presentation of the 1980 Kwangju Uprising through Mangwol-dong Cemetery," *Urban Studies* 39, no. 9 (2002): 1551-1572.

<sup>8</sup> For an essay that provides some analysis of the controversies that the Jeju April 3 Peace Park, including the Memorial Hall, has sparked even as it mainly focuses on the broader topic of transitional justice, see Sungman Koh, "Transitional Justice, Reconciliation, and Political Archivization: A Comparative Study of commemoration in South Korea and Japan of the Jeju April 3 Incident," in *Routledge Handbook of Memory and Reconciliation in East Asia*, ed. Mikyoung Kim (New York: Routledge, 2016), 287-303. For an additional overview of how the April 3 Incident has been reconsidered in post-democratized Korea, especially in Jeju itself, through the lens of memorialization of the dead (which is a central role of the Jeju April 3 Peace Park), see Heonik Kwon, "Healing the Wounds of War: New Ancestral Shrines in Korea," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 24, no. 4, is. 9 (June 15, 2009).

brutal and undifferentiating between innocent civilians and participants in the rebellion, with 25,000 to 30,000 dead as a result, that the Jeju April 3 Peace Park contextualizes the incident among worldwide examples of genocide. The narratives presented at these three sites bluntly indict post-liberation authoritarian governments for their repressive ways, making these museums introspective about the national history.

But other museums addressed here are closely connected to the memory or history wars ongoing in East Asia. Most historians date these contemporary memory wars, which more often than not involve the highlighting of victimization at the hands of foreign “others” and, additionally in some narratives, the corresponding heroic domestic response, to the decade of the 1980s. This makes them a more recent phenomenon than many people would assume. The two Koreas, the People’s Republic of China, and Japan remain at odds not only about the period when Japan inflicted aggression upon and colonized its neighbors, but also about issues such as which modern nation-state can lay claim to ancient civilizations whose territorial boundaries do not correspond to those of modern nation-states. These disputes are on display at museums, like the Independence Hall for example.

According to the short English-language guidebook published at the time that the Independence Hall opened, “The distortion of Korean history in Japanese textbooks in the early 1980s served as the catalyst for the construction of the Independence Hall of Korea,” which is “intended to awaken the Korean national consciousness and promote patriotism.”<sup>9</sup> The Independence Hall highlights the March 1, 1919 Movement as the defining moment in the birth of the modern Korean nation, while declining to provide a complex history of the colonial era overall that would include coverage of topics such as the widespread coexistence (including occasionally intermarriage) or collaboration with the Japanese

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<sup>9</sup> The Independence Hall of Korea, *The Independence Hall of Korea*, 8.

required of most all Koreans who stayed in Korea during the colonial era.

It was no coincidence that the Independence Hall was established during the authoritarian regime of President Chun Doo-hwan (b. 1931; president, 1980-88). Although stained by having presided over the Gwangju Massacre, generally unpopular, and desperately seeking legitimacy, President Chun was also the first post-liberation ruler with no colonial ghost in his closet (e.g. a record of collaboration with the Japanese, or at least of partnering in the post-liberation era with those who collaborated with the Japanese). This made it easier for him to sponsor a museum focused primarily on efforts by Koreans to gain independence from Japanese rulers, and to some extent Chun was able to tap into ever-present and popular anti-Japan sentiment in the Republic of Korea to shore up his presidency, temporarily anyhow.<sup>10</sup>

Although the imposing Independence Hall of Korea still stands and continues to attract numerous visitors, official history in post-democratized Korea does not judge former President Chun favorably. The documentary film that complements the museum exhibits at the May 18 National Cemetery begins with footage of Presiding Judge Kim Young-il reading a guilty verdict (1996) against Chun and another former president, Roh Tae-woo (b. 1932; president, 1988-1993), for their roles in the 1979 military coup d'état and the 1980 Gwangju Massacre.<sup>11</sup> It is the sort of self-examining national history that contrasts with the glorified version offered at the Independence Hall. The Independence Hall continues to present the myth of unified resistance against the Japanese, a narrative that has been strongly called into question since Korea democratized in the late 1980s.

The National Museum of Korean Contemporary History is also quite critical of post-liberation authoritarian governments. But the

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<sup>10</sup> Podoler, *Monuments, Memory, and Identity*, 231.

<sup>11</sup> The May 18 Memorial Foundation, *Documentary 5.18*, viewed in September 2015.

NMKCH also traces, for example, the economic development that took place under Park Chung-hee's (b. 1917) authoritarian regime from 1961 until his assassination in 1979. This and other topics covered by the museum's displays complicate the telling of national history according to a sharp divide whereby the authoritarian era is negated in contrast to celebration of the democratization movement and the subsequently democratized Korea. This roughly places the NMKCH, in terms of its basic narratives, between the blatantly nationalistic accounts put forth at museums such as the Independence Hall and the harshly critical narratives offered at museums located in regions of Korea that experienced, in the post-liberation era, what today are interpreted as infamous examples of harsh governmental repression.

## II. The National Museum of Korean Contemporary History

The NMKCH originated with former President Lee Myung-bak's (b. 1941; president, 2008-2013) pledge, in a speech delivered on Liberation Day (15 August) in 2008, to establish a museum about the Republic of Korea's contemporary history. From the moment that the museum was announced by President Lee, who was considered to be right of center, various constituencies sought to shape (or simply to dismiss) the narratives to be presented at the museum. After four years of planning, the museum opened on December 26, 2012. The NMKCH has proven to be popular, recording more than 1.05 million visits during 2013 and 1.015 million visits in 2014. The museum was on track to record about the same number of visits for 2015 but for the disruption caused by the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome outbreak, which kept people away from public places, that Korea experienced in the spring of that year.<sup>12</sup>

Kim Wang Sik, a political scientist by training (Ph.D., University of

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<sup>12</sup> Figures provided by the NMKCH staff, September 2015.

Missouri), has served as the only director of the NMKCH thus far. Kim, who taught at Ewha University before accepting this position, outlined the museum's purpose as follows: "Our mission is to record the history of Korea, which has overcome its share of trials and tribulations, and to pass it down to future generations. Through these endeavors, we hope to inspire pride in the people of Korea, and create a truly inclusive society that becomes the driving force behind the development of the nation."<sup>13</sup> Kim's emphasis on the museum's role in inspiring patriotism is not surprising for an entity dependent on public funds (the museum is overseen and funded by the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism) in a country where the national history can be as ideologically charged as anywhere in the world.

But in an interview with the author, Dr. Kim used the term "uncomfortable autonomy" to describe his position as director and the overall status of the museum.<sup>14</sup> His assessment is that because the museum is constantly under the microscope of every representative section of the political spectrum in Korea, it enjoys a sort of uncomfortable autonomy to pursue centrist interpretations of Korean history that make no faction happy but also no faction angry enough to cause the museum insurmountable problems. When asked whether or not the NMKCH was influenced by other museums in and outside of Korea, Dr. Kim and the curatorial staff cited the German Historical Museum (est. 1987) and the House of the History of the Federal Republic of Germany (est. 1986) as models that they have studied carefully and continue to keep tabs on.

The NMKCH endeavors "to emphasize the story of the Korean people, those who built this nation."<sup>15</sup> Although the manner in which it

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<sup>13</sup> National Museum of Korean Contemporary History, *National Museum of Korean Contemporary History Guide Book*, paperback (Seoul: Design Intro, 2012).

<sup>14</sup> I interviewed Dr. Kim and also several of the curators on September 13, 2015.

<sup>15</sup> National Museum of Korean Contemporary History, *National Museum of Korean Contemporary*

approaches social history is different from, for example, the National Folk Museum of Korea, both these national museums share an emphasis on telling the stories of the people rather than just those of the elite. The NMKCH is accessible to people in another crucial way—admission is free, as it is at many national museums in Korea.

In a way that is different from textual narratives of history, museums, including the NMKCH, are in a position to make visuals a fundamental aspect of the telling of the story. These days the visuals tend not to be limited to plentiful still images, but also encompass a variety of moving images. Showings of footage, recreations of historical scenes, and documentaries that combine footage and recreations provide entertaining windows into the past that punctuate one's progress through the NMKCH's four exhibits. These videos include combinations of eyewitness testimony, expert analysis, and narration.

Museums also display objects. The collection, cataloguing, and display of objects that are representative of Korea's contemporary history is a basic mission of the NMKCH, one that is provided for in the museum's budget. For Koreans of a specific generation, for example, coming across at the NMKCH a radio that was common in the 1960s can bring back strong memories of the centrality of this appliance to family life at that time. But the abundance of surviving objects that relate to contemporary history also presents the curatorial staff with a challenge. At present, the museum staff is required to use a system for managing relics that was established and adjusted over the years to guide how museums such as the National Museum of Korea safeguard rare surviving relics of the pre-modern past. But in just the first five years of collecting, the NMKCH accumulated more than 100,000 objects, a haul resulting in logistical trials for the staff.<sup>16</sup>

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*History Guide Book.*

<sup>16</sup> This is based on written responses to questions I submitted to the NMKCH as well as discussions with the director and the curatorial staff during my September 2015 visit.



One curious feature of the NMCKH is its location next to the United States Embassy (in the photo above, the NMCKH is to the left of the American Embassy). Considering the role that the United States played in the modern history of Korea, particularly in that of the Republic of Korea, the location is potentially rife for symbolic interpretation. Asked about this, Kim stressed that not only was the museum's location utterly coincidental, but that if a plan that is in the works for the American Embassy to be relocated is realized, the museum hopes to expand into the building presently occupied by the embassy.

In a 2014 radio interview, Kim acknowledged that even before it opened its doors, the museum faced two lines of criticism. It was suggested, first, that the museum would glorify individual leaders such as Syngman Rhee (Yi Seung-man; 1876-1965) and Park Chung-hee (father of former president Park Geun-hye), two post-liberation authoritarian rulers. Second, critics predicted that it would emphasize economic

development over the pro-democracy movement.<sup>17</sup> The present exhibits at the NMKCH are nuanced in a way that seems to belie alarmist predictions in these areas. Although cautious in reference to certain volatile topics, the NMKCH cannot be accused of simplistically sugarcoating post-liberation history or of lionizing the roles played by the Republic of Korea's presidents and other elites. For example, unedifying details of the national history, such as torture of Korean citizens by post-liberation (post-1945) authoritarian governments, are included in the exhibits. The NMKCH is also breaking interesting new ground in debates over the national identity. These facets of the NMKCH distinguish it, for example, from the Independence Hall and the War Memorial of Korea, but it still appears restrained in comparison to the May 18th National Cemetery and particularly to the Jeju April 3 Peace Park.

### III. The Prologue to the Republic of Korea

Most of the museums examined here tell a story of how “Korea” got from some point in the past to the present. Attempts to connect the historical dots in a linear fashion are further complicated by the contemporary existence of two Korean states, each of which invokes the past to claim legitimacy over all of Korea. At the Independence Hall, the War Memorial, and the National Museum of Korea, the prologue to the present covers 5000 years. This requires the appropriation, as national history, of all the (useful) history that took place in the peninsula known

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<sup>17</sup> This KBS interview of Dr. Kim, an episode in the English-language program “Touch Base with Seoul,” can be accessed at [http://world.kbs.co.kr/english/program/program\\_seoulreport\\_detail.htm?No=4509](http://world.kbs.co.kr/english/program/program_seoulreport_detail.htm?No=4509). Kim stressed that the museum had three foci: (1) state-building; (2) economic development; and (3) democratization. He also emphasized the museum's role in collecting and displaying objects (e.g. an official world cup ball from the 2002 World Cup that South Korea cohosted with Japan), which is another way that the telling of history at museums tends to be different from written works of history.

as Korea as well as some of the history that transpired in present-day Northeast China (Manchuria) during these five millennia.

Modern nation states everywhere tend to extrapolate the nation-state backward in time in order to claim as “national history” and “national heritage” all that happened (as well as physical remnants of the past found) within the present national borders and, in certain cases, that which happened (and relics found) outside the present national territory. One area of overlap between the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea) and the Republic of Korea is that the appropriation of 5000 years of history includes a tendency to glorify the territorial extent of the Goguryeo State (37 BC-668 AD), with particular emphasis on the exploits of King Gwanggaeto the Great (374-413; r. 391-413). It was under King Gwanggaeto that the territorial boundaries of the Goguryeo Empire reached their zenith. The photo below is of a map on display at the War Memorial that shows that Goguryeo (written in English on this map as Koguryo) extended well into what is now the Northeast area of China, an area sometimes referred to as Manchuria. The exhibits at the Independence Hall also put considerable emphasis on Goguryeo.

In recent decades, the People’s Republic of China has enraged both of the Koreas by claiming Goguryeo as part of Chinese history and the ethnic group that ruled the Goguryeo State as simply one of the many minorities that historically comprised and contemporaneously comprise the Chinese nation.<sup>18</sup> But in terms of Korean claims to Goguryeo, there is

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<sup>18</sup> For two excellent recent accounts of the arguments over “ownership” of Goguryeo, see David Hundt and Baogang He, “Reconciliation and the Goguryeo/GaoGouli Disputes Between China and South Korea,” in *Routledge Handbook of Memory and Reconciliation in East Asia*, 227-239; and Evelyn S. Rawski, “Epilogue,” in *Early Modern China and Northeast Asia: Cross-Border Perspectives* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 235-263. Rawski somewhat underplays the extent to which the Republic of Korea, not just the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea), has woven accounts of Goguryeo into national history. Okpyo Moon has written about “Korean national history tourism” to Goguryeo sites in contemporary Northeast China. See Okpyo Moon, “Moving and Touring in Time and Place: Korean National History Tourism to Northeast China,” in *Wind Over Water: Migration in an East Asian Context*,



an irony that stands out in another way. Both Koreas are unified in castigating Imperial Japan for its modern empire, which of course included Korea as a colony. But Goguryeo, although ancient and thus distant, was itself an expansive empire.

The War Memorial conveniently if dubiously appropriates for the modern nation-state 5000 years of warrior tradition, and also highlights one foreign threat after another that Korea has faced from interventionist neighbors.<sup>19</sup> But the guidebook to the War Memorial takes pride in the

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ed. David W. Haines, Keiko Yamashita, and Shinji Yamashita (Berghahn Books, 2002), 173-187.

<sup>19</sup> The guidebook to the War Memorial explicitly states, in reference to one of the exhibits, “Memorial Hall was prepared to cherish the achievements and memories of the souls of all those who sacrificed their lives in the battlefield for their country since the era of Ancient Joseon [2333

expansionist nature of Goguryeo: “King Gwanggaeto attacked Baekje [one of the Three Kingdoms of Korea] and occupied the whole area of Imjin River, defeated the Kitan [Khitan], the Zuoyun, Mohe, and Buyeo, and occupied the Manchurian region including the Liaodong region.”<sup>20</sup> The Independence Hall also highlights Goguryeo as a point of national pride, stressing in its guidebook, “Goguryeo secured its vast territory in 5th century and reigned over Northeast Asia *as a winner* [italics added by author].”<sup>21</sup> In one telling of the national narrative, expansionist empires that conquer peoples of other ethnicities are acceptable, so long as they are Korean.

Reproductions of the stele (the original is found in Jian City, Jilin Prefecture, China) that recounts King Gwanggaeto’s exploits can be found at numerous public spaces in Korea. These include the grounds of the War Memorial and of the Independence Hall, the latter of which plays host to ruins of the colonial-era Government General Building transported there after it was demolished in 1995 in an official effort to cleanse Korea of vestiges of its own experience of having been ruled by an outside empire. It is true that campaigns by both Koreas to claim Goguryeo serve as a corrective to accounts that incorrectly slight Korean contributions to the evolution of Northeast Asia. Some of these narratives date to colonial-era efforts by the Japanese to justify their rule over Korea by downplaying Korea’s historic role as an independent actor in Northeast Asia. But the irony of reviling the Empire of Japan while glorifying Goguryeo largely gets muddled in nationalistic versions of the past.

In the case of the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History, the “Prelude to the Republic of Korea,” the name of the first of

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BC-103 BC] to today.” *War Memorial of Korea*, War Memorial of Korea, 22.

<sup>20</sup> War Memorial of Korea, *War Memorial of Korea*, 28.

<sup>21</sup> Independence Hall of Korea, *Independence Hall of Korea*, 9.

four exhibits, begins in 1876. This chronology relieves the museum of responsibility for constructing a teleology that, within the national framework, connects the distant past to the present. But interpreting the modern era is no less controversial, and even the title to the first exhibit seems to suggest that all history before 1948 was simply leading up to the establishment of the Republic of Korea. According to the NMKCH, the lineage of the Republic of Korea runs through the Korean Provisional Government established in 1919 in exile in Shanghai, and relocated during the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) to Chongqing. Unsurprisingly, the museum puts little emphasis on the anti-Japanese guerilla warfare conducted by Kim Il-sung (b. 1912, leader of North Korea, 1948-1994) and others whose lineage is tied to North Korea.

It was in 1876 that the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1897), as the result of the unequal Treaty of Ganghwa that Japan coerced Korea to sign, began to open its ports to the outside world. NMKCH curators stressed, as they escorted me around the exhibits in September 2015, that if their museum were a book, the first exhibit, about the period from 1876 to 1945, would be the background chapter. The fact that the “authors” of the exhibits guided me on this occasion made my visit thoroughly atypical compared to that of the average museumgoer. At the NMKCH, as at most museums, the curatorial hand is not acknowledged in the exhibits themselves (there is no “About the Curators” display, although perhaps there should be). This lends the exhibits an aura of objectivity. Whereas the period from 1876 to 1945 is covered at the NMKCH as necessary context, the main focus of the museum is the post-liberation period. But one cannot understand post-liberation Korea without grasping what came before. Thus, the museum’s interpretation of the “Prelude to the Republic of Korea,” a period that includes the sensitive colonial era, requires examination.

An underlying narrative presented in the “Prelude to the Republic of Korea” is the interruption of nascent indigenous modernization by Japanese colonial repression. This is substantially the narrative presented

at the Independence Hall as well. The War Memorial, for its part, includes little discussion about the forces behind late twentieth century and early twentieth century modernization in Korea, preferring instead to emphasize heroic resistance against Japanese, from Admiral Yi Sunshin's (1545-1598) triumphant naval victories over Japan's invading forces at the end of the sixteenth century to Yun Bong-il's (1908-1932) assassination of several Japanese dignitaries in Shanghai in 1932.<sup>22</sup>

One can quibble with the NMCKH's portrayal of the extent of indigenous modernization that was taking place in the decades from 1876 until Japan made Korea a protectorate in 1905 and then a colony in 1910. During the period before Japan formally asserted control over Korea (but was already intervening significantly nonetheless, as were other foreign powers), Korean society was deeply divided between proponents of tradition and modernity or of some blend of those two concepts (and both tradition and modernity were defined in myriad ways). Various domestic factions often aligned with foreign powers exerting influence in Korea during this tumultuous period.

There certainly was no straight path trodden indigenously toward modernity after 1876 in the way suggested by the short video titled "An effort to modernize the Korean Empire" (covering the period from 1897 until Korea lost its sovereignty) featured at the museum. At the same time, the storyline of indigenous modernization taking place before the formal Japanese intervention is not contrived.

The main problem with the narrative presented in this first exhibit is not so much a mildly exaggerated portrayal of the extent and linear direction of indigenous modernization, but rather the implicit claim, made largely by absence of coverage, that modernization was brought to a jerking stop when Japan made Korea into a colony. The unwillingness to associate modernization with the colonial period results in part from

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<sup>22</sup> Jager, *Narratives of Nation Building in Korea*, 129.

memories of Japanese colonial-era propaganda that touted Japan's civilizing mission in Korea. Imperial Japan justified its control over Korea by stressing Japan's role in bringing modernity to a (supposedly) long "stagnant" society. It is in part in reaction to this that there is strong, sometimes fierce, resistance in Korea to employing the concept of modernization in reference to the colonial period. This reluctance is on display in the NMKCH in the sense that development or modernization that took place during the colonial period is basically ignored.

This is in spite of the fact that the NMKCH's account of the colonial period, although critical, comes across as restrained in comparison to the exhibits at the Independence Hall and the Seodaemun Prison History Hall. These two museums include graphic life-sized wax figurine exhibits of Japanese torture techniques employed on Koreans during the colonial period that do not leave gruesome details of imperial rule to the imagination. The photo below shows one such scene from the Independence Hall. Until recently, the displays at the Seodaemun Prison History Hall were accompanied by bone-chilling sound effects recreating the cruel interrogations of the wardens and the screams of the tortured.<sup>23</sup> One can still experience life-sized displays of colonial-era torture practices that include the corresponding sound effects at regional museums such as the Jeju Anti-Japanese Movement Memorial Hall.<sup>24</sup>

In the case of the NMKCH, with its emphasis on post-liberation history, any detailed dramatization of colonial-era techniques of inflicting pain could have led to calls that equal attention be paid to the torture methods widely employed by successive authoritarian governments in the Republic of Korea on their own citizens. Until recently, Seodaemun Prison History Hall, for example, largely elided the fact that it continued to be used as a prison, including for political prisoners, until it closed in

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<sup>23</sup> Some of the now silenced sound effects from previous exhibits at the Seodaemun Prison Hall Complex can be experienced through videos on youtube.com.

<sup>24</sup> Visited in September 2015.



1987, in other words for forty-two years after liberation.<sup>25</sup> Such omissions suggested that 1945 was more of a discontinuity than perhaps it was, at least in terms of how the authorities handled dissent.

When I visited the Seodaemun Prison History Hall in September, 2013, the exhibit included some displays on post-liberation political prisoners and the following acknowledgement of the prison's post-1945 history:

After the restoration of national independence Seodaemun Prison was a historical symbol of Korea's democratization movement until it was moved to another area in 1987. The victims from the tumultuous political events manipulated by the dictatorship along with students, laborers and democratization activists who fought against the despotic regime were imprisoned, tortured, or died here.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Podoler, *Monuments, Memory, and Identity*, 126.

<sup>26</sup> It is also true that the English-language brochure available at the time I visited in September

But overall the exhibits remain overwhelming focused on indicting the Japanese colonial rulers. A potentially more scandalous trans-1945 continuity that the Seodaemun Prison History Hall fails to address frankly is that the same Korean wardens employed by the Japanese to torture independence activists kept their jobs after liberation, directing their techniques toward critics of post-colonial governments.<sup>27</sup> By contrast, the museum at the Jeju April 3 Peace Park, located far away from Seoul on the island of Jeju, offers a bold attempt to confront some of the disturbing nooks and crannies of the national history avoided or obscured by other museums.

One display at the Jeju April 3 Memorial Hall bluntly states, in reference to the period in Jeju from 1948 to 1954, “Torture methods learned under Imperial Japan were applied by the police to their compatriots, including torture by electricity and water.” This same museum exhibits graphic photos of the residual effects of this torture on survivors in a series of photos taken decades after the torture took place, visuals that are comparable in shock value to the life-sized recreations of colonial-era torture practices. Although the NMKCH does draw attention to post-liberation instances of torture, including sexual torture of the pro-democracy female student protester Kwon In-suk (b. 1964) during police detention in 1986, it does not exhibit recreated graphic scenes of torture or of its aftereffects, and it tends to downplay potentially embarrassing trans-1945 continuities.

To return to the question of modernization, the basic storyline at the NMKCH maintains that Korea was in the process of modernizing before Japan took de facto control in 1905, and that the modernization process

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2013 described Seodaemun Prison History Hall as where “independence activists and pro-democracy activists were jailed and martyred.” But only a small portion of the exhibit at that time was about the post-liberation period.

<sup>27</sup> Alexis Dudden, *Troubled Apologies Among Japan, Korea, and the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 11-12.

was only restarted after liberation in 1945. Although the colonial period was undeniably repressive, it requires quite an exercise in denial to claim that no modernization happened during the colonial period; simply compare a map of the sparse railway network in Korea in 1905 to the spider-web-like network in place by 1945, for example. There are pertinent questions that need to be addressed in reference to this modernization, including whether or not colonial-era macro-level modernization benefitted Koreans. Nonetheless, to ignore that modernization continued from 1905 until 1945, albeit on Japanese terms, represents an unwillingness to confront controversial topics. In fact, modernization and repression are perhaps best studied in tandem because the former can facilitate the latter.

The touchiness of the topic of colonial-era modernization is difficult to overstate. For example, the Korean sociologist Lee Chulwoo began a 1999 essay as follows: “Discussing the question of whether Japanese rule contributed to the modernization of Korea is like stepping into a minefield. The pompous claims of Japanese colonialists that they were modernizing Korean society and the use of those claims to justify colonial rule are vivid memories for Koreans, as is the support many contemporary Westerners gave Japanese imperialism for bringing the blessings of modernity to Asia.”<sup>28</sup>

I admit, in spite of prior knowledge of the sensitivity of the topic, to having trespassed into this mine-infested territory while being hosted in Korea. During the discussion session following a talk (September 12, 2013) that I gave at the Institute for Japanese Studies at Seoul National University that included mostly faculty, I carefully voiced my puzzlement at how the concept of modernization as scholars understand the term could be left out of museum accounts of the colonial period. I

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<sup>28</sup> Chulwoo Lee, “Modernity, Legality, and Power in Korea Under Japanese Rule,” in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, ed. Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), 21.

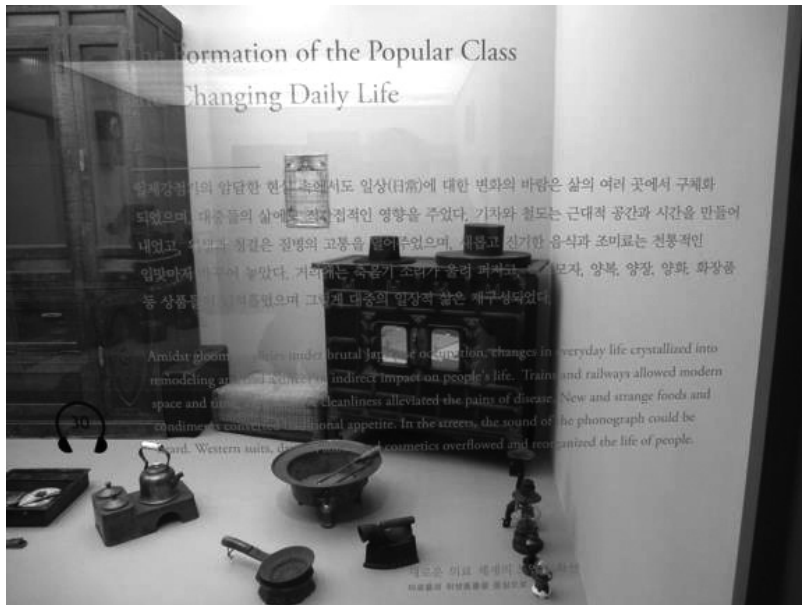
was met initially with what I interpreted as an uncomfortable silence. But then Professor Park Tae-gyun, widely respected as a leading expert on contemporary Korean history, suggested that whereas some Korean scholars in academic writings had no trouble associating the colonial period with modernization, a term that scholars do not necessarily interpret as representing progress (scholars are well aware that modernity can facilitate more effective means of repression including mass imprisonment and mass killing), in popular discourse in Korea the term modernization was so associated with the concept of progress that there was a taboo about using the term in reference to the colonial period.

Curiously, the Seoul Museum of History and the National Folk Museum represent exceptions in their willingness to associate the colonial period with modernization. When I visited the Seoul Museum of History, I was struck by the complexity and nuance of exhibits about Seoul during the colonial era, including coverage of topics such as the development of mass consumer culture that traced the advance of modernity through the decades of the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s. The 2002 version of the museum's guidebook, in a section about the development of department stores in Seoul, makes the bold (and controversial) assertion, "The Japanese introduced capitalism to Korea when they came to Seoul."<sup>29</sup> The 2013 version of the guidebook includes a section titled "1910-1945: Seoul under Japanese Control, Shades of Modern Urbanization," but the text qualifies how Koreans experienced modernity: "The Korean capital modernized quickly under Japanese colonial rule, but the modernity of a colonial city merely fascinated Koreans. It did not include them."<sup>30</sup>

The National Folk Museum includes a few displays explicitly linking the colonial era with modernization in terms of daily lives. Below

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<sup>29</sup> Seoul Museum of History, *Seoul Museum of History* (Seoul Museum of History, 2002), 224.

<sup>30</sup> Seoul Museum of History, *Seoul Museum of History: Places and Memories* (Seoul Museum of History, 2013), 147.



is a photo of one such display, and the first part of the English-language description reads as follows: “Among gloomy realities under brutal Japanese occupation, changes in everyday life crystallized into remodeling and had a direct or indirect impact on people’s life. Trains and railways allowed modern space and time. Hygiene and cleanliness alleviated the pain of disease. New and strange foods and condiments converted traditional appetite. In the streets, the sound of the phonograph could be heard. Western suits, department stores, and cosmetics overflowed and remodeled the life of people.”<sup>31</sup>

The extensive rail network that the Japanese colonial authorities developed in Korea carried businessmen, family members returning to ancestral homes, tourists on leisure trips, and military personnel, but it was also employed to transport Korean “comfort women”<sup>32</sup> on trips that

<sup>31</sup> This particular part of the National Folk Museum’s display is also featured, albeit with slightly different wording than I encountered, in National Folk Museum of Korea, *National Folk Museum of Korea*, 70-71.

<sup>32</sup> There is considerable debate over the definition of the term “comfort women,” as evidenced by the indictment in Korea of the scholar Park Yu-ha in reference to her scholarship in this area, but here I refer to women who were essentially sexual slaves for the Japanese military.

eventually landed them at comfort stations throughout the empire. It was also used to transport large numbers of Korean male forced laborers to sites throughout the empire. The various aspects of modernity should never be interpreted as unequivocally good. But it is not only in Korea that modernization is popularly associated with positive progress. The NMKCH's stress on the interrupted modernization thesis stands out as an example of the cautious approach of the museum, which caters to the broad public, to certain volatile topics.

Director Kim and his staff responded frankly with a written, English-language answer to a question I submitted calling into question the NMKCH's sidestepping of the topic of colonial modernity, a topic we also addressed at length when I met with Dr. Kim and his staff. The written response is worth quoting at length here both for its acknowledgement of the delicacy of the topic and because it asks pertinent questions about the definition of modernization:

It is not possible to deny the fact that railways, roads, buildings, other infrastructure, and modern facilities were constructed during the Japanese colonial rule. Today almost no one denies this fact. Even those who had emphasized the repressive nature of the Japanese regime and the victimization of Koreans are beginning to accept this double-edged modernization process. Despite this changing atmosphere in academe, it is not yet time to debate this double-edged modernization process publicly. In this regard, the Korea-Japan relationship and reconciliation with the past are prime factors to be noted.

It is important to note that the modernization process was capitalized on by Japan as the pretext for justifying its rule and repression. If modernization means not simply the accumulation of wealth, but also implies the significance of democratic values such as liberty, equality, love for all people, and peace, the modernization process prompted by Japan cannot be seen positively. During the Japanese colonial repression,

the Korean people were treated unfairly, and in fact mistreated as an inferior race. Given this truth, it would be unfair to suggest that the modernization process was implemented in the interest of Korea. In our view, when assessing the modernization process, we should consider both material and mental aspects.... For this reason, we would argue that the “genuine” modernization process was interrupted during the Japanese colonial rule, only to be put back on track after Korea was liberated.<sup>33</sup>

The above critique of colonial-era modernity rings true in several areas. However, according to several of the criteria outlined above, one could argue that there are only shades of difference between colonial-era modernization and that carried out by post-liberation authoritarian regimes, most notably that of Park Chung-hee, that had little or no interest in democratic values but were hell-bent on modernizing the Republic of Korea. Viewing modernization and repression as potentially complementary, rather than as necessarily oppositional, raises troubling parallels between colonial and post-liberation regimes that undermine the nationalistic telling of history in Korea.

#### IV. Trans-1945 Continuities

Ignoring the modernization that took place during the colonial era is part of a larger tendency to downplay various trans-1945 continuities. This downplaying is evident not only in the NMKCH’s second exhibit titled “Founding of the Republic of Korea (1945-1960),” but also at the War Memorial of Korea and the Independence Hall. Each of these three museums portrays August 15, 1945 (Liberation Day) as something of a

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<sup>33</sup> Text of written responses to a list of questions submitted by the author, provided by the NMKCH on September 13, 2015. I made minor grammatical edits without changing the meaning of the response.

“day zero” when Korean history was restarted, in isolation from the preceding colonial period. At the same time, these museums highlight links, sometimes tenuous, with pre-1945 threads of patriotic history in place of emphasizing continuities that are tainted with connections to Imperial Japan. The trans-1945 continuities between colonial-era Korea and the Republic of Korea are particularly numerous, both in terms of structures and personnel, and they relate closely to the especially explosive issue of collaboration with the Japanese colonizers (what in Korean is typically termed as having been “pro-Japanese”).

These continuities range from the policing system to the education system to the fact that many of the lineages of the great business success stories of the post-liberation industrialization of Korea can be traced back to Korean entrepreneurs who succeeded in the industrial, capitalist environment of the colonial period. But in terms of telling Korean history in a patriotic manner, one of the most problematic continuities of all from the colonial period is the lineage of the Republic of Korea armed forces, specifically of its officer corps.

At the War Memorial of Korea and the Independence Hall, the lineage of the Republic of Korea armed forces, often represented in dramatic symbolic terms through visuals including statues and reliefs, is portrayed more or less as follows with three stages: (1) The righteous army of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century that fought against initial Japanese encroachment; (2) The post-1919 independence army based in Manchuria that also occasionally carried out attacks in Korea, including the oft-cited 1920 raid at Cheongsanri; and (3) The liberation army established in 1941 in Chongqing, China that was under the Provisional Government of Korea.

Unfortunately for this patriotic narrative, however, a significant proportion of what became the Republic of Korea officer corps, including most famously Park Chung-hee, served in the Japanese Imperial Army before liberation and gained much of their military expertise through that experience. The political scientist Gregg Brazinsky writes:

Although there were no national armed forces in the Japanese colonial period, many Koreans first experienced service in a modern military during these years either by enlisting or being conscripted into Japan's imperial army. As Japan's need for troops surged during World War II, the empire forced thousands of Koreans into service. By 1945 approximately fifty thousand Koreans had served in the Japanese military and several hundred had become officers. A handful of Koreans who were able to attend the Japanese Military Academy or other elite officer training schools would eventually play a vital role in the formation and development of the ROK army.<sup>34</sup>

This unedifying detail linking service in the Japanese military with the development of the ROK armed forces is frequently omitted outright in museum accounts of the national history. Consider, for example, how the English-language guidebook to the War Memorial recounts this history. The keyword here is "legitimacy": "The ROK Armed Forces, which carries on the legitimacy of the righteous army, independence army, and liberation army, has extensively reinforced its military strength while overcoming the great ordeal of the Korean War and have become the elite army of the people and an advanced and powerful forces of the world."<sup>35</sup> In the exhibits at the NMKCH on the other hand, this issue is (by and large) simply avoided.

The reluctance of museums to confront such continuities from the colonial era speaks to the sensitivity of the topic of collaboration even seventy years after Korea was liberated from Japanese rule. The way in which collaboration is portrayed in most of the museums examined here

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<sup>34</sup> Gregg Brazinsky, *Nation Building in South Korea: Koreans, Americans, and the Making of a Democracy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 72.

<sup>35</sup> The War Memorial of Korea, *The War Memorial of Korea*, 150. Sheila Jager previously zeroed in on the question of legitimacy. See Sheil Jager, "Monumental Histories," *Public Culture* 14, no. 2 (Spring 2002): 127.

largely follows Koen De Ceuster's analysis of how Korean historiography has addressed the issue, at least until the democratization of Korea in the late 1980s.<sup>36</sup> As De Ceuster stresses, the definition of "collaboration" remains ambiguous in the Republic of Korea in no small part because the widespread collaboration that took place during the four-decade colonial period was not addressed in a comprehensive manner in the legal system in the post-liberation era. Collaboration went largely unpunished in the southern half of Korea first because of the reluctance of the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK), which valued bureaucratic efficiency, to do so when it ruled below the 38th parallel from 1945 until 1948, and thereafter because of President Rhee's unwillingness to confront the collaborationist legacy of many of his regime's supporters during the early years of the Republic of Korea. Roh Myun-hyun (1946-2009; president, 2003-2008) focused on collaboration both during his campaign and his administration. This renewed focus led to various investigations, mostly by civil groups, that produced lists of collaborators that sullied the reputation of some Koreans and their descendants, but again no formal punishment was carried out.

To the extent that museums highlight collaboration, it is generally in reference to the period between 1905 and 1910 when so-called traitors turned over national sovereignty to Japan by signing what most Koreans view as illegal treaties. The photo below shows the staging in the Independence Hall of the signing of the Eulsa Treaty in 1905 that made Korea into a protectorate of Japan. Among the so-called "five traitors of Eulsa" was Yi Wan-yong (1858-1926), who is viewed as national traitor number one in the Republic of Korea for also having later pushed Emperor Gojong (1852-1919; r. 1863-1907) to abdicate in 1907 and then for having signed the 1910 treaty that made Korea into a Japanese

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<sup>36</sup> Koen De Ceuster, "The Nation Exorcised: The Historiography of Collaboration in South Korea," *Korean Studies* 25, no. 2 (2002): 207-242.



colony.

While scapegoating a small number of traitors, the museums examined here (with the notable exception of the April 3 Memorial Hall) generally continue to abstain from addressing the widespread collaboration or coexistence (a better term to describe the large numbers of Koreans who carried on simply by not antagonizing the Japanese rather than by actively partnering with them) that continued up until liberation in 1945 because to do so is, in a sense, to challenge the legitimacy of the Republic of Korea. In the Republic of Korea (in contrast to North Korea), almost all collaborators escaped punishment in the post-liberation period, and many in fact went on to play prominent roles in all areas of society.

One of the more poignant admissions by a museum that resistance against the Japanese was nowhere near as unified as that suggested by the myth of national resistance can be found at the memorial hall devoted to one of Korea's most celebrated opponents of Japanese imperialism,

Ahn Jung-geun (1879-1910). In 1909, Ahn assassinated Japan's first Governor General of Korea, Itō Hirobumi (1841-1909), in the city of Harbin. Before his execution by Japanese authorities, Ahn penned the "15 Crimes of Itō Hirobumi," an indictment of Japan's imperialism in Korea.

Ahn is one of the most illustrious national heroes in contemporary South Korea, and the memorial hall that bears his name is devoted to his story. The Ahn Jung-geun Memorial Hall is located on Namsam Mountain overlooking Seoul. In a surprisingly honest manner considering that it undermines the myth of national resistance, one display at the memorial hall documents Ahn's unsuccessful efforts to rally Koreans living in China against the Japanese in the period immediately following the signing of the Eulsa Treaty: "Ahn Jung-geun visited several places in Shandong Province, and arrived in Shanghai. He met many Korean residents there in Shanghai and tried to mobilize them for national sovereignty restoration movement. However, their responses were far from what Ahn Jung-geun expected."

The NMKCH elides the topic of widespread collaboration, or coexistence, in its exhibit "Prelude to the Republic of Korea." However, the next exhibit, titled "Founding of the Republic of Korea (1945-1960)," draws attention to the tendencies of the American authorities to maintain as many structures and personnel from the colonial era as possible. It is also makes specific mention of the Rhee Regime's role in undermining attempts to prosecute collaborators, stressing, "With the launch of the government [in 1948], the National Assembly set out punishments for Anti-National Activity. However, interference by the Syngman Rhee administration brought an early end to the effort, leaving the task of resolving the past unfinished."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> National Museum of Korean Contemporary History, *National Museum of Korean Contemporary History Guide Book*, 54.

Few combinations can match for volatility the intersection of collaboration and comfort women. The scholar C. Sarah Soh has argued that there were many layers of involvement, both Korean and Japanese, in the recruitment and exploitation of Korean comfort women, an assertion that does not sit well with nationalists in Korea. But Soh points out that numerous testimonials by survivors themselves mention recruitment, in a deceitful manner, by fellow Koreans.<sup>38</sup> Outside of Korea, the topic of local complicity pales in comparison to and can be misused to divert attention from the overwhelming responsibility of the Japanese colonial and military authorities for the comfort women system. But I would argue that inside Korea it is an issue that must be forthrightly addressed, however uncomfortable and however much it undermines the notion of a nation unified against Imperial Japan.<sup>39</sup>

Consider the following photo of an exhibit at the Independence Hall recreating what presumably was meant to be a representative scene of colonial-era recruitment of comfort women. The English-language description reads, “The miniature model shows a Korean woman in a rural village forcefully taken away by a person belonging to a private business under order of the Japanese military.” But are we to understand

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<sup>38</sup> For example, Yi Sun Ok (b. 1921) remembered how she was recruited in 1938: “One day, a Korean man, a Mr. O in his forties, visited Mr. Morita [of the Japanese family for which Yi was working]. I was there and listened to the conversation. Mr. O said that he had come to recruit girls to work in a new silk factory in Japan. Answering my questions, he even told me that I could quit work anytime if I didn’t like work there.... I decided to go. My parents were against the idea but I persuaded them. I was seventeen when I left home.” Quoted in C. Sarah Soh, *Comfort Women: Sexual Violence and Postcolonial Memory in Korea and Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 2-3.

<sup>39</sup> The scholar Hyunah Yang argues that nationalist narratives of the comfort women in fact silence numerous aspects of the broader story, including Korean complicity in the recruitment and also patriarchal tendencies in Korea, and also contributed to the fact that in spite of plentiful evidence about the comfort women system having survived in Korea after the colonial era, it was not until the 1980s that it became a significant scholarly and public issue. See Hyunah Yang, “Re-membering the Korean Military Comfort Women: Nationalism, Sexuality, and Silencing,” in *Dangerous Women: Gender and Korean Nationalism*, ed. Elaine H. Kim and Chungmoo Choi (New York: Routledge, 1998), 123-139.



that the businessman was Japanese or Korean? One wonders why the Independence Hall curators did not clarify this, but maybe the vagueness was a strategy to sidestep empirical evidence indicating that some or all of the men shown in the recreated scene *could have been* Korean (the historical record suggests that they could have been Korean or Japanese). No doubt the fact that I enjoy academic freedom on the other side of the Pacific makes it easier to propose that it might be more valuable for Koreans who visit the Independence Hall to be confronted with the complex nexus of domestic as well as colonial social conditions that explain the recruitment of comfort women (and Korean complicity in this recruitment), rather than simply receiving a dose of anti-Japanese sentiment. These conditions include that slavery was only outlawed in Korea in 1894 but survived in practice into the twentieth century; that concepts of women's rights and universal rights were nowhere as developed as they are today; and that systems of patriarchy were deeply entrenched.

## V. Founding of the Republic of Korea (1945-1960)

Post-liberation history includes so many twists and turns that it is unlikely that any museum could cover them all, a relevant point when contextualizing the NMKCH's second exhibit, "Founding of the Republic of Korea." This period began with the defeat of the Empire of Japan, but also with the arbitrary division of Korea into two sectors, one occupied by the Soviet Union and the other by the United States, in spite of the fact that Korea had not been an aggressor in World War II. Introduced by the American side in collaboration with the Soviet Union as a part of the agreements made toward the end of World War II, this division laid the groundwork for the emergence of two competing regimes, each claiming legitimacy over the Korean peninsula. The subsequent fratricidal civil war that began in June 1950 left much of Korea in ruins and yet did not reunify the nation by the time a truce in 1953 finally brought the open warfare (but not the stark ideological divisions) to an end.

The NMKCH addresses the emergence of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (coverage that avoids denigrating North Korea, a fact that Director Kim attributes to a confidence among South Koreans that their side won the competition between political-economic systems), the civil war, and the post-truce interactions (periodically violent) between the two Koreas. But it does not claim to tell the history of the two Koreas from 1945 until the present. Rather it focuses on the Republic of Korea, despite the fact that the history of South Korea cannot be told independently of that of North Korea. Even the domestic history of the Republic of Korea is replete with fissures, ranging from ideological ones to regional histories that stubbornly refuse to fit conveniently into one national narrative.

Director Kim and his staff are aware of how touchy the subject of trans-1945 continuities is, more so than the NMKCH's exhibits would indicate. Kim preferred to stress discontinuities, however:

The question of “trans-1945 continuities” is a key theme that our museum is dealing with cautiously. It is an undeniable fact that there exists continuity between the colonial period and post-liberation Korea in terms of the institutional systems and personnel. As you capture [in a written question I submitted], the trans-1945 continuities exist in the area of the military, the educational system, policing, and the economy where the personnel from the colonial era remained intact.

Despite this fact, in my view I do not think that the question of trans-1945 continuities can be dealt with only by judging the perspective of institutional systems and personnel. There are other important elements to be considered.

For example, it may be worth examining whether or not the spirit/national esteem of the Korean people survived in spite of Japanese oppression. At the height of the Japanese colonial rule, the Korean people were banned from using the Korean language (*Hangul*) and their own names. This was done because the Japanese desired to annihilate the Korean identity and culture. Immediately after the liberation of 1945, *Hangul* was restored and the Korean people were once again able to use their own mother tongue.

This suggests that, despite the previous institutional and personnel system that emanated from the colonial era and which had indeed infiltrated our society, the ethos of the Korean people was not dead. In other words, the people who resisted the colonial rule and those who survived Japanese oppression should be viewed differently from those who compromised themselves with the *modus vivendi*. The question of trans-1945 continuities is too complex to judge from a single point of view.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Text of written responses to a list of questions submitted by the author, provided by the NMKCH on September 13, 2015. I made minor grammatical edits.

Discontinuities from the colonial era are arguably as significant as the continuities, probably more so as the distance from 1945 grows. For example, although the overbearing United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) that ruled Korea from 1945 to 1948 frequently felt imperial to many Koreans, the Americans also brought with them their missionary zeal for the American way, including for American-style democracy, so long as communism was first eradicated. And in spite of a haughty attitude that was often mixed with broad ignorance of local conditions, the American overseers nonetheless sought to replace their military rule with a democratically elected (but most certainly not communist) government of an independent Korea. What in fact resulted was the creation of a government that was certainly anti-communist but which in practice was also undemocratic, and yet enjoyed the blessing of the United States.

Scholarly monographs continue to sort out the complex events in the three years after liberation that led to the establishment of two regimes competing for control over the Korean peninsula and nation. The short story for the part of Korea south of the 38th parallel, which skips over the alternatives as well as the resistance to the eventual outcome (and surely pays insufficient attention to Korean agency in these developments), is that it ended up with a republic led by a fiercely anti-communist but also equally nationalistic president, Rhee Syngman, who observed at least the trappings of liberal democracy (e.g. elections), even while governing in an authoritarian manner. In spite of his regime's reliance, especially after the invasion from the north, on the United States, Rhee was not necessarily pro-American.

The constituent assembly election of May 10, 1948 that inaugurated the Republic of Korea was rife with balloting irregularities and the subsequent Rhee regime (the national assembly elected the president on July 20) frequently exhibited dictatorial tendencies.<sup>41</sup> The NMKCH emphasizes the cup-half-full interpretation of the national election of 1948, which is that no such exercise in democracy had ever taken place

during the colonial era or, for that matter, ever previously in Korea. Before my visit to the NMKCH in September 2015, I expressed my incredulity in a written question to Director Kim that the paperback English-language guidebook to the NMKCH included the following bold statement that more or less also represented how this election was portrayed at the museum: “The election marked a watershed in Korea’s history: it had finally been transformed into a democratic nation.”<sup>42</sup> The NMKCH’s written response was as follows:

This election is appraised as the first democratic election that established a constituent national assembly. Having noted this significance, the English-language guidebook describes 10 May 1948 election as a “watershed in Korea’s history.” Similarly, given that the 10 May 1948 election was the first election that introduced a democratic electoral law, the guidebook in English was written that “[South Korea] had finally been transformed into a democratic nation.” Of course, it is true that there had been a series of electoral frauds and distortions, and that malpractice continued up until the late 1980s. Yet, since 1948 an array of institutional reforms has continuously ensued. The [10 May 1948 election] was a serious attempt to transform South Korea into a democratic country.<sup>43</sup>

This is one plausible narrative of the development of the Republic of Korea, the establishment of which nonetheless represented for Koreans the heartbreaking division of the nation. But for many Koreans south of the 38th parallel, what distinguished the period leading up to and

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<sup>41</sup> The Constitution of the Republic of Korea was promulgated on July 17, 1948.

<sup>42</sup> National Museum of Korean Contemporary History, *National Museum of Korean Contemporary History Guide Book*, 51.

<sup>43</sup> Text of written responses to a list of questions submitted by the author, provided by the NMKCH on September 13, 2015. I made minor grammatical edits.

immediately following the establishment of the Republic of Korea was not simply electoral irregularities and other dubious anti-democratic behavior, but dual, overlapping regimes (the American Military Administration and then the Rhee Administration) that were quick to label all forms of dissent as communist, and thus in need of suppression. This suppression was often carried out by quick, violent means with no due process.

The history of Jeju as portrayed by the Jeju April 3 Peace Memorial Hall provides a bitter counter narrative to the cup-half-full appraisal of post-liberation steps toward democracy. Whether what happened in Jeju was an exception to what the southern half of Korea experienced during this period or in fact all too representative of what was going on throughout the territory controlled by the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) followed by the Rhee Administration is an intensely contentious historical question. As more and more evidence emerges of the Rhee Administration's extermination of tens of thousands of civilian opponents in the period leading up to full-scale war and especially after the invasion from the north, one cannot help wondering if the case of Jeju, for all its specificity, is sadly representative of nationwide happenings during these years.<sup>44</sup>

The April 3 Incident and the accompanying October 1948 Yeosu-Suncheon Rebellion of military personnel who refused to take part in the suppression of the Jeju uprising have been the subjects of much inquiry since the Republic of Korea democratized in the late 1980s, with a

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<sup>44</sup> Research by the Republic of Korea's Truth and Reconciliation Commission suggested that the Rhee Administration killed approximately 100,000 civilians it deemed as threats. See Do Khiem and Sung-soo Kim, "Crimes, Concealment and South Korea's Truth and Reconciliation Commission," *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* (online journal) 1 (August 2008); and Dong-Choon Kim, "The war against the 'enemy within': hidden massacres in the early stages of the Korean War," in *Rethinking Historical Injustice and Reconciliation in Northeast Asia: The Korean Experience*, ed. Gi-Wook Shin, Soon-Won Park, and Daqing Yang (New York: Routledge, 2007), 75-93.

governmental commission presenting its findings about the Jeju April 3 Incident in 2003. Thus, rather than addressing the details that are available in official reports and also scholarship, the focus here is mostly on competing master narratives of these incidents provided at museums in Korea.

Exhibits at the War Memorial of Korea portray both the Jeju and Yeosu-Suncheon Incidents as communist uprisings. This is also basically the stance of the NMKCH, where a clear distinction is made between those two incidents and other popular anti-government demonstrations, such as the April 19, 1960 protests against the increasingly anti-democratic tendencies of the Rhee Administration<sup>45</sup> or the 1980 Gwangju Democratization Movement. “4.19” and “5.18,” as the two movements are typically referenced in Korea, are now officially recognized as important landmarks in the development of democracy in Korea, but a bitter divide remains about where to situate the April 3 Jeju Incident.

In a written response to my question about what distinguishes one popular protest from another, Director Kim emphasized:

The April 3 Jeju Uprising and Yeosu-Suncheon Rebellion were inherently different in nature from the 4.19 and 5.18 Democratization Movement. The April 3 Jeju Uprising and Yeosu-Suncheon Rebellion were for the overthrowing of liberal democracy, and instead sought the establishment of a socialist system akin to North Korea. Recently, there has emerged social demand for a reassessment of the April 3 Jeju Uprising. This is because many innocent civilians were killed when the government forces quelled the rebellion.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> These protests resulted in President Rhee’s resignation in 1960 and a subsequent period of democratic rule that was overthrown by Park Chung-hee’s military coup d’état in 1961.

<sup>46</sup> Text of written responses to a list of questions submitted by the author, provided by the NMKCH on September 13, 2015. I made minor grammatical edits.

The April 3 Peace Memorial Hall memorializes the killing of many innocent civilians, but otherwise departs substantially from the line that what happened in Jeju was a communist-inspired, existential threat to liberal democracy.

The April 3 Peace Memorial Hall, relying on the “The Jeju 4.3 Incident Investigation Report” issued by the National Committee for Investigation of the Jeju April 3 Incident and Recovering the Honor of Victims (est. 2000),<sup>47</sup> summarizes what happened in Jeju between 1947 and 1954:

The April 3 Jeju Uprising was a series of incidents in which some 25,000-30,000 Jeju residents were killed as a result of clashes between armed civilian groups and military government forces. It primarily took place between March 1, 1947, when the police opened fire on civilians, and April 3, 1948, when members of the Jeju chapter of the South Korea Labor Party began an uprising to protest against both oppression by the police and the Northwest Youth Association<sup>48</sup> as well as a separate election and a separate government in South Korea only. It effectively continued until September 21, 1954, when closed areas of Mount Halla were reopened to the public.

The Jeju 3 April Peace Memorial Hall, again basing its exhibit on the findings of the official investigation, highlights a triad of factors that led to the uprising: (1) Confusion in grain policy (which very possibly resulted in part from profiteering by American military personnel); (2) The employment of pro-Japan collaborators [by the U.S. Military Administration]; and (3) Corruption of U.S. Military Administration

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<sup>47</sup> “The Jeju 4.3 Incident Investigation Report” (2003) is available online at [http://www.jeju43peace.or.kr/report\\_eng.pdf](http://www.jeju43peace.or.kr/report_eng.pdf). Accessed November 12, 2015.

<sup>48</sup> The Northwest Youth Association was a right-wing group that participated in the suppression of the April 3 Incident.

officials. These findings undermine the labeling of Jeju at the time of the uprising as a “Red Island,” although there was an active minority communist faction (many of whom were intensely nationalistic). The official committee has refused to recognize such communists as victims of the Jeju April 3 Uprising and therefore they have not had their honor restored.

The infamous incident of March 1, 1947 whereby police opened fire on individuals engaging in a peaceful celebration of Independence Day resulted in a widespread general strike across the island, a key part of the prologue to the armed uprising. According to the Jeju April 3 Peace Memorial Hall, the strike in turn sparked an extreme response by the Korean authorities entrusted by the U.S. Military Administration with maintaining order. The photo below is of a recreated scene showing the conditions of some of the 500 individuals arrested in the weeks after the general strike began. The caption reads: “Thirty-five prisoners... crowded in a cell approximately 10’x12’.”

According to the exhibits, reports of the torture of many of the 2,500 arrested between March 1, 1947 and April 3, 1948, and the death of three male prisoners by torture in March 1948, inflamed popular disgust with the overbearing American Military Administration and the far right, pro-Japanese collaborators (Koreans) it commissioned to clamp down on the protests.<sup>49</sup> By shining a light in this area, the memorial hall squarely draws attention to among the most notorious of trans-1945 continuities, namely, the role of collaborators who had tortured independence activists on behalf of the Japanese authorities employing the same methods of inflicting pain on fellow Koreans in the post-liberation era.

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<sup>49</sup> There were dissenting voices among both United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) personnel and local Korean officials who argued that inept and corrupt local administrators were to blame for the uprising. Some called for a measured response and the addressing of the underlying reasons for popular discontent, but they were ignored.



The Jeju April 3 Peace Memorial Hall is equally blunt about the Korean military forces mobilized to put down the uprising, with a typical caption reading: “Like the commander of the 9th Regiment, Ham Byong-son, commander of the 2nd Regiment [which replaced the 9th Regiment in Jeju], [had been] a warrant officer for the Japanese army.” The fourth hall of the exhibit, titled “Destruction and Massacre,” chronicles the scorched earth approach to quelling the rebellion that was adopted by Korean military forces and sanctioned by their American overseers and later by the Rhee Administration.<sup>50</sup> This approach typically drew no distinction between a numerically small group of rebels and the broader civilian population.

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<sup>50</sup> Again, there were dissenting voices within the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK), as there were among Korean officials. The Jeju April 3 Peace Memorial Hall highlights that one U.S. military report stated, “The 9th Regiment adopted a program of mass slaughter.”

The Jeju April 3 Peace Memorial Hall also highlights widespread sexual abuse that took place during the quelling of the rebellion, in other words Korean governmental armed forces and other officials abusing Korean women. Although the Jeju April 3 Peace Memorial Hall does not explicitly make the connection, one cannot help but juxtapose the attention to domestic instances of sexual abuse with the overwhelming focus that one finds throughout Korea on the issue of comfort women. The topic of comfort women, especially if the issue of Korean complicity in the recruitment of comfort women is elided, can be portrayed as a crime committed by Japanese upon the Korean nation, and at times the overwhelming stress on the comfort women overshadows the broader sexual exploitation of women. In contrast, there is no nationalistic us-versus-them narrative in which to place the sexual violation and murder that occurred in Jeju, important though it is to distinguish between the empire-wide system of comfort women and examples of sexual violence such as the following: “Following the attempted rape of a village girl, police shouted in front of residents, ‘As she’s female, a female member of the Great Korean Youth Association come out, and spear her!’”<sup>51</sup>

The Jeju April 3 Memorial Hall chronicles how many Jeju residents suffered for decades after the violence came to an end as the result of what is known as the “involvement system.” In other words family members related to individuals labeled (frequently incorrectly) participants in the uprising were denied the social, economic, and political fruits of full citizenship in the national community. This museum also addresses an important misconception about the large community of individuals in Osaka, Japan, who trace their ancestry to Jeju. A widely held assumption is that it was colonial-era economic exploitation that drove them from their ancestral homes. But there were

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<sup>51</sup> This is a caption of one of the displays at the Jeju April 3 Peace Memorial Hall.

also many who fled Jeju as the result of post-liberation repression by American and Korean governmental authorities, finding refuge in Japan. This is but one additional detail of the many highlighted at this museum that pointedly refuses to join the national chorus singing about the victimization of Koreans by outsiders.

## VI. Development of the Republic of Korea (1961-1987)

Two broad themes shape evaluations of Park Chung-hee's regime, which began with the coup d'état that brought him to power in 1961 (derailing a brief experiment in democratic government), and ended with his assassination in 1979. First, although the Park Regime was undeniably successful in achieving one goal that had eluded previous post-liberation administrations—remarkable macro-level economic growth—how does one judge the authoritarian side of this technocratic administration? Did the ends justify the means? Second, how does one evaluate the development itself? Who benefitted from this centrally orchestrated modernization, and who did not? The NMKCH addresses these and other topics in its third exhibit, “Development of the Republic of Korea, 1961-1987,” a period that also includes Chun Doo-hwan's military dictatorship that finally gave way to overwhelming popular demands for democratic reform.

There are notable omissions from the exhibit. By providing no trans-1945 prologue other than perhaps the concept of indigenous modernization to the story of the remarkable economic development from the 1960s on, the NMKCH seemingly situates industrial capitalism in Korea as a post-liberation phenomenon. In any case, it draws no connections between colonial-era and post-liberation development. In contrast, some historians, most notably Carter Eckert, trace the origins of capitalist development to the colonial period when a small group of Korean capitalists achieved great wealth. According to Eckert, many of these same capitalists and their progeny were later at the forefront of

Korea's rapid development from the 1960s on.<sup>52</sup> In my interview with NMKCH Director Kim, who was well versed in the debates about colonial modernity, he noted that scholars continue to debate intensely the origins of capitalism in Korea, with many researchers disagreeing with Eckert's emphasis on the importance of the colonial era.

Curators at the NMKCH explained that they do, on occasion, alter exhibits in response to criticism. For example, they added to the third exhibit information about opposition in the 1960s to the Park Regime's moves to establish diplomatic relations with Japan, which was accomplished in 1965 after popular protests against normalization were quelled by the government's heavy hand. The Park Regime leveraged monies provided by Japan as the result of the normalization treaty into national development projects. However, the normalization treaty not only left various legacies of the colonial era unsettled, but, even worse in the eyes of many Koreans, the following clause also seemingly nullified the possibility of addressing these issues in the future:

“The High Contracting Parties confirm that the problems concerning property, rights, and interests of the two High Contracting Parties and their peoples (including juridical persons) and the claims between the High Contracting Parties and between their peoples, including those stipulated in Article IV(a) of the Peace Treaty with Japan signed at the city of San Francisco on September 8, 1951, have been settled

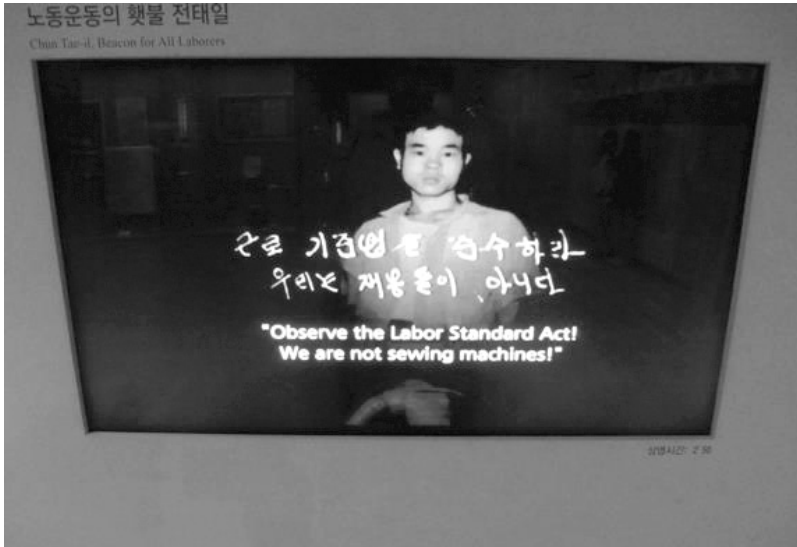
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<sup>52</sup> Carter J. Eckert, *Offspring of Empire: The Koch'ang Kims and the Colonial Origins of Korean Capitalism, 1876-1945* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991). Eckert wrote: “In retrospect, what is striking about the colonial period to the student of Korean socioeconomic history is, first of all, the extent of industrial growth that did take place in spite of Korea's colonial status. Second, and even more interesting, is that colonialism did not preclude considerable numbers of Koreans from taking an active part in such industrial growth” (5). Eckert also oversaw a study that determined that “nearly 60 percent of the founders of South Korea's top fifty *chaebol* [vertically and horizontally integrated industrial combines] had some kind of colonial business experience” (254).

completely and finally.”<sup>53</sup>

The Park Regime traded historical closure with Japan for hundreds of millions of dollars of investment capital. Another source of investment capital for the Park Regime, the dispatch of troops to Vietnam during the 1960s and 1970s in support of South Vietnam with whom South Korea shared a patron in the United States, also resulted in troubling legacies for present-day Korea. This intervention was mercenary, ideological, and strategic all at once: the Republic of Korea received payments from the United States for dispatching troops, and the Park Regime then leveraged these for development projects. This element of the story is the focus of the NMKCH’s coverage of the Korean role in Vietnam. But in recent decades, the Republic of Korea has been forced to rethink its intervention in Vietnam, now an important trading partner. Exposés have accused Korean troops of committing various atrocities in Vietnam, including sexual abuse of the local women, the sort of stories that undermine the notion that Korea always plays the role of victim. These cruelties also raise troubling parallels with crimes committed by Japanese imperialists in Korea during the colonial era for which the Republic of Korea demands demonstrations of contrition from the Government of Japan.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> “Agreement Between Japan and Republic of Korea Concerning the Settlement of Problems in Regard to Property and Claims and Economic Cooperation,” June 22, 1965. <http://worldjpn.grips.ac.jp/documents/texts/JPKR/19650622.T9E.html>. This Agreement was signed on the same day, June 22, 1965, as the “Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea” that reestablished diplomatic relations between the two countries.

<sup>54</sup> For analyses of changing views in the Republic of Korea regarding that country’s intervention in the Vietnam War, see Charles K. Armstrong, “Doubly Forgotten: Korea’s Vietnam War and the Revival of Memory,” in *Ruptured Histories: War, Memory, and the Post-Cold War in Asia*, ed. Sheila M. Jager and Rana Mitter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 291-306; and Kyung-Yoong Bay, “From Seoul to Saigon: Gook Meets Charlie,” in *Rethinking Historical Injustice and Reconciliation in Northeast Asia: The Korean Experience*, 114-130. Depending on one’s interpretation, President Kim Dae-jung either apologized or issued a statement of regret during a visit to Vietnam in 2001 for the “suffering caused to the Vietnamese people by our participation in that unfortunate war.” The government of Vietnam has not called upon the Republic of Korea to apologize, preferring instead to focus on building economic ties.



In line with its commitment to social history, the NMKCH goes to considerable lengths to highlight the role of average people in contributing to the economic development that transformed the Republic of Korea from one of the poorest nation states in the world in 1960 to the upper ranks of prosperous countries a half-century later. The NMKCH also documents the underside of this rapid economic development, the exploitation of labor, for example. Below is a photo of one image from a video presentation at the NMKCH about Chun Tae-il, a tailor who committed suicide in 1970 at the age of twenty-two in order to protest the horrible working conditions in textile factories. The Park Regime typically suppressed demands from laborers that they get their share in the growing economic pie, prioritizing the drive for macro national prosperity and strength.

In a part of the exhibit titled “Shadows of Growth,” the NMKCH renders a verdict on who did not enjoy the benefits of the modernization, and also identifies some unwelcome side effects:

Korea's drive for high growth ended up costing balanced development between agricultural and industrial sectors, between urban and rural areas, and between different regions. Also the government dealt with the urban poor who lived in unlicensed shacks by displacing them from the center of cities, which made the situation worse for them. Confrontations between the urban poor and authorities sometimes got violent as shown in the case of the Gwangju Daedanji incident of August 1971. The rights of workers were also ignored. Especially female textile workers suffered from long labor hours and low wages. Chun Tae-il, a young tailor worker at Pyeonghwa Market in Seoul, protested against society's cruel indifference to the working class by burning himself to death. While his sacrifice awakened society's consciousness about the miserable conditions of workers, the government did not give up on its drive for rapid growth.

The reference to unbalanced regional growth would be understood in particular by most anyone from the southwestern region, the area that includes Gwangju. Whereas the Park Regime directed investment to the southeastern coastal zone that includes Pohang, Ulsan, and Pusan, it largely ignored the southwestern region. This accentuated a longstanding east-west divide that has been apparent not only in elections, but also in other forms of political expression.<sup>55</sup>

The exhibit also details, in a social history manner, how modernization transformed daily life. Although the Park Regime was anti-labor, there was nonetheless a trickle-down effect from the economic development, which laid the basis for the prosperity that citizens of the Republic of Korea enjoy today. The NMKCH traces the entry into Korean homes in the 1960s and 1970s of consumer items ranging from

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<sup>55</sup> For an analysis of the historic and contemporary marginalization of the southwestern or Cholla Region, see Sallie Yea, "Maps of Resistance and Geographies of Dissent in the Cholla Region of South Korea," *Korean Studies* 24 (2000): 69-93.

telephones to refrigerators to televisions to washing machines to electric rice cookers, and documents how consumer appliances altered daily life. During this period, a remarkable migration from rural areas to cities took place. The NMKCH also highlights the development of Korea's educational system, a generally happy story of the continuous extension of opportunities throughout most of the post-liberation period, and especially of the post-armistice era.

The proverbial elephant in the room in reference to this period, however, is the pro-democracy movement, or more precisely government's hostile response to it. The War Memorial of Korea, for its part, generally elides coverage of the military's role in domestic repression and includes no mention of its role in repressing the Gwangju Democratization Movement, focusing rather on the link between military strength and national prosperity.<sup>56</sup> But the gap between how the NMKCH and museums in Gwangju examined here portray the pro-democracy movement is minimal, at least at the broad level. In this respect, there is no fundamental division of the sort that exists between the NMKCH and the Jeju April 3 Peace Memorial Hall in relation to the April 3 history. The trauma of the governmental repression of the Gwangju Democratization Movement is personalized at the 5.18 Memorial of Chonnam National University<sup>57</sup> and at the May 18 National Cemetery in ways not replicated at the NMKCH. But all three present the Gwangju Democratization Movement as a key chapter in South Korea's transformation into a democracy.

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<sup>56</sup> Sheila Jager described the message of the War Memorial, as it relates to prosperity, as follows: "The history celebrated by the War Memorial everywhere portrays the force of the fundamental alliance and unity between the people and the military as *the* primary condition for a prosperous (unified) future." See Jager, "Monumental Histories," 126.

<sup>57</sup> The brochure to the May 18 Memorial of Chonnam University describes it as a "place to commemorate the role all communities of the University, including students, faculty and staff, played in democratization movements in Korea, and is the place for meaningfully connecting the past to the present."

Now that the military has been returned to the barracks and the Republic of Korea is a stable democracy, any narrative of contemporary history that does not broadly embrace the democratization movement would call into question the legitimacy of the present democratic form of government, an unpopular stance (especially among the liberal left, whereas conservatives are more open to accentuating the positive aspects of authoritarian administrations that antedated the democratization of Korea).

Beginning in the 1990s, in order to legitimize the new political order, democratically elected administrations expanded the national heritage landscape to embrace the pro-democracy movement. The recognition of the pro-democracy movement is symbolized by the fact that participants in the Gwangju May 18 Democratization Movement, not only those who died violently or were wounded at the hands of the government forces but also those who participated in the movement, are now granted the honor of burial at a sacred national cemetery.<sup>58</sup> It was in 1993 that Kim Young-sam (1927-2015), the Republic of Korea's first democratically elected civilian president (1993-1998), began the process of redeeming what the Chun Regime had portrayed as a communist-inspired rebellion in Gwangju as rather a shining if tragic moment in the country's evolution into a democracy. He did this by insisting on an official re-interpretation of this moment in the national history (as well as a broader reexamination of Korea's modern history), and also through the creation of official heritage sites to commemorate the May 18

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<sup>58</sup> In her analysis of the May 18 National Cemetery and the contestation it has engendered as the Gwangju Uprising has come to be memorialized by the state, Yea is critical of the simplistic way in which the cemetery claims for national history, particularly with the "History of Struggle in Bas-relief," several examples of (often anti-government) popular protest dating back to resistance in 1592 to the Japanese invasion. See Yea, "Rewriting Rebellion and Mapping Memory in South Korea: The (Re)presentation of the 1980 Kwangju Uprising through Mangwol-dong Cemetery," esp. 1564-1565. I agree with Yea's conclusions but still find the May 18 National Cemetery, in relative terms, to be far more self-critical and introspective about the national history than, for example, Independence Hall and the War Memorial.

Democratization Movement. The subsequent official Truth and Reconciliation Commission opened additional previously taboo areas of Korean history dating back to 1910 to reconsideration.<sup>59</sup>

Visitors to the May 18 National Cemetery encounter the following description of the Gwangju Democratic Uprising: “The May 18 Gwangju Democratic Uprising was a civil uprising against a military dictatorship conspiring to seize political power illegally, in which citizens demanded a true democracy in Korea. It was an eruption of the people’s strong desire to declare themselves as masters of their own history and to defend their rights.” The photo below shows the interior of the Yuyeongbonganso, where photos of individuals who played a meritorious role in the May 18 Democratization Movement are displayed.

The May 18 National Cemetery is meant to be a sacred memorial to those who sacrificed themselves for the cause of democracy, one that anchors in the popular memory the new, official account of the Gwangju Uprising as a pivotal moment in the democratization of Korea. But this also makes exhibits at the May 18 Memorial somewhat simplistically predictable. Would this museum consider focusing on some of the cruel ironies of the Gwangju Uprising, I wondered as I toured the exhibits? For example, the young soldiers who, under orders from superiors, brutally repressed the protests (about which they had been misled) were about the same age as the students who they beat with truncheons, bayoneted, and fired upon. What became of these young agents of the powerful state after they perpetrated such violence on their countrymen, and also later when the repression they helped carry out was formally judged criminal?

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<sup>59</sup> The Gwangju Massacre was taken up in the National Assembly in 1988, immediately after the initial democratization of Korea, but the fundamental repositioning of the Gwangju Democratization Movement in the official national history took place under Kim Young-sam’s administration. For an analysis of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, see Dong-Choon Kim, “Critical Assessments of the South Korean Truth and Reconciliation Commission,” in *Routledge Handbook of Memory and Reconciliation in East Asia*, 144-158.



Were they, too, victims of the military dictatorship?

When I returned to the NMKCH in September 2015, it was sponsoring a special exhibit titled “The Road to Democratization.” Photo after photo showed mass numbers of Koreans taking to the streets to demand democracy during the decades of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Even someone who gave the photos no more than a cursory glance could not have missed the underlying narrative, namely that democracy was earned from below, at great sacrifice, after repeated confrontations with authoritarian regimes. The standing exhibit at the NMKCH also portrays the intensely confrontational process, including the willingness of the government to use violence to maintain its hold on power, which eventually led to the democratization of the Republic of Korea.

However, for a museum that claims that the development of governmental structures (“state-building”) is one of its primary three

foci, there is one surprising absence from the exhibits too. After assuming power in 1961, Park established three agencies to oversee his development program, the Economic Planning Board, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, and the Ministry of Finance, each of which loomed large in the subsequent modernization of Korea. But Park also established another agency that symbolized the repressive nature of his modernizing regime, namely the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA). The KCIA grew into an immensely powerful mechanism of political control. Although not entirely absent from the exhibits at the NMKCH, the KCIA is not featured with a prominence corresponding to its role in undermining, by whatever means necessary including torture and murder, opposition to the government for nearly three decades after its establishment. The government justified this approach by hyping the existential threat from the North and by labeling all forms of dissent to be communist in nature.

The democratization process in Korea involved returning the military to the barracks from where they joined their countrymen in observing and participating in free elections. But an equally important chapter was the determined efforts of civilian governments to rein in the massive security apparatus that previous regimes had developed to monitor the citizenry, and to punish anyone who dissented. This process of trimming the security apparatus occurred in the 1990s, a reminder that although 1987 was a crucial turning point in the democratization of the Republic of Korea, the structural reforms that anchored democracy continued well into the next decade.

## VII. Modernization and Korea's Vision of Future (1988-)

The NMKCH's fourth exhibit underwent fundamental revision between the first time I visited in 2013 and my recent visit in September 2015. Previously, the exhibit placed great emphasis on two major international sporting events that served as coming out occasions for the newly

democratized Republic of Korea, the Seoul Olympics of 1988 and the World Cup (co-hosted with Japan) in 2002. The NMCKH's director explained the changes:

The holding of the 1988 Seoul Olympics and the 2002 World Cup were momentous for the Korean population. In hosting these two major international sporting events, we sent a message to the world that Korea has successfully achieved the advancement of the economy and the democratization of politics. As such, we made clear to the world that Korea is an active member of the international community. More importantly, the Korean people shared a good collective memory in hosting these two major international sports events. It was the 1988 Seoul Olympics and the 2002 World Cup that bound the Korean people together.

Yet we felt the need for a change in the fourth exhibit. The attention to sports was reduced and, instead, a variety of exhibitions dealing with the process of democratization, the economic crisis, and Korea's reunification are being newly introduced.

Arguably the most intriguing aspect of the revised fourth exhibit is the NMCKH's articulation of a new national identity for Korea.

All of the museums examined here, to a greater or lesser extent, venture definitions of the national identity—shared history tends to be fundamental to national identity, after all. In many articulations of Korean national identity, the modern nation-state is made heir to 5,000 years of supposed cultural (and in some articulations, racial) continuity. For example, the guidebook to the Independence Hall explains that the purpose of that museum's first exhibit, "The Origin of the Korean People," is "Opening the door of 5,000 year History."<sup>60</sup> The guidebook

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<sup>60</sup> The Independence Hall of Korea, *The Independence Hall of Korea*, 8-9.

elaborates on why understanding the 5,000-year prologue is necessary to grasp the Korean nation's resistance, as symbolized by the March 1, 1919 movement, to Japanese imperialism:

Since prehistoric times, Korean people have developed into a core nation of North-East Asia in full blossom of independent and resplendent culture around Korean peninsula and Manchuria....

Our Korean people have kept this territory through numerous wars against invasions of foreign forces during the history of thousands of years. Undaunted spirit and will of patriotism of the forefathers have continued for long time and served as foundation for recovering the lost nation against Japanese invasion.<sup>61</sup>

The War Memorial of Korea nationalizes all those who died in battle from the time of the Ancient Joseon Dynasty (according to legend, established by Dangun in 2333 BCE) through to the present:

Our forefathers' spirit of sacrificing themselves for the protection of their homeland became the basis for the Republic of Korea to persist and prosper until today even after undergoing various wars throughout its history. Memorial Hall was prepared to cherish the achievements and memories of the souls of all those who sacrificed their lives in the battlefield for their country since the era of Ancient Joseon to today.<sup>62</sup>

This represents an especially bold extrapolation of modern nationalism back in time.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>62</sup> The War Memorial of Korea, *The War Memorial of Korea*, 22. Scholars who have called into question the War Memorial's claiming, for the modern nation-state, an ancestral lineage of Korean warriors who did not necessarily think of themselves as "Korean" include Hong Kal, "The Aesthetic Construction of Ethnic Nationalism: War memorial museums in Korea and Japan," and Jager, "Monumental Histories."

The anthropologist Laurel Kendall points out that the National Folk Museum “constructs its folk as one unitary people, reconciling regional differences into a cohesive body of Korean custom recognizable across space and through time.”<sup>63</sup> Along the same lines, Kyung Hyo Chun argues that the “myth of homogeneous ethnicity” (said to date from time immemorial) that has been so central to nationalism in postcolonial Korea largely defines the exhibits of both the National Folk Museum and the National Museum of Korea.<sup>64</sup> Longstanding stress by these and other museums in Korea on concepts such as a supposedly timeless “homogenous ethnicity” (even in the face of numerous examples of inter-racial and inter-cultural mixing) is precisely what makes “Toward a Korea Where Various Cultures Coexist” featured in the NMKCH’s fourth exhibit all the more of an interesting departure.

The explanation of “Toward a Korea Where Various Cultures Coexist” is as follows:

The number of resident foreigners in Korea exceeded 1.75 million in 2014. The increase in immigrant workers and marriage immigrants since the late 1980s is helping to make Korea a multicultural society and requires the Korean people to deepen their inter-cultural understanding. More effort is needed to ensure that Koreans and resident foreigners respect each other’s culture while maintaining their original identities.

The term “marriage immigrants” refers, in particular, to the tens of

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<sup>63</sup> Kendall, “Peoples Under Glass,” 126.

<sup>64</sup> Kyung Hyo Chun, “Postcolonial Aspirations and Contestation.” Although the following is only a minor example in comparison to the breadth and depth of Dr. Chun’s research, the English-language *National Museum of Korea Timeline of Korean History* provides the following chronology for the Ancient Joseon Era, in support of the national mythology: 2333 BCE (supposed birth year of Dangun) to 108 BCE. See National Museum of Korea, *National Museum of Korea Timeline of Korean History* (Cultural Foundation of National Museum of Korea, no publication date given, but purchased in the gift shop in 2013).

thousands of women from poorer countries including Vietnam, the Philippines, Cambodia, and Mongolia who have come to Korea to marry, most typically with Korean men in the countryside who have trouble attracting countrywomen to a rural lifestyle. The visual component of this display shows the reality of an increasingly heterogeneous nation. Although the wording of the explanation is careful and includes an emphasis on maintaining “original identities,” it is nonetheless courageously estranged from the spurious notion of a homogeneous ethnicity supposedly unchanged for 5,000 years.

## VII. A Comparative Framework

Is there an overall verdict to be rendered about museums in the Republic of Korea? Although it is customary for scholars to devise grand conclusions, my answer to that question would be, “Not really,” other than they are about as good and as bad as museums in other liberal democracies when it comes to addressing the national history. The museums studied here reflect pluralistic viewpoints that one would expect from a nation of fifty million, viewpoints that can be openly expressed (for the most part) now that the Republic of Korea is a liberal democracy. Museums that receive public money tend to present official history, although some national museums established in post-democratized Korea present surprisingly blunt indictments of post-liberation authoritarian regimes.

It would be worthwhile to compare Korea’s “museum-scape” (regarding history) to that of the United States, a nation-state that struggles as much as other liberal democracies to confront dark chapters in its past ranging from slavery to the dropping of the atomic bombs, as well as to the museum-scape of any number of liberal democracies. But since Japan represents the quintessential “other” for Korea and for the Korean national identity, and also because I have conducted fieldwork at various museums in Japan, a country that I know especially well, here I

make some brief comparisons with Japan's museum-scape. Let me state clearly here that I also rate Japan's museums in the area of history as about as good and as bad as the museum-scape of other liberal democracies with which I am familiar. This comparison is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather to introduce the plurality of the history museum-scape in Japan.

There is one telling difference between the Republic of Korea and Japan in the area of museums about modern history. Japan has no national museum devoted to the full sweep of Japan's modern history, a curious evasion for a country that does not lack for national museums. The National Museum of Japanese History, inconveniently located in Chiba Prefecture, is devoted to the history of "Japan" from prehistoric times to present, but this means coverage of the modern era is diluted. This lack of a national museum devoted to modern history results in part from intense domestic contention about how that modern history should be told. Frankly, the lack of such a museum hints at the fact that the Government of Japan has failed in the postwar era to reconcile fully with much of its own citizenry, not to mention with its neighbors, about the imperial era and in particular the Asia-Pacific War (1931-1945).

The fact that there is no national museum devoted to the modern history of Japan in Tokyo (or elsewhere) elevates the significance of the Yūshūkan, the infamous far right museum that is operated by and on the grounds of the Yasukuni Shrine that is situated conveniently in the center of Tokyo.<sup>65</sup> There is a large and growing body of scholarship about the Yūshūkan (the present exhibit dates from 2007), so there is no need for me to detail this museum's obnoxious exhibits although I have visited the Yūshūkan many times. But here I reference two quotes that aptly capture its basic historical narrative. The historian Yoshida Takashi writes, "The

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<sup>65</sup> For the history of the Yasukuni Shrine, see Akiko Takenaka, *Yasukuni Shrine: History, Memory and Japan's Unending Postwar* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2015); and John Breen, ed., *Yasukuni, the War Dead and the Struggle for Japan's Past* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

current Yūshūkan museum adopts the position that the Pacific War was a just and honorable war that liberated other Asian countries from Western colonialism. Proudly and defiantly, the museum honors the soldiers of Imperial Japan who died for the nation, and it disregards all the negative aspects of the Imperial Army and the empire.”<sup>66</sup>

The scholar Nakano Koichi describes the Yasukuni doctrine or the Yasukuni interpretation of history in a manner that echoes Yoshida’s evaluation, but by no means sanctions the Yasukuni doctrine: “All the wars Imperial Japan has fought in modern times were wars of self-defense. Therefore, the people who died while fighting for the country’s peace and safety—not only the soldiers, but even nurses and other civilians who were killed on the battlefield—should be commemorated and treated as deities. Also, as a logical conclusion, those conflicts are never treated as wars of aggression.”<sup>67</sup>

Yasukuni Shrine and the Yūshūkan receive no funding from the government; they have been private entities since State Shinto was disestablished in 1946. But periodic visits by elected officials including prime ministers blur the shrine’s status. The politicians visit because Yasukuni Shrine is where the spirits of 2.4 million Japanese war dead are enshrined, and powerful political constituencies such as the Bereaved Families Association are appeased by such visits. Although most politicians who come to Yasukuni do not take time to visit the Yūshūkan, here, too, the fact that powerful national representatives periodically visit Yasukuni lends legitimacy to this museum.

Perhaps most problematic of all about Yasukuni Shrine is the fact since 1978 individuals designated and executed as war criminals according to the Tokyo War Crimes Trial and other war crimes trials carried out after the war throughout areas once occupied by Imperial

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<sup>66</sup> Takashi Yoshida, *From Cultures of War to Cultures of Peace: War and Peace Museums in Japan, China, and South Korea* (Portland, Maine: Merwin Asia, 2014), 235.

<sup>67</sup> Quoted in “A Trip around the Yushukan, Japan’s font of discord,” *Japan Times*, July 28, 2014.

Japan, are also enshrined at Yasukuni. These executed war criminals are even referred to as “martyrs” by Yasukuni. There is next to nothing introspective about Yasukuni Shrine’s (including that of the Yūshūkan) approach to telling Japan’s history, no self-critical examination of areas where Japan might have done something wrong or instances of when Japanese behaved less than heroically. However, the same largely can be said of version of national history put forth at the Independence Hall of Korea. I found the Independence Hall disturbingly analogous to the Yūshūkan in the ways in which it conveniently plays up certain details while omitting others in order, resolutely, to provide a patriotic narrative of the national history.

Japan’s museum-scape also includes institutions that adopt a highly self-critical, introspective stance about the national history. Consider, for example, the Kyoto Museum for World Peace, established and operated by Ritsumeikan University. This museum is blunt about assigning weighty responsibility to Imperial Japan for the suffering it caused, as evidenced in this description of the purpose of the Kyoto Museum for World Peace penned by a staff member:

In 1992, the Kyoto Museum for Peace opened as the first peace museum run by a university. It was established as a facility to realize the university’s educational principles. A permanent exhibition was developed to reflect both the common academic understanding and Ritsumeikan’s own perspective on Japanese history. Like other peace museums in Japan, it documents the horrors of war to induce the sentiment “never again.” But the museum focuses not only on the perspective of the victim, but also on the perpetrator’s side of Japanese history. One display includes images that are often targeted by historical revisionists, such as those of sex slaves (often from occupied areas) of Japanese soldiers and bodies of Nanjing Massacre victims. The museum believes that only through exploring all facets of history, can one learn the lessons for peace. The university’s own past as a collaborator [in the

militaristic era] is also on display.<sup>68</sup>

The far right in Japan uses terms such as masochistic and self-flagellation to describe the sort of historical narrative offered by the Kyoto Museum for World Peace.

There are museums in Japan that provide an even harsher verdict on modern Japan's history. The Osaka Human Rights Museum offers one of the most biting anti-government interpretations of history that I have ever come across anywhere. These introspective museums tend not to receive any governmental funding. If they receive public funding at all, it is from local governments, which in recent years have often come under intense attack for underwriting unedifying accounts of the national history. This has led some museums that started out boldly introspective, such as the Osaka International Peace Center, to dilute the critical nature of their exhibits.

Nonetheless, although I am not aware of anything in Japan quite like the Jeju April 3 Peace Memorial Hall in the sense that this museum is simultaneously funded by the central government and yet points a bitter, accusing finger at the First Republic under President Rhee, there are several museums in Japan that offer highly critical analyses of that country's modern history. Even at a time when the Abe Shinzō (b. 1954, prime minister 2006-2007 and 2012-present) Administration tends to be drowning out the plurality of historical viewpoints in Japan with its saccharine, diversionary accounts of the national past, the plurality of the overall museum-scape must be acknowledged. The diversity of views about the past offered by museums in Japan reflects the broader diversity of interpretation among the 130 million Japanese who comprise the nation.

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<sup>68</sup> Junko Kanekiyo, "Japanese Peace Museums and the Challenges and Perspectives of the Kyoto Museum for World Peace," in *Museums of Ideas: Commitment and Conflict*, ed. Gabriel Bix (Edinburgh: Museumsetc, 2011), 528-529.

There is nothing closely analogous in Japan to the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History in terms of chronological coverage and interpretive stance, which tends to be cautious but at the same time not simplistically patriotic. But in terms of occupying, to a greater or lesser extent, the middle ground of mainstream interpretations of the past, it might be possible to compare the NMKCH to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, especially the “prologue” part of the latter’s exhibition. The Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, established and operated by the City of Hiroshima, presents what could be termed the pacifistic view of Japan’s past and present. Although the pacifistic line, which remains especially prevalent in Japan, can at times be faulted for its unwillingness, for example, to assign clear responsibility for which country perpetrated the Asia-Pacific War that caused so much suffering, it nonetheless draws a vehemently anti-war stance from the lessons of the past. In that sense, it tends to be anti-Imperial Japan.

Although the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum (the exhibit I analyzed dated from 1994) is mostly about the atomic bombing of the city, the part of the exhibit about what led to this atomic bombing includes self-critical interpretations of Japan’s modern history and specifically of Hiroshima’s history. For example, the exhibition stresses that much of the city’s modern prosperity and significance in the period before the dropping of the atomic bomb in August 1945 derived from military bases and military-related infrastructure in and around Hiroshima.

The exhibit also draws attention, with remorse, to the fact that residents of Hiroshima celebrated the fall of Nanjing in December 1937 with a lantern parade, a photo of which is on display along with the following explanation:

Early in the war with China, the Japanese Army occupied many Chinese cities. In December 1937, it took the capital city, then called Nanking.

The occupation of this important city cheered the Japanese people, who considered the war in China a holy crusade. Hiroshima's residents celebrated with a lantern parade.

In Nanjing, however, Chinese people were being massacred by the Japanese Army.

Reports of the number killed vary depending on the area and the time studied. Some estimates are in the tens of thousands, while others put the figure at well over 100,000. In China, the most common estimate is 300,000.

Another part of the exhibit draws attention to Imperial Japan's use of forced labor: "During the war, Japan funneled all resources into the war effort and forcefully brought thousands of people to work in Japan from Korea and other countries. Many forced laborers died in the A-bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki."

The museum offers a general statement about the need for contrition on the part of Japan and the Japanese: "Here in Japan, we must understand the agony that Japan's colonial policies and the wars that ensued inflicted on the peoples of Asia and the Pacific region." Although the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum could still be taken to task for certain omissions, such as making no mention of the fact that Japan also sought to develop an atomic bomb during the war, at this point in time it is not fair to dismiss it as a simplistic example of victim's history that dwells, in the name of peace, only on the suffering of the Japanese people.

At the same time, the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum is nowhere as critical of the national history as are the Kyoto Museum for World Peace or the Osaka Human Rights Museum. Rather it occupies a middle-ground position, espousing the notion that war is bad and peace is good. Those who seek to understand Japan must take into account that although the widespread attachment to pacifism among Japanese has evolved in recent decades, it is still a defining feature of that nation. The

Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum espouses this pacifistic view of the past and present. Although admittedly in some ways the comparison is one of apples and oranges, both the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum and the NMKCH (“Democracy is good, authoritarianism is bad”) broadly represent the middle ground in museum representations of the past in Japan and Korea.

In neither of these countries do museums offer monolithic portrayals of national history of the sort one finds in authoritarian countries such as China and North Korea. Rather, in both countries, museums reflect pluralistic interpretations of and ongoing contention about the past. Finally, “distortion” of history knows no national borders. There is plenty of distortion to be found in museums in the Republic of Korea as much as in Japan, but one also finds examples of thoughtful, nuanced historical narratives in museums in both countries.

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# Pseudo-history and Historical Fascism

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*The Journal of Northeast Asian History*

**Volume 14 Number 2 (Winter 2017), 189-214**

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## Pseudo-history and Historical Fascism

“Pseudo-history” refers to irrational historical research obsessed with the power and dimensions of ancient Korean territories. It emerged along with government-issued history textbooks under the Park Chung Hee regime in 1974. Led by former Minister of Education Ahn Ho-sang, pseudo-historians advanced unsubstantiated slander against mainstream historians and filed administrative litigation urging the government to edit history textbooks in their favor. Although pseudo-history appears opposed to Japanese colonialist historical perspectives, it is in fact nothing more than chauvinism internalizing the Japanese colonialist theory of “peninsular attributes.” Generally based on “evidence” extracted from the forged *Hwandan gogi*, moreover, it fails to meet the standards of legitimate academic research. It seems obvious that the pseudo-history promoted in 1970s Korea fundamentally originated in a fascistic approach to the understanding of history. Despite such fascistic intentions, however, both conservatives and liberals tend to uncritically accept these claims, indicating the vulnerability of Korean society to chauvinism.

**Keywords:** pseudo-history; fascism; Ahn Ho-sang; *Hwandan gogi* (forged historical text); history textbooks

# Pseudo-history and Historical Fascism

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## I. Standardization of Korean History Textbooks and Historical Fascism

On October 12, 2015, the Park Geun-hye government formally announced its plan for the national standardization of Korean history textbooks. While many considered this a sudden, shocking measure, the administration had planned this since its inception in early 2013. The year 2013 was marked by commotion over the publication of history textbooks reflecting the historical views of the New Right. These history textbooks published by Kyohaksa with full government support had achieved an adoption rate of zero percent at the time; they were all but ignored in classrooms. The reason for this was the low quality and excessive “right-leaning tendency” of the content. Coming to realize the hopelessness of propagating textbooks blatantly based on its own views under the competitive official textbook approval system, the government

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\* This is a translated version of the original article published in Korean in *Yeoksa bipyong* 166 (Spring 2016) under the title, “사이비 역사학과 역사과시즘” [Pseudo-history and historical fascism].

changed tack, playing the “national standardization” card.

While outlining the revised 2015 curriculum, Minister of Education Seo Nam-su stated the possibility of turning the Korean history book national standardization issue over to the public sphere, deliberately stoking the public outcry regarding controversial claims by Prime Minister Jeong Hong-weon and members of the ruling party over “national history book regression.”... He stated, “*We are already working on a general plan to revise the curriculum to be announced in 2015.*”<sup>1</sup>

The government justified the move toward standardization citing the intolerable “left-leaning tendency” of existing history textbooks, asserting that “self-rectification” of this problem was unlikely since historians composing the textbooks themselves were generally “left-leaning.” The majority of Korean historians, however, disagree with the claim that the textbook approval system tends to produce left-leaning textbooks, maintaining that left-leaning historians compose an extremely small minority in Korea. Nonetheless, the government has proceeded to mobilize state power in unilateral support for a minority opinion.

The government and ruling party politicians, as well as scholars aligned with them, advance intensely aggressive and exclusionary rhetoric in advocating national standardization of Korean textbooks.<sup>2</sup> Regarding mainstream historians as “absolutely evil” and “enemies,” they demonstrate excessive self-conviction and partisanship disallowing the slightest possibility of a difference of opinion. The actions of this minority group, mobilizing state power and indiscriminately condemning academia as “abnormal” and “leftist” in order to monopolize historical

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<sup>1</sup> *Gyeonghyang Sinmun*, December 12, 2013, 1. Emphasis added by the author.

<sup>2</sup> “Gim museong saenuri dang daepyo ui ‘hanguk sa gyogwaseo’ baleon” [Comments of Saenrui Party representative Kim Mu-seong regarding ‘Korean history textbooks’], *Hangyeore Sinmun*, October 18, 2015.

interpretation, clearly qualify as “historical fascism.” However, it is not merely “historical fascism” threatening historical scholarship in Korea; antagonism toward the discipline of history in Korea is, in fact, varied and deep-rooted.

This paper explores another form of Korean “historical fascism,” namely, that distinguished by the concern with early ancient history (*sanggo sa*) and the irrational obsession with national power and territory. This form of history, often called “fringe history” (*jaeya sahak*),<sup>3</sup> may also be referred to as “pseudo-history.” One might plausibly take issue with the use of the label “pseudo,” considering the possibility for diverse interpretation inherent to historical writing. But having taken account of the manner in which the historiography investigated in this paper eschews accepted academic standards, its use will likely appear justified.

Up until the early 1970s, perhaps pseudo-history could have been understood in terms of the “excessive nationalism” and underdeveloped methodologies of amateur scholars. By the mid-1970s, however, pseudo-historians had initiated a public campaign indiscriminately engaging in baseless slander and criticism of academia. This movement culminated in the compilation and dissemination of the *Hwandan gogi*, a forged historical text. Scholars have repeatedly verified problems with the *Hwandan gogi*; the evidence of forgery is readily apparent.<sup>4</sup> Being an

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<sup>3</sup> Yi Mun-yeong, *Mandureojin hanguk sa*, 17-18. “Fringe” (*jaeya*; 在野; literally means “in the wild”), a term traditionally used to refer to those relegated to the remote areas of the realm, now commonly denotes those pseudo-historians lacking in any proper credentials with respect to the discipline of history. However, such historians are not merely limited to the “fringe.” As with Yun Nae-hyeon, a specialist in ancient Korean history, and Sin yong-ha, a specialist in modern Korean history and society, as well as with the archaeologist Bok Gi-dae and scholar of modern Korean history Yi Deok-il, each of who have been particularly active as of late, there are indeed professional scholars endowed with credentials related to the field of history embracing pseudo-history. The term “fringe,” therefore, does not quite fully capture the scope of pseudo-history.

<sup>4</sup> See Jo In-seong, “Hyeonjeon ‘gyuweon sahwa’ ui saryo jeok seonggyeog e daehan il geomto” [Investigation of the historical character of the Gyuweon sahwa], in *Dugye ibyeongdo baksa gusun ginyeom hanguk sahak nonchong* [Journal of Korean History Commemorating the Words

attempt at popular agitation through historical forgery, then, the movement may be deemed devoid of the slightest academic credibility.

## II. The Emergence and Enterprises of Pseudo-history

Investigation of the conditions under which pseudo-history emerged in earnest must begin in the early 1970s. On May 5, 1972, in accordance with its campaign to “discover the nationality of education,” the Park Chung Hee government inaugurated the “Committee for the Strengthening of National History Education” (*Guksa gyoyuk ganghwa wiweonhoe*) under the purview of the Ministry of Education.<sup>5</sup> The government thus declared its intent to implement historical education

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of Dr. Dugye Yi Byeong-do] (Korea: Jisik saneopsa, 1987); “‘Gyuweon sahwa’ wa ‘Hwandan gogi’” [The Gyuweon sahwa and the Hwandan gogi], *Hanguk sa simin gangjwa* [Civic lectures in Korean History] 2 (Iljogak, 1988); “Hanmal dangun gwangye saseo ui jaegeomto—‘sindan silgi’, ‘dangi gosa’, ‘Hwandan gogi’ reul jungsim euro” [Reexamination of historical texts of the late Daehan period related to Dangun: Case study on the Sindan silgi, Dangi gosa, and Hwandan gogi], *Guksagwan nonchong* [Journal of national history] 3 (Guksa pyeonchan wiweonhoe [National history compilation committee], 1989); Park Gwang-yong, “Daejonggyo gwallyeon munheon e wijk manta—‘gyuweon sahwa’ wa ‘the Hwandan gogi’ ui seonggyeog e daehan jaegeomto” [The many forgeries of Daejonggyo literature: Reexamination of the characters of the Gyuweon sahwa and Hwandan gogi], *Yeoksa bipyeong* [Critical review of history] 10 (Yeoksa munje yeonguso [The Institute for Korean Historical Studies], 1990); “Daejonggyo gwallyeon munheon e wijk manta 2—‘sindan silgi’ wa dangi gosa’ ui seonggyeog e daehan jaegeomto” [The many forgeries of Daejonggyo literature: Reexamination of the characters of the Sindan silgi and Dangi gosa], *Yeoksa bipyeong* 16 (Yeoksa munje yeonguso, 1992); Hanguk yeoksa yeongu hoe godaesa bungwa [Department of Ancient Korean History at the Korean History Society], ed., “‘Hwandan gogi’ mid eul su inna” [Is the Hwandan gogi believable?], in *Mundabeuro yeokkeun hanguk godaesa sanchaek* [A walk through ancient Korean history woven together by question and answer] (Korea: Yeoksa bipyeong sa [Critical review of history], 1994); Jo In-seong, “‘Jaeya saseo’ wiseco ron—dangi gosa.hwandan gogi.gyuweon sahwa reul jungsim euro” [Discussion of forged texts as so-called “fringe texts”: Case study of the Dangi gosa, Hwandan gogi, and Gyuweon sahwa], in *Dangun gwa gojoseon sa* [History of Dangun and Gojoseon] (Korea: Sagyejeol, 2000); “Hwandangogi ui dangun segi wa dangi gosa.gyuweon sahwa” [The Hwandan gogi’s Dangun world and the Dangi gosa and Gyuweon sahwa], *Dangun hak yeongu* [Dangun studies research] 2 (Dangun hakhoe [Dangun Scholarly Society], 2000); Yi Mun-yeong, *Mandureojin hanguk sa* [Made Korean history] (Korea: Paran midieo, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> “Guksa gyoyuk ganghwawi seolchi” [Establishment of committee for strengthening national history education], *Gyeonghyang Simmun*, May 11, 1972, 7.

centered on the “nation” (*minjok*). National history was accordingly established as an independent subject on the preliminary university entrance examination, and a concrete policy was announced to establish national history as a compulsory subject in universities.

Having established one-man authoritarian rule through the promulgation of the Yushin Constitution in October of the same year, Park Chung Hee announced yet another education-related policy on June 23, 1973: history textbooks, consistently under the jurisdiction of the official textbook authorization system since the founding of the Republic of Korea, were to undergo national standardization.<sup>6</sup> This was justified as a measure allowing students to “establish a sense of agency and proper views regarding the state” and mitigate inconsistency in university entrance exams owing to diversity of textbooks. However, the most important objective was to propagandize and legitimize the newly founded Yushin regime.

Historians and educators generally opposed the national standardization of history textbooks, concerned with the “uniformity” of historical education that might result.<sup>7</sup> Ignoring scholarly opposition, however, the government began the distribution of standardized textbooks to schools in 1974, an action that would have unforeseen repercussions.

On July 25, 1974, the Society for Ancient Korean History (*Hanguk godaesa hakhoe*), a fringe organization headed by Ahn Ho-sang, drafted a mission statement asserting that the standardized textbooks restricted the scope of Korean history and forcefully and uncritically perpetuated Japanese colonialist historiography in historical education by portraying Dangun as a mythical figure. On the following day, the organization held

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<sup>6</sup> “Guksa gyogwaseo gukjeong euro” [History textbooks to undergo national standardization], *Gyeonghyang Sinmun*, June 23, 1973, 7.

<sup>7</sup> “Guksa gyogwaseo gukjeong e daehan gakgye uigyeon” [Various opinions regarding the standardization of history textbooks], *Donga Ilbo*, June 25, 1973, 5.

a “National History Textbook Evaluation Conference,” providing a forum to disseminate its views.<sup>8</sup>

As South Korea’s first minister of education under Syngman Rhee, Ahn Sang-ho had advocated the “one nation principle” (*ilmin juui*) functioning as the regime’s theory of governance and had been central to the founding of the Student National Defense Corps (*Hakdo hoguk dan*) accused of being modeled on the Hitler Youth. He earned his Ph.D. in philosophy—not history—in Germany. Having been a devoted follower of Daejonggyo since his youth, he was deeply interested in Dangun and Gojoseon.<sup>9</sup> In fact, he later ascended to the position of “supreme leader” (*chongjeongyo*) of Daejonggyo in 1992.

In the standardized textbooks, the section on Gojoseon stated: “‘Dangun’ means ‘high priest’ and ‘Wangeom’ means ‘head of state’. ‘Dangun Wangeom’ was thus ‘patriarch’ [*jokjang*] ruling over both ‘church and state’.<sup>10</sup> Pseudo-historians, represented by Ahn Ho-sang, expressed grave concern with this depiction. For them, Dangun was to be worshipped as the progenitor of the Korean people and “great thought” (*widaehan sasang*); they could not abide description of him as but a “patriarch” that ruled over an “undeveloped society” (*mibaldal ui sahoe*).

On October 8, 1975, Ahn Ho-sang and company formed the Korean Historical Discovery Council (*Guksa chatgi hyeobuihoe*), commencing an all-out attack on existing historical research. In the periodical *Jayu* (Freedom), the group published article after article criticizing historical academia, many of which amounted to personal attacks verging on the profane. Yet academics were perhaps most greatly taken aback when the group filed administrative litigation against the state over content in the

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<sup>8</sup> “‘Sinhwa’ nya ‘sasil’ inya” [‘Myth’ or ‘Fact’?], *Donga Ilbo*, July 27, 1974, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Also translated as the “religion of Dangun,” this is a religion native to Korea proclaiming the divinity of Dangun, the putative father of the Korean race.

<sup>10</sup> Mungyobu [Ministry of Education], (*Inmungye godeung hakgyo*) Guksa [National history (humanities high school)], (1974), 9.

standardized textbooks on September 29, 1978.<sup>11</sup>

In the meantime, historians did not simply sit idly by. On November 23, 1978, ten representatives of academic historical organizations gathered together and signed a resolution demanding the Korean Historical Discovery Council cease its efforts to mislead the Korean people through unscientific arguments.<sup>12</sup>

They [the ten representatives] listed the following claims of the fringe organization Korean Historical Discovery Council: 1) Koreans created Chinese characters (*hanja*); 2) Confucius and Mencius are forebears of the Korean people; 3) the Baekje Kingdom ruled South-central China for 400 years; and 4) forged artifacts were planted in the Royal Tomb of King Muryeong in Gongju in order to distort Baekje history. These lamentable claims lacking in any common sense, they declared, are manifestations of the shameful backwardness of Korean culture.

Professor Kim Weon-yong, who excavated the Royal Tomb of King Muryeong, confessed the following: “Academia has been quiet so far because the provocations of these outsiders are simply groundless and absurd. But considering the extent to which *Jayu* has been misleading people all over the country, with financing provided by the Arts and Literature Promotion Fund, scholars can no longer just stand by silently; they have to lead.”<sup>13</sup>

At the time, the Ahn Ho-sang group was advancing a number of chauvinistic and nonsensical claims. Of particular note was the purported “fabrication” of the Royal Tomb of King Muryeong. Excavated in 1971,

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<sup>11</sup> “Guksa gwangbok... isaek haengjeong sosong” [National history and independence... unusual administrative litigation], *Gyeonghyang Sinmun*, September 29, 1978, 7.

<sup>12</sup> “Sosong jegi e gyeonggo seongmyeong masseo” [Litigation against warning statement], *Gyeonghyang Sinmun*, November 24, 1978, 5.

<sup>13</sup> *Gyeonghyang Sinmun*, November 24, 1978, 5.

this ancient Baekje burial mound was found in pristine condition, with a number of splendid artifacts such as gold coins and necklaces uncovered. In particular, the stone on which the name of the tomb's occupant was carved roused serious scholarly interest. But the size and scope of the tomb and the splendor of its artifacts were simply incommensurate to the "great empire" extending into contemporary China and Japan that Ahn Ho-sang and his associates imagined of Baekje. They thus adopted a nonsensical attitude, dismissing what was regarded as the greatest post-liberation Korean archaeological find as a fabrication.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to refuting ridiculous pseudo-historical arguments, historians also set out to present their positions and research findings to the general public. One example of this was a special series of articles published in *Gyeonghyang Sinmun* under the heading of "This is Ancient Korean History." This response alone, however, would be insufficient to resolve the issue.

On November 26-27, 1981, amid the early stages of the Fifth Republic under President Chun Doo-hwan, a public hearing regarding the standardized textbooks was held in the National Assembly Culture, Sports, and Information Committee (*Mungong wiweonhoe*). This was a hearing petitioned by Ahn Ho-sang and associates to debate the textbook content. The Pseudo-historical position was represented by the likes of Ahn Ho-sang (chairman of the Korean Historical Discovery Council), Park Si-in (professor of English Literature at Seoul National University), and Im Seung-guk (Society of Korean Political History [*Hanguk jeongsa hakhoe*]). Those representing the position of mainstream historians

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<sup>14</sup> "Jaeya saga reul ilso haryeo haji mara" [Do not try to eliminate fringe historians], *Gyeonghyang Sinmun*, November 29, 1978, 5. The article's author, Mun Jeong-chan, was the current chairman of the Society for Ancient Korean History (*Hanguk godae sa hakhoe*), a representative pseudo-historical institution. He pointed out that the Gongju tomb was composed of a single stone chamber, whereas the tombs of a great empire such as Baekje should be composed of at least three or four. He thus deduced the tomb to be but a mischievous "prank" of Dang generals dressing up a prince's tomb.

included Kim Weon-yong (professor of Archaeology and Art History at Seoul National University), Kim Cheol-gun (professor of Korean History at Seoul National University), and Yi Gi-baek (professor of History at Sogang University).<sup>15</sup>

The arguments of the Ahn Ho-sang group were as follow:

- The textbooks neither acknowledge nor recover the more than 1,000 years of Gojoseon history lost under the Japanese.
- Dangun and Gija are real historical figures, and the territory over which they presided extended to contemporary Beijing.
- The Gojoseon capital, Wanggeom seong, was located in what is now Liaoning Province, China, and the Lelang Commandery (*Nangnang gun*) was located near Beijing.
- From the third to seventh century, Baekje territory stretched out from Beijing to Shanghai and along the Yellow Sea coast.
- The territory of unified Silla once extended to Beijing.
- The kingdoms of Goguryeo, Baekje, and Silla gave rise to Japanese culture.
- The Jurchens were a Korean tribe.

The historians responded by insisting that much had been accomplished in overcoming colonialist historiography and that the textbook content was faithful to fact. They also called into question the credibility or interpretation of most of the historical materials submitted by the petitioning group. Above all, they asserted the danger of the opposing side's historical views, strongly urging them to consider the historical lesson offered by Japan, where imperial historiography glorifying the

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<sup>15</sup> “Ddeugeoun guksa toron 7 sigan 30 bun” [Heated seven-and-a-half-hour history debate], *Gyeonghyang Sinmun*, November 27, 1981, 3.

empire ultimately brought about its downfall.

Who is to say who came out on top at the end of the two-day public hearing? Journalist present at the debate tended to judge the historians' arguments as more persuasive.

The public hearing today, in terms of the arguments from both sides, those addressing the petition, rather than those defending it, appeared better organized and more reasonable. This is probably due to the fact that the petitioning side was not composed of professional historians. Those on the first day who watched the hearing tended to agree that the petitioner's arguments were rather weak.<sup>16</sup>

The response of National Assembly Members to the hearing, however, was decidedly different. While overwhelmingly supporting the arguments of the "fringe historians," they adopted a consistently aggressive and antagonistic stance toward the established historians.

Being unfamiliar with the procedures of the National Assembly, Yi Gi-baek apologized for not knowing the name of the questioning member, Gang Gi-pil, and offered his response. In reply, Member Gang Gi-pil stated the following: "This is the National Assembly Hall. My name is inscribed here on my nameplate. *Perhaps your eyes are too poor to make out which member is speaking, but surely there is some corresponding etiquette for such a situation in academia.* Considering your reputation as a renowned professor, I won't say any more than that, but I hope you'll reflect on this".... Echoing this sentiment, Member Im Jae-jeong took his turn to address professors Kim Weon-yong and Yi Gi-baek. Speaking at length and adopting a sanctimonious tone, *he berated the professors for their objectionable attitude toward the*

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<sup>16</sup> *Gyeonghyang Sinmun*, November 27, 1981, 3.

*National Assembly, reasoning that if they adopted such an attitude with respect to historical research then that, as well, would surely be objectionable. He urged them to correct this attitude.*<sup>17</sup>

The high-handedness of the National Assembly members thus subjected the historians to the harshest humiliation of their lives.

On February 25-26, 1987, as the Chun Doo-hwan era came to a close, the Academy of Korean Studies held a large conference on “Issues in Early Ancient Korean History.”<sup>18</sup> With attacks against mainstream historians by “fringe historians” remaining heated, the Academy of Korean Studies opened this forum of debate in hopes of resolving the issue academically. On February 26, the second day of the conference, a general debate was held.

Today at the general debate there were fifteen scholars on stage and more than 800 people in the audience.... At this point, some among the audience approached the stage, yelling out, “Professor Yi plagiarizes Suematsu Yasukazu [末松保和] and Imanishi Ryu’s [今西龍] colonialist scholarship,” “If you cannot answer to this then get off the stage,” and, “Why have the organizers allowed this manner of scholar to speak?”... While the debate continued in the hope the impassioned audience members would calm down, some half the professors, including Professor Yi, had already left. Amid the disorder, some among the audience took hold of the microphone and continued their denunciations of the historians.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Yun Jong-yeong, *Guksa gyogwaseo padong* [History textbook shockwaves] (Korea: Hyeon, 1999), 91. Emphasis added.

<sup>18</sup> “Heomak haejin ‘yeoksa toron hyeonjang” [‘Historical debate forum’ turns ugly], *Donga Ilbo*, February 27, 1987, 6..

<sup>19</sup> *Donga Ilbo*, February 27, 1987, 6. Emphasis added.

This was a disagreeable atmosphere hardly characteristic of an academic conference. Another testimony described the “chaos” as audience members “struggled to gain hold of the microphone, with those who could not standing up and screaming at the presenters, while another group forced its way onto the stage.”<sup>20</sup> In contrast with the intention to mediate between the historians and “fringe scholars,” the conference ultimately deteriorated into unbridled displays of rhetoric and force. This experience would become an important impetus precluding any further communication between the two sides thereafter.

### III. Why did Pseudo-history Emerge?

How then did the historical consciousness and logic of these pseudo-historians claiming to articulate the truth of Korea’s glorious ancient history, which they themselves referred to as “nationalist history” and “fringe history,” emerge? Tracing the roots of this thinking, one comes to the colonialist historiography propagated under Japanese rule. The work of colonialist historians contributed to various theories legitimizing Japanese dominion over Korea, as exemplified in common ancestry theory (*ilseon dongjo ron*) asserting Japan and Korea’s shared ancestral ties, stagnation theory (*jeongcheseong non*) asserting Korean’s abortive historical development, and heteronomy theory (*tayulseong non*) asserting Korea’s subservient and outwardly oriented nature. The emergence of pseudo-history was closely related to this last theory, which proposed the geographically deterministic idea of “peninsular attributes” (*bando jeok seonggyeong non*).

The theory of heteronomy maintained that Korean history lacked subjectivity. The reasoning behind this supposition was the idea of “peninsular attributes,” which paid particular attention to the fact that

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<sup>20</sup> Yun Jong-yeong, *Guksa gyogwaseo padong*, 159.

Korea was situated on a peninsula. Caught up in the confrontation between continental and maritime forces, it was argued, Korean history could not but unfold passively. Thus Japanese historians projected onto the distant past the experience of the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars, through which Japan gained control over Korea.

A cursory look at the histories of Rome or Spain, which each beget extensive empires from humble peninsular beginnings, easily refutes the argument that peninsular history is somehow inferior and heteronomous. While it is true that geographical elements are greatly influential on the course of history, they are by no means deterministic. The most effective way to argue against the theory of peninsular attributes, then, is to expose the irrationality of geographical determinism applied arbitrarily.<sup>21</sup>

In any case, the most prominent attempt to address this issue argues that Korean history is not that of a peninsula but a continent. In order to deny the “inferiority” of Korean history, in other words, some historians tirelessly labor to discover the continental, rather than peninsular, origins of “our history.” However, this argument fully accepts the mistaken Japanese colonialist assumption that “peninsular history” is somehow “inferior.”

Such attempts, then, internalize rather than overcome the theory of peninsular attributes, succumbing to the undeniable appeal of depicting a “great and powerful Fatherland” existing in early ancient history. This has ultimately resulted in a bizarre manner of chauvinism both shaped by and fiercely rejecting colonialist historical theory.

The characteristics of pseudo-history include the emphasis on the superiority of the Korean people, obsession with the vastness of ancient territory, and the inclination toward conspiracy theory. Despite the virtual absence of any documentary or archaeological evidence to support such

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<sup>21</sup> For a description of the response of Korean historians to the colonialist historiographical idea of peninsular attributes, see Yi Gi-baek, “Bando jeok seonggyeong non” [Theory of peninsular attributes], *Hanguk sa simin gangjwa* [Civic lectures in Korean history] 1 (1987).

historical views, pseudo-historians allege “concealment” or “removal” by the Japanese or “colonialist historians” ostensibly composing mainstream Korean historical academia. The same goes for any evidence refuting their claims; it has simply been “fabricated” by Japanese or “colonialist historians.” Under such conditions, there is simply no room for dialogue or academic verification.

The desire to confirm one’s identity as a member of a glorious, powerful nation—even one so remotely situated in early ancient history—permeates pseudo-history. In order to draw into relief the superiority of the Korean people, pseudo-historians demonstrate animosity and imperiousness toward foreign nations, dismiss the entirety of Korean historians as “colonialist,” and engage in popular agitation typically fascist in character.

Why did Ahn Ho-sang, who played a decisive role in the emergence of pseudo-history, initiate such activities in 1974? The answer to this question is related to the national standardization of history textbooks under the Park Chung Hee government. While Ahn Sang-ho was an outspoken critic of the standardized textbooks, he had no issue with “national standardization” itself. What he did take issue with was the particular “content” of these textbooks. The Park Chung Hee regime emphasized “education incorporating nationality,” producing textbooks focused on the “nation” and the “state.” But for one such as Ahn Sang-ho, who devoutly worshipped Dangun and embraced aspects of fascism, this was simply intolerable.

Furthermore, the national standardization of history textbooks allowed the state to monopolize the interpretation of history. The possibility for varied interpretations of history existing under the textbook authorization system thus ceased to exist, and a single government-approved “national history” became the formal interpretation. It appears that this homogenization of “national history” provided an impetus to those like Ahn Ho-sang possessing decidedly unique views of Korean history.

As history textbooks underwent national standardization, Ahn Ho-sang and his associates came to desire the history they believed in become “national history.” In order to fulfill this desire, Ahn mobilized the whole of his social capital and capabilities as former Minister of Education to attack and pressure historical academia. The emergence of pseudo-history was thus one reaction to, and side effect of, the national standardization of history textbooks in 1974.

#### IV. The Popularization and Perverse Acceptance of Pseudo-history

Following a decades-long large-scale propaganda campaign, pseudo-history achieved popular acceptance. Take the image of “King Chiyou” (*Chiu cheonwong*) used as the emblem of the “red devils,” official cheering squad for the national soccer team. This is not unrelated to the influence of the *Hwandan gogi*, the forged text produced by pseudo-historians. Indeed, with pseudo-historical content found in the likes of novels, manga (*manhwa*), and television dramas, and with certain astronomers introducing the astronomical records of forged texts as “fact” on television and in books, the shadow of pseudo-history is apparent in every corner of Korean society.<sup>22</sup> Recently, pseudo-history has served to propagate certain new religions, some of which manage cable television stations broadcasting such content as if it were common sense.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Popular novels like Yi U-hyeok’s *Chiu cheonwang gi* (Flag of King Chiyou) and Kim Jin-myeong’s *Geulja jeonjaeng* (War of letters) as well as manga (*manhwa*) like Kim San-ho’s *Daejyusin jeguksa* (Imperial history of great Joseon) and Yi Hyeon-se’s *Cheongug ui sinhwa* (Myth of Heaven) are imbued with pseudo-historical content. Television dramas like *Yeon Gaesomun* (SBS 2006-07) and *Taewong sasingi* (The legend; MBC 2007) both directly and indirectly reflect the pseudo-historical worldview. In the field of astronomy, director of the Korean Astronomy and Space Science Institute Park Seok-jae repeatedly defended texts such as the *Hwandan gogi* and *Cheonbugyeong* on the 2012 EBS program *Yeoksa teukgang* (Special history lecture).

<sup>23</sup> Looking at the program listing for SBT, the *Jeungsando* religion cable channel, programs like

The seriousness of the problem is perhaps most clear when one considers the traces of pseudo-history now detectable even in presidential speeches. President Park Geun-hye caused quite a stir when she referenced content from the *Hwandan gogi* in her speech commemorating National Liberation Day (*Gwangbokjeol*) in 2013.<sup>24</sup> The quotation, “The nation is as body and history as spirit,” is a line in the *Hwandan gogi* (1979) attributed to late Goryeo Dynasty period scholar Yi Am. But these are actually words lifted from independence activist Park Eun-sik’s *Hanguk tongsa* (Painful history of Korea; 1915). President Park repeated the quotation at a closed meeting of top-level Bluehouse secretaries on October 13, 2015.<sup>25</sup>

When considering the manner in which the public has embraced pseudo-history, one particularly peculiar point becomes apparent. Despite the clear fascist basis for pseudo-historical principles and arguments, they are unreservedly embraced by conservatives and progressive alike.<sup>26</sup>

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“Hwandan gogi Book Concert” and “Reciting the Hwandan gogi” constitute the majority of programming. The lecturer featured in these oft-repeated televised *Hwandan gogi* recitations is Ahn Gyeong-jeon Jongdosa, the *Jeungsando* leader. In 2012, Sangsaeng Publishing (*Sangsaeng chulpan*) published his translated and annotated version of the *Hwandan gogi*, which has become a *Jeungsando* holy text.

<sup>24</sup> “Gwangbokjeol chuksa e wiseo inyong han daetongnyeong” [The president who cited a forged text in a National Liberation Day commemorative speech], *Midieo oneul* [Media today], August 21, 2013.

<sup>25</sup> “Bak geunhye daetongnyeong, 5 ja hoedong seo minsaeng bangjeom” [President Park Geun-hye, national livelihood emphasis at five-member meeting], *Meteuro* [Metro], October 23, 2015.

<sup>26</sup> Looking at the media, for example, progressive outlets such as *Hangyeore Sinmun*, *Sisain*, and *Pressian* have each featured articles uncritically accepting the arguments of pseudo-historians. “Chiu cheonwang’ gwa ‘guyeokjil la neun samguk sagi” [King Chiyou and the nauseating Chronicle of the Three States], *Hangyeore Sinmun*, October 5, 2005; “Goguryeo ui pyeongyang, daeryug e isseonna” [Did Goguryeo Pyeongyang lie on the continent?], *Sisain* 391 (March 18, 2015); “Singmin sagwan geudaero ddaragan dongbuga yeoksa jido” [Northeast Asia map precisely adheres to colonialist historiography], *Pressian*, April 2, 2015. “Progressives” embracing pseudo-history, including the likes of teachers, labor activists, literary figures, politicians, and scholars, exist across diverse professional fields too numerous to list. The character of pseudo-history in Korea is such that it transcends the political spectrum, embraced by left and right as well as conservative and progressive alike.

This curious situation is attributable to pseudo-history's outward presentation as "nationalist" and "anti-colonialist." Denouncing the historical mainstream as "pro-Japanese," thus implying one's own antithetical position in this regard, it is but a simple matter to draw sympathy from a Korean public so conscious of the urgent need to resolve the colonial collaborative legacy. This situation is thus also indicative of the vulnerability of Korean society to chauvinism.

Currently, popular history writer Yi Deok-il is spearheading the propagation of pseudo-history. Over the years he has published various books, including *Gojoseon eun daeryug ui jibaeja yeotda* (Gojoseon: Continental ruler),<sup>27</sup> *Uri an ui singmin sagwan* (The colonialist historiography within us),<sup>28</sup> and *Maegug ui yeoksahak, eodi ggaji wanna* (History betraying the nation: How far has it come?).<sup>29</sup> He also spreads the ideas of pseudo-history as an active public speaker. The content of his ideas is largely the same as that propagated by Ahn Ho-sang beginning in the 1970s; there has been little change in pseudo-history over the years. However, the extent of Yi Deok-il's public influence is now perhaps something that cannot be overlooked.

Recently, Yi Deok-il was critical of the state-owned Northeast Asia History Foundation's East Asia mapping project. While he cited various issues, questioning the depiction of Dokdo, for instance, he was mainly concerned with the locations of the Gojoseon capital and the Lelang Commandery erected following Gojoseon's collapse, each of which had been located at what is now Pyongyang.

On April 17, 2015, the National Assembly summoned Yi Deok-il and Im Gi-hwan (Seoul National University, Department of History), who had overseen the Northeast Asia mapping project, for questioning at

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<sup>27</sup> Korea: Wisdom House, 2006.

<sup>28</sup> Korea: Mangweondong, 2014.

<sup>29</sup> Korea: Mangweondong, 2015.

a meeting considering “Northeast Asian History Distortion Countermeasures.” The atmosphere of the meeting was reminiscent of the public hearing held by the National Assembly Culture, Sports, and Information Committee in 1981. Whether part of the ruling party or the opposition, National Assembly members adopted a favorable attitude toward the pseudo-historical claims of Yi Deok-il. Newspaper, broadcasting, and other media representatives, as well, uncritically reproduced Yi Deok-il’s one-sided and provocative argument that the Northeast Asia mapping project faithfully reflected the distorted historical claims of China and Japan.<sup>30</sup>

As a result, the Northeast Asia mapping project, which had involved the efforts of dozens of historians and cost 4.7 billion won of taxpayer money over a period of eight years, was thrown into crisis: incorporate a number of pseudo-historical claims or be terminated. If the former does indeed occur, Korea will become an international laughingstock and its reputation for academic standards will be greatly damaged.

Amid its campaign for the national standardization of history textbooks, the ruling party asserted that ninety percent of Korean historians were “leftists.”<sup>31</sup> As well, members of the New Right, an organization closely affiliated with the Park government, declared history in Korea to be excessively nationalist. Meanwhile, Yi Deok-il and other

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<sup>30</sup> See “Segeum euro yeoksa yeongu ‘dokdo neun ilbon ddang?’ jido, iraeseoya...” [Mapping project paid for by tax dollars, “Dokdo a Japanese territory”? How can this be...], *Meoni tudei* [Money Today], September 7, 2015; “‘Hanbando e hansagun’ waegok doen godae sa jaryo mi uihoe e bonaetda” [‘Four Han Commanderies on Korean Peninsula,’ textbook distorting ancient history sent to U.S. Congress], *Jungang Ilbo*, October 5, 2015; etc. There were a striking number of media reports. What deserves close attention is the fact that, in general, such coverage closely followed the publication of Yi Deok-il’s *Maegug ui yeoksa hak, eodi ggaji wanna* (History betraying the nation: How far has it come?) (August 15, 2015). It looks as if National Assembly members and the media have aligned with Yi Deok-il’s marketing strategy to sell more books by stirring up the public through irresponsible arguments.

<sup>31</sup> “Gim museong ‘guksa hakja deul 90% ga jwapa ro jeonhwan’” [Kim Mu-seong, ‘Ninety percent of Korean historians now on the left’], *Gyeonghyang Sinmun*, October 17, 2015.

pseudo-historians continued to use the label “traitorous colonialist scholarship” with regard to Korean historians.<sup>32</sup> Synthesizing the claims of these conservative groups yields a rather baffling description of Korean historical scholarship: it is “pro-Japanese” but also “ultra-nationalist,” and some how still “leftist.” Needless to say, such allegations merely amount to ridiculous slander. What is more worth paying attention to is the extremeness and irrationality of dismissing the entirety of Korean historians as leftists or pro-Japanese colonialist historians in order to establish one’s own biased historical views as “national history.”

Meanwhile, there are also those concerned that the government-promoted nationally standardized textbooks’ treatment of modern history justifies or glorifies “pro-Japanese” and “dictatorship.” In order to address such criticism, it is likely that the government will strengthen the nationalist perspective in the ancient history sections. In fact, a plan to expand content in the textbooks pertaining to ancient history and the Goguryeo Dynasty has already been announced.<sup>33</sup>

As the textbook composition process continues, it is not so implausible that the National Assembly or high-level bureaucrats, amicable to pseudo-history as they are, will attempt to involve pseudo-historians or directly ensure the content reflect unverified pseudo-historical claims. If such a scenario does indeed unfold, the nationally standardized Korean history textbooks will come to exhibit a chimerical makeup, with the parts on ancient and modern history respectively reflecting utterly different forms of historical fascism.

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<sup>32</sup> In his book, *Maegug ui yeoksa hak*, Yi Deok-il writes, “Beyond colonialist historiography, this [Korean historiography] is historiography betraying the nation” (6). This is not an expression used sparingly in the book. Through it’s 400 or so pages, Korean historical scholarship is repeatedly referred to as “colonialist historiography” and “historiography betraying the nation.”

<sup>33</sup> “Sidong geon gyogwaseo pyeonchan jageop... godae sa ganghwa ro yeoksa waegok daeung” [Textbook compilation underway... strengthening of ancient history reaction to historical distortion], *Yeonhap News*, November 3, 2015.

Currently, Korean historical scholarship is in crisis, under siege on two fronts from “wrongful state interference” and “pseudo-historical attacks.” The arduous task that lies before historians, then, will consist of balancing against and breaking this twofold siege.

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# Interview



# Interview with Professor Fei-Ling Wang, author of *The China Order: Centralia, World Empire, and the Nature of Chinese Power* (2017)

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—  
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## I. World Order and Global Trends

**Choo:** The “America First” and “Make America Great Again” movements may potentially challenge the global liberal and economic order. With such political rhetoric, the Trump Administration is attempting to amend regional trade practices, such as with regional FTAs, and will probably try to do the same with global institutions. Will such efforts put liberal institutions in danger? Won’t this have a profound effect on the current liberal world order? How far do you see Trump and his administration challenging the current liberal order?

**Wang:** These are great questions that I think are on the minds of many people. I think the answer, to a great extent, is yes; if Donald Trump really means what he has said then liberal international institutions might be in deep danger. But will Donald Trump be able to do what he has said? That’s another question. I don’t think he can do much. I think he can probably affect the liberal international order only at the margins. So I’m aware of the danger but I don’t think necessarily that Trump and his administration will

fundamentally change the current liberal world.

**Choo:** But will China see this as a window of opportunity to challenge the extant liberal order and institutions? Will China jump on the bandwagon or will it continue to embrace and accommodate the current order and institutions? Will it remain with the rest in resisting America's challenge and preserve the current order and institutions or become more aggressive and assertive with its own regionalization schemes such as with One Belt One Road and RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership)? In other words, will China enhance its regionalization efforts?

**Wang:** Yes, I think China has seen Trump's rhetoric as a window of opportunity to challenge the existing world order. Now, I'm not saying the *liberal* world order but the current world order. That's because China's interest is not necessarily how liberal or illiberal the world order is but who is calling the shots—who is the leader. As far as embracing and accommodating the current order and institutions, I think China will continue to do this selectively, as it has done for decades. I think the Chinese have done this very successfully, selectively embracing and accommodating the current world order and rejecting and fending off the parts it doesn't like. But beyond that, with schemes like One Belt, One Road or RCEP, I think China probably is going beyond just selective embracing; it is probably more interested in showing that it could reset some, if not all, the rules. One Belt One Road and RCEP and many other schemes Beijing has been investing heavily in are, in other words, actually representing China's effort to reshape or reset the rules to some extent. I'm not saying to dismantle them completely, but to change them in a piecemeal fashion, one by one. The regionalization effort China has shown much interest in is probably not opposing the kind of globalist stance Xi Jinping is demonstrating. In other words,

regionalization and globalization are merely two processes that China thinks could be of use to it. I'm not saying they're mutually exclusive; they concur. So I wouldn't say that the Chinese enhancement of the regionalization effort necessarily hampers its globalization effort. They're actually glued together.

**Choo:** Can I ask you to elaborate a little more on China being very selective with its engagement? What benefits has China really accrued from selective engagement?

**Wang:** China has gained a great deal. It has gained access to the world market, especially the very profitable market in the United States. The U.S. has constantly been a major source of Chinese trade surplus; in other words, the cash financing China's economy. China has also had access to the market in Japan, Korea, Europe, everywhere. And it has benefitted a great deal from international investment. "Selective" in the sense that China has protected its own domestic market quite well, especially where it doesn't have any competitive advantage or areas that are politically sensitive, like cyber communication, and especially the banking district. This is what we call "selective accommodation" instead of "complete embrace." Every country is trying to be selective, but the Chinese have been extremely successful because they have been consistent and forceful. The American or foreign effort trying to open the Chinese market in many areas has simply been unsuccessful, unlike Japan or Korea or Taiwan, where pressure really changed things. Chinese selective embracement has been very successful because it's been tough, strong, and consistent. The Koreans and Japanese fight for that, too. But they cannot do so much. And now Donald Trump is renegotiating the Korean-US FTA. By joining the WTO the Chinese have very successfully, if you will, outmaneuvered the United States. So that's exactly why the United States was

promoting the TPP.

**Choo:** With BREXIT and the seeming resentment rising in the aftermath in Britain these days, what might be the fate of the EU? Will Britain retreat from its decision? Might there be a domino effect materializing as speculated with regard to a potential exodus by Spain, Greece and the like?

**Wang:** I would say that my understanding about the future of the EU is actually pretty optimistic. I think the EU will get rid of the UK and, without the UK and Turkey, I think it has a future that's bright but leaner and smaller. I'm not worried about the EU collapsing, but I think they have to go through some painful adjustment. They have to sort out how to deal with Great Britain and the Eastern European countries, and eventually decide about not letting Turkey in. In that sense, maybe they also have the leverage to punish the PIGS—the Italians, the Portuguese, the Spanish, and especially the Greeks. So overall the EU might actually have a smaller but leaner and better, more cohesive future, as long as the French and Germans can work together. If they work together well then the future of the EU is actually pretty bright. I'm not that worried about a chain reaction.

**Choo:** What is Europe's take on China's One Belt One Road initiative? What role do you see for the EU? What benefits does that EU foresee in the initiative? What does China expect from the EU? What does China see as the potential role and contribution of the EU?

**Wang:** The Chinese have benefitted a great deal from trade and investment with the EU so I think their attitude towards the EU and BREXIT is kind of ambivalent. On the one hand, they don't necessarily like a stronger, more coherent EU. But on the other, a

divided Europe is not good for Chinese interests, in terms of trade and all that, either. They have deals with all these countries, not just one. I don't think they necessarily want a strong EU, especially one that is a friend of the United States. But they probably don't necessarily want the EU to be completely gone either.

**Choo:** It has become an axiom that China wants to build a regional order centered on itself for the foreseeable future. What will it take for China to realize this “dream” of restoring the old Sinocentric order along with its past glory and privileges? How will China attract or appeal to regional states towards this end? Is China equipped with so-called “values” that can appeal to the region?

**Wang:** Actually, my new book that came out this year addresses this idea of a “China dream” or China order. The book is called *The China Order: Centralia, World Empire, and the Nature of Chinese Power*. I think the “China dream” basically means the restoration of the past glory of the Chinese world order. Under the China order, other countries are allowed to exist autonomously but they have to be lesser in ranking, like a tributary or little brother. That's the essence of it. But whether the dream can be realized is a different question. But the effort to realize this dream, itself, could be consequential.

Now, is China equipped with so-called values that appeal to the region? You bet. For example, the China-order values appeal to many elites in China as well as, I would say, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and all these other places; because authoritarianism appeals to people. You know, we all like democracy and freedom, but deep down we don't mind authoritarianism if we are the ruler. Authoritarianism, world unification, becoming the great emperor—they're actually quite appealing to elites anywhere. Now to the public, who cares, right? But because of education and

indoctrination, even ordinary people in places like China have this worship of the emperor. In China, there has always been worship of the emperor. This goes for Japan and Korea, too: the royal family, the king, the palace, the imperial power. This shows that, deep down, we all have this, as the Chinese call it, “emperor envy,” or emperor worship. Contrary to many people’s point of view, I think the Chinese actually have some values that are quite appealing to the region. Then, of course, who are the people who will try to realize these values? Not everyone can be emperor. All in all, I think that most people will agree democracy is better because not everyone can be emperor. But there might be enough people who want to be emperor and try to be so. And the same goes for world unification. Well, many think a competitive, diverse world is better. But some of us are actually like: “Well, should we pursue world unification? The great harmony—it’ll be great! One single order for everything!” That’ll be the China order.

**Choo:** But isn’t that somewhat contrary to what successive Chinese leaderships have been emphasizing?

**Wang:** Very good! As I write in my book, actually, I think that from Sun Yat-sen onward, Chinese leaders all harbored this “China order” thing, only the idea was voiced in different terms. Sun Yat-sen’s famous saying that “the world is for all” (*tianxia wei gong yi*). Mao Zedong had a similar slogan. I mean, take Tiananmen Gate. There are two slogans. One says, “Long Live the PRC.” What’s the other? It’s “Long live the solidarity of the people of the world.” What does “the solidarity of the people of the world” mean? You never hear that at the White House. No, they say, “We’re for America first,” right? Take Korea, too. When was the last time a Korean president said, “We are struggling for the unification and solidarity of the people of the world”? You never hear that. Rather, it’s “the

unification of Korea” maybe, right? So that’s a clear illustration. Mao Zedong tried to carry out a world revolution, or world unification, and achieve great harmony. It’s the same thing. This is actually an old playbook. I mean, if we look at the Qin Dynasty that unified China 2,000 years ago, it’s exactly the same playbook; you talk about one thing, do the other. When they say, “We support national independence” or “decolonization,” those signal what? To liberate people, first. And then after liberation, what happens? Solidarity: “help *me*.” So here liberation is not like the Western understanding. For liberation, the first step is, freedom is out of your control. And then you help me; solidarity. So that’s the Chinese idea. Therefore, the Chinese leaders have acted very consistently. They always talk about it. And that’s in my book. So to say China has no cultural appeal or no appealing values is wrong. China always thinks about how to be appealing to many Americans. They love the idea. Well, who wouldn’t? I mean, we call it globalization. It’s that idea. If we push the idea one step further, that’s the China order.

The question is not whether we need or want globalization but what kind of globalization? You might get a lot of diversity, competition, autonomy and sovereignty, right? Without that, globalization is the same as the China order. So how do we ensure that? How do we make people independent, sovereign, competitive, yet share the same system? That’s really the dimension we’re facing right now.

**Choo:** So it’s like the Qin Empire trying to achieve unification?

**Wang:** Yes, because for the Qin Dynasty—Qin Shi Huangdi—he wanted war and he got it. And then for the following twenty-seven centuries, China or East Asia was basically united. And, of course, sometimes they see foreigners. But some are far away, and they don’t care. But foreigners nearby—the Koreans, the Vietnamese—are under their

umbrella; they more or less subscribe to this. Even the Koreans, too. For East Asians, the world was united for a long time, until the Europeans came in. But sometimes emperors might not realize there are other countries. Or they just choose to keep them away or ignore them—a deep political function; no foreigners are coming in. Korea, Japan, China, all at the international level, accept isolation policy, the main purpose of which was to keep foreigners out and prevent their own peoples from talking with foreigners. So for China, in the Tang Dynasty, arguably the most cosmopolitan, open dynasty, if a Chinese went abroad without permission, upon return one might be, at worst, beheaded. You had to get permission to go out. And usually it was one way. If a foreigner came to China, it was the same; no return, until Ming/Ching altered the case. The idea behind that is: “Ok, I know I can’t control the whole world, but I can control my world. To protect my people, the rest don’t exist. And they’re insignificant. They’re like barbarians.” Either way, you assume away the rest of the world. Until, of course, they really come in with force.

## II. North-East Asian Regional Affairs

**Choo:** China’s aspiration for maritime power status has been somewhat perceived as a major challenge to the current regional maritime order and in particular to general freedom of navigation. Will this aspiration devolve into a major source of conflict between not only China and other regional states but the US as well? Do you see the US doing its utmost to quell such a challenge, even resorting to military means?

**Wang:** I do think China is determined to change the maritime order in East Asia. Xi Jinping has said very clearly, “China will be a great maritime power.” China has constructed seven islands in the South

China Sea and made claims beyond the so-called first-island chain. And then you have Chinese submarines, ships, aircraft carriers, and so on. So I think China has invested very heavily in realizing what I call the “blue dream.” China is trying to achieve its blue dream by becoming a great maritime power.

**Choo:** According to a report, there was a difference of opinion between Obama and the Department of Defense regarding US China policy. It was speculated that the DoD wanted to advance an aggressive and hawkish stance, as opposed to Obama’s restraint. What is your take on this?

**Wang:** I think there’s always a difference of opinion between the president and one branch of government.. I don’t think the disagreement between the DoD (Department of Defense) and Obama was necessarily that big. Obama launched his pivot and the DoD fought the order. Even right now, people are also speculating that there’s a difference between Trump and the DoD. Because there should be a pay cut right now; you pay the commander or the general or the admiral. Also, it’s supposedly more hawkish than Trump. But what we know and what we see is only on the surface. The DoD has to follow presidential orders. But it can also affect the presidential mind. So, my take is, if there *are* differences, they’re probably just a matter of degree on how to implement policies. It’s a loop. The DoD can change the presidential view, as well. But eventually—ultimately—of course, the president makes the policy.

**Choo:** You say that China is determined to change the maritime order. In what direction do you see this leading?

**Wang:** That I don’t pretend to know. I can only speculate. I think that, first, China wants to break the first-island chain. That’s completely

standard; they say so. Second, they clearly want to control the South China Sea. To make it a “lake of China” or something. Third, they want to keep the U.S. as far away as possible, maybe to Guam or even beyond. And also they want to venture into the Indian Ocean to safeguard their shipping routes. Or avoid the Indian Ocean altogether to use the harbor in Pakistan—Gwadar. So they are literally trying to alter the maritime order in this region. The main purpose is to keep the U.S. out as far as possible and then become the dominant force in the region.

**Choo:** Maybe that’s where major conflict might appear in the future. It may come along especially with regard to South Korea.

**Wang:** But what I hear in many table-talk exercises—like war game exercises in the U.S.—is that the real war between the U.S. and China will likely start in the South China Sea somewhere. They don’t think it’ll start around Taiwan or Korea necessarily. It’s the South China Sea. Because if the Chinese attack and the Americans lose even—just take one warship—that’s the end of it. One ship amounts to hundreds, even thousands, of American soldiers. That’s a big deal.

**Choo:** It’s like going back to the Opium War.

**Wang:** Yes, that was just one ship. It could be even a Japanese ship, because there’s an alliance, or even a Korean ship. But right now it’s American ships that are quite annoying. They sit too close with us. There’s no island. And from the Chinese point of view that’s very annoying. And if they can sink it they’ll probably sink it. But then what happens after? I’ve been talking to some Chinese friends and they tell me, “Don’t worry, we’ll have the ability to sink American ships soon.” But what after? Take even the American aegis ship,

which has only limited ability to defend against an attack. They can exhaust their aegis missiles and then they are sitting ducks. Then what happens? That's the danger. But from China's point of view it's very annoying. China is concerned with the islands but Americans just hang around and ignore that. That's quite annoying.

**Choo:** And you say that China wants to keep US access to the South China Sea as far out as off Guam. But the U.S. might be pursuing a naval base in Korea—in Jeju.

**Wang:** That's right. The potential for maritime conflict is pretty real and substantial. That's a nightmare for me, by the way, that it could happen.

**Choo:** There are two schools of thought on the rise of China, namely, power transition theory and the Thucydides trap. However, both theories show limitations in defining the “challenger” or “enforcer.” While power transition theory assigns culpability to China for a clash between it and the U.S., the Thucydides trap portrays the U.S. as a “trap builder” and thus war initiator. With respect to either case, do you think the U.S. or China is willing to commit to such consequences?

**Wang:** I think that those theories are too rigid and limiting. Basically, the question is whether a revisionist power will challenge an existing one or the existing one will set a trap to destroy the rising one. Either could be possible and not necessarily mutually exclusive; they can both happen at the same time. The rising power will definitely challenge the old one, and the old one will try its best to contain the other. So I think both theories together would probably explain, to some extent, what's happening now. You can argue from Beijing's point of view that the United States is already setting the

trap. But you could also say that China is setting a trap, too. This is too limiting a theory or description. But I think the consequences will be grave and terrible.

**Choo:** But is any party really willing to allow that?

**Wang:** Yes, both are doing it. We shouldn't kid ourselves about that. The Chinese spend all this money on weapons. What are they for? Taiwan? Do you think the American pivot is for protecting sea-lanes against pirates? No. They are doing it already. Which is to say, it's not clear yet. They're all aware of the consequences. And they are sometimes delusional: "Oh, maybe we shouldn't do that. Maybe you're going to do that." If you believe the hardcore realist analysts like Mearsheimer or Graham Allison at Harvard, then this is happening; it's inevitable, right? Only if there's something drastic will it happen. And you can believe other people—maybe John Ikenberry is one. You know, they're like, "Don't worry." John is an extremely smart guy but I think that on this particular issue he displays too much wishful thinking. It's not that we want a war. I think it just happens.

**Choo:** To what degree do you see territorial disputes developing into a major source of conflict? Are these temporary issues or will they have a lingering effect on regional international relations? What possible solutions are there? Do you see multilateral arrangements as a possible solution? Or will regional states have to resort to bilateralism for conflict dialogue?

**Wang:** Well, there are quite a few territorial disputes in Northeast Asia right now: Japan and Korea, Korea and China, China and Taiwan, China and India, China and Vietnam, and even with Russia. They're all actually minor, relatively speaking, except for China and India.

But all the others are insignificant, especially with Korea and China. What are they arguing for, right? I think territorial disputes will continue to be a source of conflict in East Asia. Managing them requires great care, wisdom, and skill, but I'm worried our leaders may not have that. There's also a dangerous tendency—longstanding territorial disputes could be used by one or two or both countries for whatever; they could become a flashpoint suddenly. For example, there's what the Koreans call Jeodo, which is a non-issue. But occasionally if you mention it you can make an issue out of this. Let's just say that China would like to make an issue of this. It becomes a big flashpoint. But right now they don't want to talk about this. And with the dispute between India and China it's the same thing: it hasn't become an issue yet; it may die down. It's like the Diaoyu or Senkaku islands. Mostly they don't want to make an issue. If they don't want to make an issue, it quiets down. That's where your danger is. With territorial disputes, people just, for whatever reason, don't want to negotiate a peaceful settlement. They just want to keep it or leave it, all or nothing. That really actually sets the trap, if you will.

### III. US-China Relations

**Choo:** Do you see a military clash occurring between the U.S. and China? Why or why not?

**Wang:** I don't see it happening, but it's very possible. Some say it's likely, but it's not happening just yet. Both sides are trying to avoid that now. But both have redlines marked. And each can actually provoke the other.

**Choo:** How about economic relations? Will Trump's administration be able to truly reduce the trade deficit? Is this realizable? Do you see

his rhetoric, such as calling China a “currency exploiter,” or China’s punitive tariff measures for trade malpractice effectively reducing the trade deficit between the two?

**Wang:** I think the economic relations between the two right now are complex, big, and very important, but unbalanced. So like any important relationship, if it’s not balanced, it’s not going to do much. And there’s a danger of some kind of breaking point if we don’t correct the imbalance. It’s almost unbearable now. The U.S., simply because of its size and position, can still put up with it. But I honestly think that it’s in China’s interest to correct that imbalance.

**Choo:** That’s in China’s interest?

**Wang:** I think that’s definitely in its long-term interest. If you keep a very important relationship unbalanced—it’s like a wife and husband, you know, if there is a complete imbalance between them for too long it’s not going to make them happy. And you don’t want to wait for that relationship to collapse. You want to be proactive. Trump actually talked tough but so far hasn’t done much because he is a “businessman” and he wants to make “bargains”: “Okay, I’m not going to do anything about trade now. But you have to deal with North Korea.” But it’s not happening. So we’ll see.

**Choo:** How has China reacted to Trump’s verbal provocations, such as with trade deficit and so on? Will China make an effort to compromise with the Trump Administration? Is there anything on the table from the Chinese perspective?

**Wang:** I think China should, but whether it is doing that or not, I don’t see it just yet. Well, I take it back. The Chinese are doing a little bit now because they are buying American cultural goods; they are sending

teams to the United States to find this and find that. They are trying to appease the United States: “Okay, I’ll buy more of your stuff.” But that is not going to be addressing the fundamental issue, which is, again, the selective thing: The Chinese are not opening up the market where Americans are really competitive. And they subsidize trade on their exports to the United States while closing the door to Americans who may be competitive in some areas like entertainment, communication, banking, consulting, and education. Trump may actually decide, if he’s completely disappointed about North Korea, to punish China. That could be ugly.

**Choo:** The EU seems to be stuck between the U.S. and China with respect to numerous issues. On the one hand, it seems like Trump has difficulty in getting along with some European leaders. On the other, at the G-20 summit it seemed that China was much more on the same page with the EU on global and regional issues. Can we expect further EU-China cooperation facilitating China’s rise as opposed to US-EU cooperation neutralizing China’s rise?

**Wang:** It’s not there. This is like the Chinese or American strategies. Like, “Whatever the other side is not doing, I’m doing it.” It’s like, “The enemy of my enemy is my friend.” It doesn’t mean that the EU and China are agreeing on some fundamental global issues. First of all, they don’t agree on a host of problems.

**Choo:** What do you see as the Trump Administration’s ultimate policy goal with regard to China? Deterring China’s rise? Managing it? Or perhaps meeting it with both containment and engagement, as with past administrations? In the context of his past rhetoric, where do you think Trump stands?

**Wang:** I think the Trump administration is very young at the moment. We

don't know what's happening. Also, Trump is such an extraordinary president in the way that he governs like no other; his candid rhetoric, his traits, and so on. We don't know. But I think he is probably not moving too far away from traditional American policy. That's some kind of fear for containment and some kind of wish for engagement, or some combination. I don't think the people in Washington have decided to go one way or the other. But I think an increasing many think engagement is just a delusion; it's not working. I think the scale is moving in that direction—more containing, “deal with it, manage it”—away from engagement. Engagement was based on the assumption that we could change China. Now they see, “Well, not only can we not change China, China is growing big and might change us now.”

**Choo:** Will there be more of a downward spiral between the two countries as a result of the security dilemma? Or will there be more dialogue, as witnessed in the past between the two countries, so as to avoid clashes as much as possible?

**Wang:** If I have to choose, I would say the security dilemma is getting worse between America and China. It's already happening between America and China in East Asia, which may not be in China's long-term interest at all since it will be racing against several countries. I think even Taiwan is going to spend more money on the military. And Vietnam, India—everybody is spending. The Chinese expansion of military power may prove to be unwise. And the United States, of course, is engaging with this as well. But the U.S. can do so in a cost-effective way by bringing the Japanese, Koreans, and Taiwanese into this arms war. I think the security dilemma is already happening. Not necessarily completely all the way down to open war but I think it's happening already. It can be managed properly. If the Chinese don't want much then it's easier to manage,

but the Chinese want a lot. So that's the thing. And China uses its muscles to do that. And look at the Japanese. The Japanese leadership are building warships at a pace unseen for a long time. And the Japanese military integration issue in the United States is really deep.

**Choo:** Sooner or later, do you see the arms race being prevented by economic costs? Like with aging societies, pensions, and so on?

**Wang:** Yes, of course. The arms race can be stopped or slowed down by a few things. One is a war. That's a fact, right? And the other is being broke. Like you said, you have pension plans—all these things. Or third, there's the cost of new technology. Nuclear weapons scared the Soviet Union and United States into behaving. This does not seem to be the case for many in East Asia because there's wishful thinking, or maybe Asian thinking, that nuclear weapons will not be used. It's almost too scary, right? But I think the North Koreans are right. They want to have ultimate security. I think the arms race may be slowed down by that but—see, the thing is, if we are in an arms race and I'm getting poorer and poorer because I have pensions, retirement, and the economy is going down, we only have several options. One is to give up. That's not very pleasant. And the other is, "I'm going to use it, before I really get too weak." That's actually very dangerous, if you think about it. In a security dilemma, if one side is going broke, it's very dangerous. The former Soviet Union chose to reform and collapsed. But not all countries are like that. Sometimes you choose to just gamble—to use it. The ideal situation would be that the broken side would stop and surrender, like the former Soviet Union. But that's not really normal. It's actually quite exceptional.

**Choo:** They don't want that to happen with North Korea.

**Wang:** Exactly. If North Korea gets desperate, if it feels it is losing out, it can just launch that.

**Choo:** So you want to bend it but not break it.

**Wang:** You want to bend it, you want to force it, but you don't want to break it. Once you break it then the consequences are going to be huge. I don't think we have the stomach for that.

#### IV. The Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia

**Choo:** North Korea's seemingly incessant provocations, whether with nuclear tests or missile tests, and South Korea's decision to deploy THAAD are two thorny regional issues. With the new leaderships in Korea and the United States, both countries are in search of a way to put an end to North's nuclear aspirations. This won't be easy and it will take some time but there are two possible scenarios in this regard. One is a peaceful solution involving dialogue and cooperation. The other involves demolishing North Korea's nuclear facilities through either surgical or preemptive strikes. What are the chances of such military action? Is this a feasible scenario?

**Wang:** The chances of military action now, actually, are increasingly unknown. Previously I think the chances were almost null, but right now who knows. Is this a feasible scenario? Yes, it's clearly a feasible scenario but the price will be high. How many streets of Seoul do we sacrifice, right? I heard—this is not really official—that the United States and South Korea can destroy all North Korean cannons through an assault within an hour or two. But there could be about ten percent left to fire maybe one or two rounds. Let's just say ten percent of them, you know, one thousand cannons, or mortars or rockets. This is like two shots before they're totally

destroyed. Two shots will be two thousand artillery shots on Seoul. That's the price we will pay. Do we have the stomach for that? If we decide, "We'll take the two thousand cannonballs, let's do it," then, yeah, North Korea can be done tomorrow. But who's to say, "We'll give you the risk of two thousand cannons." That's actually in North Korea's security interest. But if South Korea has had enough of it, they might say, "Gamble it all, let's risk that rather than risking millions down the road," right? It can be that easy. Maybe it's not that scale, maybe it turns out there's just a couple hundred, not two thousand. If the U.S. and South Korean militaries agree, they can probably take out ninety-nine percent in a first strike. Then they have only a hundred cannons left shooting a hundred cannon balls: "Oh, that's all? Who cares." It's not going to be terrible. And those guns are not very accurate, so I think it's feasible. It's just a price. How much can we give? The current price versus the one down the road. Because of nuclear weapons I can envision a worse situation. Compared to that—and with two thousand cannonballs, you know, it's a clear choice in the end, in my view. But this is a laymen's opinion. The military caste probably won't think this way.

**Choo:** The only alternative to military action is dialogue. Thus far, North Korea does not seem to want to engage in dialogue until it completes its nuclear development programs. Do you see dialogue as a realistic or feasible approach? President Moon has claimed that he will be proactive in persuading the North to engage in inter-Korean and multilateral dialogue, i.e. possibly Six-party talks. His confidence seems high as he garnered much support from all surrounding powers, as evidenced in his meetings with his counterparts. What would it take to bring North Korea to the table?

**Wang:** I think the Six-Party talks, or any other talks, are always good. But I don't think we can talk North Korea out of nuclear weapons,

period. There's no chance now. They're not looking back. The North Koreans are thinking they are China in 1964-65.

**Choo:** Exactly!

**Wang:** Yes, not only do they not want to give it up, they want to make more. So talks will not work anymore. You have to give them something. You have to treat them as an equal, like the United States did in Nixon's visit. Or destroy them.

**Choo:** I kind of make the same analogy when I talk about this issue. China probably well understands South and North Korean thinking and strategy and so forth. In the end, does China really expect the only breakthrough to be, say, like with Nixon in '69 and a "dream fulfilled"? In other words, does China see North Korea moving on the same path?

**Wang:** In a way, I think the Chinese are like the Soviet Union during that time: very reluctant to see this happening. But they see it. The Chinese [position] on this nuclear issue, I think, is the worst, of all the parties. Why? Because the North Koreans are not going to give up nuclear weapons. So you have two options, basically. Well, several options, but the main ones are either attack them or accept them. Accepting North Korea will make North Korea not be friends with China anymore, probably an enemy of China. You don't want an enemy right on the border. The Chinese are talking about how the U.N. should have normalization with Korea, but they're not very sincere. If I was in Beijing, I wouldn't like North Korea to defect to the United States and become an American little brother like South Korea. Why would I want that? But that is actually what North Korea wants. And China doesn't want that, kind of like the Soviet Union. And the United States doesn't really care about a nuclear

North Korea because North Korea is small. If North Korea was two or three times as big and could be a conduit to China, you've got a [problem]. But the United States is saying: "North Korea, what can you offer? We have Japan and South Korea already." So North Koreans are having a hard time to realize the dream, you know? The dream. It's the same dream. The North Koreans are working like hell to get there. All the belligerent talk is actually trying to get American attention: "Come on, come on! Talk to me!" And the North Koreans also realize the Six-party talks are not productive; too many parties.

**Choo:** So, in the end, what would be the ideal scenario for China?

**Wang:** The ideal scenario for China, actually, is for somebody, some foreign force, to suddenly get rid of North Korean nuclear weapons without bringing the regime down.

I think if there's a relatively clean surgical strike, China, at the most, would make some protest; it's not going to do anything. But if the surgical strike were messy and South Korean troops had to cross the DMZ, then that's a different situation. But in a very messy situation the South Koreans may have a moral obligation to do that. I always say that South Korea will have no choice if it becomes very messy—if the country collapses or war breaks out and people are dying. And that's when the Chinese probably will respond. For South Koreans the campaign would be very clear: they want to get rid of the nuclear weapons, and then we can either unify or not unify—we talk, fine. But for the Chinese it's more complicated.

**Choo:** So if it's a clear, precise surgical strike then there's a high chance that Beijing will remain acquiescent.

**Wang:** Not only a high chance but almost a certainty, I would say. They'll

make a protest. You'll see them jump up and down like something crazy. But it's just a protest. That's it.

**Choo:** Going back to '64 when the United States wanted to carry out the surgical strike...

**Wang:** No, the Soviet Union wanted to carry it out.

**Choo:** Oh, that was '69.

**Wang:** But going back to '64, the U.S. never wanted to carry out a surgical strike. That was just kind of a low-level talk.

If the United States did attack, I bet you Moscow wouldn't have really reacted. Moscow would have actually been happy. The logics are similar. If in 1966 the United States attacked and took away China's nuclear facility, Russia would have been really happy. But certainly they would say, "Imperialism," you know, "Attacking our socialist brother."

**Choo:** That was the official statement coming from Moscow back then. "The alliance is still effective..."

**Wang:** The irony is that when the Russians wanted to attack, the U.S. actually opposed that. So in this case it would be, if China wanted to attack, the U.S. would oppose. But no, the South Koreans are going to oppose. Let's say tomorrow China decided, "Let's have a surgical strike to get rid of North Korean nuclear weapons." What is South Korea going to do? "No, no, don't! We'll have the fallout!" But analogies are always handicapped. North Korea today is like China in the 1960s only to some extent.

**Choo:** The United States and its allies want tougher sanctions on Pyongyang if North Korea continues with its missile and nuclear tests. However, China's cooperation is essential and vital. Beijing has been fending off United States demands to be more responsible, and cooperative and to comply with demands for tougher sanctions, i.e. cutting off the oil supply to Pyongyang. What will it take to bring China to our side? What will it take for China to succumb to our demands?

**Wang:** One is that if the South Koreans and Japanese talk about having their own deployments, that'll do the trick. Two, if South Korea decides, "We're not fearful of the two thousand bombs anymore; we're going to attack." Those things will make a change, in my mind. In other words, South Korea has to be really tough. It's getting hard. South Korea really has to be showing: "Look, I'm going to get nuclear bombs, if you [China] protect North Korea. Moreover, actually, I wouldn't mind the Japanese having nuclear bombs." That would do the trick. Or, the South Koreans are going to say, "Okay, Americans, you have to bomb North Korea now. I don't care about Seoul anymore. Two thousand bombs, two thousand artillery shells—fine." That would make the Chinese think again. Other than that, I don't think China is going to defend North Korea. They said so. Put these two on the table and China will tend to believe and react. I have long suggested that South Koreans should develop nuclear weapons. I think you should seriously consider that. From an American point of view they won't like that. American policy is non-proliferation, of course. It's a big deal for Washington to accept that. If South Korea and Japan seriously decided to go nuclear, that would make China think; that would change the equation. That would also neutralize North Korean nuclear warheads. I think the North Koreans are not that crazy. They're not going to use nuclear weapons against anybody. Unless they are dying. If South Korea,

China, Japan, Russia all had nuclear weapons, that would cancel out North Korean nuclear weapons. That card is gone, useless. That's a big change. And we have to persuade Americans to go along with that.

**Choo:** In light of this, it looks as though the Trump Administration's China policy will still hinge on the economy. From that perspective, is it possible for the two nations to cooperate on North Korean issues?

**Wang:** The United States and China cooperating on North Korean issues is possible but not very likely. The Chinese line is very clear. The American line is "no nuclear weapons." Trump had this wishful thinking that Xi Jinping would help him because he worries about trade. Xi Jinping has almost no influence in Pyongyang other than the "all-out solution." And China does not want that. Trump says, "I'm disappointed." Well, you should be disappointed. What were you thinking? The Chinese leverage is very minor, other than the all-out, final solution. But in the final solution, Pyongyang can collapse. And that's not a desirable scenario. So I think there are limits to building cooperation or unity.

**Choo:** What's your take on THAAD deployment to South Korea? Do you see it as the beginning of many more US deployments of sophisticated and highly advanced weapon systems to the peninsula? Does this only signal the beginning, in other words? Can we expect the U.S. to deploy more such weapon systems as part of its containment strategy? I raise these questions because of the unprecedented way in which the United States "leaked" its plan to deploy THAAD on its military bases on the peninsula. Why do you think the United States has been "leaking" this plan since 2014 despite the lack of need to do so?

**Wang:** Did the U.S. leak the plan in 2014?

**Choo:** In late 2013 or early 2014, Obama started talking about how “US bases in Korea might need to defend themselves” or how “US bases are in need of better defense against North Korea’s missile attacks.”

I raise this question because American behavior has been somewhat unprecedented in this regard. With all the deployment of weapons and weapon systems to US military bases in Korea, the U.S. always did it in a discrete way. Up to date, we don’t really know the sophistication of the weapons and weapon systems installed in the bases. But for some reason they decided to be open with respect to THAAD. So I was wondering if this was an indicator meant to test China regarding the U.S. plan for more deployments of advanced weapons—did they just want to test the Chinese reaction?

**Wang:** That’s a good question. I’m not military, so I’m going to answer intuitively, but I think it’s entirely South Korea’s sovereign decision. Americans aren’t going to mind; they’re allies, right? Once they decided to do it, whether it’s good for them or bad for them is irrelevant. I think for a third country like China to be really angry about this is natural because China is affected. But there is only so much you can do. These are just sovereign countries; you bargain, you trade. President Park and President Moon, also, said that the Chinese did not offer enough to bargain. So it’s an ongoing issue. I think that President Park bargained hard with Xi Jinping, again, as Trump is bargaining with Xi Jinping: “If you do something about North Korea, I won’t punish you on trade issues.” President Park Geun-hye tried really hard: “I’ll be nice to you.” It can be something like that. “I’m not going to deploy THAAD if you do that.” Well, Xi Jinping didn’t do it. But he did make the gesture, to be fair. He didn’t go to Pyongyang. He made gestures. That’s it. They cut off

some trade. That's not going to do the trick. In that sense, of course, China is really unhappy; North Korea, as well. But in my view, the Koreans ultimately have to make the decision. This has to do with safety, security, and sovereignty. You do things to safeguard yourself; that's a sovereignty issue. But the Americans probably want this, too. So that's probably the "leak" issue. If they did manipulate this and leak it out, they probably had this in mind. It's sort of making the Chinese unhappy deliberately and the Chinese are trapped. I think the Chinese are probably smart enough—well, the Chinese reaction is bad but I think the reaction is... What do you think about the reaction, seriously?

**Choo:** China's counterargument against the claim of sovereignty is: "Well, the US military bases are out your jurisdiction. And it's all a common area so you don't get to manage or operate the THAAD system. You basically have no rights to access the system. So what are you talking about here?" Which is understandable. The common argument is valid, that's for sure. So that's why I think we've lost some ground in our argument against China over the THAAD issue because, strictly speaking, it's not a sovereignty issue. Because THAAD is being deployed to US military bases for the defense of US military bases.

And now the whole economy is getting affected. We never expected China's punitive measures to last this long with respect to such a wide range of economic areas and fields. Overall, we're fed up with China's reaction because it does not seem to want to talk about it. They're just shutting us out. We try to patch up things but...

**Wang:** But do you think that's probably because Xi Jinping is personally unhappy?

**Choo:** I guess so, too.

**Wang:** I think he probably thought that he and President Park Geun-hye got along quite nicely and South Korea is making too much money from China with a trade surplus and so on. And that's when you do the deals and you didn't do it. Kind of personally. But what do you think? Essentially, it's going to continue?

**Choo:** Yes, as of next month, August, the sanctions and punitive measures will have continued for one year already. But usually if you look back at some other cases, like with many of the European cases, Chinese action over political conflicts only lasts about a year or two, max. So by the time it is winding down in the first year, China always sends out the signal to patch up things, but so far China hasn't shown any intentions of anything like that. The only possible clarification that I can detect from the Chinese side occurred in March and April when China came out and said, something like, "Okay, pull out the bone from my neck."

**Wang:** "Whoever tied the bell should untie it." That means that they still want to get rid of THAAD.

**Choo:** Yes, exactly. But other than that they don't seem to show any leniency.

**Wang:** So the THAAD deployment is going to continue?

**Choo:** It has to—one squadron is not going to do it.

**Wang:** One squadron is not enough. So how many squadrons are enough?

**Choo:** Usually to be effective, in theory they need at least, what, four?

**Wang:** Okay. So they'll still continue to deploy. And at the present moment they're basically saying, yes, right? President Moon went to Washington and basically said, yes, right? Did President Moon surprise some liberals?

**Choo:** Yes, he goes to D.C., changes his mind, and butters up Trump. Then he sees Xi Jinping at the G20 summit and says, "We've got another year so relax."

**Wang:** Xi Jinping was expecting him to be different.

**Choo:** Yes, exactly. But Xi Jinping wasn't fooled because he already knew what Moon said in Washington D.C.

**Wang:** So that meeting at the G20 was not really useful?

**Choo:** No, not in my eyes.

**Wang:** So the sanctions will continue?

**Choo:** Yes. We are about to go into the second year.

**Wang:** Okay and do you expect any enhancement of sanctions? My students actually reported—they did some research and found out that Hyundai car sales in China are really decreasing right now.

**Choo:** Yes, the other day there was a reader report saying that Hyundai Automobiles has prompted a China tax scheme.

**Wang:** To deal with the situation?

**Choo:** Yes. And they just opened up a new factory.

**Wang:** I know they were trying. And their own factories are already having problems with the cars. And one report from my student was saying that the Chinese are now buying more Japanese cars.

I think THAAD makes Xi Jinping himself personally unhappy. I think he's personally involved in this. And if that's the case, the Koreans are going to have to act—the Chinese lose money, too, but the Koreans lose more. Against the Chinese capitalists, “Well you lose more, I lose less and let's see who can last.” And if Koreans can find substitutes then it shouldn't be a problem. I mean, for tourists, you can find substitutes; South East Asians for example. But for the sales market, China's big. What should the South Korean government do? It's a tough call: money or security? At the present moment I think he made the decision already. He went to Washington and signed all the papers and so on. South Korea is valuing security more than money, which is normal.

**Choo:** And so we get another slap in the face from Washington: they want to mandate US free trade...

**Wang:** I know, but I wouldn't worry about that. Trump says many things. He's losing credibility quite a bit.

**Choo:** Yes, that's what happened with President Park, too. He's walking the same path.

**Wang:** Yes, he's still in office but his credibility is gone. The revision or renegotiation of FTA with Korea, in my opinion, is more for political propaganda at home than really doing something about it. He doesn't even know the details. He had an interview recently—the day before yesterday—with some reporters from the *New York Times*. He was mumbling a lot. And the *New York Times* didn't

publish it—it was too “mumbly.” And he comes and says, “Hey, why didn’t you publish that interview?” “Oh, we thought it was a little too informal. You probably don’t want us to publish.” He said, “Go ahead and publish it.” And they published it, today. And you read it, it’s terrible “mumbling, mumbling.” It’s like, “Oh, China has 8,000 years of history.” What is he talking about? I wouldn’t take his threats seriously... if I were the Korean government I wouldn’t worry about the Korean FTA being renegotiated. It’s going to be bureaucrats talking about this and that; maybe they will give and take.

**Choo:** China’s punitive economic measures due to political conflicts have only lasted a year or two at max in the past. There were numerous cases with European states. The first year of such measures by the Chinese government with regard to South Korea is approaching its term in August. However, there appears no sign that China will call an end to the sanctions. Do you see them continuing into the second year or for the foreseeable future? Do you see any solution to the China-Korea conflict as a result of the THAAD deployment? Assuming no more deployment of THAAD and other highly advanced weapons and weapon systems in the future, what should the South Korean government do?

**Wang:** I think that Beijing has been viewing Korea as a potential for a united front. Beijing has hoped Korea to somehow keep its distance from Japan and maybe, eventually, leave the United States. That’s been the hope for a long time now. That explains a lot of things: why Beijing never criticizes South Korea openly, and why the Chinese netizens, if they dare to criticize anybody in Korea—leaders like President Park—are censored. But criticize the United States government? Sure. Criticize Abe, the Japanese Prime Minister? By all means. So they have high hopes. I think that THAAD and also

the North Korean nuclear program have really dashed that hope. I think that China is actually wounded with the pain of that, also. So the policies against South Korea, in my opinion, are almost like a reflex. It's not even calculated, it's just a reflex; a fear of this pain. So in the long run what does that mean? That means the Koreans still have to make the call. Do you want to be a US ally? Or do you want to change your situation? If Koreans make a decision, "We want to be a US ally." Simple. Then, well, the honeymoon between Korea and China is not going to continue. That's simple. But if the Koreans say, "We're going make a decision, adjust a little bit," leaving the United States a little bit to be more neutral, then maybe the honeymoon will come back again. But then Korea's position will be precarious. It's almost like playing with fire. North Korean nuclear weapons are going to be there; they won't get rid of them. And in the future, who knows what the Chinese are going to do. So Korea probably has to be prepared for some hard times in terms of economic relations with China. I think Chinese trade with Korea is still structurally complementary. But the level of complementarity is decreasing. A few years from now the Chinese demand for Korean products will probably go down. Therefore, the Korean surplus against China will not be that easy anymore; the golden egg will no longer be there. That's really important. But even then, the overall picture is that the Koreans have to balance between security and money; and balance the inter-Korean relationship against the Chinese relationship.



# Book Reviews



**Modern Korean Historical Faultlines in the  
“Reclaimed Area”:  
Review of *Korean War and Reclaimed Area* [Hanguk  
jeonjaeng gwa subok jigu]**

By Monika Han  
Seoul: Pureunyeoksa, 2017

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**I. The History of Inje County through Microscope  
and Toothpaste Photos**

This book is a local history of Inje County in Gangwon Province combining all of the virtues of historical studies, such as gathering and analyzing a large number of documents, on-site investigations and oral records. The author complements this historical depth with a biological analysis of the Inje area closely observing cells in a microscope as well as a geological analysis examining the faultlines that have accumulated over the centuries. In its comprehensiveness and novelty, the book is a masterpiece demonstrating the virtues of local, biological, and geographical history.

The historical faultlines in the region are extraordinary. Referred to as the “Reclaimed Area,” this is a region that has experienced a variety of regime shifts through rule by the Japanese Empire, U.S. military, Republic of Korea, and Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. Thus it has seen changes in ruling elites, political ideology, economic order, and

policy goals. These dynamics have certainly affected historiography on the region, which reflects the legacies of colonial rule, foreign intervention, people's democracy, and nation-building. Considering these transitions, the author suggests that the Reclaimed Area may be linked to a more general comparative study on post-socialist transitions. In other words, the author contends, it is possible to discern an experience in the Reclaimed Area similar to that of Eastern European countries that underwent a transition to democracy and market economy (25).

The author focuses on three points to analyze the historical faults of the Reclaimed Area. First, there was the change in the relations of land ownership, which provided the economic foundation of the region. Just as land reform was the biggest national challenge for many countries in Europe after World War I, so it was for the majority of Asian countries achieving independence after World War II. Thus, comparison of land reforms under the colonial and postcolonial systems may serve as an important basis for understanding the overall political development of the two systems.

Second, the author analyzes changes in the power structure that transition brought to the Reclaimed Area. Who gained power? What political interests were formed? What were the overriding policy objectives and ideology and what did they produce? These are key questions in studying the history of transitions.

Third, the author analyzes patterns in identity changes among the people experiencing this transition. This is also a very important analysis considering that identity change reflected the very essence of the Cold War: ideologies and their means of realization.

The composition of the book is analogous to its analysis of these three subjects of land reform, power structure, and identity. What follows is an overview of the theoretical implications and issues of the book's main findings.

## II. Legacies of State Corporatism during Colonial Rule

The analysis begins with the colonial structure of land ownership. According to the author, during the colonial period land ownership in the region was based on a landowner system, but the degree of land concentration was moderate compared to the Hwanghae or South and North Pyeongnam provinces. Together with the “sharecropping committee” implemented by the Japanese colonial government to mediate land conflicts, this ensured that tenant disputes were less severe here than in other regions (65-67).

The “Committee System,” as noted by the author, demonstrated the typical characteristics of the Japanese state-corporatism system introduced to the Korean Peninsula during the colonial period. State-corporatism is the very antithesis of democratic corporatism. While under the former the state itself organizes society and absorbs potential conflicts, the latter is characterized by more of a “bottom-up” process. The basic model for the Committee System originated in the conservative administrative system of Prussian Germany, which tried to manage society through bureaucratic administration instead of introducing political democracy. The same is true of the power structure of various administrative organizations, such as administrative agencies, agricultural cooperatives, farmers’ associations, bureaucrats’ union, organizations for established elites (commercial, transportation service, brewery farming), etc. (71-77, 87, 96). The Committee System was the epitome of the Prussian model of taxation, administration and local election systems. It systematically adopted discriminatory political policies with regard to asset levels to restrict democratic suffrage and electoral rights.

Although the author references just some of the examples of such practices, her analysis of the Inje area in the colonial period convincingly reveals the emergence of a pseudo-democratic administration system reflecting the Prussian system Japan adopted after the Meiji Restoration.

This finding is likely to be significant for Korean academia in the future, allowing others to further analyze the relationship between local power structures formed under this administrative system and the greater dynamics of contemporary Korean politics stemming from local hierarchies.

### III. Land Reform and the Peoples' Experience of People's Democracy

According to the author, North Korean land reform was aimed at promoting the ownership structure of the people's democratic system rather than sweeping socialism. As a result of the reforms, the proportion of middle-income farmers grew to sixty percent, while the remaining forty percent became or remained poor farmers. Overall, the biggest benefits went to those who had been small-scale landowners. The reforms also did away with the cleavage structure of land ownership. Subsequent to the reforms, many poor farmers began to participate in people's committee elections and poor farmers came to occupy seventy-seven percent of the Labor Party. The reforms also facilitated the general adoption of the people's democratic political system. As a result, the author concludes, the power structure in the Inje area introduced via land reform took the form of a "unified front."

In Eastern Europe, several states were founded under the influence of the Russian Revolution in 1917 that underwent radical and comprehensive land reforms. In many countries, this removed the legacy of land ownership and the heritage of feudalism. Yet the political institutions adopted in these countries on the basis of standardized hierarchy were those of a very mature parliamentary democracy rather than a one-party socialist regime. It is thought that countries in Eastern Europe were influenced by Weimar democracy, which was ostensibly more democratic and mature, transcending the past counter-revolutionary and conservative bureaucracy of Prussia.

To what degree did North Korea carry out land reform compared with these Eastern European cases? While this question cannot be addressed within the confines of this brief review, it is fairly clear that North Korea endeavored to establish a people's democratic one-party system and a popular-front style socialist state based on the North Korean Labor Party largely composed of poor farmers, not laborers.

#### **IV. The Characteristics and Results of Transition to the South Korean System**

A power restructuring occurred with the transition to the South Korean system. After the 1950-53 Korean War, the Inje area fell under the jurisdiction of the ROK in 1954 following the transfer of administrative rights from the US military government to the South Korean government. Since the land ownership structure was shaken as a result of the war, social conflict emerged; there was no established principle of ownership. As had occurred with the transition from colonial rule, when the existing landlords resumed ownership of the land, the Rhee Syngman administration expanded the South Korean legal system without acknowledging the ownership status of the previous order. This meant the purchasing of farmland from landowners and distributing of lands to convert tenant farmers (land) into independent farmers (industrial capitalists). In 1958, however, new land reform was carried out in a highly qualified manner mainly targeting absentee landlords. But such lax reforms failed to dismantle the sense and culture of land ownership and establish stability for postwar farmers.

After the land reform, a new political power structure in the region was formed. The reorganization process had begun amid the Korean War under the influence of military forces, with army units and military officers then comprising fifty to eighty percent of the population in the region. Administration was generally composed of those who had served in the executive branch of the military government or former

bureaucratic elites of the Japanese colonial era. While majors were recruited from among those born south of the 38th parallel, village chiefs were recruited from among those native to the North. Labour Party organizations disappeared and the ruling and opposition party organizations moved in. Since 1958, however, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has remained dominant over the Democratic Party, with Liberal party candidates consistently elected under the influence of military officers, conservative paramilitary groups, and bureaucrats. As well, the influence of anti-Communism groups, including the Korean Youth Corps, was very strong.

While the journey to the North Korean People's democratic system from Japanese colonial rule exhibited some plainly intelligible characteristics, incorporation into the South Korean system was more complex. Although the author presents a persuasive analysis, the process did not consist of a simple transition from the North Korean regime to the South Korean capitalist system. In other words, the transition may also be interpreted as a temporary and exceptional political order that operated in the middle of the Korean War.

## V. The Multiple-division System in the Reclaimed Area

The book presents an excellent analysis of the contrasting nature of the overlapping rules of the Japanese, US military, North Korea, and South Korea. Few studies have attempted to trace this long-run transition process. On the one hand, the author appears to view this process as a transition from the North Korean people's democracy system to the South Korean capitalist system. On the other hand, as suggested above, the task remains of elucidating a more precise understanding of this process in the East Asian context compared with the Eastern European context, in which an advanced socialist system transformed into an advanced capitalist market system.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to refute the author's conclusions. Highlighting the perspective of local Inje residents, she states the following:

The experience of the Reclaimed Area shows us what would happen if the unification of the two Koreas proceeded unilaterally. We need to realize the importance of mutual respect and systematic preparation for unification. When we understand the macro process of transition from the perspective of the local population, the "Reclaimed Area" could become a source of wisdom enabling us to change the boundary of the divided peninsula into a test area for unification in the future. (8)

This is the valuable wisdom the author uncovers through local history.



**Paving the Way for Gender Historical Research  
Transcending Institutions and Daily Life  
Review of *Colonial Joseon Women in Divorce Court*  
[Ihon beopjeong e seon singminji joseon  
yeoseong deul]**

By SO Hyeon-Suk  
Seoul: Yeoksa bipyeong sa, 2017

—  
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This book is a revised and expanded version of the author's Ph.D. dissertation, "Women's Responses to the Modern Divorce System of the Colonial Era" (*Singminji geundaejeok ihonjedo wa yeoseong ui daeung*), which reconstructed the colonial period through the lens of "divorce." The author's Master's thesis, "Discourse on Childbirth Regulation during the Japanese Colonial Period" (*Ilje singminji sigi joseon ui chulsan tongje damnon ui yeongu*), analyzed discourse pertaining to population control based on the sciences of eugenics and demographics produced by colonial ruler and Joseon nationalist alike. Published two decades ago, this was a fairly shocking thesis at the time, when feminist or gendered perspectives of modern Korean history were yet quite unfamiliar.

In the meantime the author has consistently produced research shaped by such a critical perspective, the results of which are neatly tied together in the current work. Being a specialist primarily in Korea's colonial urban history, the reviewer cannot claim to be immediately familiar with the book's subject matter. However, the book's concerns

with greater debates surrounding colonial history, especially the endeavor to present a balanced understanding of “colonial modernity” while avoiding the one-sided views of anti-colonial nationalism, undoubtedly provide ample opportunity for comment. Considering these broader features, this review attempts to introduce the book’s central argument and offer relevant critical insight.

Excluding the introduction and conclusion, the book is composed of three chapters. The first of these deals with the implementation of the modern divorce system during the colonial era, tracing the corresponding transformation in divorce customs and substantive characteristics of divorce trials. While divorce was forbidden in Korea prior to colonization in accordance with the dictates of Neo-Confucianism, the Japanese implemented its own system of civil law in 1912 via the “Korean Civil Ordinance” (*Joseon minsa ryeong*). But the law endeavored to adhere to Joseon “custom” with regard to kinship and inheritance, thus continuing to preclude “legal divorce.” Through precedent, however, the law gradually came to recognize “trial divorce” and “divorce claims” traditionally disregarded by Joseon custom. This was due to the increasing number of women filing for divorce and was also linked to the 1922 amendment to the Korean Civil Ordinance, enacted in accordance with Japanese civil law, legally recognizing trial divorce. While this change accorded with the “assimilation policy” intended to unify Japan and Korea under one legal jurisdiction, it was also the fruit of women seeking to “procure” divorce. In reality, however, informal divorce in which husbands “discarded” their wives was as widespread as ever, far surpassing instances of divorce “procured” through legal petition. Coerced reconciliation in the courts, moreover, was also common and petitions were frequently withdrawn. The change in everyday life thus engendered institutional change, but institutional change did not necessarily affect everyday life, in turn.

The second chapter deals with the dissemination and various effects of discourse on the “freedom to divorce.” New intellectuals embracing

Western liberalism had advocated the “new family” based on bonds of love since 1910. Accordingly, they advocated freedom with respect to love and marriage as well as divorce. In reality, however, the freedom to divorce, which signified the enlightened self and resistance to the feudal family order, often led to the “abandonment of lawful wives” by those among the new intellectuals who had married young. In turn, “traditional women” led the struggle against undesired divorce and the movement to protect their rights as lawful wives, though those among them actively seeking divorce was also increasing. Meanwhile, the new family composed of “new men” and “new women” was less than conducive to marital bliss. In many cases, new men paid lip service to the ideas of gender equality and the new family without actually giving up patriarchic power. Thus divorce became a major social issue for the new family toward the end of the colonial period.

The third chapter analyzes the litigation by which women strived to address the various forms of alienation and violence committed by their husbands. It was in this manner that women of the colonial period began to resist physical abuse, otherwise known as “civil punishment” (私刑), and various forms of infidelity such as bigamy, concubinage, and adultery. This resistance materialized in the use of legal rights, including the recently emerged rights to file for divorce or file a civil suit. This means that women exercised their legal rights by engaging in litigation. They would use this powerful weapon to ensure their husbands remain monogamous and fulfill their marital duties. And soon the violence so easily committed by husbands or other family members under the patriarchic order in the name of providing “guidance” (啓導) also became subject to litigation. This series of changes was clearly reflected in the enactment of civil and criminal laws following liberation.

There are three particular points worth mentioning with respect to the book’s significance. First, it maintains a consistent concern with the “subjectification of women,” paying close attention to the interweaving of daily life and institutions and revealing how women persistently filed

for divorce as the modern divorce system was implemented during the colonial period, a time when divorce was yet forbidden by “Joseon custom.” Institutional transformation was not something simply given; it derived from preexisting actions transcending systematized taboo. But the author’s treatment of “woman as subject” is not limited to those bravely demanding divorce. She also evaluates the efforts of traditional women rejecting divorce and asserting their rights as lawful wives as a form of subjective action. The book’s major contribution, then, is its demonstration of how the subjectification of women did not progress down a single path. This is a process that may manifest in multiple and contradictory forms according to particular historical conditions. In this respect, the book also successfully realizes the principles of people’s history, a fashionable field as of late, which endeavors to embody the words and thoughts of the people as they were rather than as idealized by elite intellectuals.

Second, the book skillfully presents the “courtroom” as a forum in which conflict surrounding divorce erupted and was resolved. In principle, the colonial courts functioned as a crucial instrument of colonial rule. Events transpiring in the colonial court, therefore, have often been ignored unless related to the independence movement. According to many recent studies, it was not well known that the courtroom served as the site for defending one’s rights as a Korean during the colonial period. In fact, the use of litigation to assert one’s rights was by no means an unfamiliar custom. Thus, in delineating the practices of the colonial divorce court without censorship or prejudice, whether intended or not, the book effectively breaks one of the taboos of colonial period research.

Finally, while the book is primarily concerned with the colonial period, it also investigates the divorce norms and practices of Joseon by class, analyzing their influence on relevant institutional change during the colonial period and linking these changes with the creation of new laws and practices after liberation. In this manner, the author shows the

continuity, rather than discontinuity, between the traditional and modern as well as colonial and postcolonial periods. For that matter, the book demonstrates the very importance of viewing history in terms of continuity.

Despite the book's strengths, there are, too, a number of ways in which it could be improved. First, its composition is somewhat unbalanced. Compared with the first chapter tracing the process by which divorce litigation developed into a formal system and the third chapter vividly and concretely describing the various forms of women's legal "struggles," the length and breadth of the second chapter analyzing the impact of the slogan, "allow free divorce," is strikingly scanty. Similarly, the subject of life after divorce is treated only supplementarily, which seems an injustice; considering one's life as a whole, divorce is perhaps more a beginning than an end.

Second, even while acknowledging the value of reproducing divorce issues just as they were, it is difficult to overlook the books' occasionally disorienting flow. For example, the rejection of divorce by traditional women intent on protecting their status as lawful wives was certainly indicative of women's struggle to survive, but it is also true that some of these women were simply conservative or even reactionary. Clearly a virtue of the book is that it does not simply dismiss the struggles of traditional women as conservative or reactionary. It seems a bit stingy, however, in pointing out the limitations of this point of view in some places.

To be sure, the book has one or two shortcomings. But if one defines the virtue of historical research in terms of specifying the concreteness of human lives rather than in enriching the sophistication of theory, then the book's value cannot but be evaluated in the highest regard. Indeed, the author's painstaking collection, arrangement and reproduction of women's lives constitutes an inimitable success.

If there is any matter left worthy of remark, perhaps it is the book's subject. Narrowly, this is divorce. More broadly, however, it can be seen

as “family.” In other words, the book ultimately deals with the composition and dissolution of the family. The composition and dissolution of the family is not limited to the colonial period; it is relevant to everyone in the present, even the author. Of course, a researcher must endeavor to adopt an objective and levelheaded approach to any subject. But adopting such a position with respect to a subject so directly related to one’s own life is all the more difficult. In this respect, the author, who courageously and successfully addresses the composition and dissolution of the family, is worthy of commendation.

***The Second “Postwar” : Japan’s Re-encounter with Asia in the 1960s and 1970s* (Du beonjjae ‘jeonhu’ : 1960~1970 nyeondae asia wa majuchin ilbon)**

GWEON Hyeok Tae and JO Gyeong-hui, ed.

Seoul: Institute for East Asian Studies at Sungkonghoe University, 2017

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In twenty-first century Japan, the term “postwar” plainly signifies the period after the Pacific War.<sup>1</sup> Determining this period’s precise duration, however, is another matter. Debate in Japan over the postwar began with its experience of high economic growth, a period declared to be “no longer the postwar” (*Mohaya sengode wanai*).<sup>2</sup> Implied in such a declaration is the sharp separation between “prewar” and “postwar” with respect to the Asia Pacific War and the idea of a period of rapid change in which a collapsed nation reemerged as a member of international society. Postwar Japan began in defeat and occupation. Inherent to the idea of “postwar” Japan, then, was the “evil” and “criminality” of war and

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<sup>1</sup> In December 1941 the second Sino Japanese War that began on July 7, 1937 gave way to the Pacific War. Taken altogether, however, the scope of this conflict incorporated not only China and the Pacific but also all of Asia. It may thus be referred to as the “Asia Pacific War.”

<sup>2</sup> Keizaikikakuchō [Economic Planning Agency], *Nenjikeizaihōkoku* [Annual economic report], July 1956.

renouncement of the “prewar” in which lay the war’s origins. In this manner, whether conservative or reformist, it was believed Japan could establish a new socially reformed and democratic society by affirming the discontinuity between the “prewar” and “postwar.”

Preliminary research pertaining to the postwar period is thus strikingly characterized by an emphasis on the discontinuity between pre and postwar Japan. Such a perspective highlights the transformation of Japan under US occupation, upholding the “success of unconditional surrender.” As a representative example of this, one may look to John W. dower’s *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (2000). More recently, however, research has increasingly questioned the idea that occupation reforms were realized in accordance with an externally prescribed image or projected hopes and experiences.<sup>3</sup> Amamiya Shōichi, for example, sharply differentiates between “radical reform through defeat of the totalitarian system” and “radical reform through occupation” to emphasize the continuity between the prewar, post-defeat, and postwar periods. He accordingly argues that Japan could have pursued democracy without occupation, albeit more gradually. Thus, the debate over continuity and discontinuity with respect to postwar occupation reforms has continued unabated.

Aside from debating the meaning of the “postwar,” full-fledged debate over the “postwar” in Japan began on May 15, 1995. Along with historical issues creating friction between Japan and other Asian nations since the early 1990s, the fiftieth anniversary marking the end of the war afforded Japan the opportunity to reflect on its defeat and occupation. *The Second Postwar* is a work attempting to address this yet unresolved issue in Japan. Breaking free of traditional “success story” and “occupation and reform” narratives, it seeks a new understanding of the

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<sup>3</sup> Amamiya Shōichi, *Jeomnyeong gwa gaehyeok* [Occupation and reform], trans. Yoo Jia (Korea: Eomunhaksa, 2012).

“postwar” in terms of the greater Asian context.

The book is the fruit of critical awareness shared in successive seminars held by the “Postwar Japan Seminar Team” at the Sungkonghoe University Institute for East Asian Studies. It pays close attention to the intensification of capitalistic and Cold War contradictions emerging as the Japanese “postwar” system took root and how this shaped conflicts and hostility between Japan and other Asian, as well as third-world, countries. Although the Japanese people actively embraced a “revolution from above” immediately after defeat, the Cold War and Korean War seemed to reveal that war could break out irrespective of Japanese provocation. Ultimately, the pursuit of economic reconstruction under the revived imperial system as the occupation withdrew could not but hinder democratic reform. The “postwar” created together by the U.S. and Japan thus took hold as a system excluding Asia and the third world.

The “second postwar” referenced in the book’s title does not allude to the 1960s and 1970s in chronological terms alone; this was the period in which “high-growth Japan” came to fruition. It was also the period in which the people and states of Asia, having traversed myriad postcolonial frustrations, entered once more into the Japanese field of view. Following the Korean War in 1950, the signing of the San Francisco Treaty in 1951, the end of US military occupation in 1952, and the armistice agreement suspending the Korean War in 1953, the hodgepodge of international cohabitation characterizing prewar Asia gave way to clearly defined, separate states. In the 1960s, new security-centered partnerships were formed in the wake of the global capitalist tide and intensification of the Cold War. The book explores this process in three sections corresponding to three events: the normalization of Korea-Japan relations in 1965, the normalization of Sino-Japanese relations in 1972, and the return of Okinawa to Japan in 1972. Therein section one deals with “colonial aftermath and the onset of the Cold War,” section two, “deadlocked perspectives,” and section three, “the Asian problem.”

The book’s first section portrays the postwar encounter between

Korea and Japan as former colony and colonizer. The first chapter, “Normalization of Chosen Studies-Korean Studies Relations,” provides an account of the “Chosen Studies Conference,” the first postwar academic conference held in Japan in which Korean scholars participated. The author argues that financial support provided by the Asia Foundation to participating Korean scholars exemplified how the U.S. sought to expedite the normalization of relations between Korea and Japan by promoting private exchanges. Rather than merely emphasizing the importance of scholarly and interdisciplinary exchange, then, this chapter presents important evidence showing the influence of international relations and the US-led plan for an East Asian cooperative regime even in the realm of academia. The second chapter, “Beyond Empire as Compulsory Colonial Taboo,” begins with the claim that the US pursuit of normalization between Korea and Japan was part of a series of measures meant for the East Asian region congruent with a global hegemonic design. In this context, the pressing issue of “coloniality” emerged together with the global resistance to the Cold War order centered on the United States and the Soviet Union as reflected in critical debates over “neocolonialism” and “neoimperialism.” The argument of this chapter may serve to clarify the relationship between Korea-Japan-US relations and the colony-colonizer problem.

The second section is generally concerned with perceived feelings owing to the similarity of “postwar” subjects in Korea and Japan. The fourth chapter, “Two ‘Postwars’, Two ‘Mournings’,” describes a common system of historical interpretation in Korea and Japan reflected in the feelings and behaviors of the lives and diaries of children in both nations that suffered due to the war. The fifth chapter, “Okinawans and Zainichi Koreans, ‘Postwar’ History of a Mutual Gaze,” elucidates the solidarity between Okinawans and Zainichi Koreans as they struggled to move from “non-citizens” to “citizens” of Japan and a united Korea, respectively. While the Okinawans achieved citizen status with the return of Okinawa to Japan, many Koreans ended up turning to residency in

Japan as Korean division persisted. The “postwar,” as viewed by marginalized peoples in Korea and Japan, thus demanded life choices unexplainable through “continuity” and “discontinuity” alone. And when facing this reality, their respective gazes could not but intersect. This is a novel line of argument that will be greatly helpful to the understanding of the “postwar” in Korea and Japan.

Finally, the third section deals with the encounter of Japanese intellectuals with Asia. Topics include Oda Makoto’s Korea, records of travel in North Korea, memories of America in artworks portraying the nuclear bombing, memories of colonial rule, and Tsumura Takashi’s struggle with immigration control and his encounter with Asia and the third world through anti-discrimination discourse. The investigation of the reasoning and methods Japanese intellectuals employed in their turn toward Asia is important since this may yield important criteria for understanding how the Japanese perceive Asia.

Altogether, the book investigates and reveals the Japanese national character formed under the Cold War regime by analyzing the capitalist and Cold War contradictions emerging as the “postwar” system took root primarily with respect to Japanese relations with Asia and the third world. In order to do this, it draws on the concept of the “second postwar,” which corresponds to the 1960s and 1970s. As is made clear in the book’s introduction, not only does this investigation encompass the extensive space that is Asia, but also the various problems and interrelations between each of the individual states therein. One can only surmise the difficulty of binding together such diversity into a single volume. Despite the variety of researchers and research areas involved, moreover, the interrelatedness of the book’s contents is not lost across its three sections. One must thus appreciate the manner in which the book allows the reader to grasp the overall flow.

Another notable point is the book’s refreshing look at Japan’s re-encounter with Asia during the period of high economic growth after having dealt with defeat and occupation. Not only were the 1960s and

1970s marked by normalizations between Korea and Japan and China and Japan and the restoration of Okinawa to Japan, as the book discusses, but also the emergence of military rule in Korea following the April 19 Revolution and the May 16 military coup d'état and the consolidation of US-Japan security relations through revisions to the Security Treaty Between the United States and Japan. While the book does not necessarily discuss this wider historical context in detail, it is certainly grounded on the idea that, in the 1960s and 1970s, when postwar restoration efforts appeared to be paying off, Korea and Japan opted to strengthen and use the Cold War order in East Asia through alliance with the United States. Ultimately, one can say, the current historical disputes between Korea and Japan are the result of this, making study of this period, and the significance of the book, all the more important.

Nevertheless, the book is not without shortcomings. Each of the essays included in the book, for example, are concerned only with progressive Japanese intellectuals. While one must acknowledge the difficulty of conducting research pertaining to ordinary people, portraying their perceptions of the re-encounter with Asia, rather than the plainly intelligible thoughts and actions of intellectuals, might have gone further to pique the reader's interest.

Lately talk of Japan's "rightward turn" has become all too common in the public sphere. With the overwhelming victory of Abe in the recent general election in Japan, even after he ran into trouble concerning a political funding issue, this view has only become more preponderant. With respect to security, nuclear, and territorial issues, this election was an important political matter signaling changes in East Asia threatening to entangle not only North Korea and China but the United States as well. It was accordingly an election paid attention to by many Asians. However, there are insufficient grounds for associating Japanese citizens' preference for Abe with the desire for constitutional revision allowing for the waging of war. But perhaps the recent election does confirm suspicions that, just as in the 1960s and 1970s when it chose rejoining

the international community and pursuing economic growth through alignment with the United States over reconciliation and cooperation with Asian states, Japan yet regards reconciliation and cooperation with Asia as a lesser priority. While the books does not address this suspicion, in terms of the manner in which it illustrates the perceptions that emerged amid the re-encounter between Japan and Asia in the 1960s and 1970s, it offers clues as to what might happen when Japan and Asia encounter each another once again. It is this aspect of the book, most of all, which will surely interest readers.



# Was He a Spy?

## Review of *King of Spies: The Dark Reign of America's Spymaster in Korea*

By Blain Harden  
New York: Random House, 2017

—  
PARK Tae Gyun  
Seoul National University

When researching a book on Cho Bong Am in 1995,<sup>1</sup> this reviewer was left with many unanswered questions surrounding a suspicious character named “Nicholas,” known only as a member of the Counter Intelligence Corps of the U.S. Air Force. “Nicholas” was known to have played a decisive role at the time in the imprisonment in 1958 and execution in 1959 of Cho Bong Am, leader of The Progressive Party, by providing evidence of his connections with North Korea. But who was this “Nicholas,” really? There was little information to be found.

With the publication of *The King of Spies*, however, questions surrounding this mysterious figure are finally resolved. His real name was Donald Nichols and he was active in Korea from 1946-1957. While originally an auto mechanic in the U.S. Army during World War II, he joined the Air Force upon returning home in 1946. He was then recruited

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<sup>1</sup> Park Tae Gyun, *Jo bongam yeongu* [Study of Cho Bong Am] (Soul: Changbi, 1995).

for a twelve-week spy-training course in Tokyo, the extent of his higher education.

His actions were shrouded in mystery, his rank and age, unknown. He was seventeen when he joined the army and twenty-three when he came to Korea. Soon, he became the “son” of Syngman Rhee after their meeting in 1946. The two maintained this familial relationship until Nichols return to the U.S. in 1957. His seeming omnipotence, then, stemmed from the Air Force’s total support as well as Rhee’s faith and trust. He founded ‘the 6006th intelligence squadron,’ an organization free of interference from any military unit and comprised not only of American soldiers but more than 200 Koreans as well. The employment of Korean citizens in the U.S. Air Force is difficult to explain without reference to the power of Syngman Rhee as well as Kim “Snake” Chang Ryong, who exercised absolute authority under Rhee’s protection.

Harden bases his analysis of Nichols’ activities on his autobiography, a work that became known in Korea in 2015 through the *Korea Times*.<sup>2</sup> Other than that, a Korean researcher had also conducted a study of Nichols’ activities during the Korean War.<sup>3</sup> The reason why so little was known about his activities in the 1950s was that Koreans in the 1950s did not even know his age, rank, or whether his name was “Nicholas” or “Nichols.” Besides the fact that he was an American of considerably large physique, little was known beyond that he was a person who had unrestricted access to Rhee and was in charge of the mysterious unit stationed in Oryu-dong.

The author also makes use of many resources other than Nichols’ autobiography. He endeavors to provide a comprehensive account of his

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<sup>2</sup> “‘Doneoldeu Nikolseu’ sarajin hoegorok ipsu jeongyeok gonggae” [Full Disclosure of Donald Nichols’ Lost Memoir], *Hanguk Ilbo*, August 8, 2015. <http://daily.hankooki.com/lpage/politics/201508/dh20150808094707137430.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Jeong Sim Yang, “USFA Counter-Intelligence against North Korea during the Korean War—a focus on Donald Nichols,” *Sarim* 46 (2013): 415-422.

activities through interviews with family members and work associates of Nichols in Korea. These include his personal stenographer as well as many Koreans, many of who went on to fulfill important roles in the Korean armed forces and the KCIA, and some of whom invited Nichols to Korea in March 1987, on the eve of Korean democratization. Some interviewees were also active in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of the early 2000s.

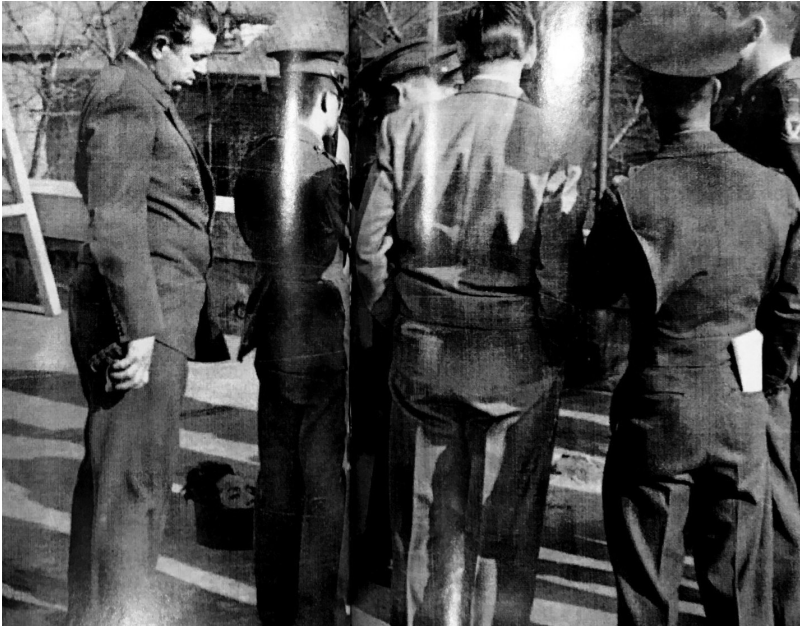
The interviews reveal that the Koreans who collaborated with Nichols believed his actions crucial to Korean security. Not only did Nichols anticipate the North Korean invasion,<sup>4</sup> it is claimed, but through the procurement of the engine and parts of a crashed North Korean MIG air fighter, he also allowed the U.S. Air Forces an advantageous position in the air war with Soviet fighters secretly engaged in the war.<sup>5</sup> It is also argued that the U.S. Air Force was able to carry out more effect bombing in North Korea based on intelligence pertaining to key facilities in North Korea obtained by an agent dispatched by Nichols.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, it is revealed that these operations were made possible by Nichols frequent visits to refugee camps to forcefully mobilize refugees from the North. In turn, not only did he receive numerous commendations from the U.S. but from the Korean government as well. Were his actions truly worthy of

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<sup>4</sup> The author writes that General Charles A. Willoughby, a close associate of General MacArthur, ignored Nichols' intelligence pertaining to the North Korean invasion and that MacArthur headquarters also ignored Nichols' intelligence regarding the large-scale entry into the war of Chinese troops. These two moments set the stage for the greatest failures of the U.S. during the Korean War. However, it is uncertain whether this is true or just a story of Nichols.

<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the procurement of intelligence pertaining to Soviet MIG fighters was Nichols' most important achievement during the war. However, Harden points out the controversy over Nichols' precise role therein.

<sup>6</sup> According to Kim Tae Woo, American bombing was completely ineffective throughout the war, a point reiterated by Harden. See Kim Tae Woo, "Limited War, Unlimited Targets: U.S. Air Force Bombing of North Korea during the Korean War, 1950-1953," *Critical Asian Studies* 44, no. 3 (2012). At the time, precision bombing was technologically impossible, and since the U.S. preferred to use Napalm, target areas were destroyed indiscriminately. Thus, it would simply be unreasonable to conclude that intelligence led to more effective bombing.

Picture 1



Picture 2



commendation?

While the primary significance of the book consists in its revelation of Nichols' activities, its many interesting photographs are surely also a highlight. Two of these photos are shown above.

The first of these depicts Nichols looking at the beheaded guerrilla leader, Kim Ji-hoe, who refused to give in to the suppression of the Jeju guerrilla movement and was a leader in the Yeosu-Suncheon Rebellion. The second picture depicts Nichols and some American soldiers observing the site of communist executions in a village.<sup>7</sup> The communists were communist cells in South Korean forces, who were arrested due to the confession of colonel Park Chung Hee in 1949 shortly after the suppression of the rebellion. Both of the photos belonged to Nichols.

Up until the release of Harden's book, Nichols' activities were unknown outside of those related to the Korean War. However, in the book, Nichols' complicity in a number of massacres and political events in Korea is revealed, as the pictures above show. Nichols was proficient in Korean and was involved in the destruction of communist organizations even before the Korean War. He was deeply involved in: the arrest, interrogation and torture of leaders in the South Korean Labor Party in 1947 and 1950; the purge and execution of communists within the Korean military in 1949; the massacre of the National Guidance alliance, also known as the Bodo League Massacre, at the outset of the Korean War; and the interrogation of North Korean defectors determining whether they were spies or not. Within his own memoirs, Nichols admitted being party to an "unforgettable massacre."

The book's noteworthy claim is that U.S. intervention in

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<sup>7</sup> Captain Hausman, a member of the US Military Advisory Group in Korea (KMAG), was also present. There is also video footage of the executions available in the Hausman Collection at the Harvard-Yenching Library. The picture above, taken from Nichols' collection, depicts the scene from another perspective.

intelligence and military activities, massacres, and political affairs is not a supposition but a fact. Despite the many revelations pertaining to U.S. espionage in Korea after 1945, however, the book is not without a few shortcomings. For example, it does not reveal the concrete connection between Nichols' activities and Korean politics. There are a number of post-1945 political events that yet defy explanation. This is particularly so with respect to events involving the left or nationalists, examples of which are the assassinations of Yo Un-hyung and Kim Gu. In particular, testimony at the trial of An Du-hui claiming that Kim Gu's assassination was related to the Yeosu-Suncheon Rebellion supports this point. Looking at the latest documents<sup>8</sup> showing that An Du-hui was an agent of the U.S. Combat Information Center demonstrates the extent of the influence of U.S. counterintelligence over Korean politics.

The same is true for history after 1953. Opposition politicians were subject to countless instances of oppression. Always accompanying such oppression, moreover, was the label of "communist." This oppression culminated in sweeping measures under the aegis of the National Security Law on December 24, 1958. Coincidentally, this occurred right after Nichols left Korea in 1957 due to his absurd and inappropriate behavior during the 1950s.<sup>9</sup> Might not have the weakening power of counterintelligence, exercised by the likes of Nichols to render opposition politicians into "communists" without any recourse to a "Security Law," engendered the government's need for such a legal framework?

Although the author himself is not a researcher by profession, through various interviews with Nichols' associates, he provides the most

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<sup>8</sup> "An duhui neun migun bangcheob daeweon" [An Du-hui U.S. Military Counterintelligence Agent], *Hangyeore Sinmun*, September 4, 2001.

<sup>9</sup> There were two cases in which his counterintelligence squadron was reported in the mass media during the 1950s. One report concerned the North Korean agent who tried to open a pub in front of his unit in order to get information; the other concerned a crime regarding counterfeit bills, which are mentioned in the book several times.

detailed account of Nichols' activities to date. And while there may be some aspects of these activities that yet require uncovering, one cannot but acknowledge the author's detailed understanding not only of Korea after 1948 but 2008 as well.<sup>10</sup> This book is thus a necessary read for any researcher concerned with Korean politics or Korean-U.S. relations. More research on the details of counterintelligence activities both by South Koreans and the U.S. unit in South Korea should be carried out by scholars in near future.

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<sup>10</sup> The author's impressive understanding of Korean society is clear in his treatment of land reform and collaborator issues after 1945 and his pointing out the ineptitude of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission since 2008.



# Notes for Contributors

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**The Journal of Northeast Asian History**  
**Volume 14 Number 2 Winter 2017**

Published in Winter 2017

Compiled by the Institute of International Affairs at GSIS

Published by the Institute of International Affairs at GSIS

Seoul National University, Kwanak-ro 1, Kwanak-gu, Seoul, 08826, Korea

Tel: +82-2-2012-6189 Fax: +82-2-884-3952

ISSN 1976-3735

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