

Over Contested Terrain: Currents and Issues of Korean Studies

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The origin of Korean studies has been scattered in numerous loci and diverse spaces, i. e. Korean peninsula, East Asia (China, Japan, and Russia), and the United States among others. This article will critically examine the various issues of particular significance that have arisen from these many locales—including the particularism and universalism of Korean studies, the continuity and discontinuity of Korean history, embryonic capitalism, colonial modernity, nationalism, Confucianism, and renewed awareness to East Asian perspectives. It seeks to analyze the many different facets and directions of Korean studies research within the context of their bases from diversity of locales and as driven by local needs and interests. Despite differences of a diverse array of opinions, Korean Studies scholars from all corners of the globe share a deep and lasting concern for advancing knowledge about Korea, a respect for the value of mutual cooperation, and a sense of solidarity.

Keywords: Korean Studies, indigenous development theory, theory of embryonic capitalism, colonial modernity, nationalism, East Asia, Confucianism

Introduction

Korean Studies has been shaped in diverse ways by historical circumstances as well as researcher interest and motivation. The various tendencies and directions inherent in the concept of Korean Studies have been controversial and at times confrontational. Korean Studies manifests itself as tensions between the humanities (i.e. Korean history, Korean literature, Korean philosophy, etc.) ver-

sus the social sciences, individual versus general, and idiographic versus nomothetic. Although not unique to Korean Studies, these conceptual uncertainties have translated into doubt about the academic viability of Korean Studies as a whole.

The complexity of the problems within Korean Studies is also manifested in different ways. Even when looking only at the modern era, the origin of Korean Studies has been scattered in numerous loci and diverse spaces. First, the very first scholars of Korea conducted their research on the peninsula that today is comprised of North and South Korea. Subsequently, the massive dispersion of Koreans during the Japanese colonization period and the Korean War initiated academic work by Koreans who had emigrated to Japan, China, and Russia. Finally, countries such as the United States, which had geopolitical interest and/or a vital relationship with Korea, have also been sites of academic research on Korea.

This article will critically examine the various issues of particular significance that have arisen from these many locales—including the particularism and universalism of Korean Studies, the continuity and discontinuity of Korean history, embryonic capitalism, colonial modernity, nationalism, Confucianism, and the renewed awareness to East Asian perspectives. In short, this article seeks to analyze the many different facets and directions of Korean Studies research within the context of their bases from diversity of locales and as driven by local needs and interests.

Traditions and Peculiarities of Korea

The first scholars of Korean Studies concentrated their attention on pre-modern Korean society. As James Palais lamented, this situation was in sharp contrast to the recent trend of focusing on the modern period to obtain employment more easily (Han 2001b: 225). With the notable exception of Bak Eun-sik, who examined the early Japanese colonization period in *Hangukdongnipwundongjihyeolsa* (The Blood History of the Korean Independence Movement), most scholars chose to study ancient or medieval Korea or the Joseon period.¹ Those such as Shin

1. This pattern persisted from after independence until the 1980's. For example, it was in the latter half of the 1980's that the first master thesis on the colonial period was written in the Department of Korean History of Seoul National University. This might be partially a reflec-

Chae-ho, Choi Nam-seon, and Baek Nam-un researched ancient Korea, while scholars such as Yi Neung-hwa and Jeong In-bo focused on the Joseon Dynasty. In *Joseonmunmyeongsa* (History of Korean Civilization), An Hwak explained his focus on the period before 1897, stating that “it is impossible to properly formulate theory on the Gwangmu (King Gojong’s reign) and Yunghui (King Sunjong’s reign) periods due to the volatility of political transition and the prevalence of rumors and subversions during these times” (Jang Seok-heung 1994: 148).

In Russia, Mikhail Pak wrote the first thesis on Korea in the first half of the 1940’s titled “Joseon and the Sino-Japanese War” (1984) in college, which he later developed as a master’s thesis in 1947 titled “A Summary of 19th Century Joseon Politics” (Bak No-ja 2002: 289-90; Tikhonov 2002: 140). However, his main achievements in this work were actually on the ancient Three Kingdoms period. In 1956, he published a thesis on Shilla’s socio-economic structure in *Voprosy Istorii*, which set off vigorous debates among North Korean historians about the issue of slavery (Tikhonov 2002: 143). Between 1940 and 1950, the period marking the birth of Korean Studies in Russia, Pak mentioned that he had to base his research of modern Korean history on Russian, English, and French language materials because he could not read Korean texts containing Chinese characters. He was only able to access research material from North and South Korea much later after he had fully mastered the Korean language (Tikhonov 2002:152).

In China, Pak Ch’ang-uk (Bak Chang-uk) could be said to have specialized in modern history, as he focused his research on the history of Korean immigrants to China and the Anti-Japanese Nationalist Movement. However, he also pointed out that a few history professors at Yanbian University who had been involved in the Nationalist Liberation Movement in the early 1950’s were averse to revealing their past and preferred to focus their work on ancient Korean history. While they were well positioned to study ancient Korean history in the context of Korean Studies and may have settled on their research direction due to their potentially nationalist consciousness, Bak stated that the most important factor for their choice was their sensitivity to political activism due to their past involvement in the Nationalist Liberation Movement (Liu 2002: 171-2).

tion of the need to analyze the great amount of materials housed by Gyujanggak, the royal library of Joseon now located in Seoul National University. However, in the backdrop there existed the preference of scholars to avoid the colonial and modern periods.

In Japan, Kang Jae-eon's area of interest was social thinking of the late Joseon period. However, while it did not draw as much attention as his work on modernity, he did publish a few volumes on contemporary issues.² Like Kang Jae-eon, Kajimura Hideki also studied the late Joseon period; however, he also conducted research on the socioeconomic history of the Japanese colonial period and the Nationalist Liberation Movement. Unlike in socialist countries, where the study of modern Korea was limited due to political and ideological factors, researchers in Japan were able to push forward a relatively vigorous research agenda regarding the Japanese colonial period.

It is interesting that the early scholars of Korean Studies in the United States also focused on pre-modern Korean society, as did scholars in Korea and neighboring countries. Although the work of Wagner on the Joseon period could be said to be quite different from the critical perspective of Korean scholars, his research agenda was identical to the post-1960 focus of Korean academia on the Joseon period as the most important subject for theoretical interest (Yi Hun-sang 2002:100). In 1967, Palais and Deuchler both presented doctoral theses on the Joseon period. Ledyard and Peter Lee also chose the Joseon period as the primary subject of their study, and this situation continued on until the colonial and post-independence periods were tackled by Cumings, Eckert, and others.

Why did the first scholars in Korean Studies share a common interest in pre-modern Korean society? The first reason is that the majority of early scholars were historians. Consistent with the traditional definition of history as the study of the past, they believed that the present was not an appropriate topic of study. Thus, for these scholars, the modern age in which they lived had not played itself out. There was also the problem of language. Mikhail Pak and early U.S. scholars such as Deuchler who could not read Korean in their early days of research, had typically received their degrees in East Asian programs related to China, and thus were often fluent in reading Chinese characters. With their backgrounds, they were able to easily access Korean historical texts written in Chinese.

However, the most important reasons were political in nature. Especially under the circumstances of the Cold War, the majority of scholars consciously and unconsciously avoided study of the present as the danger of raising political-

2. For example, *Ilboneuihan joseojibae 40 nyeon* (40 Years of Chosun's Domination by Japan, 1983), *Manjuui joseonin bbalchisan* (Joseon Partisans of Manchuria, 1993), and *Kim Il-sung shinhwau ui yuksajeok geomjeung* (Historical Examination of Kim Il-Sung's Deification, 1997).

ly sensitive issues were much more apparent. This dynamic can be easily identified in Chinese and Russian cases, but also was not uncommon in South Korea, where authoritarian rule was justified under the influence of nationalist ideology. Even in the U.S., where political pressures would seemingly be least evident, political considerations could not be completely denied.

As Duncan has properly pointed out, with the exception of political scientists dealing with the Korean communist, nationalist, and democracy movements directly relevant to the Cold War, most U.S. historians studying Korea focused on pre-modern Korean history, which was related to Cold War policy (Duncan 1997:171-2). According to Duncan, area studies in the Cold War aimed to identify special characteristics of the various regions of the world through the reliance on positivist scientific methodology. Since such regional characteristics were seen to be a result of historical factors, the demand for researching pre-modern political, social, and cultural characteristics was unsurprising. As a result, whether they agreed or disagreed with the U.S. government's policies, U.S. historians of Korea tended to focus on discovering the peculiarities of Korea within the context of the Cold War framework (Duncan 1997: 172).³

In retrospect, the confrontation of particularism with pretensions of "universality" has a long history. Examples include the debate between the "universal laws" of development derived from the Anglo-Saxon experience as espoused by Adam Smith versus the specific path (*Sonderweg*) of capitalist development in Germany; or the dialectic nature of universalism vs. particularism inherent in the humanities, social sciences, and area studies in the U.S. Even American Studies, a part of Area Studies, has commonly been defined as a search for a uniquely American experience, and as a result, one of its main tasks has been to identify the peculiarities of the United States (Eun Ki-soo 2002: 157-79).

Japanese scholars who studied the Joseon era under Japanese colonization devoted their full efforts to identifying and proving the unique nature of Korean society compared to other societies. Baek Nam-un criticized such research of Japanese historians, calling it "government-sponsored particularism" that promoted the "pseudo rationalism" of pure sciences and positivism (Bang Gi-jung 1994:212). This did not mean that he denied the particularistic nature of Korean society. For example, he had a deep interest in Joseon's social structure, such as

3. Another reason for the pressure to identify Korea's particularities was, as mentioned above, the need to highlight Korea's individuality and peculiarities vis-à-vis China and Japan for the purpose of strengthening the position of Korean Studies within East Asian Studies.

gye (mutual assistance), *bo* (fund), *hyangyak* (village code), *hwan-gok* (grain loan system), and *shijang* (market). What distinguished Baek from the Japanese scholars he criticized is that while the Japanese scholars only sought to identify special characteristics of Joseon society, he attempted to place Joseon's specificities with respect to global context. Put differently, he aimed to analyze the relationship between universalism and particularism (specificity and generality) through Joseon's distinctive social structure (Yi Jun-shik 1993:40).

After liberation, research by Korean historians in Korea tried to identify a paradigm that could overcome the effects and aftermath of persistent colonial historical interpretations. However, despite such efforts, the majority of research was again focused on discovering the uniqueness of Korean society. From a theoretical perspective, the pursuit of such unique characteristics in the absence of a comparative element with examples from other regions meant that there was a danger of reproducing the same type of historical work as under Japanese colonial rule. From an ideological perspective, an overemphasis on one society's uniqueness had the tendency to reinforce nationalistic tendencies characterized by parochialism and isolationism.

It has already been stated that Koreanists in the U.S., who were suspicious of research conducted in Korea as being biased by nationalism, were also not exempted from the pursuit of identifying the particularism of Korean society. The interest in the uniqueness of Korea that emerged in Korean Studies in the U.S. was revealed by two factors: first, an emphasis on the continuity of Korean society and second, the debate between internally versus externally driven developmentalism. Much as American scholars criticized Korean scholars for nationalism that arose out of overemphasizing Korean uniqueness, Korean scholars were also wary of American scholars' reluctance to entertain the potential for indigenous development. These differences in opinion and outlook have led to mutual isolation and misunderstanding among both Korean and American scholars of Korean Studies. For example, Wagner's basic conceptualization of the *yangban* in the Joseon period was to explain the durability of *yangban* society. He suggested that the ruling class of early Joseon was not based on the interaction of two competing groups but rather was a durable single class. This logic, which did not consider the dynamic relationship between urban ruling groups and rural community elites, served as Wagner's key focal point in his research, and later formed the basis of Korean Studies in the U.S. through his students, such as Palais (Yi Hun-sang 2002:106-9). In this vein, Palais understood Joseon society's fundamental characteristic as the continual and stable rule by the *yang-*

ban class, while along a similar vein Deuchler placed great emphasis on the fact that Joseon, unlike China, was a society characterized by persistent continuity. Moreover, Deuchler argued that in a society like Joseon, it would be difficult to achieve social change with initiative from below (Jeong Du-hui 1999: 77).⁴

In his investigation of Yu Hyeong-won's ideology, Palais once again argued for the durability of Joseon. Palais criticized the view of many Korean academics who saw *shirhak* ideology as containing the embryo of modernity and thus as a basis for nationalistic tendencies. According to Palais, Yu Hyeong-won's view of the slavery (*nobi*) system was not a promotion of the abolition of social hierarchy and was not a claim on modern human rights, but rather should be understood as a statement regarding ideal Confucian mores (Jeong Du-hui 1999: 49). Thus, according to Palais, Yu Hyeong-won did not deviate from the China-centered worldview, and at the same time did not reject the traditions of the Joseon dynasty in which he lived. Thus, he argued that it was incorrect to interpret Yu Hyeong-won's ideology as the origin of mainstream modern thought rather than as an expression of traditional Confucian ethics (Jeong Du-hui 1999:57).

Palais' perspective, which rejected the search for revisionist interpretations (conceptual meaning) in Joseon society, was also the target of various critiques from Korean scholars. For example, although Jeong Du-hui (1999:61) agrees with Palais' view of Yu Hyeong-won's ideology as expressing traditional Confucian thought, Jeong warns that crucial insights will be missed if *shirhak* ideology from the early Joseon period is interpreted in too narrow a context (understood strictly from a constitutional perspective). As early as the 1950's, Cheon Gwan-wu attempted to identify positive elements in *shirhak* thought, although he criticized Yu Hyeong-won's work as oriental in nature and as not deviating from a traditional Confucian framework (Jeong Du-Hui 1999: 63).

4. Although not widely known, Chandra's study of the Independence Club (1988) reconfirmed these peculiarities of Joseon society. According to Chandra, Joseon was a society in which tradition passed down over hundreds of years and remained strong into the late 19th century. In other words, despite the fact that the Joseon dynasty was driven by the necessities of new challenges to engage in progressive social reform and a shift in consciousness, its historical background did not allow for fundamental transformation. Chandra attempted to explain why revolution was impossible in Korean society during the Independence Club Movement through the examination of the structure and character of the Joseon dynasty. He saw Korea as a simple and strictly centralized society in which the political power to challenge the center could not possibly develop in the peripheral regions. In this way, Chandra argued that the influence of the Joseon dynasty remained quite strong (Jeong Du-hui 1999: 100-101, 108-109).

Although *shirhak* thought did not result in modernity nor democracy in Korean history, even a relatively small degree of change was significant in late Joseon, in a situation where even the potential for change was difficult to identify. Furthermore, critical thinking on existing societies and the search for alternatives espoused by late Joseon *shirhak* thinkers undoubtedly impacted the developmental process of Korean. Thus, while Jeong Du-hui (1999:64) agrees with Palais' view of Yu Hyeong-won's ideology as being Confucian, Jeong also critiques Palais' failure to appreciate the historical significance of Yu Hyeong-won's thought from the late Joseon period onward.

As mentioned above, there is a clear difference of thought between Korean and U.S. scholars on the evaluation of societal change during the late Joseon period. This disagreement can also be found in the transition from Goryeo to the Joseon periods. While Korean scholars regard the emergence of the *shinheungsadaebu* (newly rising high ranking officials) as a shift in the social structure from noble to bureaucratic elites, American scholars stress the continuity of ruling classes from Goryeo to Joseon. For example, Duncan (1997:180) denies the existence of this new ruling group (*shinheungsadaeboo*) in early Joseon and instead asserts that most of the influential families and clans in early Joseon were descended from the Goryeo nobility.

This logic of stability and continuity was expanded to other historical eras. Palais attempted to retroactively apply his perspective to Goryeo, while Duncan accentuated the continuity of the ruling class between Shilla and Goryeo. While there is diversity in American scholars' work on the Goryeo period, there is a common tendency to emphasize the continuity within the political or socioeconomic structure in the Shilla and Goryeo periods.⁵ This emphasis on continuity and stability can also be found in works on modern Korean history. For example, Cumings' work on modern Korean history focused on the continuities during and after the Japanese colonial period, a direct contrast to the views of Korean academics who deliberately emphasized the discontinuities before and after liberation (Jeon Sang-in 1998: 173).

The second point of contention on the unique nature of Korean society is the so-called problem of indigenous development. This debate arose from the assertion of government-sponsored Japanese scholars during the colonial period who

5. Duncan states that U.S. scholars do not all deny the possibility of change in the Goryeo dynasty. In fact, he states that articles on the Goryeo period by Edward Shultz or himself actually describe considerable periodic change (Duncan 1997: 177-179).

denied the possibility of autonomous development within Korean society, instead arguing that an external intervention was necessary to push Korea into modernization. It is important to note that the assumption among American scholars that Korean scholars share a common perspective on this issue is simply not true. In fact, there was a diversity of thinking on this issue during the colonization period.⁶ The emergence and critique of embryonic capitalism theory has existed in Korean academia since the 1960's, although the concept of embryonic capitalism was not denied. Even the advocates of embryonism themselves expressed concern about overembellishing or ignoring the contradictions of the historical period in the late nineteenth century.⁷ In recent years there have increasingly been calls for the rejection of an attitude that overly values the theory of indigenous development, alluding to the increasing irrelevance of the historical utility of the theory of indigenous development with the decline of nationalism (Jeong Du-hui 1999:24).

Such debates can also be found among Korean Studies scholars in East Asia. For example, Russia's Mikhail Pak has a skeptical view of the potential of autonomous development within Korean society. According to Pak, the Japanese colonization of Korea in the latter half of the 19th century was inevitable because the objective economic conditions of the late Joseon period could not possibly support self-modernization. Thus, Pak is skeptical of the theory of indigenous development as well. Although the theory that the direction of development has turned toward capitalism cannot be denied, evidence contrary to such theory could be evinced in many different dimensions. For instance, Pak asserted that long-term trends aside, the capitalist merchant class had not become politically influential until the latter half of the 19th century, and in fact that Joseon was largely a traditional society made up of the landed and peasant classes. He added that it was difficult to find a "modernization drive" within the social structure, and that the hegemony of the ruling class in broad terms had not

6. For example, An Hwak asserted that there was no feudal system in Korean history judging by the standards of western political history. Therefore, because he ultimately accepted the argument that a medieval period was absent, he was criticized for lacking the ability to counter the absence of feudalism that was a fundamental basis for the stagnation theory of colonial history (Jang Seok-heung 1994:146-7). On the other hand, Baek Nam-un was critical of An, despite the fact that Baek himself was heavily influenced by Hukuda Tokuzo, whose assertion of the absence of feudalism later served as a basis for the stagnation theory of Japanese official scholars (Yi Jun-shik 1993:18; Bang Gi-jung 1994: 209).

7. For a detailed description of such criticisms made by scholars such as Yi U-seong and Kang Man-gil, refer to Jeong Tae-hun 1999: 149; 2002: 165, 172.

totally disappeared. Even with respect to social consciousness, pre-modernistic concepts of region, faction, and family lineage prevailed over the modern concept of “nation,” whereas “national solidarity” was nonexistent during this time.

In contrast to the above, Kang Jae-eon’s research in Japan aimed to discover an ideological basis for modernization in traditional Korean society. Put differently, it was an effort to find the so called superstructure of the roots of capitalism as proposed by Kim Yong-seop in Korea, among others. In response to Japanese scholars who claimed that Korean society lacked the ideological basis for self-modernization, Kang attempted to track down such ideological buds, claiming that the manifestation of modern ideology in the modern era was not accidental but could be traced back to traditional roots. Kang claims that the view held by Korean academics that such roots of capitalism had been destroyed by foreign powers is narrowly one-sided. Instead, he argues that we must understand the evolutionary process of confrontations and compromise between tradition and progress in the form of external impacts as the possibility of indigenous development. From this perspective, Kang does not reject external factors but also posits that internal factors must be considered. In sum, Kang cautions that there are dangers in the wholesale acceptance of the theory of external influence that places the blame of slow development or absence of modernization solely on foreign influence (Jeong Hye-gyeong 2000: 239).

These various perspectives on indigenous tradition vs. foreign influence as well as interrelationships between internal and external factors were of great value in bringing into focus new questions. Kajimura Hideki also developed his own theory of indigenous development that was similar to these perspectives. According to Kajimura, the study of modern Korean history began with the critique of Japanese colonial history. The colonial historical take on development, whether from a theory of backwardness or of external shock, claimed that the backwardness of Joseon society relative to the rest of the world meant that foreign intervention was required for kickstarting its development (Yi Hong-rak 1997:236). On this point, he insisted that the critique of this official view of colonial society was inevitable given the need to construct a new society based on a national identity. However, Kajimura claims that this attempt to critique the official colonial view resulted in the unintended consequence of not a single Korean figure appearing in the Korean historical arena. Instead, what was presented was an image of the violence and exploitation of Japanese imperialism on the one hand and the image of the helpless and passive Koreans on the other.

Kajimura claimed that in this respect, embryonic capitalism theory emerged

as less as an explication of Korean history and more as an apology of Japanese history, especially the history of Imperial Japan (Yi Hong-rak 1997:231-2). For these reasons, Kajimura's first thesis topic was the Joseon family structure, which was widely considered symbolic of stagnation. However, Kajimura instead argued that familism should be understood within the context of the developmental process. Instead of the image of a backward society as depicted by colonial historians, Kajimura aimed to describe the economic bases for embryonic capitalistic activity, as well as the process by which the activity of small goods producers were eventually eradicated by the onset of Japanese imperialism. Instead of an already established national economy being dispersed through export with Japanese intervention, Kajimura described the process by which a grassroots production economy had already regionalized in the period before the establishment of trade ports, forming relatively autonomous regional economic blocs that resisted Japanese penetration. Therefore, the 1910's, which Korean scholars saw as simply a period of transition to colonialism, was actually a time of increasing flows within the regional commodity economy. Thus, the establishment of a colonial economy by Japan in the 1920's was described by Kajimura as a process whereby indigenous developments within Joseon society interacted with the colonial authority to be transformed into institutionalized forms.

Despite the fact that there were such vast differences of opinion in Korea and East Asia regarding indigenous development vs. foreign influence, U.S. scholars often suspected these debates as being expressions of nationalism. Similarly, Korean scholars also did not fully appreciate the differences between U.S. scholars on this issue. For example, Palais' description of the period of "embryonic capitalism" as a slave society was criticized by Korean scholars as overly characterizing traditional Korean society as stagnant (Han 2001a: 293-5). Palais' claim that a slave society existed for nearly 1000 years from Shilla through Goryeo to Joseon was in direct opposition to the existing mainstream historical thought in both North and South Korea. For this reason, Korean academics labeled him as an "overseas stagnant theorist," and the resulting criticism leveled against him was ubiquitous (Kim Seong-u 2002: 132).⁸

8. Palais claimed that until the middle of the 18th century, Korean society was a slave society in which over 30% of the entire population was comprised of slaves. He argued against the historical analysis of Korean academia that was based on historical materialism, stating that Korean scholars and the public neglected the slavery issue, which is sharp contrast with the American

Similar criticisms were offered in response by scholars in the U.S. According to Palais, Korea could not reform itself and thus had to wait until foreign power intervened. This was a direct critique of Korean scholars such as Kim Yong-seop who had proposed indigenous development theory (Shin 2002: 83).⁹ In order to expand his critique of indigenous development theory, Palais introduced modernization theory to contrast embryonic capitalism theory, which at the time was the dominant view in Korean academia. The application of modernization theory to Korean history, in turn, allowed for Japanese colonial theories of backward stagnation to return anew stronger than ever (Shin 2002: 84).

In response to such criticism, Palais claims that he never depicted Korean history as unchanging. Although Palais accepts some of the claims of indigenous developmentalism as proposed by scholars such as Kim Yong-seop, he points out that there is difficulty in estimating what exactly constitutes an “embryo” of capitalism. Although Palais concedes that the late Joseon period was not stagnant and clearly was a time of great economic development, he asserts that idealizing this period as “embryonic capitalism” is problematic. Although it is true that Korea did transform and develop in the late Joseon period, Palais points out that Korea still lagged behind its Japanese and Chinese neighbors (Han 2001b:211-2).

Despite Palais’ attempt at a clear division between indigenous development and embryonic capitalism, the undeniable relevance between the two concepts raises questions on how persuasive and defensible such a division is. Thus, the evaluation that “Palais criticizes stagnation theory as espoused by colonial historians while at the same time is reluctant to accept indigenous development theory as espoused by Korean scholars,” does seem to hold some weight. While Korean historians’ positions were necessarily one-sided in favor of indigenous modernization due to nationalistic pressures, Palais was able to reject both stagnation theory and indigenous developmental theory due to his not being subject to the same pressures. However, Palais could not formulate a paradigm that could serve as an alternative (Em 1997: 195).

In general, U.S. scholars seem to be skeptical of whether historic transitions in Korea could be understood through the lens of embryonic capitalism theory.

case where scholars engaged in energetic research and discussions around the topic (Han 2001a: 294-5). For critical responses to Palais’ claims, refer to Yi Yeong-hun (1999), Bak Tae-gyun (2002: 51), and Kim Seong-u (2002).

9. He adds a proviso stating that Palais did not offer a definite criticism of indigenous development theory.

However, this does not mean that all U.S. scholars of Korean history completely reject the possibility of indigenous development. Indeed, as Harry Harutunian states, “In order to understand present day society, we necessarily must start from an indigenous perspective” (Cumings, et al. 2001: 165). As Duncan, along with Deuchler (1992), and Peterson (1996) have recently pointed out, finding change within continuity is a primary theme in current research, and thus identifying gradual processes of change over a long period of time is now well accepted (Duncan 1997:185-6). Such positions are in line with Palais’ assertion that Korea did experience considerable economic development during the late Joseon era, despite lagging behind China and Japan.

Colonial Modernization and the Search for Alternative Modernity

To this point, this article cautioned on the possible pitfalls of oversimplification that results from strictly reifying the differences in opinion between Korean and U.S. scholars around the issue of indigenous development in traditional Korean society. Although relevant scholars reflected the historical and societal pressures they faced, there was also a diversity of opinion within Korean as well as American academia. This dynamic continued to manifest itself in debates regarding development in the modern era as well. From the 1980’s, colonial modernization theory, which noted that Japanese colonization formed a part of the explanation for Korean economic development, was roundly criticized as misappropriating the mainstream view of Korean history as a process of exploitation and oppression under the dominance of Japanese imperialism.

To put it simply, in contrast to the Korean perspective of Japanese colonization as an exploitative and oppressive phenomenon, U.S. researchers understood this same phenomenon under the rubric of development and modernization. However, it is clear that the various opinions regarding this issue are not so easily bifurcated. During the colonial period, Japanese colonial historians understood Korean society under Joseon as backward and stagnant, and thus claimed that modernization took place under colonialism. Japanese government-sponsored scholars who inherited the stagnationist thought of the colonial historians appraised the Korean economy under Japanese colonization as “the advance of industrial evolution” and justified colonial invasion from an academic perspective by touting the benefits of capitalism. (Yi Jun-shik 1993: 30; Bang Gi-jung 1994:212).

Therefore, there was little room for the acceptance of modernization theory in Korean society in the immediate period after liberation as Korea was plagued with mass repatriation, the outbreak of war, inflation, poverty, and scarcity. This situation did not change appreciably in the 1960's with the onset of the "five year plan for economic development" nor in the 1970's. The Korean economy was not at the point where it could enjoy the confirmative results of modernization. These dynamics were also concretely reflected in the research conducted in the U.S. As a part of the 1947 IPR (Institute of Pacific Relations) project, the McCune report (McCune 1950) depicted the colonial period as exploitative, and other successive McCune reports (McCune 1956, 1966) criticized the viewpoint that Korea experienced a diverse array of industrialization under Japanese colonization (Kim Wang-bae 1999:23-25). Shortly thereafter, Andrew Nahm (1973) argued that modernization under colonialism was merely a system for extractive exploitation and that the industrial remnants from this period were essentially useless and inflexible for future development.

Such estimations began to gradually shift from the 1980's onwards as the miraculous nature of Korean economic growth was noticed by western observers. Numerous scholars engaged in various debates about the sources of Korea's economic growth and the lasting effects of the Japanese colonial period became a frequently discussed possible factor. Citing the Kyungsung textile factory as an example of a colonial inheritance that positively affected the development of capitalism after liberation, Eckert (1991) effectively extended Palais' analysis of Joseon to the modern era. Similar to Palais, Eckert aimed to critique the existing mainstream theories of embryonic capitalism and national capital (*Minjokjabon*). Eckert's bias towards external intervention, particularly Japanese colonial policy, in promoting Korea's economic development after liberation was judged to be a more direct critique of indigenous development theory than even that of Palais (Em 1997: 200).

However, simplifying American academia with such a monolithic tendency is a significant departure from reality. As with the vociferous debates within Korea, the criticisms offered within U.S. academia were also quite diverse. Cumings' work is an illustration of how even one scholar offered a multiplicity of responses. Korean scholars describe Cumings as a supporter of colonial modernization theory. An example is Cumings' use of the term "developmental colonialism," which describes the rapid development of commercial businesses in Korea from the 1920's, when many local entrepreneurs appeared and later served as an important engine of economic growth in the developmental push of

the 1960s.¹⁰ Therefore, according to Cumings, Korean capitalism originated under Japanese colonial rule, and Korean scholars' insistence of the indigenous development of capitalism lacks evidence (Jeong Du-hui 1999: 128).¹¹

However, there is also an opposite analysis of Cumings' argument. According to this strain of thought, Cumings' analysis is paradoxical. On the one hand, he seems to agree with colonial modernization theory, but on the other hand, he also sympathizes with the colonial exploitation/stagnation perspective. That is, he argues that Japanese colonial policy was a paradoxical and conflicted mix of both overdevelopment and underdevelopment (Jeon Sang-in 2000:88). In general, Cumings is critical of U.S. academics that support colonial modernization theory. According to Cumings, the fact that the phrase "We [Japan] modernized Korea" has been repeated for decades is an expression of self consolation by Japanese in response to damaged self-identity (Cumings et al. 2001:168). Since Cumings sees colonial modernization as incomplete and even an utter failure, it is problematic to label him as supportive of colonial modernization theory. This is because Cumings maintains a neutral, relatively objective position that simultaneously captures both the modernization and exploitative dynamics in Korea's experience under Japanese colonization (Jeon Sang-in 1998:173).

Despite the energetic debates surrounding colonial modernization theory in Korea, the issue that remains unaddressed in these debates is how to understand modernity itself.¹² Thus, there is the unanswered question of what exactly is the

10. See Kim Wang-bae 2002: 225. Jeon Sang-in (1998:174) also criticized Cumings for being overly dependent on the external factor of the so-called capitalist world system and thus overestimating foreign influence over Korean society. In a similar vein, Ju Ik-jong (2000: 172) mentioned that Cumings, together with Woo Jung-en and Atul Kohli, unilaterally emphasized external factors in explaining Korean industrialization through a network of regional division of labor among U.S., Japan, and Korea in his application of world systems theory to the East Asian case.
11. According to analyses of Cumings' recently published introduction to Korean history (Cumings 1997), the book emphasizes the importance of external influence in Korean history. The argument is that externally introduced factors played a more important role than Korea's peculiar internal progressions in the formation of modern Korea. The many pages Cumings devotes to the legacies of the colonial period can be understood with respect to this line of thinking, as Cumings centers on such legacies to explain economic development during the colonial period as well as after liberation. Cumings tried to show that things referred to as Korean culture and traditions were mostly formed during the early Joseon era, while Korean modernity was built from the Gabo Reformation of 1894 and spanned the colonial period. Thus, Cumings is seen as critical of indigenous development and embryonic capitalism theories (Bak Tae-gyun 2002:37-40).
12. Relatedly, within the debates of Korea's colonial modernization, Yoo Jae-geon (1997) argued

type and direction of modernity spoken of by colonial modernization theory, as well as the pursuit of alternative forms of modernity in Korean society. For many years, Korean scholars have devoted their energy to recovering national pride and substantiating national identity, which resulted in theories such as self-modernization and indigenous development. Despite wrestling with the dilemma of how to achieve Korean modernity to fulfill the demands of the modern era, these theories attempted to identify signs of development in the Joseon dynasty, with the underlying assumption that the western model of development was desirable and inevitable. This was a concrete expression of so-called Occidentalism that aimed to confirm western experience in Korean history (Yi Hun-sang 2002: 122-3).

The pursuit of a modern society with the West as the model was a common approach among Korean historians. For example, An Hwak understood modernity as liberty, independence, and self-government, and asserted the need for a history consciousness to attain these goals.¹³ Such motivations were not unrelated to the movement in the 1930's to understand silhak ideology as a quest for modern thinking—a movement which was driven by the mass influx after the March 1st Independence Movement of Koreans who had studied in Japan and Western countries (Cheon Gwan-u 1974: 136-7). In Japan, Kang Jae-eon confessed that he was a “modernist” after being criticized as being “biased in favor of modernism to the degree that the people’s views are neglected.” The fact that Korea was subjected to colonization due to its failure to modernize drove Kang’s consistent interest in modernization as a research topic (Kim Gyeong-ja 2002:192).

Although not limited to Korea, the idealization of western modernity and its pursuit as a universal model has become a constantly recurring theme in modern Korea. However, within the context of increasing challenges to western-centrism, the emergence of postmodernism and the rise of East Asia, there have been increasing efforts to identify alternative forms of modernity for Korea and

for a new universalism based on the diversity of a global historical perspective that was free from Eurocentrism, while Jeong Yeon-tae (2000) expressed interest in reflecting on multiple histories.

13. He was not only influenced by the works of East Asian modernists but also by western thought such as Montesquieu’s enlightenment philosophy and Spencer’s theory of Social Darwinism. However, he preferred the progressive theories of the Enlightenment that emphasized internal momentums of development, rather than Fukuzawa’s theory that contrasted civilization to barbarism (a theme continued in Yi Gwang-su’s self-contradictory national reconstruction theory). See Yi Tae-jin.

East Asia since the 1990's. These tendencies are also evident in the debates around colonial modernization theory in Korea.

Turning our attention to the U.S., it is widely known that in the postwar period after 1945 and during the Cold War, American academia was dominated by modernization theory. Korean scholars were not free from such influence. As mentioned earlier, James Palais, who was known to be progressionist, was criticized as being a modernization theorist despite his true motivations. This is because, as with other modernization theorists, he presented only one model as a path to modernity. Palais clearly recognized the unspoken assumption that the U.K. (and the U.S.) were the representative examples of modernization. As modernization theory emphasizes stability, its main weakness is that the transformation of non-western countries must arise from external forces, or at the very least from its political realm. Palais' book was based on Anglo-American centrism deeply embedded in modernization theory, which ultimately suggested that modernization could not be achieved unless the western model was followed (Shin 2002: 82, 86).¹⁴

Eckert's modernization theory was even more vigorously examined by Korean academics. As with Cumings, he was criticized for assigning a decisive role to imperial or external influence and was thus categorized as proposing a theory of unilateral foreign influence (Ju Ik-jong 2000:173). As a result, there was hardly room for initiatives by Koreans to achieve modernization. Eckert, understanding modernization as industrialization that is antithetical to democratization, discusses the colonial legacy as the key context for Korea's recent economic growth. However, this line of theorizing on economic development was criticized as proposing a logic that dictatorship and the collusion of politics and economics were most efficient for the allocation of resources—a position which was essentially identical to the Restoration (*Yushin*) dictatorial doctrine. The critique went on to argue that dictatorship and the coalition of politics and economics results in institutionalized corruption, and thus the colonial model was a significant factor that hindered productive capacity (Jeong Tae-heon 2002:163). Furthermore, as Eckert's work is not aware of any dilemma about colonial capitalism or modernization, Eckert is accused of being a linear modernizationist

14. However, while not as clearly stated as in Cumings' work to be described later, Palais' research does express skepticism about the axiom of western-centrism. Although focused on criticism of Korea's indigenous development theory, his comments regarding U.S. slavery and European capitalism from a comparative historical perspective offers a glimpse of this skepticism.

and a common apologist of capitalism (Jeong Tae-heon 2002:161-2). Much as some Korean scholars from the embryonic capitalism school are open to criticism for their excess of “assumptions,” Eckert’s position was also criticized due to his “assumption” that Korea from the beginning had no ability to develop on its own. Eckert’s understanding of history was focused on capitalism rather than humanism, and thus he was seized by the idea that modernity meant solely capitalism—a logic that can be used to justify imperialism (Jeong Tae-heon 2002 :165). Even so, this does not mean there are no examples of U.S. based Korean Studies research that transcend modernization theories in the pursuit of alternatives. This is because in the U.S. as in Korea, there have recently been a rise in the number of critiques leveled against the universality of western-centric ideas and modernization theory.¹⁵ From this perspective, one U.S. Koreanist criticized the application of indigenous developmental theory in Korea as being based on the western experience. He argues that if the emergence of capitalism in the west was “accidental,” the question of why this did not happen in Joseon is meaningless (Em 1997: 195). As Cumings pointed out, at a time when western-centric concepts are no longer valid (Em 1997:196), indigenous development theory has lost its foundation.

As seen above, Cumings has a critical position on the linear developmental model and western-centrism despite the vague nature of his position on colonial modernization. In an interview with Harry Harutunian, Cumings cautioned against an extremist social science view of Asia as an alien subject to be studied and also expressed his sympathy with Harutunian’s argument that even scholars not studying Asia should recognize the value of Asia as a region with its own way of life, even when it is in conflict with the U.S. or western Europe. In addition, Cumings pointed out that in an era of globalization and neoliberalism, the idea that one model can apply to the entire world is thoroughly a U.S.-centric idea, and that the tendency to ignore significant differences and to oversimplify is dangerous (Cumings et al. 2001:170).

His position as described above is relevant in the search for alternatives regarding Korea’s modernity. In the introduction of his book written in 1997,

15. This reminds us of Kajimura Hideki’s argument in Japan. Despite the criticism that he is oriented to modernity, his indigenous development theory evinces a motif of strong criticism to modernity rather than an obeisance to modern capitalism. Kajimura’s people’s nationalism, formulated from his research of Korean history, connotes a new democratic and liberal social vision symbiotic with the hard-working masses that aims for a non-western development that transcends western modernity.

Cumings asserts that “we can no longer use the term “modern” as a sign of tribute, or progress as a sign of approbation” (Cumings 1997:10). In pointing out the limits of viewing Korea’s traditions from the individualistic, modernistic, and rationalistic perspective of the West, Cumings proposes the possibility of a new “modernity” within the Eastern model. This approach to modernity can be restated as a problem of Koreanization. Thus, Cumings states “Koreans made Confucius their own just as Renaissance thinkers made Plato and Aristotle theirs,” and emphasized the fact that “the real story is indigenous Korea and the unstinting Koreanization of foreign influence, not vice versa” (Cumings 1997: 20; Bak Tae-gyun 2002: 55-7).¹⁶

Building on the foundation established by Cumings, the critique of west-centrism and universality of west-based modernization is likely to increase with the coming generations of U.S. scholars, much as in the Korean case. In spite of this article’s attempt to point out the variation in the opinions around indigenous development theory and colonial modernization, the reality is that the dominant strain of thinking among U.S. scholars of Korean Studies is skepticism regarding indigenous development theory and a continuing reliance on modernization theory to understand Korea. Furthermore, as much as this tendency departs from Korean mainstream academic thought, it seems that the distance between Korean Studies scholars in the two countries remains quite far. One U.S. scholar states “the next few years are a crucial period which will determine if the next generation of scholars find places in Asian Studies departments in the U.S., and will also reveal whether these scholars will incorporate ‘indigenous developmental theory’ into their research” (Shin 2002: 93). From the perspective of Korean scholars who are increasingly skeptical of western universalism, it must be emphasized that even an acceptance of indigenous developmental theory should be based on an alternate view of modernity that transcends the western model of modernization.

Nationalism and Its Derivatives

There is little disagreement that one of the key differences in opinion

16. Bak Tae-gyun saw such issues as raised by Cumings as refreshing, and responds that Cumings’ reference to Goryeo tradition and culture as a Korean device with which to criticize “modernity” is an endeavor to create an alternative type of “modernity” (Bak Tae-gyun 2002:56-7).

between Korean and U.S. scholars has to do with the issue of nationalism. U.S. scholars tend to believe that work done by Korean scholars is usually imbued with nationalistic sentiments, while their own research agenda tends to focus on countering such sentiments. Moreover, from this perspective, Korean nationalism is often seen as having developed monolithically and holistically without any differences of opinion. However, expressed views of nationalism by even the earliest Korean scholars from the Joseon era have always been accompanied by vigorous debates, which have continued unabated to this day. Furthermore, Korean scholars did not all share nationalistic tendencies nor devotion to a common position. As with theoretical differences in understanding nationalism, the practical expression of nationalism by scholars has been diverse and complex, and in connection with the “Japanese sympathizer” question has served as a topic for continual debate to the present.

By now it has been sufficiently discussed that Korean Studies originated under the context of colonial rule, and therefore Korean Studies has incorporated strong nationalistic tendencies in the course of its efforts to resist colonialism. From a comparative perspective, if nationalism is the product of modernity as has been suggested, it is unsurprising that sources of nationalism should be found in the modernity of colonial nations such as Korea. If we look closely at the Korean case, nationalism was formulated in early Korean Studies from a battle on two ideological fronts. The first was with regard to Sino-centric history that had a long tradition of influence, and the second was with official colonial history initiated by Japanese colonialism. Subsequently, the situation under Japanese colonization gave rise to a set of unique traits in the nationalism of Korean Studies. First, the nationalism that arose did not remain at simply a theoretical level but rather was manifested as a type of activism in a very specific set of realities. Second, in a situation where a unitary sense of nation was lacking and where the antagonism toward Japan was overemphasized, the pursuit of nationalism tended to ideational and spiritual dispositions.

As widely known proponents of early nationalistic thought, Bak Eun-shik and Shin Chae-ho are model examples of the manifestation of such characteristics. On the one hand, their historical interpretation overcame the Sino-centrism inherent in traditional Confucian society, while on the other hand they clearly expressed opposition to the colonial historical perspective on Japanese imperialism. For them, history was assumed to be for the use of enhancing nationalism. In the case of Bak Eun-shik, history was the best way to cultivate patriotism and to achieve national independence. Shin Chae-ho was no different on this matter.

For Shin, history was an important means for achieving enlightenment about the nation state and nationalism. In this sense, both Bak and Shin understood history as one part of the national movement to revive nationalism and to resist imperialism. Despite these similarities, or perhaps precisely due to these reasons, Bak Eun-shik's history was criticized as overly spiritual and idealistic (Kim Gi-seung 1994:101), while Shin Chae-ho was critiqued on the basis of his acceptance of western nationalism, which meant that his ability to attack the fundamental nature of imperialism was limited.¹⁷

It was the same for Jeong In-bo, who came one generation after Bak and Shin. If there was any difference, it was that the overcoming of the Sino-centric historical model was no longer problematized in his time. Instead, he had to confront the elaborate historical descriptions based on the positivism that had been established at universities rather than the comparatively simple structure of early colonial history. Jeong proposed a nationalistic interpretation of history in response to the close relationship of the writings of Japanese scholars regarding Joseon with the colonial governor's policies. Jung was unsurprisingly criticized for sharing with other nationalistic trends a tendency to overemphasize spiritual facets of history (O Yeong-gyo 1994: 178-80).

Son Jin-tae was educated in Japan under the positivistic methodology that was the object of Jeong In-bo's criticism. After liberation in 1945, Sohn began to substantiate his beliefs in what he had termed as new nationalism. He expressed great hostility against socialist activity under colonialism, and criticized the socialist Baek Nam-un for only discovering a portion of Korean self-identity and not being able to see the entire picture. Son emphasized the practical role of nationalism and also proposed national unity based on a homogeneous unity (Kim Su-tae 1993: 77). On the one hand, he railed against the colonial historical perspective but on the other hand, he argued that traditional nationalism was too abstract and proposed the foundation of a scientific nationalism (Jeong Chang-ryeol 1992:142-43). Despite Son's advocacy of science, it is ironic that his theory was also criticized as unscientific and abstract as were other theories of nationalism due to his suggestion that 'nation' is a transhistorical entity.

17. Bourgeois nationalism, so to speak, established during the nation-state formation process in the West, hailed social evolutionary theory as proposed by Herbert Spencer. According to this theory's "winner takes all" and "survival of the fittest" principles, imperial invasion and colonial conquest is fully justified, and therefore there is no space for the necessity of colonial liberation movements in small and weak nations (Bak Chan-seung 1994:87).

Despite significant differences, studies of history from a nationalist perspective generally tended to be abstract and ideologically designed to resist Japanese imperialism. Furthermore, much as theories of embryonic capitalism were aimed to confirm western notions of modernity by examining Korean modernity, these nationalist theories were fundamentally limited due to their common purpose of responding to Japanese nationalism. Baek Nam-un's criticism of nationalism, which was founded upon historical materialism, centered around this issue. Like other nationalist scholars, Baek spoke out against Japanese colonial historical interpretation; however, he insisted at the same time that nationalist narratives were as dangerous as those of Japanese colonial historians.

Baek Nam-un's critique of nationalist history can be summarized by his abhorrence to the notion that the nation is superior and absolute—a theory of exceptionalism that was no different than the perspective of Japanese colonial scholars (Yi Jun-shik 1993: 34). In particular, he was especially critical of the “National Ancestor (*DangunJoseon*)” theory that served as a spiritual base for nationalists. Although the content and meaning between the two interpretations were different, Baek believed that the “Dangun Joseon” theory of both Shin Chae-ho and Choi Nam-seon were idealistic and ultra-nationalistic beliefs that overemphasized the uniqueness of the nation as originated from Dangun.¹⁸ Baek claimed that an emphasis on national uniqueness precluded understanding of the genuine character of class, nation, and state from a scientific perspective, and thus prevented the possibility for national liberation (Bang Gi-joong 1994: 212-3).¹⁹ Although he highlighted the limitations of epistemology and methodology normally inherent in nationalism, he did not go so far as to deny the uncompromising nationalism that could be found with Shin Chae-ho (Bang Gi-jung 1994:214).

18. Even An Hwak, who advocated establishment of modern civilization based on the Western experience, answered with regard to the attempt to erase the original ancestor (*Dangun*) myth from history that such national myths were important sources of understanding the national spirit. Thus, he was an active supporter of the original ancestor (*Dangun*) myth.

19. Mikhail Pak also criticizes the original ancestor (*Dangun*) myth discourse in nationalist history. He states that despite efforts of nationalist historians to discover the origins of the Korean nation on the Dangun myth, historical works cannot confirm an exact time period if they resort to mythology. Thus, the Dangun myth is an “ideologically driven foolish attempt to discover a skeleton and to identify it as Dangun to place it in a central position to privilege it with a leading role in reunification.” (Tikhonov 2002: 145, 149) Pak's assertion is reflected in recent efforts by North Korea, such as the restoration of Dangun's tomb, in order to reinforce the nationalistic elements in *Juche* theory.

As described above, there existed many differences of opinion between early Korean Studies scholars with regard to nationalism and the practice of nationalism. The complexity of the situation is indicative of the difficulties involved in trying to understand Korean nationalism as a simple whole. In addition, not all Korean Studies scholars understood nationalism as a movement to become directly involved with, as Shin Chae-ho, Bak Eun-shik, or Jeong In-bo did. Among these scholars, some unintentionally ended up promoting theories that supported imperialism. There were also scholars who worked under the Japanese system without being fully aware of their passive compliance, and there were even scholars who actively pursued a pro-Japanese path.

There were examples of the very last category such as Choi Nam-seon, but even if such cases are disregarded, there were cases such as Kim Gyo-heon, whose writing was devoted to the enhancement of strong anti-imperialist consciousness through the influence of the evolutionary theory of Social Darwinism, which formed the basis for western imperialist theory. However, this very fact led Kim's theory to later influence the work of Choi Nam-seon and other Greater East Asia Sphere ideologues in the 1930's, whom utilized Kim's work to justify the attempt to construct the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere (Jeon U-yong 1994:115-6). The evaluation of An Hwak, who advocated self-consciousness and national remodeling from the so-called enlightened progressive theory perspective, remains ambiguous due to his career experience working in Japanese colonial organizations and relatedly, uncertainties about his nationalist tendencies (Jang Seok-heung 1994:145). There is also disagreement among Korean academics about the possibility of Japanese collaboration by Yi Neung-hwa, who associated with colonial historians from the Cheong-gu and Jin-dan academies (Cheong-gu hakhoe, Jindan hakhoe). On one hand, he is criticized for his noncommittal historical view regarding resistance to Japan as well as national independence (Kim Yong-Seop 1976: 446-7). On the other hand, although he was not like Shin Chae-ho or Choi Nahm-seon, his commitment to studying Korean history is thought to have been impossible without a sense of duty to nation and Korean tradition, and thus Lee may have been a consistent contributor to Korean independence (Yi Man-yeol 1981:147 and Moon So-jeong 1993: 163-4).

Differences of opinion around issues of pro-Japanese collaboration also exist among scholars in China and Russia. In China, Pak Ch'ang-uk (Bak Chang-uk) is clear about his attitude regarding the pro-Japanese issue. Bak, who was born in Manchuria, which was well known as a hotbed for Japanese collaborators,

asserts that the history of the Pro-Japanese has to be redressed in order to revitalize the national spirit and to assure the elimination of toadyism in the nation's history (Liu 2002: 184). As if in reference to the phrase that Korea is "a U.S. puppet government controlled by pro-Japanese," Bak argues that vestiges of Japanese imperialism still remain due to the fact that the pro-Japanese were not exhaustively eliminated from South Korea after liberation (Liu 2002: 166).

Although reflective of their individual experiences, if Bak Chang-uk's approach is straightforward and radical, Mikhail Pak's opinion, while similar to that of Bak Chang-uk, has a difference in nuance. For Mikhail Pak, if the reality is that the descendants of colonial elites compose the ruling class of South Korea, the argument that the remaining vestiges of Japanese imperialism should be eradicated is not persuasive. If pro-Japanese refers to Koreans who were among the privileged class in the colonial period, the vested interests of their descendants will never be fully eradicated from South Korean society (Tikhonov 2002: 141-2). In other words, he asserts that the pro-Japanese problem is inevitable as long as Korean society chooses the path of capitalist development.

Mikhail Pak further elaborates his ideas in his views on nationalism. In a situation where dogmatic Soviet ideology once prevailed and still remains to a certain extent, he states that Korean historiography cannot overcome nationalist ideology. In "A Summary of Korean Historical Studies (1987)" subtitled "Critique of the Nationalistic Concepts of South Korea's Bourgeois Historians," he insists that nationalism cannot be overcome because Korean society's dominant ideology is bourgeois nationalism, and in a bourgeois nation, an alternative ideology cannot prevail. Pak argues that considering the fact that all bourgeois countries tend to reinforce nationalism, and that while the appearance of another ideology may precipitate the demise of official ideology, there is currently no alternative paradigm in Korea to replace nationalism (Tikhonov 2002: 153-4).

Although their arguments differ at basis, Pak, like U.S. scholars, is critical of the nationalism espoused by Korean scholars. However, despite his skepticism, today there are clear attempts among young Korean scholars to come up with an alternative to mainstream nationalist theory. Kang Jae-eon points out that a desirable research agenda for Korean Studies is to focus on balancing universality with concepts such as nationalism or identity. The pursuit of nationalism in the global era must no longer be exclusionary or parochial (Jeong Hye-gyeong 2000:247).

The final topic of examination is the understanding of nationalism by U.S. Koreanists. First of all, it should be pointed out that differences of opinion

between Korean and American scholars on the aforementioned issues of embryonic capitalism or modernization theory are centered around the nationalism issue. Korean scholars have tried to identify supposed roots of capitalism within Korea's own traditions. Their efforts to prove that Japanese colonization had negative effects on self-modernization was informed by their desire to counter the colonial perspective, to recover national pride, and to establish a national identity. Attempts to identify the national tendencies of Korean scholars should be made with this in mind.

It is difficult to find such understandings of nationalism in the U.S. In contrast, with rare exceptions,²⁰ U.S. scholars are generally unsympathetic to such nationalist sentiments. What is the reason for this? On one hand, this is the product of the intellectual atmosphere in the U.S. in which they have been fully immersed. Palais indicated that nationalistic sentiments were also to be found in the U.S. (Han 2001a: 309). And it is said that pre-war U.S. educational systems were plagued by the prevalence of parochialism and isolationism, which was somehow interpreted as related to the nationalistic tendency (Kim Keong-il 1998: 37-9). Nevertheless, freedom and liberty were understood early on as part of typical American culture. Moreover, after the end of the war in 1945, U.S. national interest, which was based on nationalism within the context of global hegemony, became tied to "universal" concepts such as free trade, modernization, and development. In short, these circumstances allowed for U.S. nationalism to emerge naturally as universalism. In the 1970's, the emergence of post-modernism meant more attention was given to the marginalized and the subaltern, which were thought to have been suppressed by nationalism of the Third World as well as by class centered socialism. With the end of these grand narratives, nationalism became something to be avoided and criticized.

The outlook on nationalism among U.S. scholars was also a reflection of how they understood their subject matter, namely Korean society. From their perspective, Korea was a society in which influences from Japanese colonialism still stubbornly remained due to the failure to properly eradicate its remnants. On this point, Palais argued that the failure to cleanse past wrongs in Korean society was due to the fact that those who were educated in Japan became part of the post-liberation ruling class (Han 2001b: 227). He extended this logic to criticize nationalist Korean historians who seemed to ignore this reprehensible past.²¹

20. Palais declares Korea's nationalistic disposition as an understandable response to colonial distortions (Han 2001a: 309).

Cumings also expressed intense interest on the pro-Japanese issue in South Korea (Jeon Sang-in 1998:202; Bak Tae-gyun 2002:60). He claimed that in the late colonial period between 1937-1945, Korea could be compared to the early 1940's French Vichy regime under German occupation with respect to the degree to which pro-Japanese were widely assimilated. During this period, there did not exist a ruling class, neither landowners nor entrepreneurs, that could be termed nationalist. Considering the fact that these groups benefited from their pro-Japanese positions, national suffering was not equally distributed between classes.²² In a similar vein, Eckert extended his criticism of embryonic capitalism theory with efforts to expose the untruths regarding the role of national capitalists as well as the nationalism of big business interests under Japanese colonialism (Jeong Tae-heon 2002: 160).²³

In addition, after the emergence of military rule in Korea, U.S. scholars observed the process by which dictatorship was justified in the name of "Korean" nationalism. Thus, they cast a doubtful eye on Korean nationalism as a subterfuge to justify the oppression and forced rule of the people. Unfortunately, under the circumstances of the time, it was almost impossible to find scholars or intellectuals who would criticize and resist this oppressive and insular nationalism. Instead, U.S. scholars evinced only government-sponsored scholars who readily supported the establishment of dictatorship under the name of "national culture" or the silence and resignation of numerous scholars who refused to face reality by hiding behind the supposed objectivity of academia. The cumulative operation of these various factors meant that only a peculiar brand of nationalism, one which Korean scholars did not believe in, was left to make a lasting impression on Koreanists in the United States.

21. He is as critical of Japanese nationalism as of Korean nationalism. According to Palais, Japan is ultra-centralized and ultra-nationalistic (Han 2001b: 227), and Japan's nationalistic historians write history from a perspective of Japan-centered supremacy without any significant self-introspection regarding past history (Kim Seong-u 2002: 152).
22. In this context, he mentions the role and responsibility of police and other Korean officials in the mobilization of the so-called "comfort women". See Jeon Sang-in 2000: 88-9.
23. There are various criticisms regarding Eckert's argument on nationalism. For example, Jeong stated that a fatal flaw in Eckert's theory is his inability to identify precisely what kinds or aspects of nationalism he is critiquing. Kenneth Wells also opposed Eckert's position that involvement with the colonial economic structure was incompatible with being a nationalist (Bak Jeong-shin 2000: 261-2).

Korean Studies from an East Asian Perspective

The popularized belief that Korean scholars are biased by nationalism and indigenous development theory is related to the fact that their main research subject is almost always limited to the Korean Peninsula (and after liberation, South Korea). However, like nationalism, this research tendency toward the national unit is not an expression of their inherent tendency, but rather due to circumstantial conditions. Furthermore, from the perspective of these circumstantial conditions, the scholars who concentrated all their research after liberation on South Korean society in the backdrop of the Cold War may be seen as more narrowly focused than scholars of the colonial period.

Early Korean Studies scholars under colonization were influenced by a variety of theories and currents of thought from Japan and China, and thus were able to naturally gain a comparative vision of Japanese and Chinese society. Scholars approached their research with a broad East Asian perspective that included Korea, Japan, and China, with various background factors having influence: The increase in the number of Korean intellectuals in Japan, the increased flow of emigrants and refugees toward China, Manchu, and Russia, the activity of the armed independence movement in Manchuria and its succession by the anti-Japanese partisans' struggle, the Shanghai provisional government and increase of Korean immigrants in the Chinese mainland, and the establishment of an anti-Japanese international united front in Russia, China, and Japan.²⁴ As Choi Nam-seon's widely known *Bulham* cultural theory suggested, these scholars' research perspective was not limited to solely the Korean peninsula.

As the contemporary prevalence of Confucian capitalism or Asian values debates alludes, Confucianism still maintains a strong influence on colonial Korea and East Asia as a whole. The majority of scholars during this era were critical of Confucianist thought. Shin Chae-ho, who was educated in traditional Confucian thought, leveled strong criticism against the Confucian historical perspective in *Doksashinron* (New Theory of Reading History, 1908) (Bak Chansseung 1994: 79). During the same period, Bak Eun-shik also asserted the need to reform Confucianism from neo-Confucianism centered on Chu-zsu to that of Yang-ming centered with emphasis on praxis in *Yugyogushinron* (On the

24. For instance, Bak Chang-uk posits that Kim Il-sung's anti-Japanese partisans must be considered within Korean history as part of the anti-Japanese international united front (Liu 2002: 182-4).

Renewing of Confucianism, 1909) (Kim Gi-seung 1994: 7-8). Yi Neung-hwa, who was a member of the *yangban* ruling class educated in traditional Confucianism, pushed strongly for the need to overcome Confucian historicism, arguing that the Confucian perspective inherent in typical historical texts meant that they were centered around the *yangban* class and thus were unable to depict the condition of the people as a whole.²⁵ Criticism of Confucianism continued unabated with Jeong In-bo who remarked, “Joseon history is the remnant of hypocrisy and fabrication.” Jeong In-bo objected to the dependence on and use of Chinese texts in Confucian historicism.²⁶

The critical attitude toward Confucianism expressed by early Korean Studies scholars, which remains a strong tendency of East Asian theory today, may have been the precursor to the ascendance of the state as the center of research in Korea after liberation in 1945. This is because their interest in Confucianism was not informed by a desire to conduct comparative research in pursuit of an East Asian perspective, but rather by the desire to privilege a single country centered perspective regarding the appropriateness of what is Korean. In the post-

25. For this perspective, he found the sources of the oppression of women in Confucianism, Confucian ideology, and organizations of Confucian scholars. He states that because the lack of freedom and human rights for women was a product of Confucian culture, Confucianism was an ideology of domination that made slaves of the masses, encouraged submission to China, and stripped away the spirit of independence and liberty. Despite such scathing criticism, he nevertheless had a paradoxical and vague attitude as evinced by his positive judgment of the prohibition on marriage for widows as well as for those with identical last names (Moon So-jeong 1993: 162, 177-80).
26. See O Yeong-gyo 1994: 176-8. In general, western Koreanists’ evaluation of Confucianism also tends to be unfavorable. Deuchler, whose research focused on the Koreanization of Confucianism as the dominant ideology of traditional society, describes the influence of Confucianism and patriarchy on women (Deuchler 1992; Kim 1999: 208), and argues that in very crucial respects Korean social customs resisted Confucianization (Kim 2001: 148-9). They are critical even with respect to the Confucian capitalism and Asian values views that are widely accepted within Western academia. Palais refutes the position that Confucianism contributed to the development of capitalism. Although “chung-hyo” (loyalty to nation, filial piety) in labor relations in the 1970’s is emphasized, it was nothing more than a method of controlling laborers, and the use of Confucianism as a control mechanism of laborers was similarly evinced in Japan (Han 2001a: 308-9). Eckert also expressed a critical attitude toward the role of Confucianism in Asian values (Eckert 1990: 409). However, as Palais’ confusion of Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism in his research of Yu Hyeong-won (Palais 1996) demonstrates, such positions are criticized as having an overly simplistic understanding of Joseon’s Confucian tradition (Jeong Du-hui 1999: 61). In other words, when East Asian traditions are characterized as “Confucian,” there is a lack of recognition of the wide multitude of meanings included under the term “Confucian” (Jeong Du-hui 1999: 61).

war the Cold War period after 1945, the sentiment that history must be examined with each nation and country as the focal point was established in East Asian countries. The drive to overemphasize the independent value of each country's traditional culture meant there was little space for the recognition of the importance of the reciprocal relationship between different countries (Jeong Du-hui 1999: 95).

At first glance, the situation in the U.S. seems to be better than in Korea. Korean Studies, included under the rubric of Area Studies programs, was recommended to adopt a comparative perspective, which was a frequently suggested method in Area Studies. Before Korean Studies as a field was established, the majority of U.S. scholars researching Korea approached Korea from a comparative perspective with knowledge of China or Japan as a background,²⁷ and as mentioned previously had to refer to China or Japan as a reference in order to show the uniqueness of Korean society. In the academic atmosphere in which Korean Studies was not taken seriously, it was often necessary to draw comparisons with China or Japan in order to highlight Korea's significance. For these reasons, U.S. scholars of Korea were much more accustomed to viewing Korea from an East Asian perspective.

Gari Ledyard, who was effectively the first instructor of Korean Studies in a U.S. university, viewed himself as a generalist rather than as a specialist. As his research was not limited to Korea, but spanned the East Asian region, he argued that it was not feasible to ignore the academic debates within China and Japan in the study of Korea (Armstrong 2003: 161). In an attempt to describe the character and transformation of the historical traditions of East Asian countries with Confucian foundations (Korea and China), the previously mentioned work of Palais (1996) compared the realities of the Joseon dynasty with Chinese traditions. Thus, Palais' work was seen as an analysis of Yu Hyeong-won's philosophy from an East Asian framework (Jeong Du-hui 1999: 44, 57). Deuchler also compared the transition from Goryeo to Joseon with China's transition from the Tang to Sung dynasties, attempting to discover the unique characteristics of

27. When Ledyard began to teach at Columbia in 1964, there were 12 to 15 universities with East Asian studies programs. Among these, there were only 5 universities (Harvard, University of Washington, Columbia, Berkeley, and Princeton) with what could be called Korean Studies programs. In recent years, around 15 universities have established Korean Studies programs, an almost threefold increase from the 1960's. However, within East Asian programs, with the increasing influence of Japan and China, the trend of "the strong gets stronger and the weak stayed weak" still persists (Armstrong 2003: 177-80).

Joseon society through comparative analysis with China (Jeong Du-hui 1999: 75-6).²⁸

Cumings' work is another good example of scholarship of modern history with an East Asian perspective. In the widely known *Origins of the Korean War* (1981), Cumings argues that historical evidence shows that then U.S. Secretary of State Dean G. Acheson formulated policy toward Korea keeping in mind the reconstruction of Japan as an important regional producer within the global economy, and also as having the ability to influence its former colonies. He believed "it would be an injustice" to conceptualize the East Asian structure in exclusion of Manchuria, South Korea, and Taiwan. Furthermore, Cumings stated that he wrote the second volume of his book (1990) with the purpose of analyzing the Korean War within the context of U.S. history as well as overall global trends (Cumings et al. 2001: 158-9). His East Asian conceptualization is also evident in his analysis of the history of war within the context of East Asian economic development. Therefore, taking the Manchurian Incident, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War together, he claims "warfare in East Asia was handmaiden to economic growth in the period 1935-1975" (Cumings 1997: 322; Jeon, Sang-in 2000: 94).

The comparative and East Asian perspectives of U.S. Korean Studies scholars as shown above motivated Korean scholars who had previously conducted their research from a single-country perspective. In this context, a Korean historian observed that American scholars "possess a deep understanding of the required methodological approaches for researching traditional society, and their seemless comparison with Chinese or Japanese history is also impressive." (Jeong Du-hui 1999: 13). In other words, they observe Korean society from a comprehensive perspective, and even though the actual subject of research is limited to a specific time and area, they attempt to formulate their conclusions in light of the contexts within which the research subject is situated (Jeong Du-hui 1999: 14). As is evinced in the claim that even recent tendencies "of interest in Korean Studies is related to East Asian discourse regarding the rapid growth in East Asia that constitutes an increasingly influential loci in the globalized era," (Kim Wang-bae 1999: 6) the development of Korean Studies has thrived with an intimate connection within the broader East Asian perspective.

28. In addition to Deuchler, there is also the work of Setton (1997), who focused on Confucian traditions in his comparative analysis of the intellectual histories of Korea, China, and Japan. See Jeong Du-hui 1999: 94-5.

However, such observations may simply be superficial. Unlike the discussions described above, there has been some criticism regarding East Asian Area Studies within the U.S. For instance, Cumings claims that East Asian Area Studies simply means research based on national units such as China, Japan, and Korea, and that there actually is no work that truly examines the region as a whole. Although the situation may be slightly different among the current generation, Cumings claims this was the norm in the 1960's when he was at Columbia University. Furthermore, Cumings points out that research connecting the three nations of East Asia is exceedingly difficult due to the hardship of learning three languages, a fundamental requirement for conducting research (Cumings et al. 2001: 139). However although his observations may be appropriate with respect to modern history, traditional era scholarship shows the opposite tendency. Thus, while researchers could access East Asian culture with a command of Chinese characters, the task of conducting comparative work for young scholars specializing in the current era may actually be more difficult.²⁹

Along the same lines as Cumings, Harutunian claims that scholars of East Asia "wear the mask of East Asia but their research is based on national units of analysis." Although this tendency continues today, he reminds us that this problem was even more evident in the 1960's. Furthermore, he calls for a serious examination of what is meant by the East Asian approach that has been characterized by studies at the national level. Harutunian believes a focus on the nation-state as a unit of analysis is no different than a narrow-minded empiricism whereby anyone can justify placing their second-rate knowledge into a large warehouse. In other words, the extraction of knowledge from Asian society is similar to imperialist theory where resources and labor are extracted, in that without thinking of the proper questions for analysis, or in conducting analysis based on a purely abstract theoretical framework without concern for the actual structure of East Asian society is a process of oversimplifying the society being studied (Cumings et al. 2001: 140-1). In other words, the special cases of East Asia (i.e. Korean society) are utilized simply to provide the information to confirm or disprove the validity of elaborate hypotheses that have

29. One scholar criticized the current generation of Korean Studies scholars, mostly made up of Koreans, as focusing on relatively simple and accessible research topics in modern Korean history. This tendency is contrasted with the activity of Korean Studies pioneers whose interpretation of Chinese language materials and theory from a comparative historical perspective has allowed them to deal with Korean society with breadth and depth (Kim Wang-bae 2000: 239).

been constructed elsewhere (Kim Keong-il 2001: 115).

From this perspective, to escape from mutual seclusion and misunderstanding among the East Asian countries, what is required is a reflection on the unbalanced structure in which the U.S. serves as a center around which each of the East Asian countries are connected centripetally. As argued by Kang Jae-eon, to accomplish this we must be very cautious about the dangerous pitfall of exclusiveness when conducting research focused on a single country (Kim Gyeong-ja et al. 2002: 198). Furthermore, because comparative historical research is possible only when the traditions of the case being compared is clarified (Bak Taegyun 2002: 63), there must be a vigorous exchange of cooperation and exchange between American and East Asian scholars. Beyond the temptation of state-centered research that is common in East Asian countries,³⁰ an attitude that understands East Asia as a unit of analysis within a global context is required (Im Hyeong-tae 2002: 12, 17)

Toward an Intellectual Exchange between Koreanists at Home and Abroad

Regardless of origin, Korean Studies in Korea began with the goal of reconstituting national identity to overcome the negative influences of colonial historical perspectives. Although not explicitly evident, it once served the interests of the state by integrating and mobilizing the people for the implementation of top-down modernization projects. Similarly, Korean Studies in the U.S. can be understood as an academic effort to generate knowledge about Korea that could help realize U.S. interests. The momentum behind Korean Studies emerged from the demands of the U.S. as a nation that required a specific type of knowledge about Korea. As with all Area Studies fields, Korean Studies in the U.S. reflected Korea's importance within the context of U.S. foreign policy interests as well as Korea's place in the global capitalist economy (Shin 2002: 77). Korean scholars in neighboring China, Japan, and Russia tried to integrate their

30. Unlike other East Asian countries, Korea must be considered with respect to its particular characteristics arising from its division into North and South. The standards for commonly referring to pre-liberation "Korea" as Joseon are clearly different from those referring to post-liberation "Korea," which refers only to South Korea. For a discussion of the above, refer to Kim Keong-il 2001: 126-8.

own marginal and complex interests and concerns into their own research on Korean society residing in between the country they lived in and the country they had left.

In this vein, it is unsurprising that there has been a diversity of opinion and controversy among Koreanists from various regions. Setting aside the research tendencies emerging from neighboring countries, U.S.-based Korean Studies on one hand leveled strong critiques against research from Korea, while on the other hand Korean scholars were also critical of U.S. scholarship, with colonial modernization being a prime example (Bak Tae-gyun 2002: 63). The stark reality is that despite the efforts of Korean academia to overcome official colonial history, U.S. scholarship would not appreciate the significance of nationalism in Korean academia, thus theories such as indigenous development ultimately failed to receive attention from U.S. modern history scholars (Em 1997: 190). The schism of opinion between research done in both countries on the identical time period has widened rather than narrowed (Jeong Du-hui 1999: 11).

As mentioned earlier, there are limits to understanding Korean Studies in both countries as monolithic. However, a contrast between the research tendencies of Korea and the U.S. still seems to exist to a certain extent. This is shown in the absence of intellectual cooperation and exchange between scholars of the two regions, and also reflects the self-sufficient and unilateral orientations of their research. For example, as seen in Deuchler's use of Duncan's research to prove the continual influence of Goryeo traditions even after the establishment of the Joseon dynasty (Jeong Du-hui 1999: 79), U.S. scholars generally aim to identify the stability and continuity of Korean society. Ironically, this is evidence of how work by other scholars can serve as leverage for one's own research (Jeong Du-hui 1999: 13).

This point remains valid with respect to the modern era. Chandra's research (1988) was heavily influenced by Palais' work on the Daewongun (Jeong Du-hui 1999: 102), and the core of the works by Robinson (1999) and Eckert (1991) were extensions of the problematics deployed in Cumings' *Origins of the Korean War* (vol. 1). Although presented as hypothetical suggestions, the fact that the core issue raised by Cumings were succeeded by Robinson and Eckert has meant that the work of these three scholars all fundamentally share the same problematics (Jeong Du-hui 1999: 127, 130-1). As this holds true for introductory books on Korean Studies, the opinions of Korean scholars appear in the books of neither Eckert et al. (1990) nor Cumings (1997). The former book, based on Yi Ki-baek's *A New History of Korea*, cannot be said to have ignored

Korean scholars' research, but it employed U.S. scholars' discussions with respect to major issues and referred to works by U.S. scholars (Bak Tae-gyun 2002: 62).

In this manner, one scholar points out that the use of English language materials for the sake of efficiency explains why American scholars established exclusive groups within which they produced, circulated, and consumed their work (Kim Dong-taek 2002: 380).³¹ However, it is not simply an issue of language. As Area Studies in the U.S. is part of the American social sciences more generally, it is not surprising that U.S. Area Studies scholars have been more responsive to the issues and problematics raised from U.S. academics rather than to those of Korean scholars. Therefore, it might be said that their perspective contains elements of Orientalism, which is usually understood as the discourse of Westerners on the Orient as "other." Due to the weak cooperation between U.S. Area Studies scholars and "Korean scholars" from the country of their interest, a multiplicity of available research by Korean scholars is only selectively introduced into American universities through personal networks. In this context, the few Korean scholars who have access to these networks are often rebuked as mere informants for American scholars.³²

Although the issue of Orientalism is not addressed here, it is clear that there is a great need for increased cooperation, exchange, and mutual interest between Korean, U.S., and other East Asian scholars. In this vein, Kang Jae-eon states from Japan "It is necessary for Japan and Korea to engage in reciprocal exchange and dialogue with an attitude of deep mutual respect for their respective national identities" (Kim Gyeong-ja et al. 2002: 198). From Europe, Deuchler argues that there needs to be a greater exchange of opinion between Korean and western scholars (Kim 2001: 150). As young scholars from Korea and the U.S. assert, as Korean Studies scholars' network and communication structures develop institutionally (Kim Dong-taek 2002: 395), a community that is characterized by constructive criticism and inspiration for the growth of

31. For example, Yi Hun-sang (2000: 131-3), in reference to Palais' book (1996), points out the fact that the findings of recent research are being overlooked and also that there is a niggardly acceptance of critical opinions from diverse perspectives. As a result, Yi states that Palais' work can be criticized as research that is trapped within the limitations of criticism.

32. With respect to this point, Kim Wang-bae (2000: 240) offers the biting criticism that "The mecca of English language Korean Studies is no longer Seoul, and in the current global period, the knowledge representing Korean society is not knowledge constituted by Koreans but rather by foreigners."

Korean Studies can be built (Shin 2002: 97). Ultimately, despite differences of a diverse array of opinions, Korean Studies scholars from all corners of the globe share a deep and lasting concern for advancing knowledge about Korea (Kim 2001: 158), a respect for the value of mutual cooperation (Jeong Du-hui 1999: 25), and a sense of solidarity (Em 1997: 190).

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