

# **Korean Society Shown in Foreign Social Studies Textbooks**

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This paper surveys descriptions about Korean society in foreign social studies textbooks, which were analyzed by the Center for Information on Korean Culture in 2005-2006. The textbooks were divided into Asian, European, Latin American, Arabic, and English blocs. This paper looks at the Korean War, the division of Korea, education, the democratization movement, environmental problems, and social conflicts.

Looking at how other countries' textbooks view Korean society can be a positive thing, because it gives Koreans an opportunity to look back at ourselves in a different way. However, there is a tendency to describe Korea from the perspective of one's own society, and the society's mainstream ideology is contained in the textbooks. The Korean society presented in foreign textbooks is not a completely objective introduction: it is colored by the viewpoints of the foreign countries.

Keywords: Korean society and culture, the Korean War, education in Korea, social conflicts, democratization movements, Confucian values

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## **I. Preface**

What is taught at school? Though this question sounds very simple, many scholars have tried to answer this question. According to M. W. Apple, the leading advocate of the critical theory of curriculum, schools enable the control of society through the distribution and preservation of cultural assets of the symbolic

system, i.e., knowledge, values, and norms (Yun 1988:88). In the same context, J. Anyon who analyzed blind spots in middle school history books in the United States indicates that in spite of the objectivity of textbooks many people generally believe that some content is actually selected and described in a particular groups' favor (Yun 1988:90). Therefore textbooks, the major materials of school education, are not simple texts. By reviewing textbooks the dominant ideology of the society and the essence of education can be ascertained.<sup>1</sup> The perspective of one's own society influences how textbooks describe other societies. The description concerning Korean history and society is less objective than descriptions about Korea's economy because of this tendency to describe another from one's own viewpoint. Thus, this paper will review how foreign textbooks describe Korean society.

This paper focuses on middle and high school textbooks published since 2000: 140 textbooks from five Asian countries; 205 from five European countries; forty-six from two Latin American countries; forty-nine from four English bloc countries; and twenty from nine Arabic countries. Many of these textbooks have limited or no content on Korea. While textbooks from China and Japan contain a lot of information about Korea, the ongoing historical debates with these countries makes it too difficult to include them in this paper.

This paper focuses on history including world history, geography, and society: called social studies for the sake of convenience. This paper reviews the descriptions about Korean society contained in foreign textbooks, focusing on the Korean War, education, democratization movements, and others such as social conflicts, environmental issues, and food culture. This paper divides the countries into continents and reviews the common contents described in the textbooks.

## **II. Korean Society and Culture Shown in Foreign Social Studies Textbooks**

### **1. Asian Countries (Malaysia, Vietnam, the Philippines, Thailand, and Taiwan)<sup>2</sup>**

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1. Domestic studies on textbooks which clearly show the dominant ideology of a society have been done for a long time. See Yun (1988), Curriculum Committee (1990), and Kim (1987).

Among the analyzed textbooks, there were some that contained limited descriptions about Korean society while others didn't contain any descriptions. Taiwanese textbooks are a good example. The common descriptions used in these textbooks are: the Korean War, education, democratization movements, and the others of the environment, food culture, and social conflicts. Except for Malaysia, most of the textbooks contain the following contents.

### 1) Korean War

Most of the textbooks mention the incorrect notion that Korea is the only divided country. While some textbooks briefly describe the Korean War, others provide a more detailed description. Vietnamese textbooks say that the United States didn't follow the decision of the Moscow Conference and established a pro-American government with Syngman Rhee as its head in order to divide the Korean Peninsula.

In North Korea, the Soviet Union strictly executed the decision of the Moscow Conference by making the people of Joseon choose their fate, helped to establish the people's democratic reforms including a farmland reform and the practice of liberal and democratic rights. In contrast, the United States didn't follow the December 1945 decision of the Moscow Conference, established a pro-American government with Syngman Rhee as the head, and searched for a way to divide Korea. A general election took place in South Korea in May 1948 and a separate government called the Republic of Korea was established. (Nguyen 2005:44-5)

The above contents imply that full responsibility for the division lay with the pro-American government of Syngman Rhee and the United States as South Korea's political backer. Moreover, there is a lengthy description of North Korea's development under the leadership of the Joseon Labor Party. The description that South Korea is 'a subject state of the United States' in a section dealing with the Vietnam War makes it apparent that Vietnam feels antipathy toward the United States (Dinh et al. 2005:142). In contrast, textbooks from the Philippines mention the yearly process and damage from the division, describe

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2. There are eleven textbooks from Malaysia, eighteen from Vietnam, four from the Philippines, twenty-eight from Thailand, and seventy-nine from Taiwan.

the long-cherished desire of Koreans to unify the Korean Peninsula, and explain how Korea deals with the national sorrow of division. Thai textbooks mention being part of the United Nations Forces and positively describe its role as a member of this organization.

Other Asian textbooks do not show that the Korean War was a test case of the Cold War and left Koreans ineffaceably damaged. It is only described according to relations with their countries and from their own viewpoint: a good example being Taiwanese textbooks. Most of the Taiwanese textbooks that mention the Korean War only describe the war's influence on Taiwan and there is no general description of the Korean War.

In 1949 when the government of the Republic of China moved to Taiwan, the international situation was very unfavorable for Taiwan. With the outbreak of the Korean War, the United States sent a diplomatic minister to stay in Taiwan. Therefore, the political phase of Taiwan became stabilized. (Wang et al. 2004:39)

Other textbooks from Taiwan only mention the political situation caused by the two Cold War superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, when evaluating the Korean War. Such a description derives from the fact that Taiwan, standing against mainland China, was only interested in its survival and recovery of the mainland.

The description of the Korean War shown in Asian textbooks is self-centered and simple. All the textbooks, whether from Asia or other parts of the world, describe other countries not so much with a precise description but more as a reflection of its own history. Textbooks from Europe and America provide a more critical interpretation of the Cold War and its relevance to the Korean War than textbooks from Asian countries.

## 2) Education

According to the 2006 statistics of the National Statistical Office, the number of post-secondary students studying abroad was 113,735 (National Statistical Office). This number is incessantly increasing and the number of younger students studying abroad is also rapidly increasing. The most popular country for studying abroad is the United States. According to an ICE report, the number of Korean students registered in American schools for the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2006 was 93,728, 14.9% of the 630,998 foreign students (*Hankyoreh*, April 5, 2007).

Korea is number one with the number of students studying in the United States. The number of students studying not only in the English bloc countries but also in Asian countries including China and Japan is also increasing. This fever for studying abroad is a good example of Korea's fervor for education. Also, the percent of domestic college students is over 80%. Korea's entrance examination oriented educational system often causes social problems.

Korea's educational problems are often described in foreign textbooks. Additionally, the literacy rate of almost 98% is mentioned. One reason cited for this high literacy rate is the scientific principles behind *Hangeul* (Korean alphabet) and its practicability is mentioned.

Hangeul helps to improve Korean's knowledge to a considerable degree because it enables them to precisely record the sounds of the Korean language which Chinese characters cannot describe. By virtue of Hangeul, the number of Korean people who can read and write has greatly increased. (Mateo et al. 2005:174-5)

For this reason, UNESCO established the King Sejong Literacy Prize in 1989 and awards this prize to an individual or group that contributes to literacy and, in particular, the development and supply of a native language to a developing country. Not only are the practicability of Hangeul and high education fever presented but so too are the problems of open education and the competitive entrance exam oriented education.

The Pilippino textbook also explains that the problem of establishing a foreign school is a big issue, and reveals that the conservative educational policy and the harmful influence of an entrance exam oriented system are two causes of suicides among juveniles.

It is observed that individual independence and the character of students cannot be found because of conservative educators in Korean society. It is also observed that the class size is too big in Korea. Moreover, school curriculums are too difficult. Students consume a long time to pass an exam. Students suffer from high emotional stress. Feelings of oppression are recorded as the third cause of juvenile suicides and half of them are related with school. (Mateo et al. 2005:358)

It also indicates the fervor and reasons for young children to study abroad and

mentions the reasons and problems of being a 'lone father' due to the separation from his wife and his children who are studying abroad.

Over time, parents who send their sons and daughters abroad to study increased. Most leave Korea for China or English-speaking countries. Korean parents believe that the educational oppression of these countries is less, teaching methods are better, and school curriculums are easier than those in Korea...In 2001, the number of Korean students studying abroad amounted to 150,000. The expenses for studying abroad are too high and many parents are trying to leave Korea in search of better jobs. However, Korean educators are trying to stop this situation, which could eventually lead to their own job loss ...But the percent of educated people is high. South Korea is an economically developed country. Of its population of 40 million, the percent of literate people is 98%. (Mateo et al. 2005:359)

Foreign textbooks describe Korea's high educational fever as well as its serious social problems; thus possibly creating a negative image of Korea. Money spent on language training and for studying abroad in 2006 amounted to more than 44 billion won (*Korea Economic Daily*, April 7, 2007). According to New Zealand's Ministry of Education, Korean children account for approximately 80% of all primary school age children studying in New Zealand (*Hankyoreh*, August 27, 2006). Thus, this educational fever has had a negative influence on Korea's economy and society. Since English proficiency is considered essential for success, many students of varying ages are leaving to study in English-speaking countries. English-speaking villages were established throughout Korea, which was a national political policy. Recently, people attempting to register for TOEFL crashed the server because the server's capacity was not adequate to deal with Korea's demand. These aspects show the unhealthy aspects of Korean education.

### 3) Democratization Movements

The conspicuous descriptions about Korean society deal with Korea's democratization movements and are abreast with Korea's rapid industrialization and economic development. Referring to the policy of President Chun Doo-Hwan who succeeded Park Chung Hee, it is evaluated that by virtue of the struggle in June 1987 the movement to establish a democratic government came to fruition.

General Chun Doo-Hwan stuck with the industrialization of Korea from 1979 to 1987. The national economy became rich during the 1970s and 1980s. Also, a social movement calling for democracy and a government for the people arose. This movement succeeded when Roh Tae-Woo was inaugurated as president in 1987 without a coup d'état for the first time in thirty years. (Mateo et al. 2005:391)

Descriptions of Korea like “supporting the fundamentals of economy” and “the aspect of emphasizing the profits of the whole instead of the individual” show that the development dictatorship hasn't always been viewed negatively (Mateo et al. 2005:392). Textbooks from Thailand only indicate that Korean politics kept “abreast with the problems caused by the resistance of various radical students in the democratization process and the excessive suppression of them” and don't provide specific dates and details (Witaya et al. 2003:103). Textbooks from Taiwan mention that “considering the developmental type of South Korea, the people's movements during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s impeded economic development and brought about political and economic instability” and also mention democratization struggles as an impediment to economic development. They also state that there is a tendency toward slower economic growth because of changes in the political environment since 1990 (Shi et al. 2006:81). The evaluation of democratization struggles was made fragmentally from an economic point of view rather than from political and social viewpoints.

#### 4) Others

When describing Korean society and culture, it is remarkable to mention Korea's low unemployment rate and that Confucian ideology has had an influence on people's daily lives and has been given a meaning of social practical norms. One Taiwanese textbook says that the development of 'Four Asian Dragons' including Taiwan was caused by the positive aspects of Confucian ethics. In another Taiwanese textbook, the strong cooperative spirit of Koreans and Confucianism is emphasized.

Confucian ethics can be viewed not as a major element but as an important background of economic miracles in East Asia...There was a strong cooperative spirit in Japan and Korea...There existed universally an examination system, a cooperative spirit, home influence, and Confucian tradition in economically developed East Asian society. The rapid eco-

conomic development in East Asian society resulted from the important cultural background of Confucianism. (Zhang n.d.:179)

This description recalls the ‘Argument on Confucian Capitalism’ that was widely spread during the 1980’s discussions on ‘Asian values’ and is based on Marx Weber’s idea that the cause of capitalistic development in Western societies was Christianity. Apart from the academic world, it was used politically within countries like Korea and Singapore. A textbook from Thailand explains that the cause of Korea’s economic development was “national characteristics,” but it doesn’t explain what these “national characteristics” are (Khawi 2004:77). It can be viewed in the same context as the Philippino textbook which explains that Korea’s economic development is connected with “the aspect of emphasizing the profits of the whole instead of the individual” (Mateo et al. 2005:392).

In addition, Korea’s kimchi and chopstick culture are mentioned. A Thai textbook introduces kimchi as a famous Korean food and explains how to make it. The explanation appears in a description classifying geographical locations and then civilizations. One interesting thing is that a Taiwanese textbook says kimchi is an “expression of plainness and frugality” (Shi et al. 2006:79).

The most common description in Taiwanese textbooks is the ‘Korean Wave’ (*hallyu*). The term was first used by a Chinese newspaper after a performance by the Korean dance group HOT in China in February 2000, and it is defined as a fervor toward Korean popular culture, which has spread to Japan, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. Taiwanese textbooks mention numerous times about the existence of the Korean Wave in Taiwan.

Taiwanese society came to tolerate even non-mainstream culture because information is more open and diversified every day. The popularity of Japanese and Korean serial dramas and comic books created a frivolous tendency for Japan and Korea, and Taiwan became part of a multi-culture. (Bi 2006:117-8)

However, the above example is used in the context of mentioning the cultural diversification of Taiwan instead of being about Korean society. Another Taiwanese textbook introduces the Korean drama ‘Daejanggeum’ in the same context. It mentions not only the Korean Wave but also *ilryu*, a Vietnamese cuisine, and the weekly services in the Philippines as important ‘symbols’ that distinguish present Taiwan from the existing traditional society. Cultural diversifi-

cation is the ‘dissolution of traditional society’ caused by political stabilization and economic growth. It is also an evaluation about vernacular culture that has positively accepted foreign culture according to the trend of frequent international exchanges. Meanwhile, there is a precaution against the Korean Wave: it evaluates it as nothing but “popular culture” and “a thing instant, wasteful, recreational, quickly come and quickly gone” and concludes that it is “a thing that is searched for frantically for a time, becomes old-fashioned and fades away at last” (Lin 2006:153-4).

Television is an efficient medium of the most powerful diffusion at the present time. For the last ten years, the popularity of Japanese and Korean serial dramas satisfies the demand for “Japanese Style” and “Korean Wave” in Taiwanese society. However, there is no way that Taiwanese TV production can follow Japanese and Korean production of serial dramas. Serial dramas such as “Yizhifanzihuo” (一支番仔火) seem to cause many problems in Taiwanese society. Attention needs to be paid to the development of Taiwanese society. (Chen n.d.:401)

Referring to the influence of mass media on public culture, it calls attention to the influx of foreign dramas including Korean ones. There are various points of views about the Korean Wave in Taiwanese textbooks. While the flux of foreign culture is considered positive in the context of plurality, it is also mentioned as nothing more than “popular culture” for juveniles that easily appears and disappears. It is also called a ‘flooding foreign culture’ that should be considered from the viewpoint of the influence upon vernacular social development.

## 2. European Countries (Germany, Russia, the Czech Republic, Poland, and France)<sup>3</sup>

The European textbooks, like the Asian textbooks, deal with the Korean War and democratization movements. Other content is industrialization, social conflicts, welfare, environment, the aging population, and urbanization.

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3. There are seventy textbooks from Germany, twenty-eight from Russia, thirty-three from the Czech Republic, twenty-five from Poland, and forty-nine from France. A considerable number of these textbooks contain only brief descriptions or nothing at all about Korea.

### 1) Korean War

A Polish textbook describes the Korean War and the situation of division in a few pages. It also describes the outbreak of the Korean War: the United States joined the war because the communization of Korea would mean “the exclusion of the United States from the East-Asian sphere of influence” and that “a Japan occupied by the United States would also be dangerous.” It also describes that the Korean War resulted in the expansion of armaments by the United States. While it reveals that North Korea invaded South Korea with consent from Stalin and Mao Zedong, it also mentions that in the West it was officially recognized that the Soviet Union invaded and that “the cooperation between democratic, capitalist countries and the United States was strengthened” (Sniegocki 2004:224-6). Concerning the situation of being divided into North and South Korea, it states: “Syngman Rhee didn’t want to miss the opportunity to establish his own country. The Cold War was an exceptional opportunity for Syngman Rhee” (Czubiński et al. 2004:242). In contrast, a textbook from the Czech Republic states that “Syngman Rhee became President of the Republic of Korea with wide-ranging influences” (Kuklik et al. 2002:137). A world political history textbook from Germany briefly mentions the buildup of the U.S.’s war potential as a reason for the Korean War. Like the German textbook, the French textbook briefly details the Korean War and describes the situation of North and South Korea standing face to face along the Demilitarized Zone. Syngman Rhee is not mentioned in the main text but a *New York Times* interview was included. In the interview, Syngman Rhee is vividly portrayed as pro-American and an anti-communist. Only French textbooks mention the reconciliation movement between the North and the South and they evaluate that the South is trying to open the North using ‘the Sunshine Policy.’

The textbooks from Germany and France contain a picture of Pablo Picasso and describe the sufferings of the Korean War indirectly. A German textbook asks about the U.S.’s responsibility of the massacre in Nogeunri by describing “it is not until the 1990s that there were arguments about moral errors in American society” (Golecki 2003:103).

Though Russian textbooks describe that the Korean War happened at the peak of the Cold War, clarifying the outbreak of the war, “it was North Korea that provoked the war in spite of the long negation of the war by Soviet historical science” (Zagladin 2005:277). While they confirm the North’s invasion of South Korea, they don’t mention how the Soviet Union came to join the war. They describe the confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union

during the Cold War. “The leaders of the Soviet Union took advantage of the process of de-colonization, undermining the status of the European allies of the United States for the benefit of their country” and “the leaders of the United States used the army deployed in Third World countries to overturn governments unprofitable to the United States” (Volobuev et al. 2005:189). While they are objective with statements like “the northern area of Korea was liberated by the Soviet army,” the expressions contain a value judgment and have another meaning (Zagladin 2005:276).

## 2) Democratization Movements

Russian textbooks introduce ex-presidents Kim Young Sam and Kim Dae-jung. Though “decades of military governments” continued in South Korea, large scale aid from the United States facilitated “economic modernization,” which enabled Korea to become a “semi-developed country.” “The way to democratization” was opened and “a free presidential election in 1993” took place (Aleksashkina 2005:223). They also describe that “a presidential authority over the martial law was reduced” because of a constitutional amendment for direct elections in 1987, and that “Korea broke up the system of an all-round power in the past at the turning point of the 1990s and advanced toward democratization.” They evaluate that the development of the political history of Korea and the success of democratization movements “are connected with the process of worldwide development” (Rodrigue et al. 2005:298). Even with an error in the year of the direct presidential election – it was 1992 and not 1993 - interest in and the high evaluation of Korean democratization movements is remarkable. Nevertheless, they pass the value judgment that Korean democracy lags behind Western democracy, adding an evaluation that Korea like other Southeast Asian countries is “far from the ideal of Western democratic policies” (Sergeev et al. 2003:185).

A Polish textbook says that Korean politics “is composed of its relationship with the United States, the army, and military dictatorial politicians” and that Park Chung Hee was a leader of a coup d’état “containing all negative elements” (Sniegocki 2004:248). For example, it mentions the oppression against opposition party representatives, routine martial law, and suppression. It evaluates that “the tendency to advance liberalization in the second half of the 1980s appeared and that dictatorial law was abolished and democratic politics and free elections were restored” (Sniegocki 2004:629). Also, it mentions that due to the political liberalization, corruption cases were revealed and former presidents were

judged. A Czech textbook critically describes Korea's undemocratic situation as follows.

The system of South Korea hadn't accepted democracy for a long time. South Koreans couldn't make a journey freely, worked 54 hours a week, and were not permitted to join a labor union. Also, the social system was very weak and wages were low. However, in the late 1980s, democratization movements arose among the people. As a result, Korea belongs to semi-developed countries that are operated moderately and became a democratic and right-centered country with its high quality of life. (Bruchic et al. 2003:76)

While evaluating the establishment of democracy through democratization movements, it describes the brilliant economic development and the political situation in the second half of the 1990s: "an economic structure dependent on exports, an enormous national debt, and the dictatorial government are criticized" (Pluska et al. 2001:74). It believes that the remarkable development of democracy was actually achieved in contrast with the military dictatorship but that it is still far from being satisfactory.

A textbook from France describes the social conflicts as yet unsolved more than an evaluation of Korea's democratization struggles. It posits that "the congruence between developmental ideology, Marxism, and nationalism" resulted from "the pursuit of a strong state primarily" and that under such a situation, "the hunger of the people for democracy overflows with a rush against the systematic inconsistency to entrap democracy into perpetual nationalism" (Knafou 2004:216). Concerning the non-democratic politics that still exist in Korean society, it adds the following explanation with a picture titled "A Crack in Korean Success."

A close relationship between the government and the heads of conglomerates brought about corruption prevalent in political groups and business circles. The Korean political world is shaken by continuous scandal of bribery for political activities. The two latest scandals are ex-presidents Chun Doo-Hwan and Roh Tae-Woo who received \$1.5 billion from conglomerates and were severely punished in 1996. Concerning labor and welfare, freedom of association and multiple trade unions don't exist yet and "a threat to national security" is used as a pretext for declaring strikes

illegal. Government power unhesitatingly states that a labor union is bribed by North Korea. Nevertheless, social turbulence increased and labor unions went on an unprecedented strike in 1987 against the December 1996 bill that dealt with the compensation that laborers from the conglomerates had received at the time of contract and the discharge of irregular workers, 80% of whom had joined the labor unions. This strike continued for nearly a month and resulted in the loss of \$3.3 billion. (Mathieu 2004:231)

Suppression of labor unions by the government is mentioned by another French textbook together with social conflicts deriving from unstable employment and regional inequality. In a French civics textbook, South Korea is mentioned as a country of “systematic suppression of human rights” along with North Korea (Baylac 2002:23). The Korean society presented in French textbooks is not a satisfactory country from a democratic point of view. Such an evaluation is clearly revealed with the statement: “In spite of slow progress toward democracy, social problems haven’t disappeared yet. Neither did environmental problems” (Mathieu 2004:230).

### 3) Others

What are other aspects of Korea shown in European textbooks? Korea is classified as a country of “strict Confucian ethical tradition” (Mirvald et al. 2003:84) and at others time as “a southeastern civilization dominated by Buddhism and influenced by Europe” (Stern 1997:235). In contrast with the expression of South Korea as a Buddhist-dominant country, North Korea is described as a “Taoism- and Confucianist-dominant” country (Chamigny et al. 1997:239). In addition, a French textbook mentions the higher literacy rate and the average education period and adds that Korea’s standard of education is similar to that of Japan, the highest in East Asia.

Though it explains that the gigantic metropolis of Seoul is the center of not only politics and economics but also education and has been developing into an international center of culture since the Seoul Olympics, urbanization is considered a task that must be dealt with as well as Korea’s aging population.

It is remarkable that a French textbook mentions the conflicts between Korea and Japan. There is a conflict over ownership of Dokdo/Takeshima with Japan. Korea opposes Japan’s participation as a permanent member in the UN Security Council, which stems from the fear of Japan’s rearmament and the memory of

the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It also states that the two countries “maintain antagonistic friendly relations” and had the foundation of reconciliation laid by co-hosting the 2002 World Cup. The fever of the 2002 World Cup is represented in the article “Birth of Asian Football” in *Le Monde*.

Just a year ago, Koreans blamed themselves for falling behind Japan in technique and tactics. However, reflecting a tremendous fever dominant in Seoul, they came to be conscious of their merits and accomplished a remarkable thing. (Knafo 2004:220)

The World Cup caused Korean society, who had an inferiority complex of Japan, to reconfirm their merits and become stronger. The Korean cheering parties, which were among the 100 best scenes chosen by FIFA, are contained in some foreign textbooks.

### 3. Latin American Countries (Brazil and Chile)<sup>4</sup>

The major contents concerning Korea in Latin American textbooks are the Korean War, social conflicts, and democratization movements.

#### 1) Korean War

In contrast with textbooks from other regions, the textbooks of the two Latin American countries have almost nothing about the Korean War, but they do briefly explain the division of the country because of the Cold War. A Brazilian textbook emphasizes that North and South Korea entered at the same time at the 2000 Sydney Olympics. It states that the simultaneous entrance was “a most touching scene during the history of the Olympics” and that it was not a simple “show but an ideological barrier between a capitalist society and a socialist society produced during the Cold War that had continued for over forty years.” Also, it mentions that by means of the “sunshine policy” a summit between the two Koreas, “the first epoch-making meeting since 1945,” was possible and that President Kim Dae-jung won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2000 (Antunes n.d.:108-10).

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4. Of the thirty-five Brazilian textbooks reviewed, only four mention Korea. Of the eleven Chilean textbooks, only eight textbooks contain any content about Korea.

## 2) Social Conflicts and Democratization Movements

A Brazilian textbook describes the dark side of the period when labor movements were mercilessly suppressed because of the military management of Korea's economy.

Almost in a military way, large factories were built close together and combatant industrial revolutionary labor appeared. However, no independent labor unions were allowed and strikes were mercilessly suppressed. The lives and conditions of laborers maintained the lowest standard for a long time. Such an oppressive attitude of the government caused the most combatant labor movements in Asia to be formed. It shows how often and violently the labor movements during the 1980s and 1990s were launched. The basic policy of the government was to control increases in wages at a rate much lower than the growth rate of production. (Antunes n.d.:107)

It explains that the management of conglomerates is family-centered and more hierarchical than Japanese *'zaibatsu'* and also describes the grim reality of labor: the process of industrialization took place "on the basis of cheap sweated labor." "Weekly working hours are at least 48 hours and are often extended to 53 hours. Sunday is the only holiday in a week and there is only a short leave of 14 days a year. There are few holidays. Nevertheless, the labor power of Korea shows a much higher literacy rate and the rate of average wages is also much higher than that of underdeveloped countries" (Antunes n.d.:110). Though it doesn't specifically mention Korea, a Chilean textbook describes in its chapter "A Challenge and Plan of Far East Asia," "the establishment of democracy is one of the tasks to be attained through struggles in spite of the official adoption of a democratic system" (Echeverría et al. 2005:195). It judges that the maturity of democracy in Korea is far from being satisfactory. Describing the 1997 IMF bailout, it contains photos of demonstrations by Korean laborers.

## 3) Others

A Brazilian textbook mentions that Korea continues to protest against Japan because Japan still shows a lukewarm attitude toward past affairs. It also indicates that if Germany showed such an attitude, the European Union would not exist. In addition, it describes that "there are a variety of religions in Korea and Korea is very proud of the fact that both the standard of education and the num-

ber of college graduates is the highest level in the world” (Gastellar et al. 2001:212). A Chilean textbook contains data on the standard of education which places Korea second after Japan in “Students’ Performing Duties in the Research of the OECD.” However, it is very confusing that one Chilean textbook indicates Korea as “a Confucian state,” while another indicates Korea as “a Catholic monotheist state.” Some of the confusion can be attributed to considering Confucianism a religion, but more likely stems from a lack of a general understanding of Korea.

#### 4. English-speaking Countries (the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand)<sup>5</sup>

##### 1) Korean War

How do the textbooks of the United States view the Korean War? They don’t provide a precise explanation. There appears the thought that “the United States organized the United Nations Forces to help South Korea” due to a war which broke out because of a Communist invasion, emphasizing that its aid had an influence on the war. Emphasizing the U.S. role, an American textbook describes that the aid laid foundations on South Korean society and “the United States Army remained to guarantee peace in the late 1990s” (Ellis et al: 2005:870). In contrast, a Canadian textbook briefly describes the outbreak and the development of the Korean War, adding the fact that “Canada sent an army and destroyers because of the encouragement of the United States” (Cranny et al. 2001:138). It also mentions that the Korean War was the result of the Cold War between East and West.

Australian textbooks describe the situation of the Korean War more precisely than textbooks from other English-speaking countries. They describe the circumstances of the United States joining the war according to its anti-Communism policy and the great losses caused by the war, explaining more fully that the Korean War “invited its fear about Communism within the country” (Bell et al. 2005:226). Moreover, introducing historical arguments as to the cause of the Korean War, they deal with the Korean War from various points of

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5. There are fourteen textbooks from the U.S., twelve from Canada, five from Australia, and eighteen from New Zealand. Reference books for the national examination were substituted for New Zealand textbooks since it was judged that there would be no difference between them.

view. Another Australian textbook also describes that the Korean War played a crucial role in the economic recovery of Japan. In the textbooks from New Zealand, the Korean War is mainly described in the process of describing its own history. It was the Korean War that caused New Zealand to participate in the conflicts of East Asia. The textbook describes the fact that New Zealand sent its army as part of the United Nations Forces.

Referring not only to the division caused by the Korean War but also the unification of the Korean Peninsula, American textbooks reveal that the reason most Koreans desire unification in spite of the differing political systems is “because they share history, language, and culture” and also describe that the reason unification is a matter of worldwide concern is “because of the tactical location of Korea in Asia” (Ellis et al. 2005:872). It also describes that in spite of political conflicts, a summit conference between North and South Korea was held in 2000 which laid the foundation for unification. It also states that South Korean president Kim Dae-jung won the Nobel Peace Prize by dint of his efforts for unification. It introduces the simultaneous entrance at the 2000 Sydney Olympics as proof of the easing of tensions on the Korean Peninsula.

## 2) Democratization Movements

Coverage of conflicts and the democratization movements is well done. An American textbook concludes that it was dictatorships that governed South Korean society during the 1960s industrial development and describes that the industrial development of South Korea was caused by the sacrifice of its laborers.

As in the other Asian tigers, its growth was partly due to low wages, long hours, and other worker sacrifices. By the 1990s, South Korea was an economic powerhouse. With prosperity, workers won better pay, and the country’s standard of living rose greatly. The Asian financial crisis in 1977 brought hardships such as business failure and high unemployment. The government undertook difficult economic reforms, and by 2000, the nation’s economy was recovering. The dictators under the sponsorship of the military governed South Korea for several decades since the Korean War. By 1987, however, growing prosperity and fierce student protests pushed the government to hold direct elections. Since then, the nation has moved successfully toward democracy. (Ellis et al. 2005:872)

Most of the textbooks evaluate Korea's democratization positively. Perhaps it is a surprise that Koreans moved toward democracy when they had recently overcome the ruins of the war and suffered from a long military dictatorship. Mentioning that Koreans accepted "authoritative governments" because of "Confucian traditions and the fear of invasion," a textbook adds that in spite of direct elections as a result of the April 19 Revolution and democratization movements during the 1980s, "the Korean government still restricts human rights." It reminds the reader that Korea still contains non-democratic elements. Textbooks evaluate U.S. economic aid highly by stating the development of Korea was due to "the large scale aid from the United States" (Ahmad et al. 2004:384). Descriptions emphasizing the United States' influence on Korea's democratization can be seen in many places. Another textbook precisely describes the history of Korea's military dictatorship which started with Syngman Rhee after the Korean War, explains that the democratization struggle in 1987 resulted in a constitutional amendment for direct elections, and details the U.S.'s direct influence to mitigate an oppressive government. In many American textbooks, the aid of the United States for economic development and democratization is emphasized.

A textbook from Canada indicates that the cause of Korea's economic development was investment by the United States and Japan and governmental policies. However, describing that "the growth of democracy and protection of free civil rights equal to the economic success of South Korea hasn't been established and that a dictatorial government and obvious corruption of the rich brought about frequent student demonstrations against the government," it ironically mentions the growth of democracy referring to the imprisonment of Chun Doo Hwan and Roh Tae Woo (Franzee 1997:511). Another textbook defines that "the government of dictators" with anti-Communism as a fixed line of national policy was characteristic of Korean politics and mentions that democratic movements were suppressed. Recognizing rapid economic growth and the development of democracy, it still views Korean society as "a conditional democratic system" (Chasmer et al. 1998:367). An Australian textbook mentions that like Lee Kwan Yew of Singapore and Zhang Jie Shi of Taiwan, Park Chung Hee also regarded "the pure general idea of democracy as an obstacle to the national motto for achieving continued and rapid economic growth" (Knight 2004:157). It also describes that the people's demand for democracy was "mercilessly suppressed" during the dictatorship of Park Chung Hee and adds that the democratic system began to function normally in the mid-1990s.

### 3) Confucian Values

U.S. textbooks show an interest in education. The high literacy rate is mentioned first. The reason *Hangeul* spread quickly early in its invention in spite of opposition from Confucian scholars was because “it was easier for Koreans to learn than thousands of Chinese characters” (Ellis et al. 2005:315). An American textbook indicates that *Hangeul* is easy to learn. High education fever is also mentioned among the causes of rapid industrialization. Describing that the skilled and educated population is recognized as “the most precious resource of Korea” and Koreans have always put a high value on education” and “have preserved it at a time when Japanese tried to weaken their cultural identity,” it describes Koreans’ higher interest in education. It explains that Korea has become a major industrial country in East Asia not only by virtue of such external conditions as the capital and investment of the United States and Japan but also “by virtue of such Confucian principles” as “frugality, respect towards education and diligence” (Ahmad et al. 2004:377, 381). Thus, American textbooks have a strong tendency to view Koreans placing a high value on education as Confucian values.

Though the investment of the government in education and Confucian ethics are mentioned as the causes of industrialization in Canadian textbooks, education is not especially connected with them. The textbooks from Australia also view the economic success of Korea as the concentration on education by the government and indicate the connection between Confucianism and industrial development.

This is particularly the case with Confucian societies, such as Singapore, Taiwan, Korea and China, in which the value of harmony and stability are greatly valued. Confucianism endorses paternalistic political system in which strong and wise leaders rule in the best interests of the people, and encourages deference and obedience to those in power. Societies with Confucian cultures have no tradition of individualism for collective interests are much more important than those of individuals. (Knight 2004:172)

When explaining the economic success of newly emerging industrial countries in Asia, the values of Confucianism are often mentioned as important cultural elements. While American textbooks indicate the connection between education and Confucian values, Canadian textbooks describe Confucian values in con-

nection with the relation between labor and capital. On the contrary, it is interesting that Australian textbooks describe Confucian values as a traditional patriarchal ideology irrelevant to Western democracy and freedom.

#### 4) Others

Korea is shown as a country in conflict with Japan in English-speaking textbooks. American textbooks consider the two countries economic rivals, with Korea still remembering the sufferings during colonialism and Koreans angry about the legal discrimination by the Japanese government against Korean residents in Japan. Australian textbooks also mention that unsolved problems during the colonial period remain 'sensitive problems' between Korea and Japan.

Environmental disruption and water resource pollution caused by ill effects of industrialization are mentioned and, as another problem of industrialization, the problem of urbanization is intensively dealt with. In particular, a New Zealand textbook discusses the policy of a new administrative city as a way to disperse the population.

Korean food culture is often mentioned and kimchi is the most typical. American textbooks describe how to make and store kimchi. An Australian textbook introduces Korean cuisine, mentions that ginseng has become very popular in Australia, and explains how to make bulgogi, thus it is recognized as a typical Korean food.

A Canadian textbook describes Korea as a country with an imperfect social welfare system. Korea's higher rate of saving is essential to "a country without an old-age pension and other social benefits" (Chasmer et al. 1998:245). It also mentions the prevalence of Christianity and the Unification Church. An American textbook mentions that "though Korea was not a European colony," "the major religion of Korea is Christianity" (Sager et al. 2003:646).

### 5. Arabic Countries (Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, and Oman)<sup>6</sup>

The contents about Korea in the nine Arabic textbooks are very limited and the length of these descriptions is short. Textbooks from Egypt are relatively precise

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6. There are four textbooks from Egypt, one from Oman, and two each from Libya, Morocco, the Sudan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates, totaling nineteen.

in their descriptions and the major content is that Korea is “a country that has accomplished economic growth quickly” and “a divided country” (Hussein et al. 2004:41). However, the fact that the Korean War broke out in 1950 is mentioned but there is no explanation about the division. In addition to a geographical description that there are many mountainous regions and rivers, the contents focus on population, religion, language, customs, and arts.

A racially homogeneous nation, the policy of birth control in the past, and the inequality between urban and rural areas are mentioned. The facts that the Korean language is why there is such a low illiteracy rate and that Buddhism is a major religion are also mentioned. Chopstick culture is also described. Korea is described as a patriarchal society.

In Korean society, familial relations are more important than houses or jobs. Children learn to respect their elders and should obey parents and teachers. And wives should follow their husbands obediently. (Hussein et al. 2004:44)

It is a general self-judgment that the majority of this patriarchal familial system has been dissolved due to rapid industrialization. However, Korean society is still seen as a patriarchal society with a strong Confucian tradition by foreigners.

The contents about Korea described in all the Arabic textbooks except for Egypt briefly mention natural geography and the phenomenon of urbanization and the sending of labor power to the Persian Gulf.

### **III. Conclusion**

The Korean society shown in foreign textbooks is a country that was the test case for the Cold War, a society that overcame military dictatorships by the people’s power, a society where a father is often separated from his wife and children because of extreme education fever, and a society where Confucian tradition is apparent everywhere. Some textbooks mention the Korean Wave as an example of cultural diversity within their own country, and the food culture of kimchi symbolizes the simplicity and frugality of the Korean people.

Looking at Korean society through foreign textbooks provides Koreans an opportunity to look at ourselves from a different perspective. However, it should be understood that society’s mainstream ideology is apparent in its textbooks.

World history textbooks also tend to be Western-focused, but attempts are being made to change this. For example, the Korean democratization movements described in the textbooks from English-speaking or European countries makes it apparent that the democracy of Korea is considered insufficient compared to their own democracy. Taiwanese textbooks describe Korea's economic development in connection with Confucian capitalism, a belief that Taiwan also has. Though the descriptions about Korea in foreign textbooks appear to be objective, it is also apparent that there are a variety of mixed viewpoints of each country.

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